



## From the Office of Secretary of State

**John Gale**

402-471-2554

[www.sos.ne.gov](http://www.sos.ne.gov)

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**Contact:** Laura Strimple

402-471-8408

[laura.strimple@nebraska.gov](mailto:laura.strimple@nebraska.gov)

### **Call for Nebraskans to save Kearney Archway**

The great German philosopher Goethe once said, "Whatever you do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

In 2000, when former Nebraska Governor Frank Morrison was 95 years old, his dream of a monument celebrating the convergence of the Oregon, Mormon, and California trails in Nebraska came true with the construction of the Great Platte River Road Archway monument in Kearney.

Gov. Morrison was a dreamer, but also a bold mover and shaker. He loved to promote Nebraska. In many ways he was the father of Nebraska's statewide tourism marketing and development. He saw the potential of tourism as a top revenue producing industry for our state and conceived of the archway project as a way to bring history alive and celebrate Nebraska's role in the movement west.

The Arch is an undisputed feat of engineering and had significant funds from bonds and local infusion of private and public money to succeed, but counted upon strong traveler support. Nearly all people who experience the Arch proclaim it to be a first-rate attraction. However, there have been stumbling blocks. Lack of easy access from the interstate has been problematic from the start. The surprise factor has been another challenge since the Archway is not anticipated by travelers. Attendance dipped last year to just below 50,000. Failure to keep up with debt reduction and costs has caused the Arch to slip into bankruptcy.

The question is can Nebraska really afford to let this majestic interactive tourist attraction cease to exist? Isn't our pride in our history strong enough to see it endure? Don't we share a dream for travelers and visitors to grasp that our state is

an enriching destination and not just a drive through corridor? The Archway is unique because it tells the inspiring story of our history and the significance of the Great Platte River Road to the entire nation.

Tourism has always been a major industry in Nebraska, generating meaningful revenue for the state and its citizens. Tourism dollars have a major multiplier effect as the benefits ripple across a community, a county or a region.

In the metropolitan areas of eastern Nebraska, we have seen huge capital resources raised to build ball parks, arenas, convention centers, and other outstanding tourist destinations. We know the value those attractions offer our tourism industry on the east end of the I-80 corridor. But, why can't we link the rest of the I-80 corridor as pearls in the same necklace of high-end tourist attractions across the rest of the state?

Besides the Arch, Kearney boasts other terrific attractions like Rowe Sanctuary, Yanney Park, Fort Kearney State Historical Park, and the Museum of Nebraska Art - all great places to visit. The Archway is a perfect complement to those destinations and a crown jewel in the entire I-80 corridor through Nebraska. Now, it is in peril and needs the support of our entire state, not just the residents who live in the Kearney area.

Unless we pull together as "One Nebraska", we can easily lose our race to be a competitive destination state. Iowa, Wyoming, and Colorado aren't just standing still. Let's find a way to make the Arch a crown jewel again in that string of pearls crossing Nebraska, conveying to national and international visitors the inspiring story of our pioneer past and the unique tale of the Great Platte River Road.

On Monday, July 1, I will be speaking at the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lincoln Highway. The Archway will serve as the centerpiece for that event. I hope that everyone will consider taking part in the many activities planned in Kearney on June 30 and July 1, marking the development and history of the Lincoln Highway – America's Main Street.

Just as the Lincoln Highway was designed to promote economic development and tourism across America, we need to turn our attention to one of its gems, and decide what we want for the future of the Great Platte River Road Archway.

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