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ALERT TOP STORY TOPICAL

Omaha art center fires 5 in 'restructuring'; workers say it's retaliation for union talks

Christopher Burbach

Feb 25, 2025

Five workers at The Union for Contemporary Art were fired Tuesday, the same day that employees informed management of the Omaha arts center that they were seeking voluntary recognition as a union.

Workers seeking to organize said in an Instagram post that they view the firings as retaliation for their unionization efforts. The union organizers staged a walkout Tuesday and are demanding that the employees be reinstated.

But the leader of the arts center said the terminations were not related to the union organizing but were part of a restructuring.

"They were not fired because of the unionizing efforts," Lakesha Green, executive director of The Union for Contemporary Art, said by email.

She said she had found out about the union organizing on social media and by email Tuesday.

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-

The five workers who were fired were one third of the 15 full-time staff at the arts center, said Jessica Freeman, exhibitions and resident workncies manager at The Union for Contemporary Art and a member of the union organizing committee. She said the center also has four part-time workers.

Freeman was not one of the five who were let go.

The Union for Contemporary Art is a non-profit arts center at 24th and Lake Streets that includes a gallery, workshop and performing arts spaces. It provides free cultural programming to North Omaha young people and others; produces theater works for the stage; supports artists through fellowships, exhibitions and other programs; and has a community garden and outdoor classroom.

It is supported by local corporate foundations, philanthropists and government grants.

The workers, calling themselves The Union Union, are affiliating with the Communication Workers of America Denver Newspaper Guild Local 37074. The unionized journalists of the Omaha World-Herald Guild are part of the CWA.

"We wanted to organize ourselves into a union in response to the changes that are going on in the world today," Freeman said. "There's just a lot of uncertainty. We've had some leadership changes at The Union (for Contemporary Art) and we want to make sure we have a voice at the table."

She said the organizers were planning to send an email to Green and the arts center's board and to hand-deliver a letter to Green Tuesday. Freeman said that

two employees were terminated early Tuesday morning, before she and a co-worker delivered the email and letter were delivered.

"We caught wind of that, we emailed the letter right away and we tried to deliver it in person," Freeman said. "We were unable to, and then in the hours that have followed since then, three more people have been let go."

The employees who were fired had signed union cards and have been involved in the union organizing effort, Freeman said. There had been no discussions of possible layoffs or terminations before Tuesday that she was aware of, she said.

"The timing does seem very aggressive for these firings, and it seems a little convenient that it all happened today," Freeman said.

Green sent a written statement that said, "After careful consideration and evaluation of our organization's sustainability, we have made the difficult decision to implement a restructuring process. Unfortunately, this means that some valued members of our team will be impacted.

"This decision was not made lightly, and we recognize the significant contributions of every individual who has been part of our journey.

Green said the arts center would be offering resources and assistance to help the terminated employees navigate their next steps.

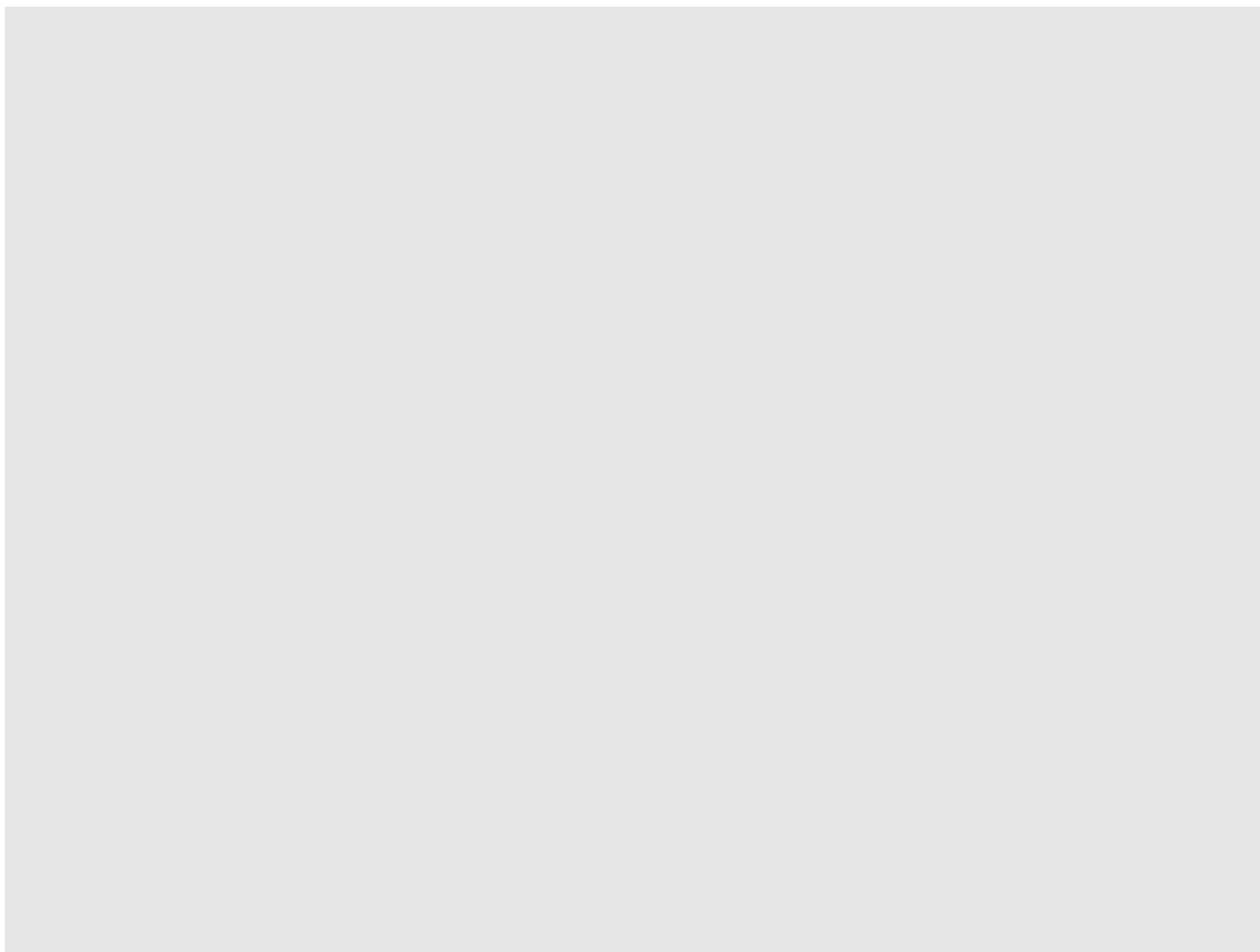
"While this moment is difficult, we believe these changes are necessary to ensure the long-term stability and impact of The Union for Contemporary Art," she said.

Green wrote that the arts center will continue to serve North Omaha with dedication and purpose.

"We appreciate the support of our artists, partners, and patrons as we move forward, and we are confident that this restructuring will allow us to grow stronger and more sustainable in the years to come," she said.

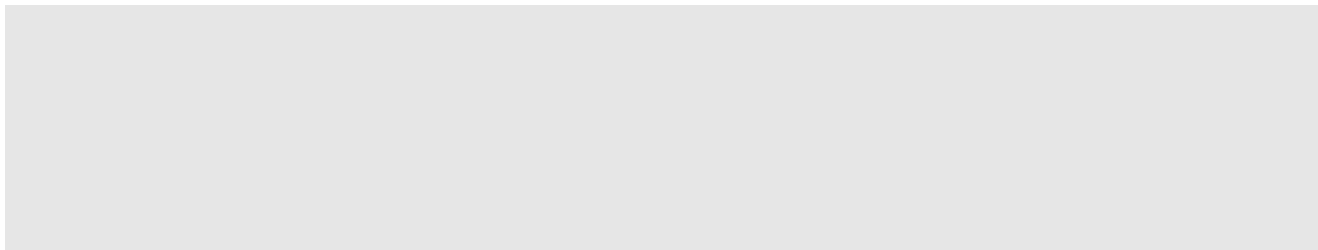
Green's statement and the union organizer's Instagram post both cited The Union for Contemporary Art's vision statement, which says that the organization's mission is to strengthen the cultural and social landscape of its community by using the arts as a vehicle to inspire positive social change.

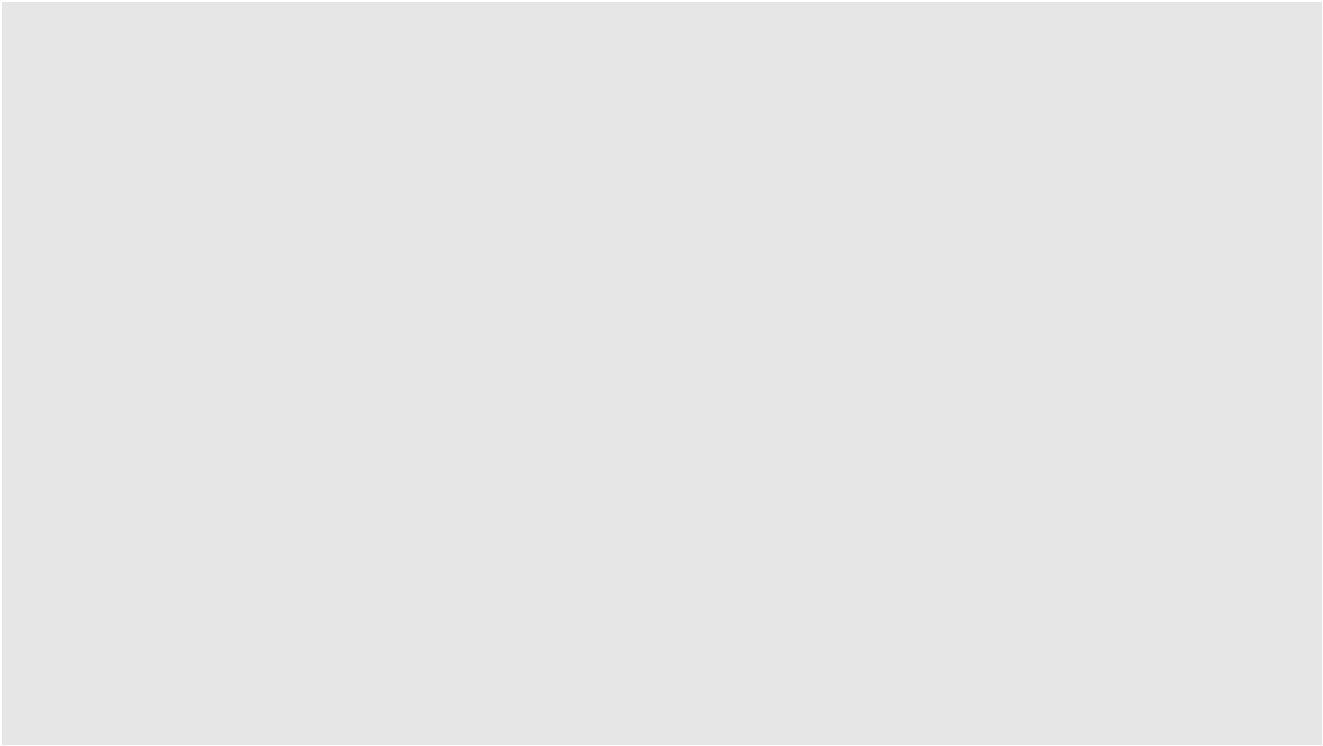
Our best Omaha staff photos & videos of February 2025



Nebraska head coach Rhonda Revelle talks to a group of young players during softball fan day at the Hawks Championship Center in Lincoln, on Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025.

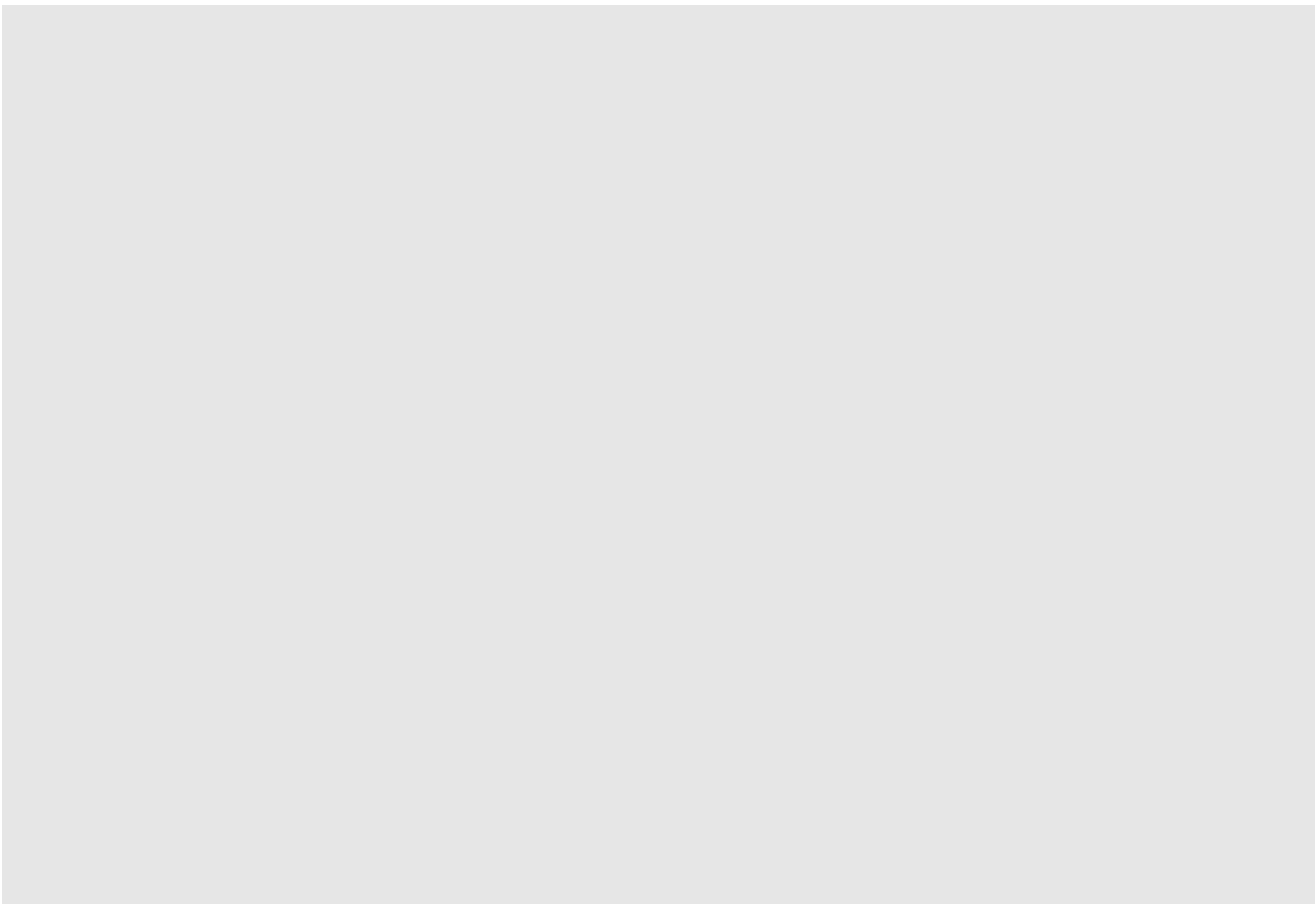
NIKOS FRAZIER, THE WORLD-HERALD

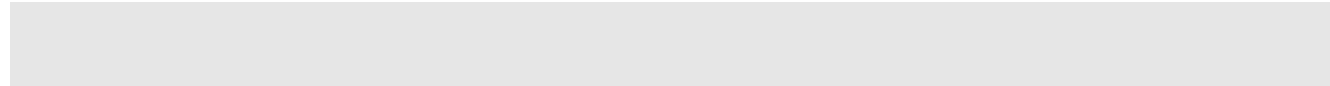




Nebraska's Macie Vickers (5) hands a ball back to Kelsey Dana after signing it for it during softball fan day at the Hawks Championship Center in Lincoln on Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025.

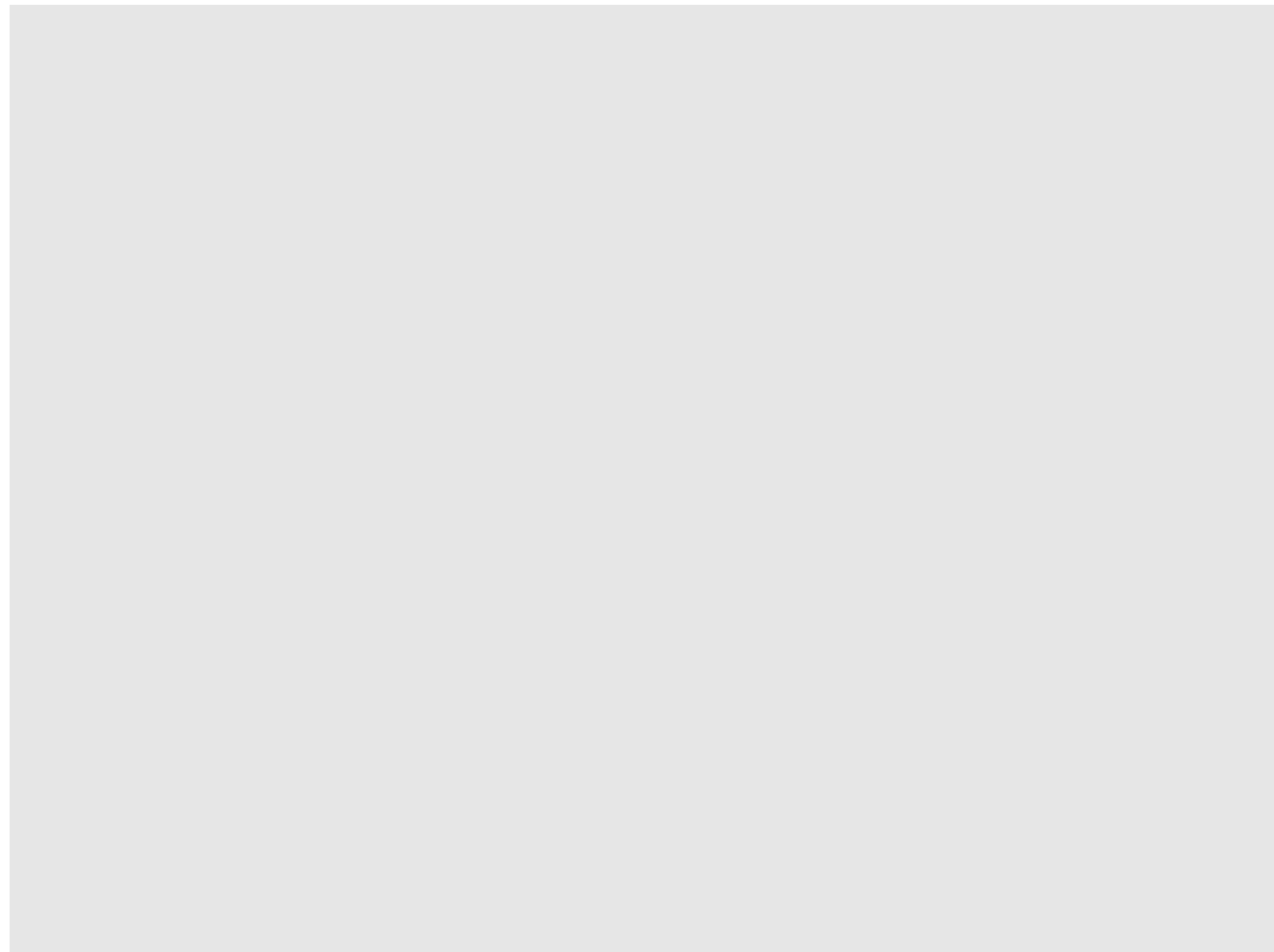
CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD





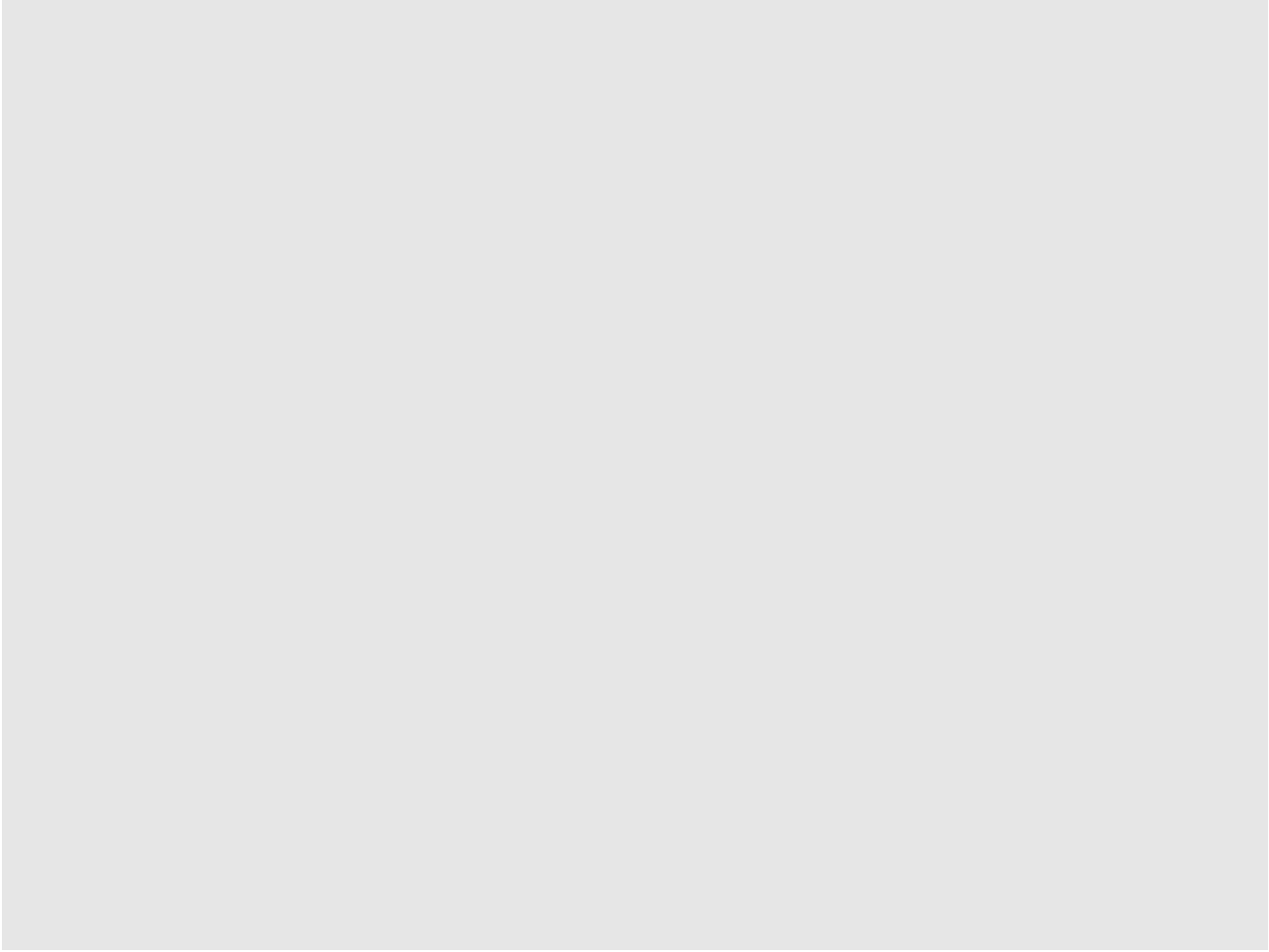
A man walks down the street next to Petersen & Michelsen Hardware located at 4916 S 24th St, in Omaha on Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025. The store has a snow shovel, snow blower and ice melt on display in the front window.

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD



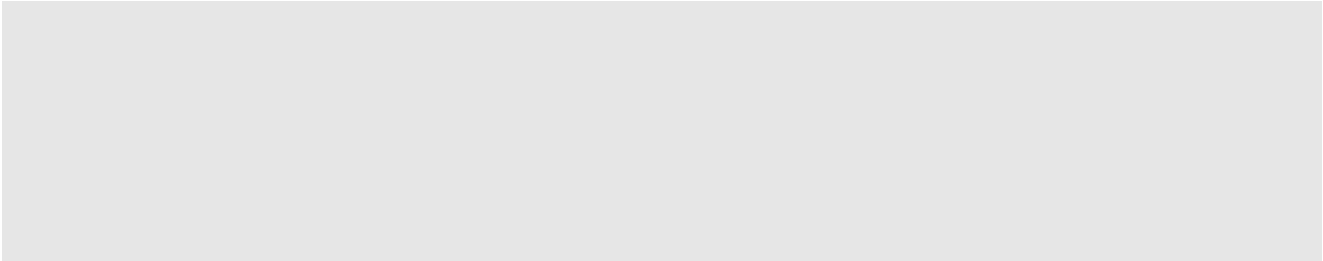
Dan Boland poses for a snow shovel in front of his store, Petersen & Michelsen Hardware located at 4916 S 24th St, in Omaha on Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025. The lack of snow has left many stores of a surplus of snow removal equipment.

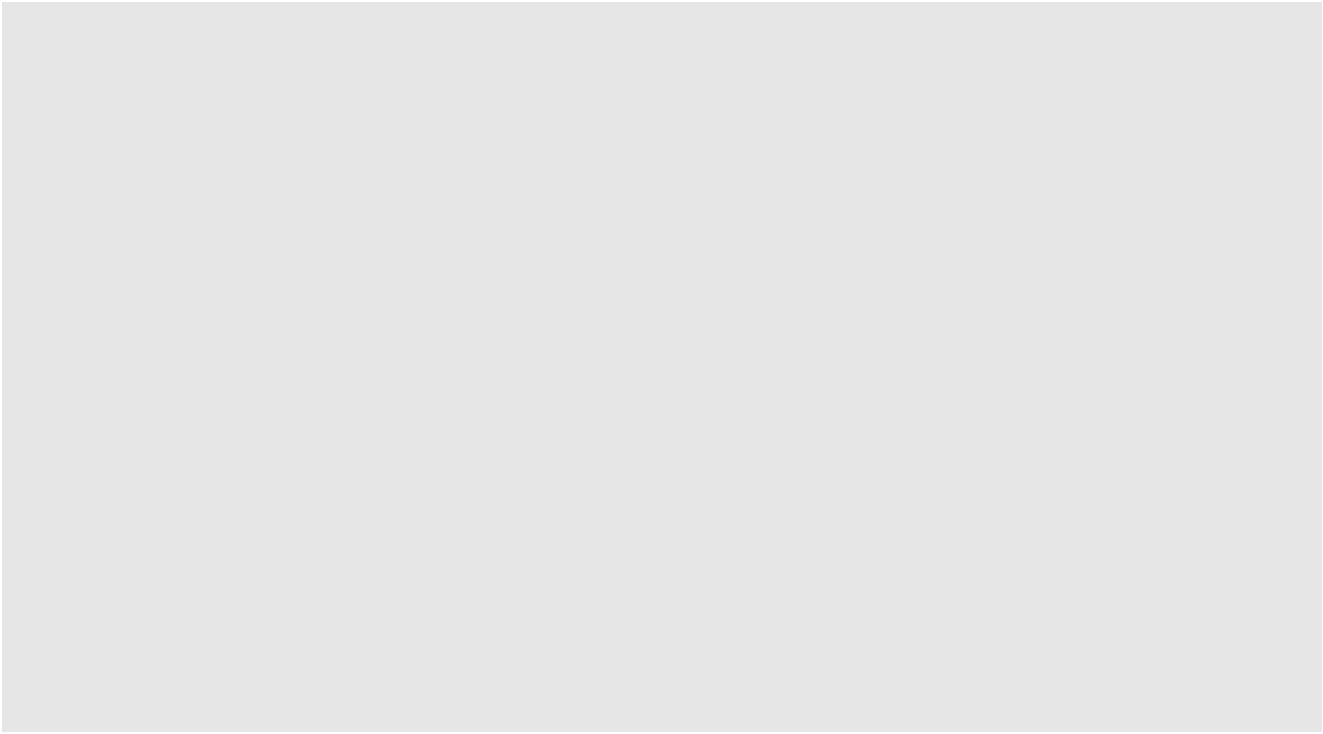
CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD



A golfball sits on the ice on the frozen lagoon at Miller Park in Omaha on Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025.

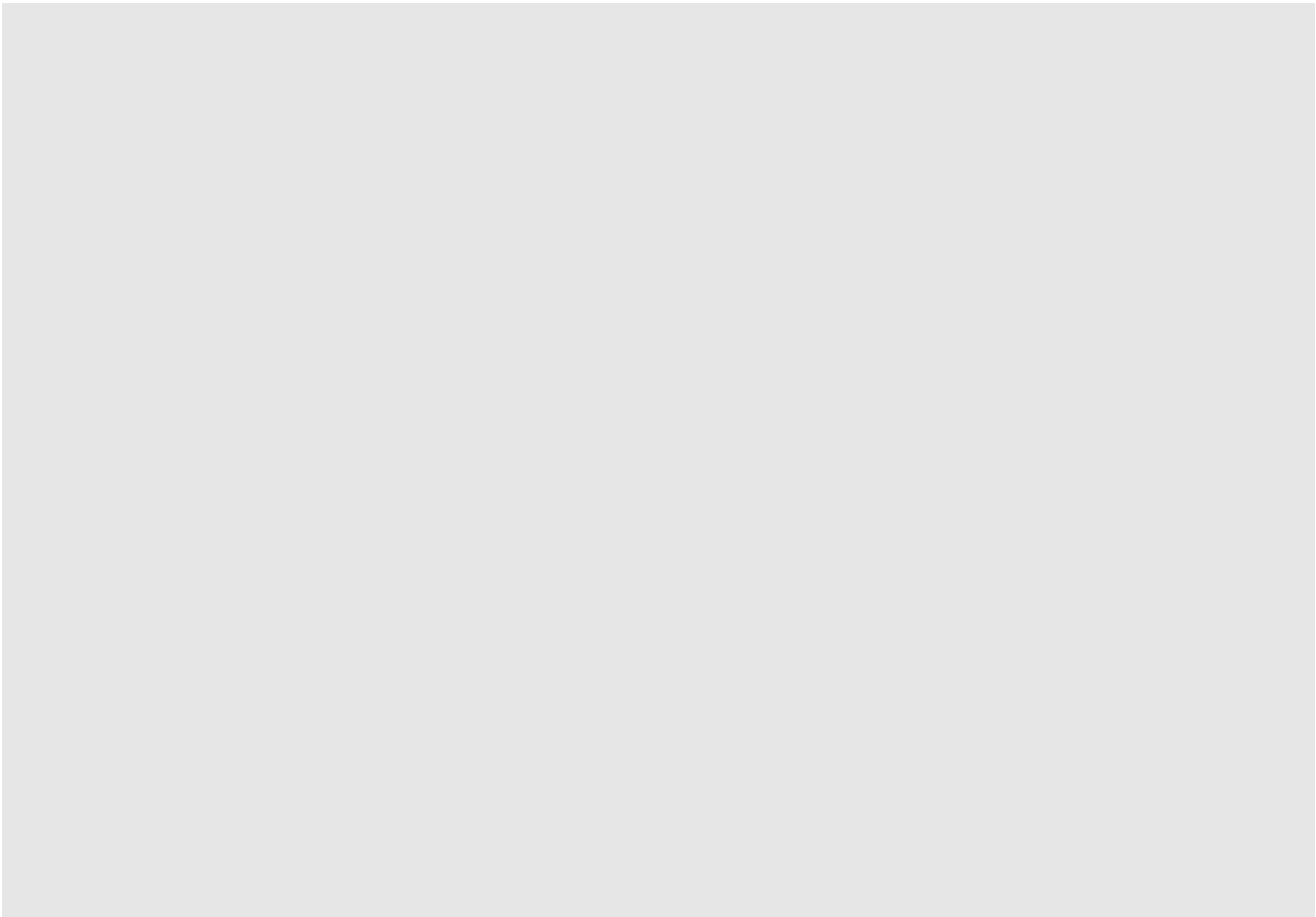
CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

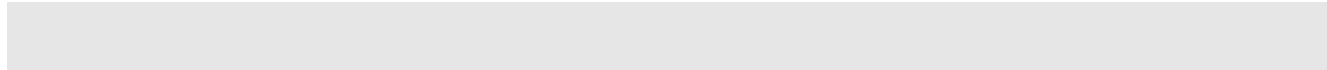




The Red Cross talks with displaced residents on a Metro Transit bus after a fire at the Ashley Park apartments at 204 S. 25th St. in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025.

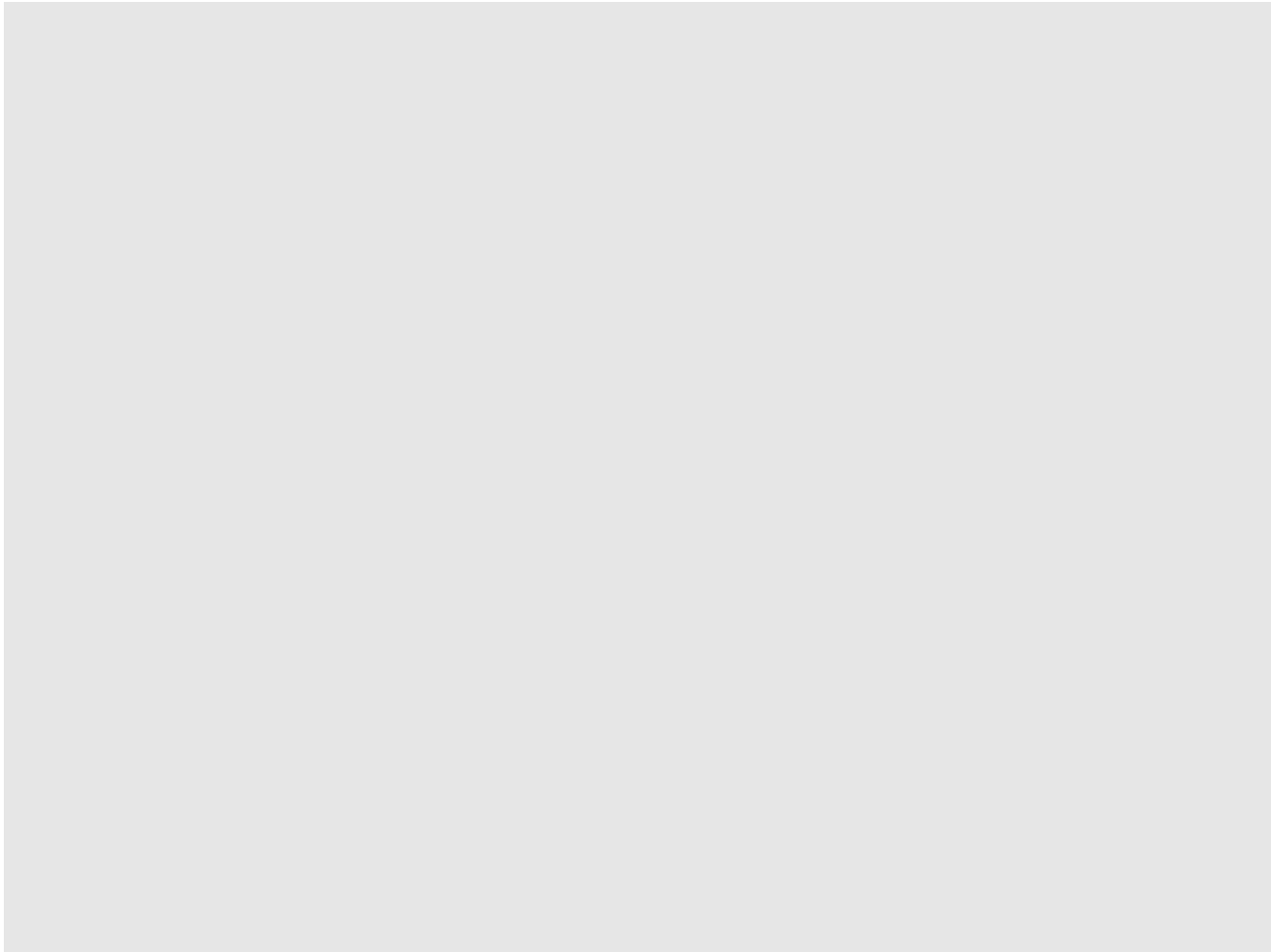
CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD





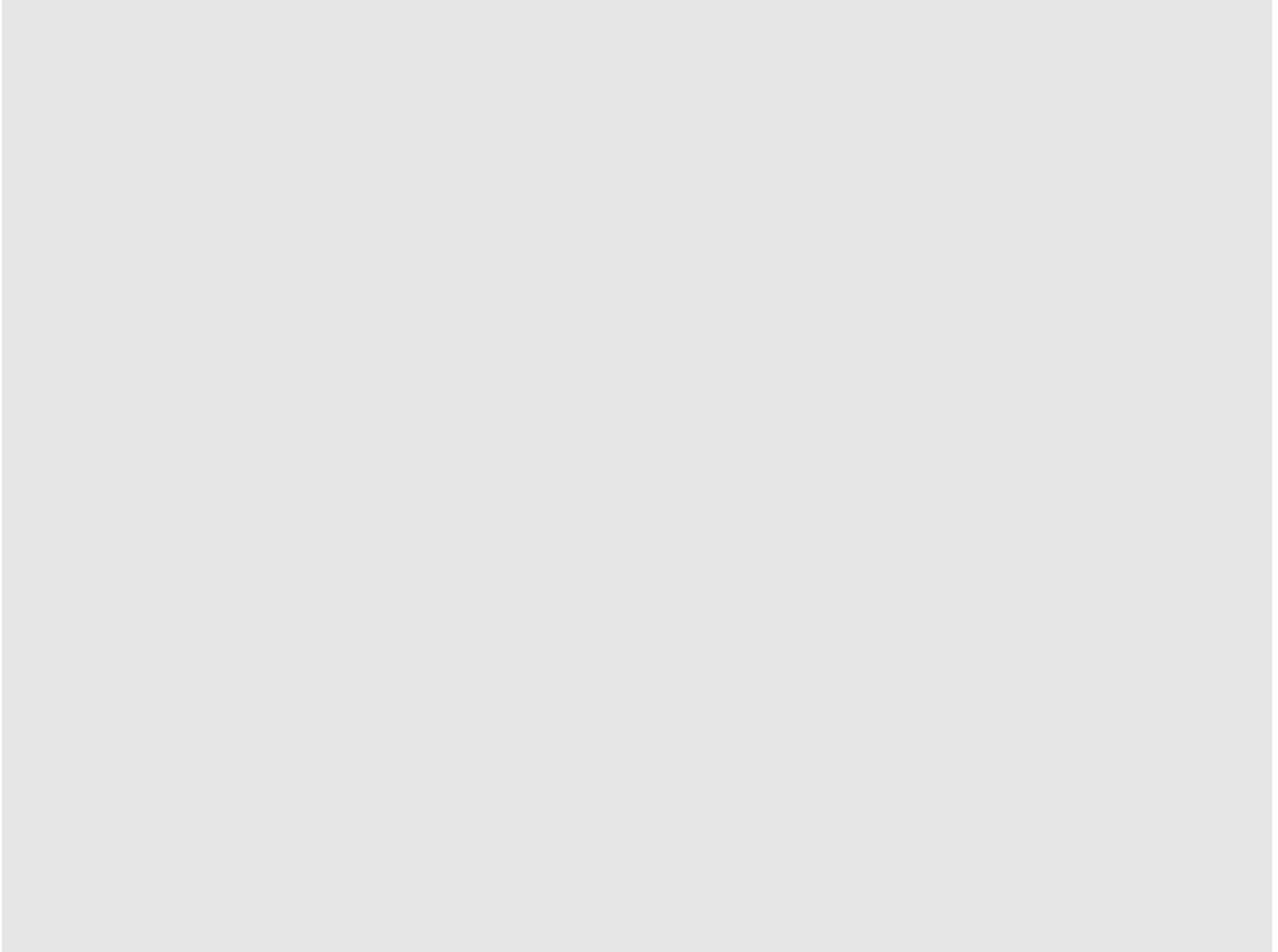
Tim McCarty poses for a portrait next to an heirloom organ at his home studio in Lincoln on Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025. McCarty and his band Dorothy's Dishes recently released the song "Road Trippin' Nebraska," which references nearly 200 people, places and things that the band believes make Nebraska great.

MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD



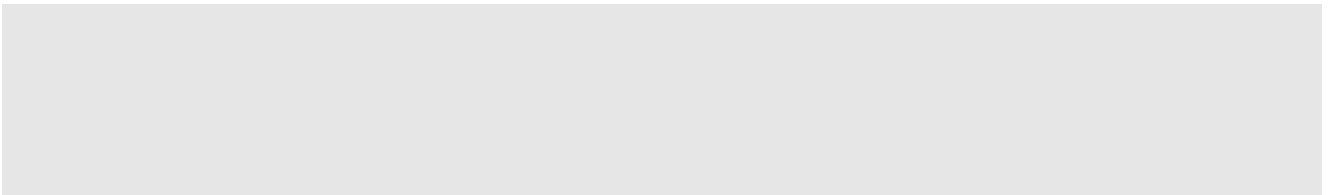
Tim McCarty poses for a portrait at his home studio in Lincoln on Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025. McCarty and his band Dorothy's Dishes recently released the song "Road Trippin' Nebraska," which references nearly 200 people, places and things that the band believes make Nebraska great.

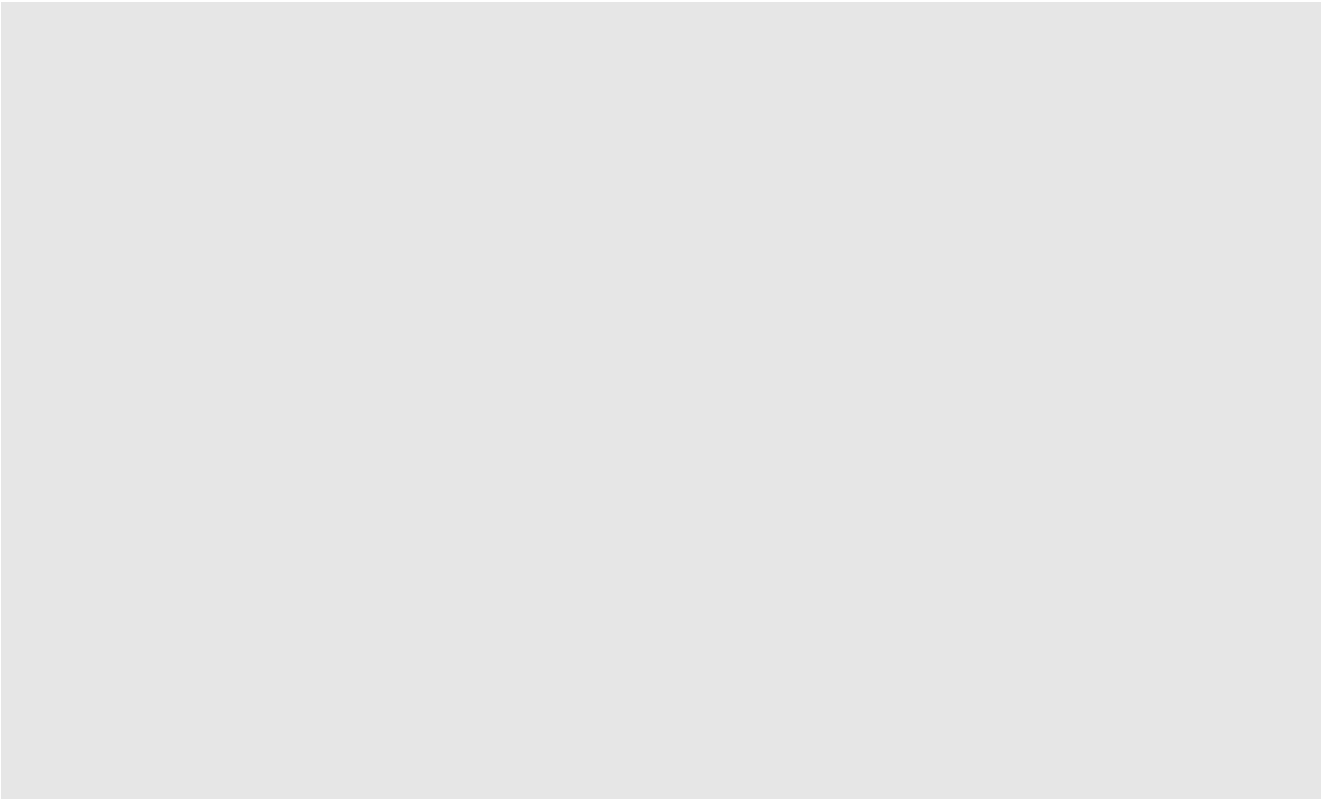
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Gregory Mullaney, 4, reacts as TJ Mullaney pulls him in a sled at Bemis Park in Omaha on Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2025.

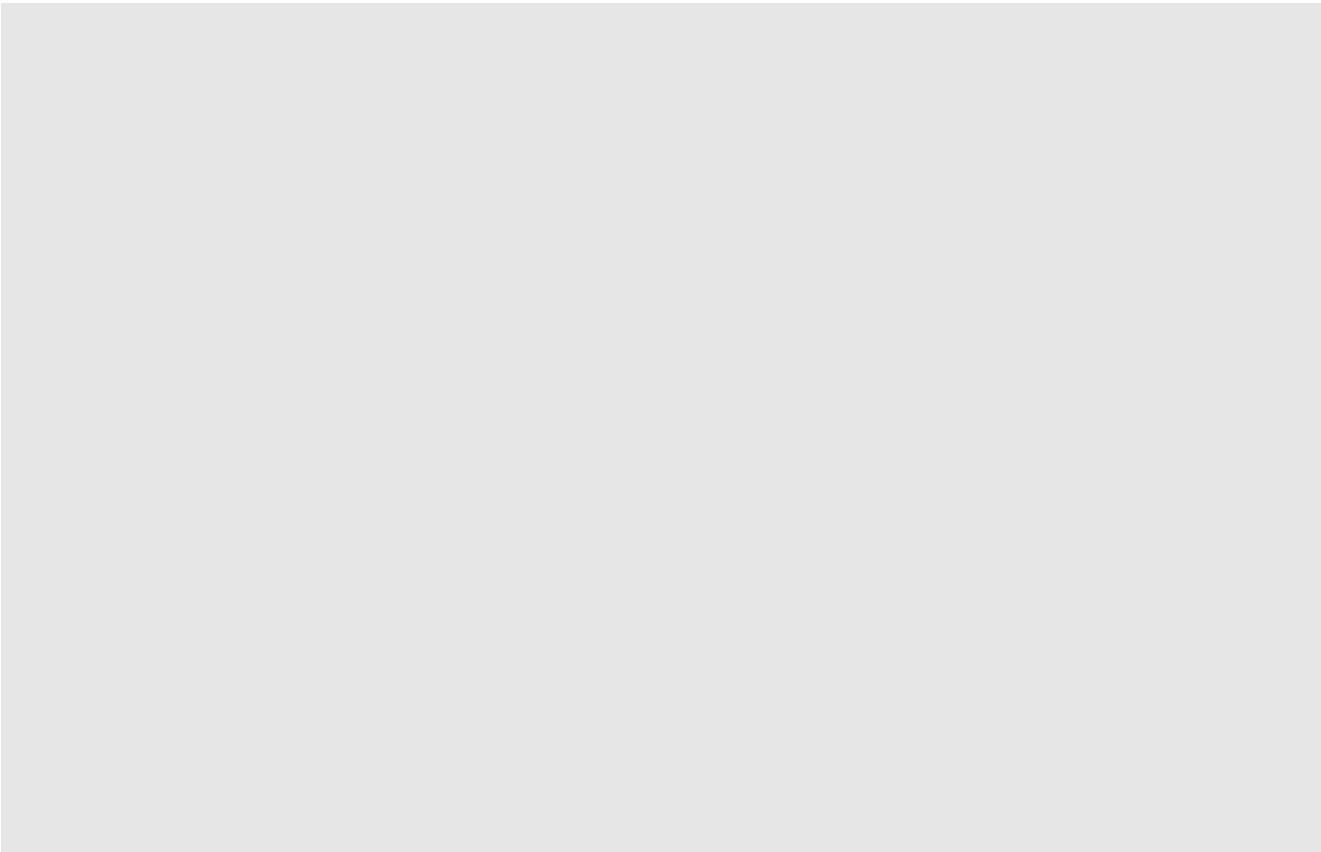
MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD

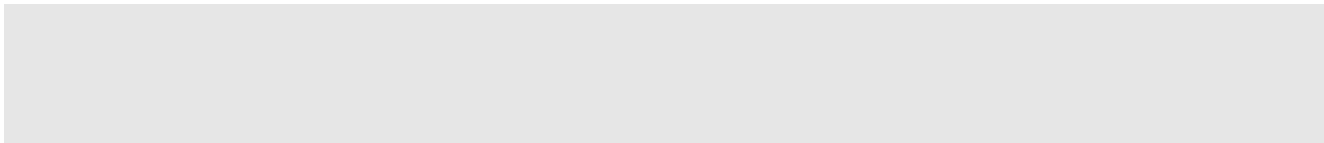




TJ Mullaney and Carolyn Mullaney, 6, sled down a hill at Bemis Park in Omaha on Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2025.

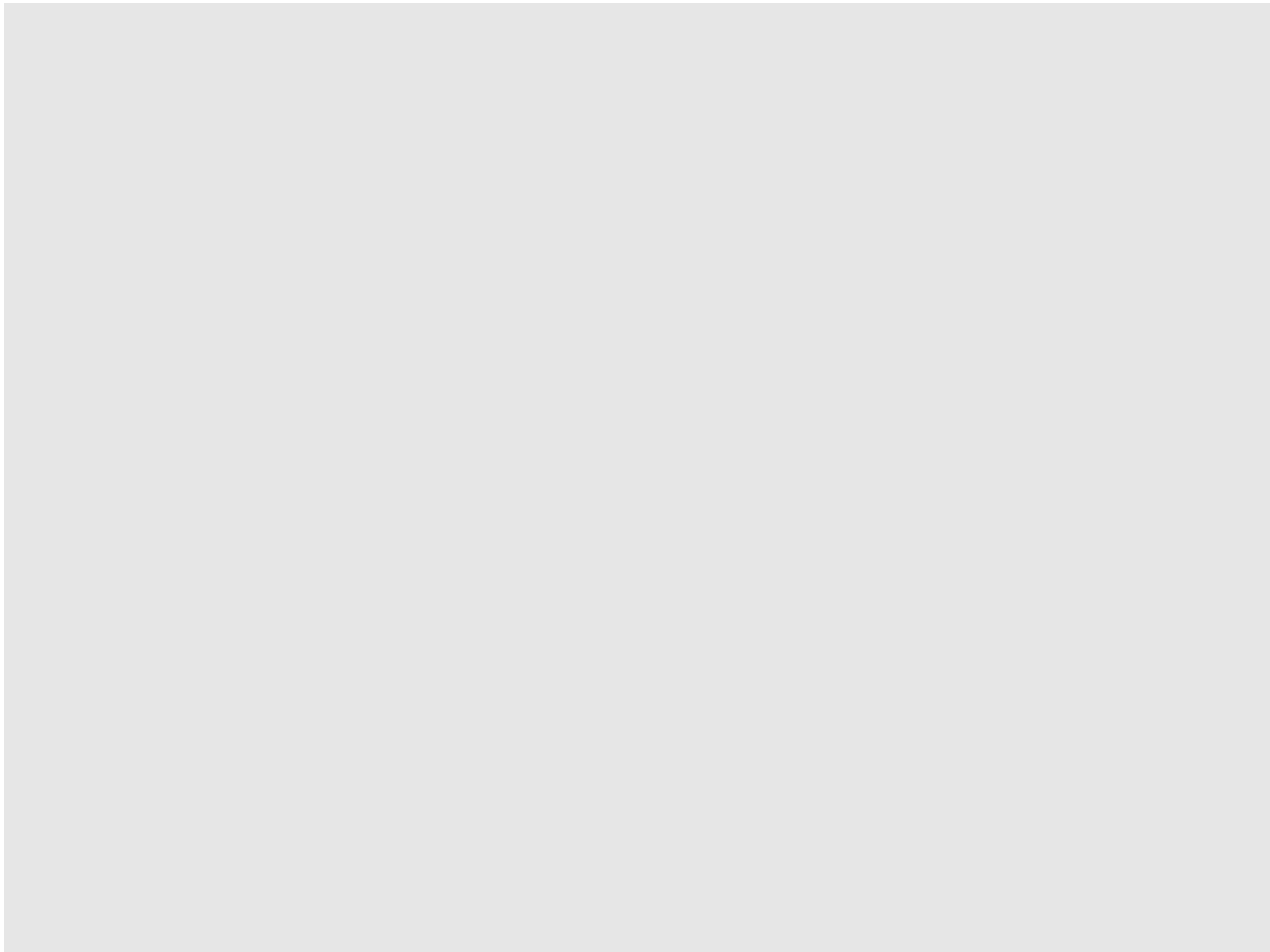
MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD





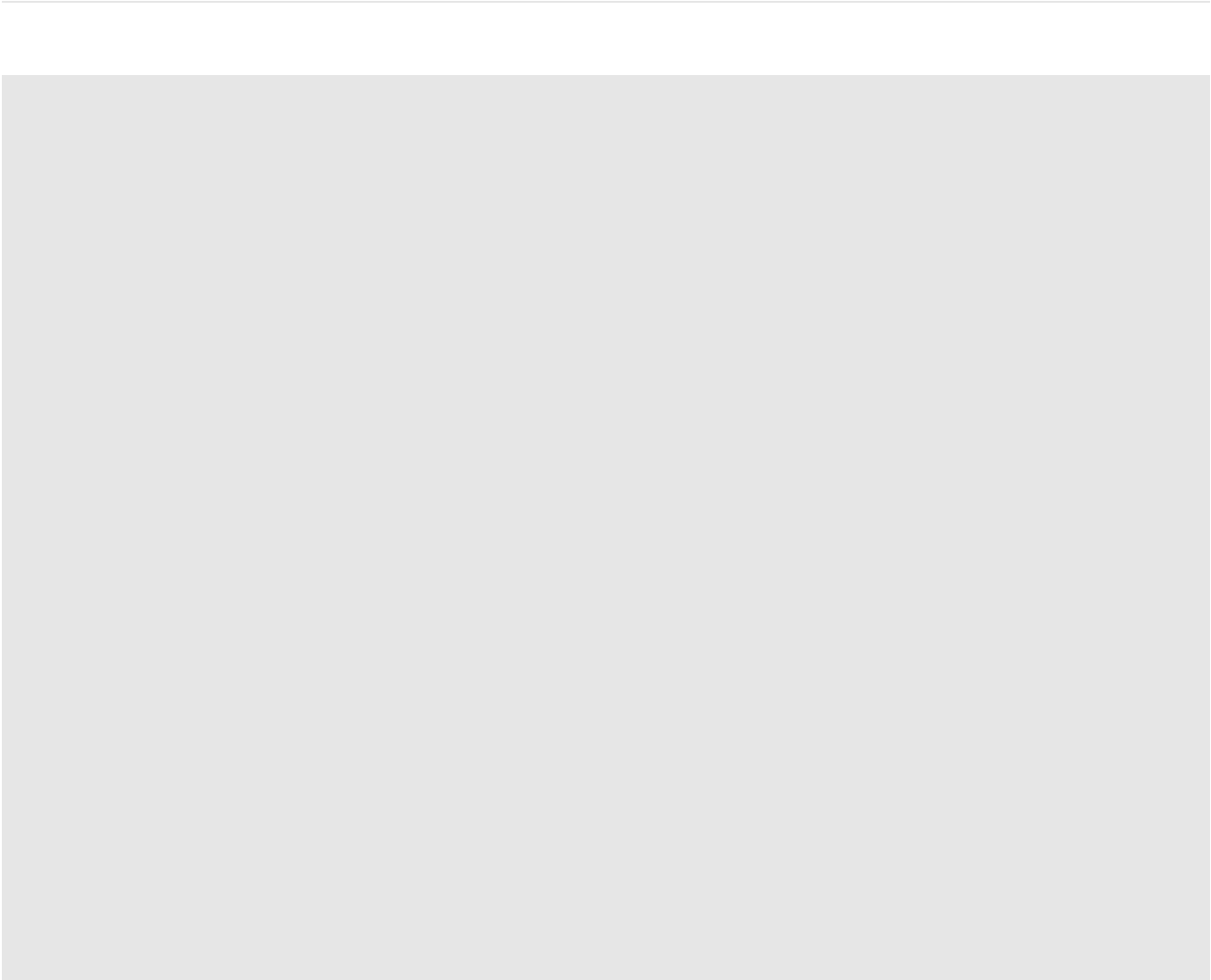
Nebraska assistant coach Adam Howard cheers while head coach Fred Hoiberg turns away from the court during the second half of a men's college basketball game in Pinnacle Bank Arena in Lincoln on Sunday, Feb. 9, 2025.

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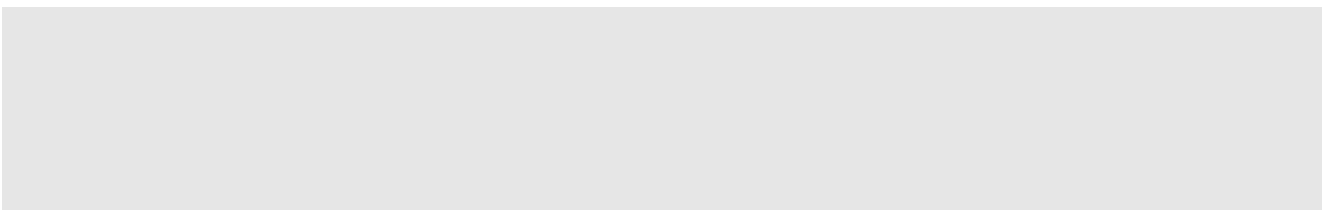
Nebraska's Connor Essegian (0) stands on the court during player introductions before a men's college basketball game in Pinnacle Bank Arena in Lincoln on Sunday, Feb. 9, 2025.

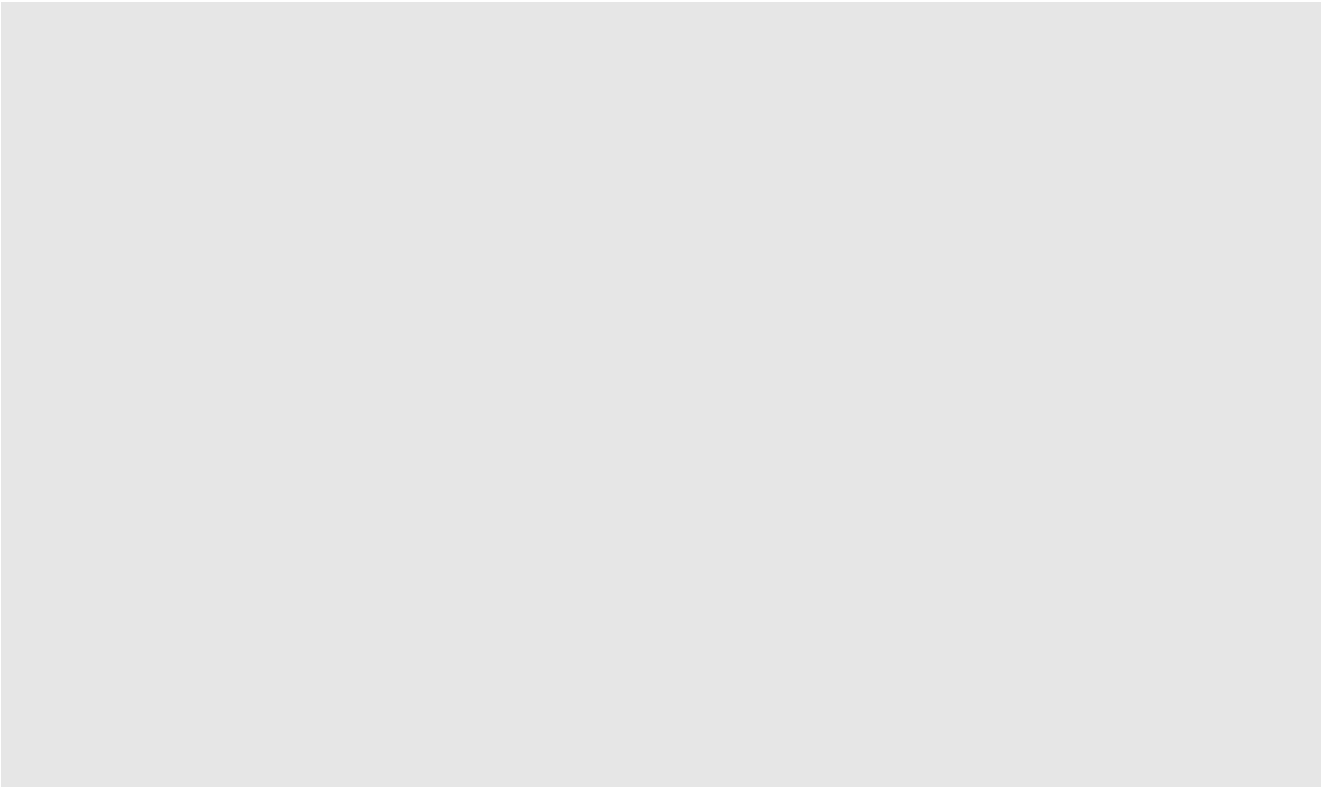
CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD



Billy Bluejay waves a flag during player introductions before the first half of a men's college basketball game at CHI Health Center in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2025.

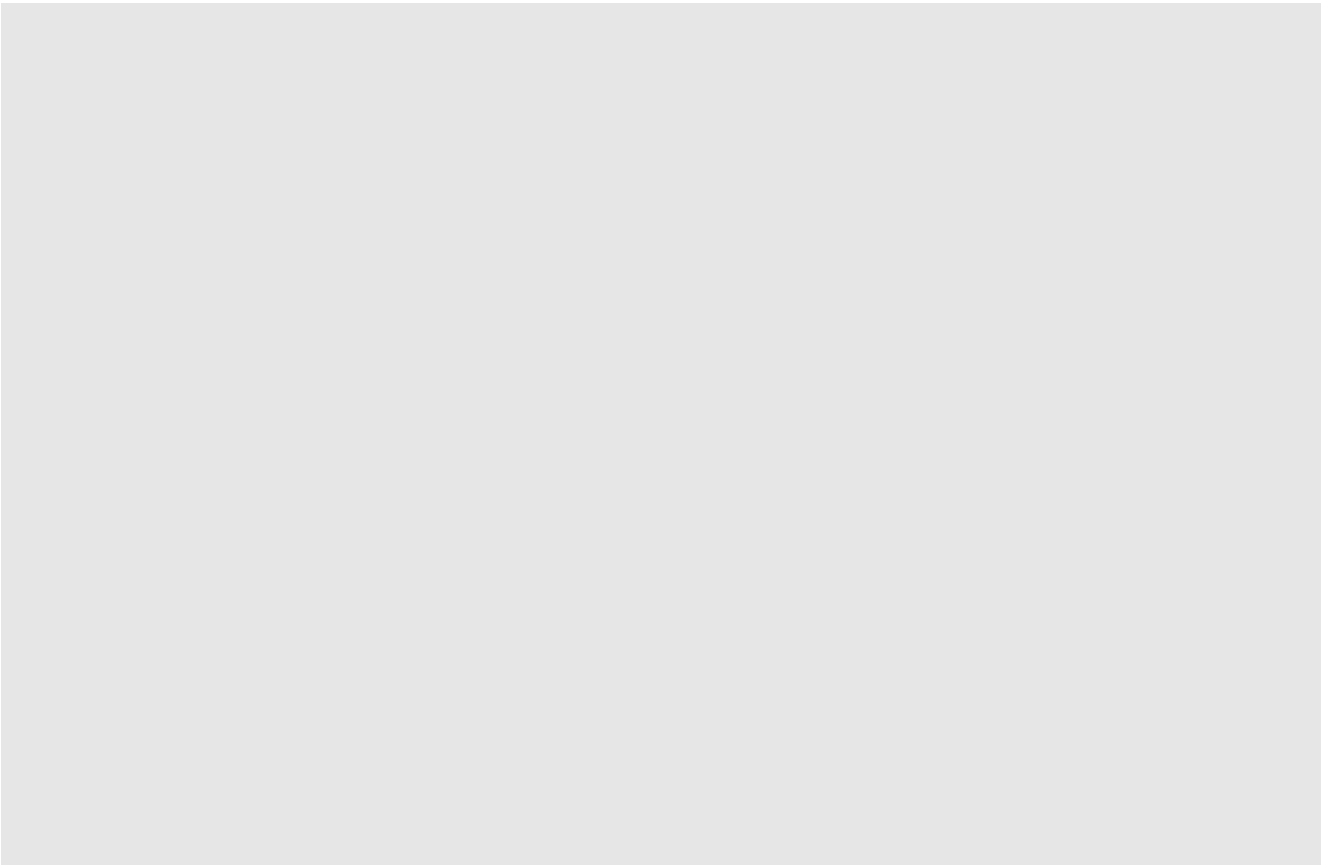
CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

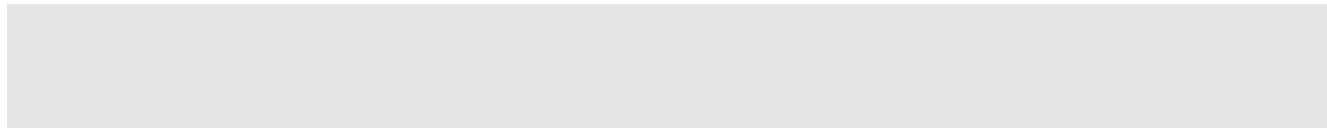




Creighton's Steven Ashworth (1) dribbles the ball against Marquette during the first half of a men's college basketball game at CHI Health Center in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2025.

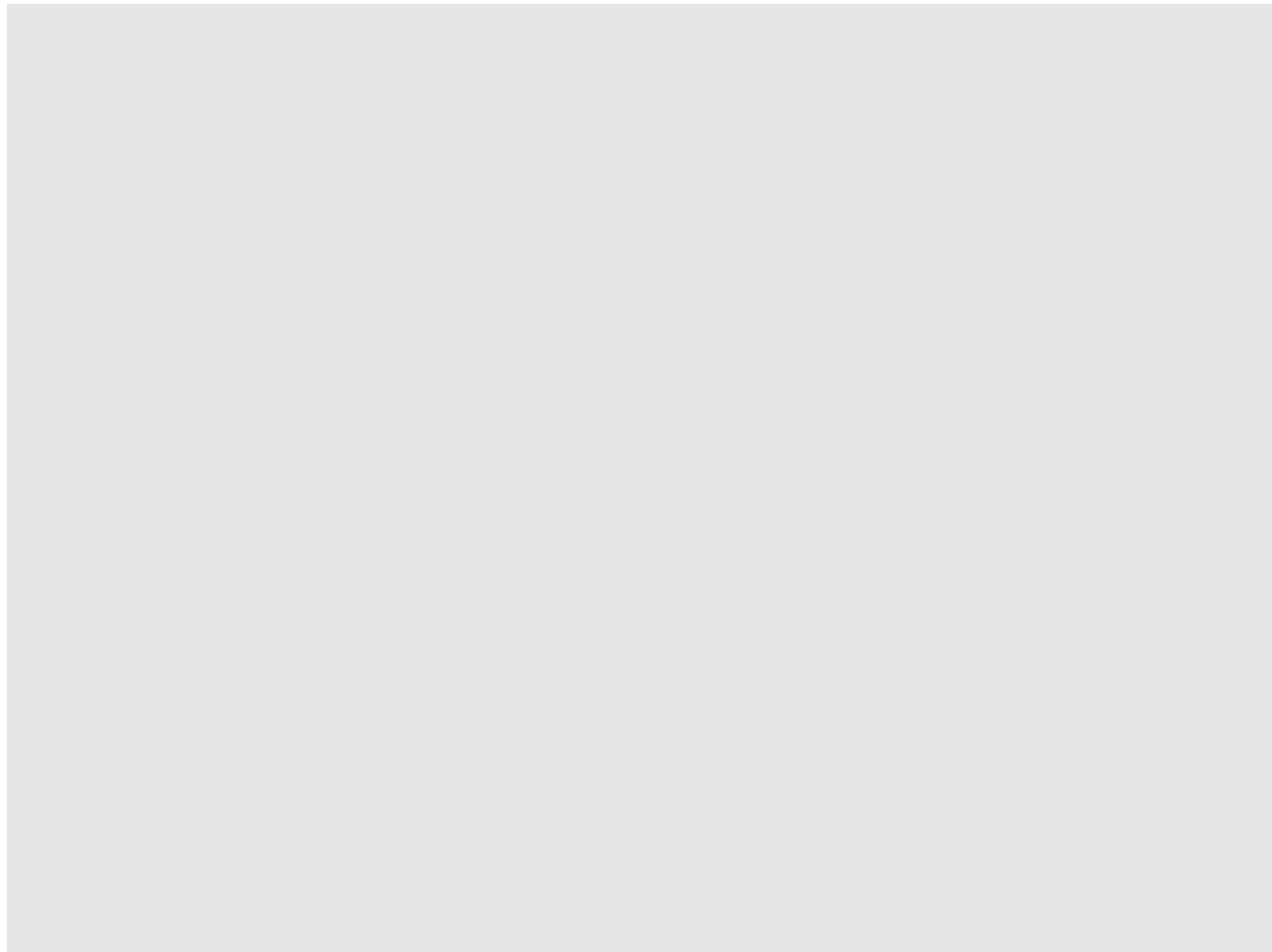
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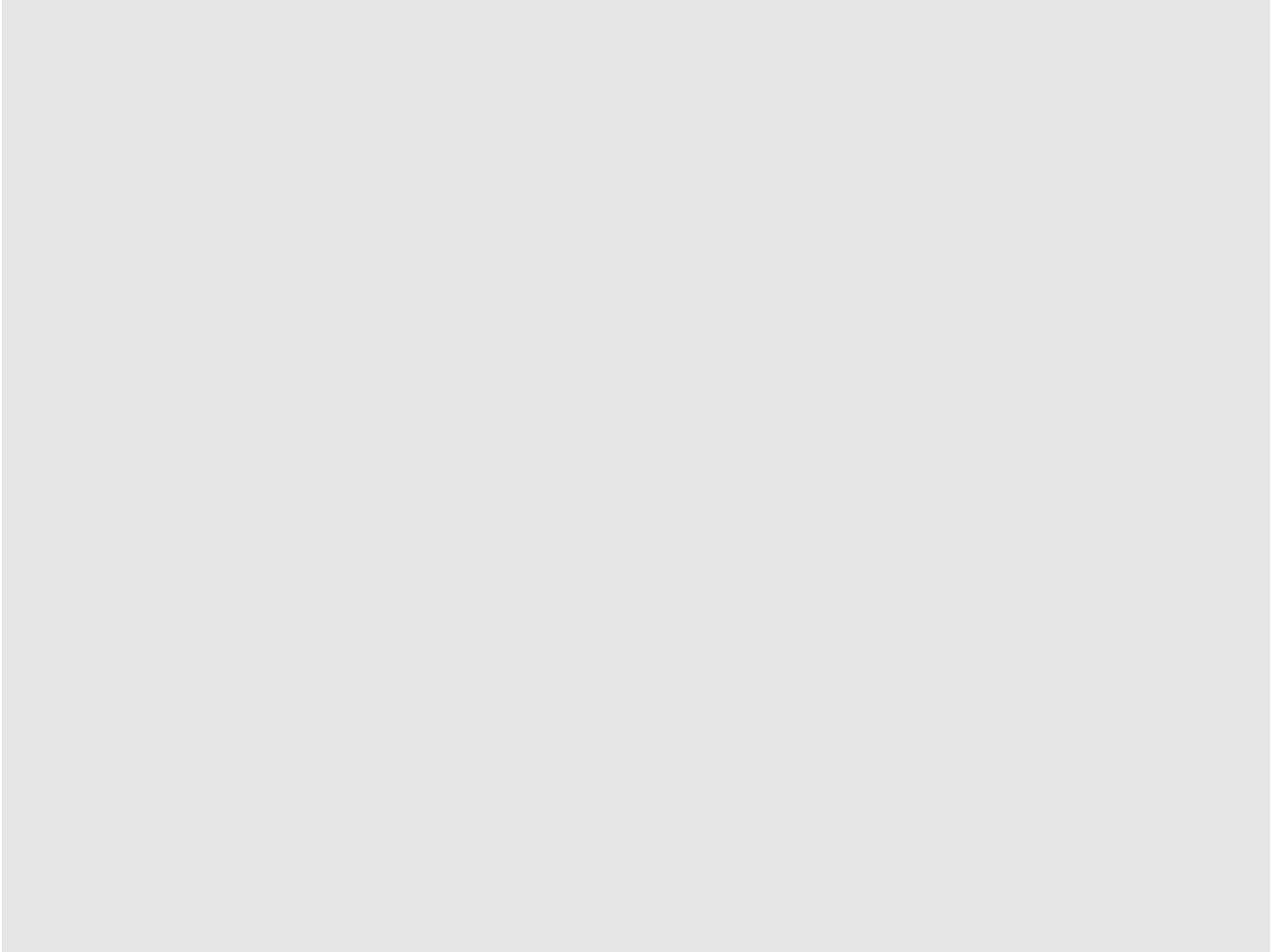
Creighton's Mason Miller (13) looks to pass the ball away from Marquette's Kam Jones (1) during the first half of a men's college basketball game at CHI Health Center in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2025.

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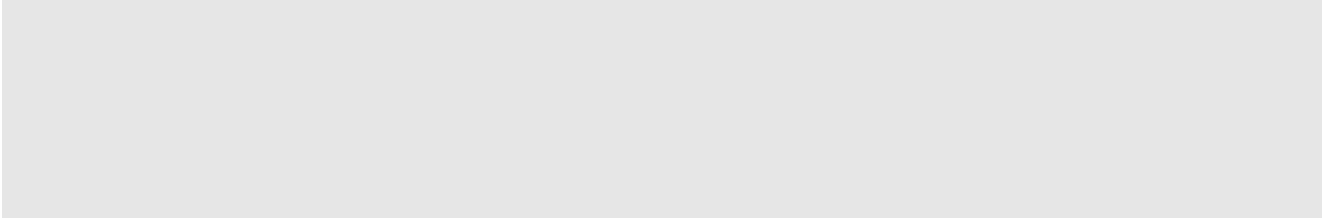
The new Nebraska volleyball head coach Dani Busboom Kelly speaks at an introduction ceremony at the Devaney Center in Lincoln on Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025.

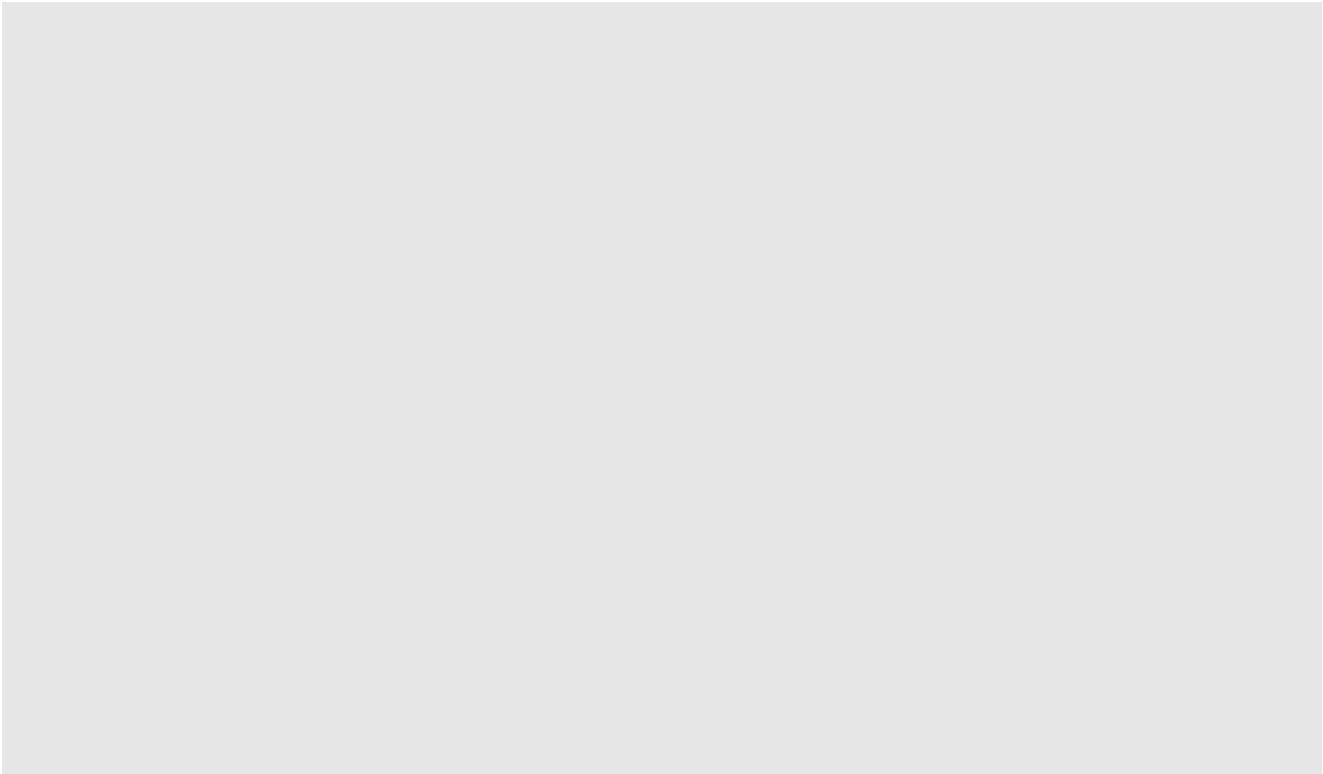
MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD



Fans watch as new Nebraska volleyball head coach Dani Busboom Kelly is introduced at the Devaney Center in Lincoln on Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025.

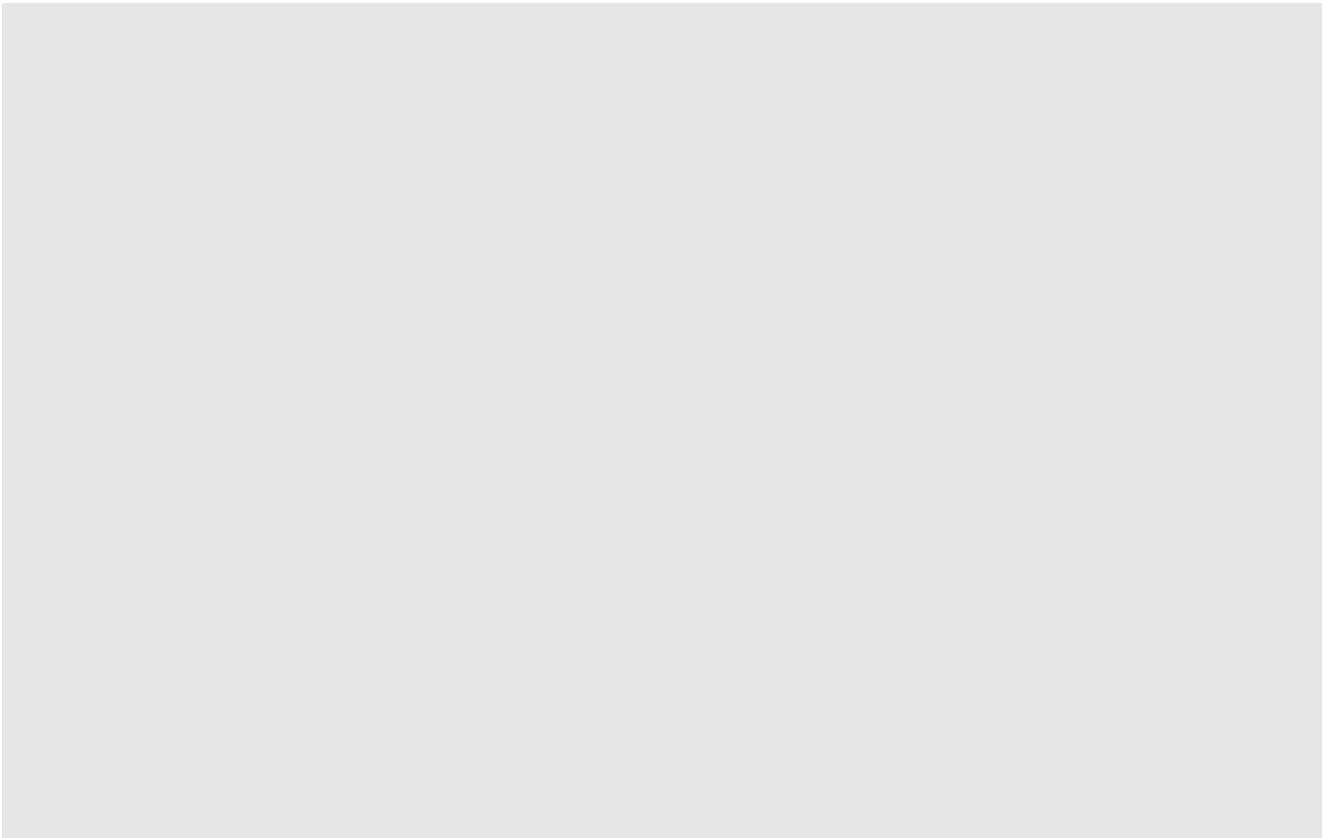
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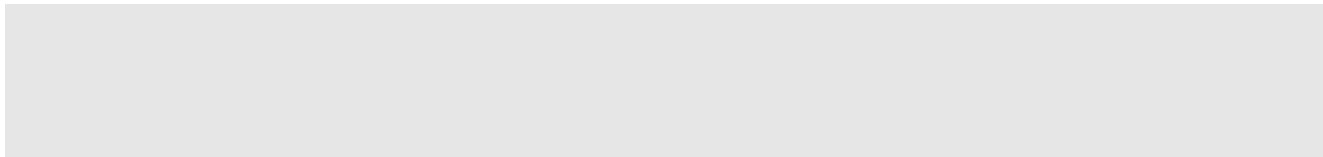




Lia Post holds up signs showing support for transgender kids at a press conference organized to voice concerns with LB 89, which would apply gender restrictions on all state-led entities, at the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln on Friday, Feb. 7, 2025.

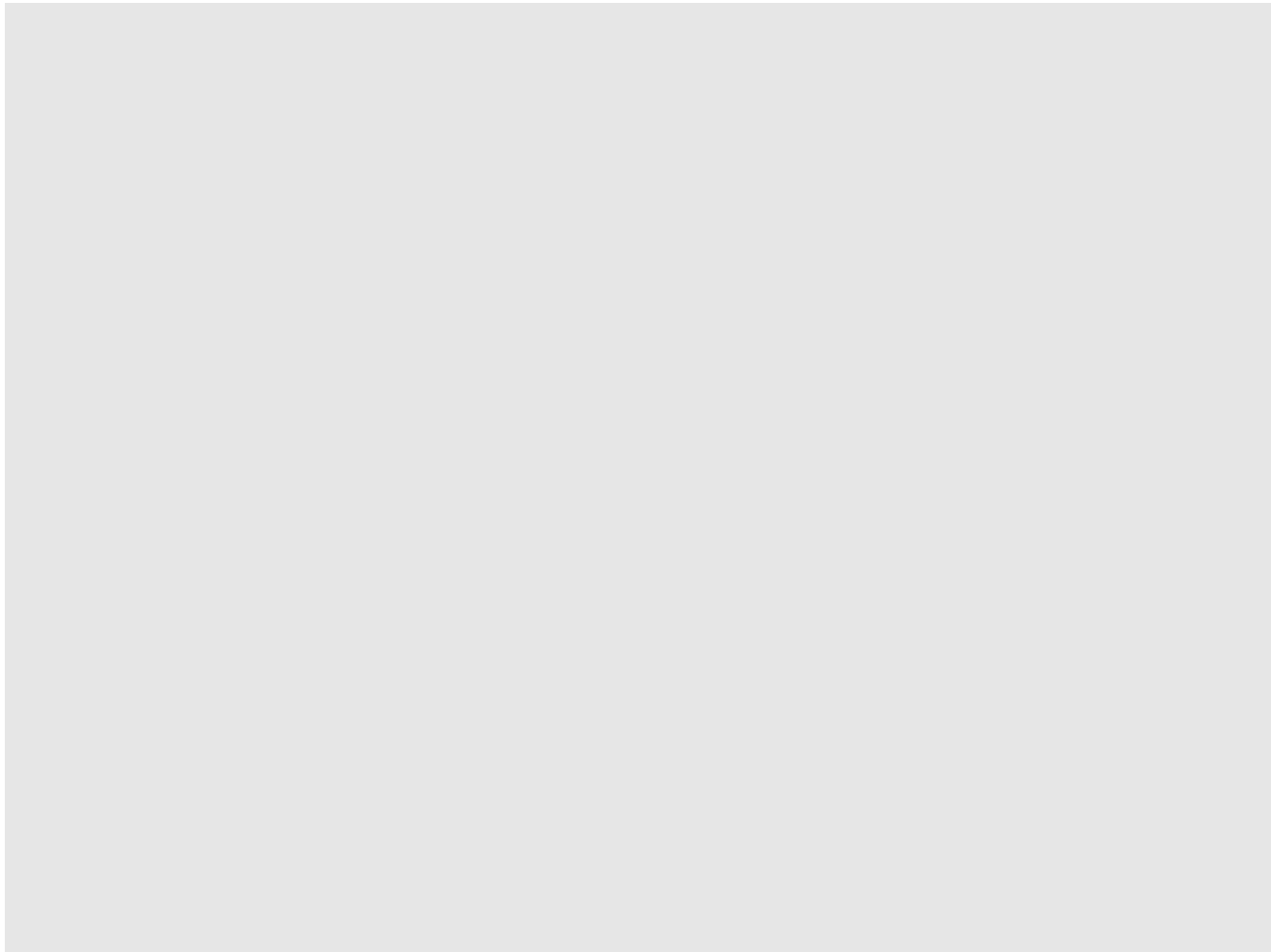
MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD





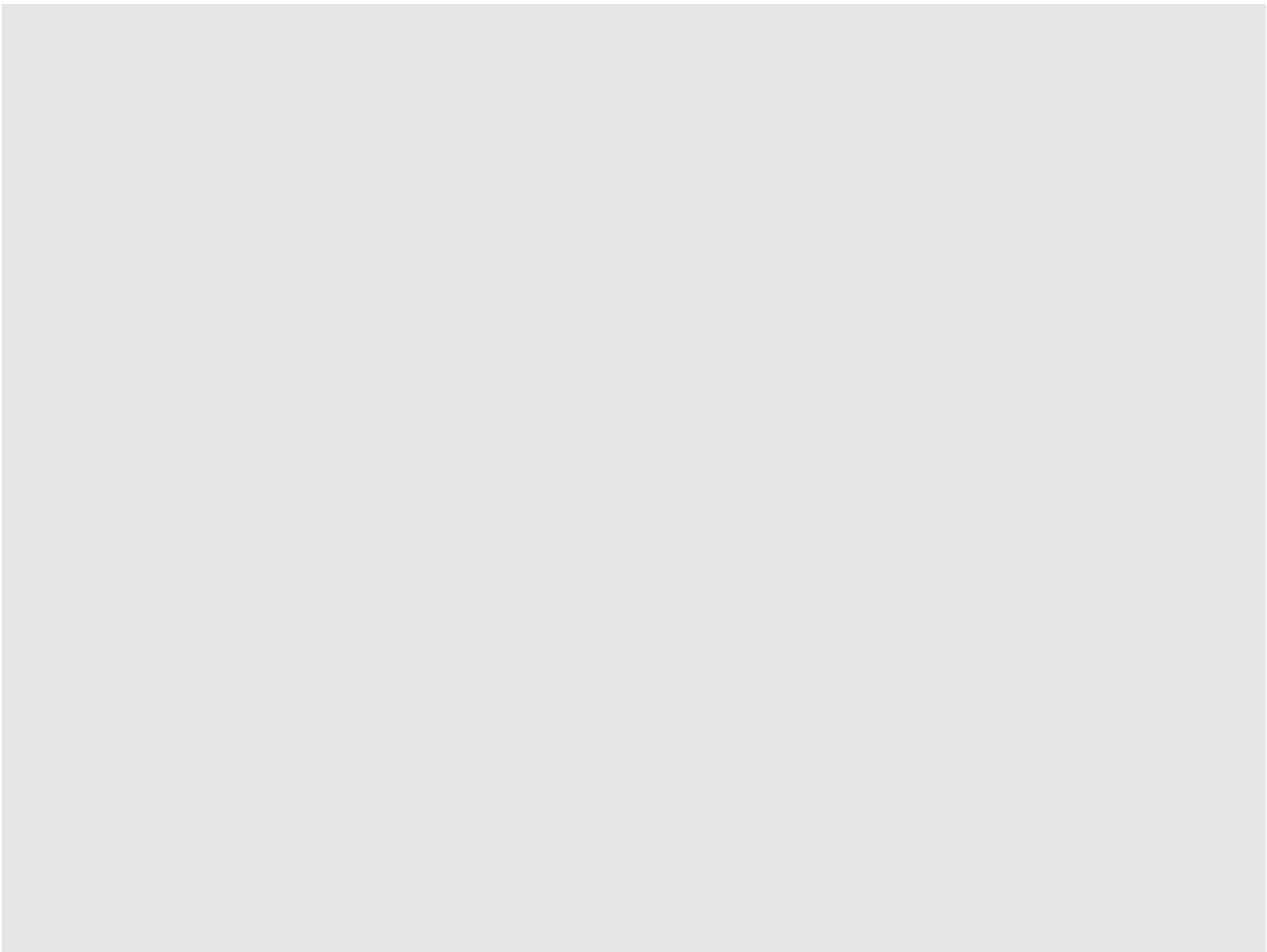
Attendees hold up signs that read "Nebraska is for all of us" at a press conference organized to voice concerns with LB 89, which would apply gender restrictions on all state-led entities, at the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln on Friday, Feb. 7, 2025.

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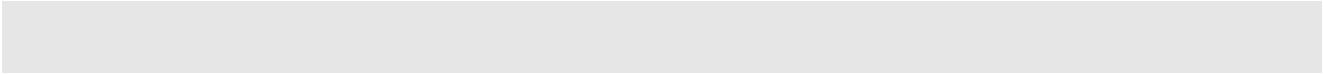
Teresa Scott gets emotional while holding her cat Digger in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2025. Scott's boyfriend, Adam Kerr, died in a fire at their apartment a week before. Digger's mother, Precious, also perished in the fire. Digger was thrown from a third-floor window and was found a few days later. Scott was rescued from the fire and spent several days in the hospital before being reunited with her cat.

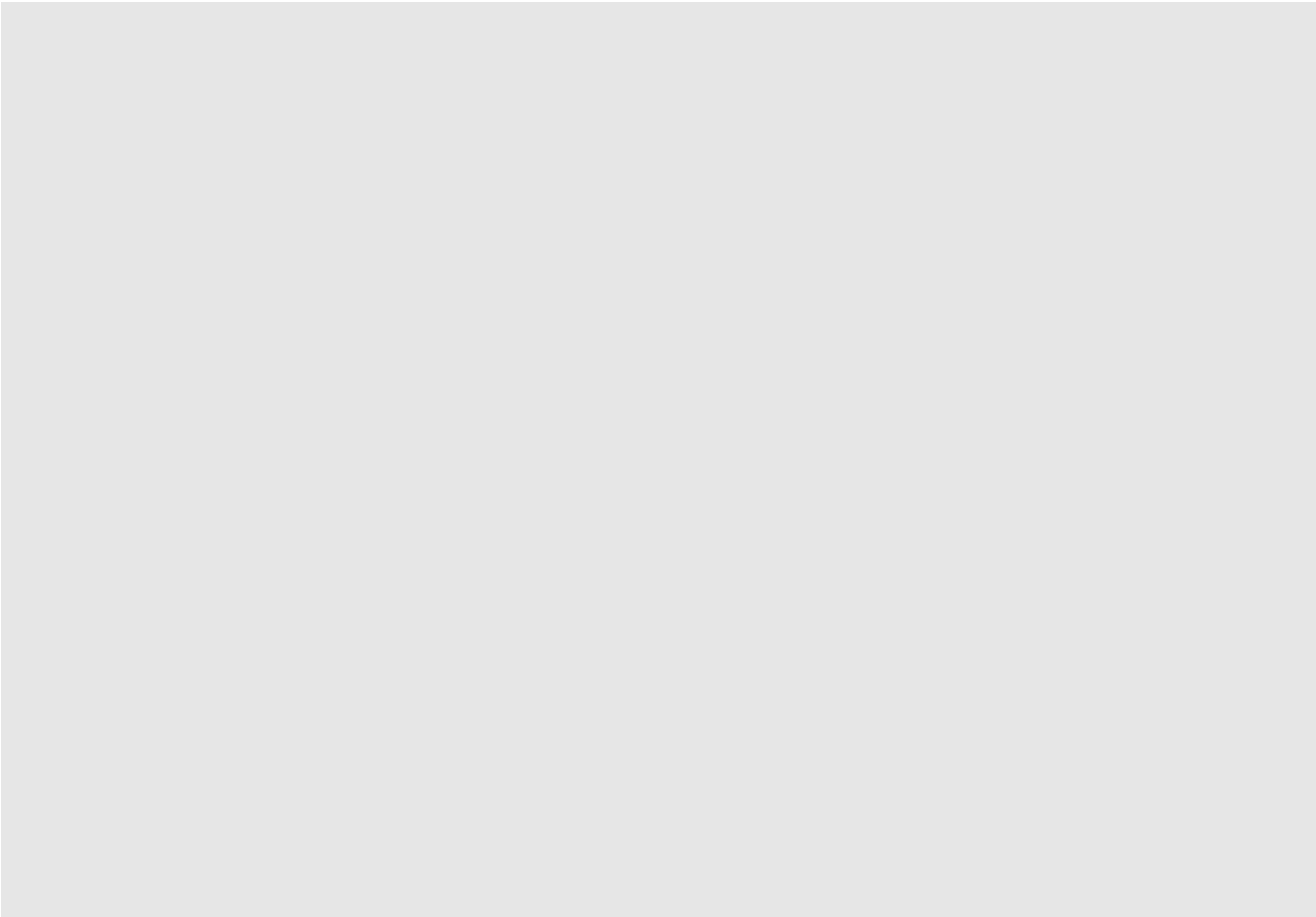
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One person was killed, and another went to a hospital in critical condition after a crash left a vehicle overturned in the Little Papillion Creek in Omaha on Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2025.

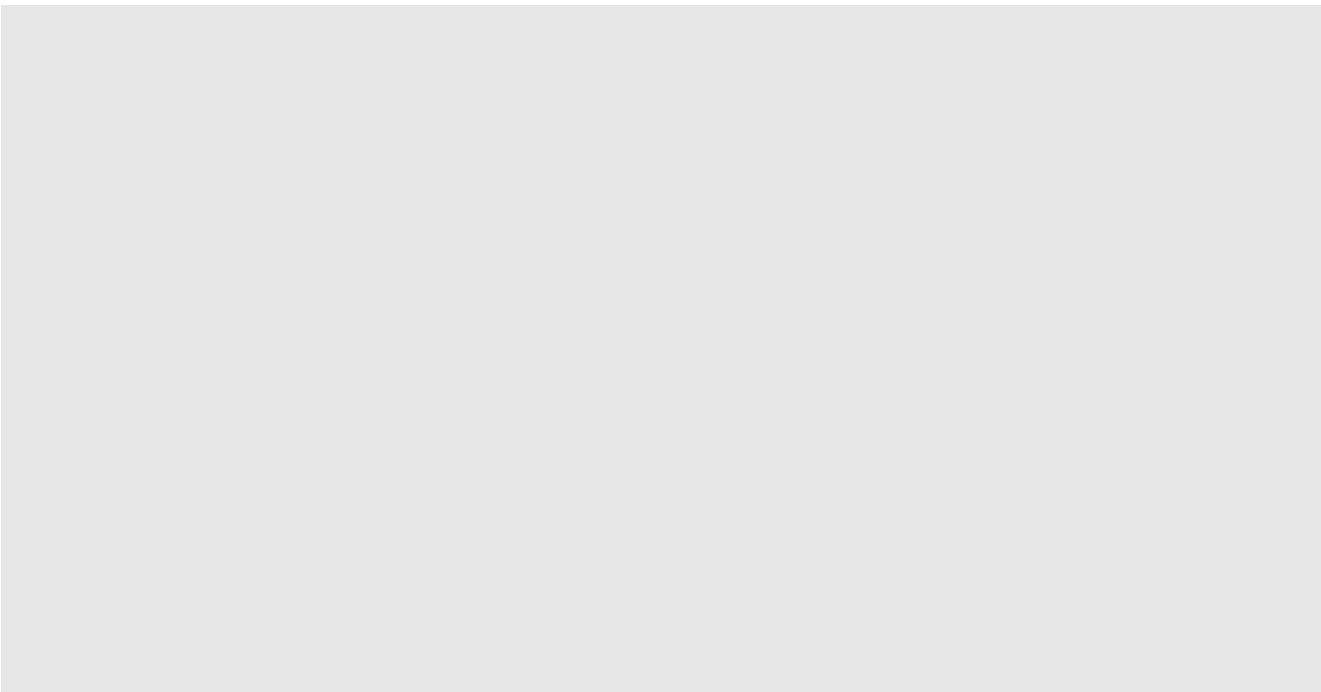
CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

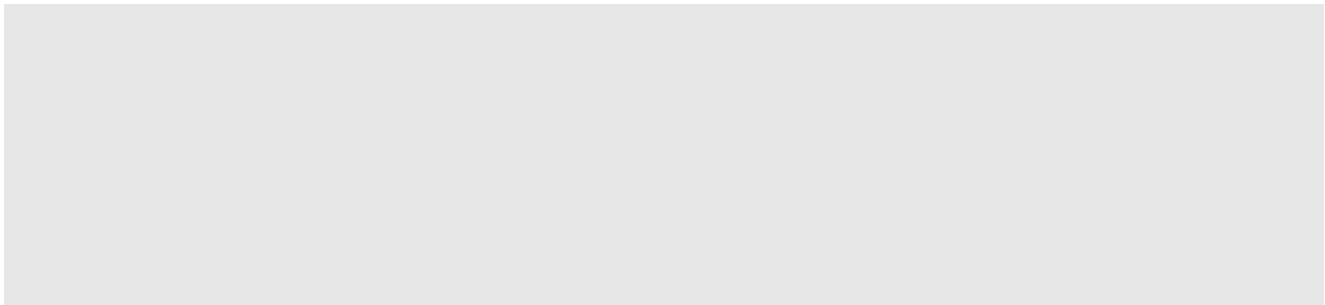




Wood River's Jace Martin celebrates his win over Battle Creek's Ayden Wintz during the Nebraska Class C 113-pound boys championship match at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025.

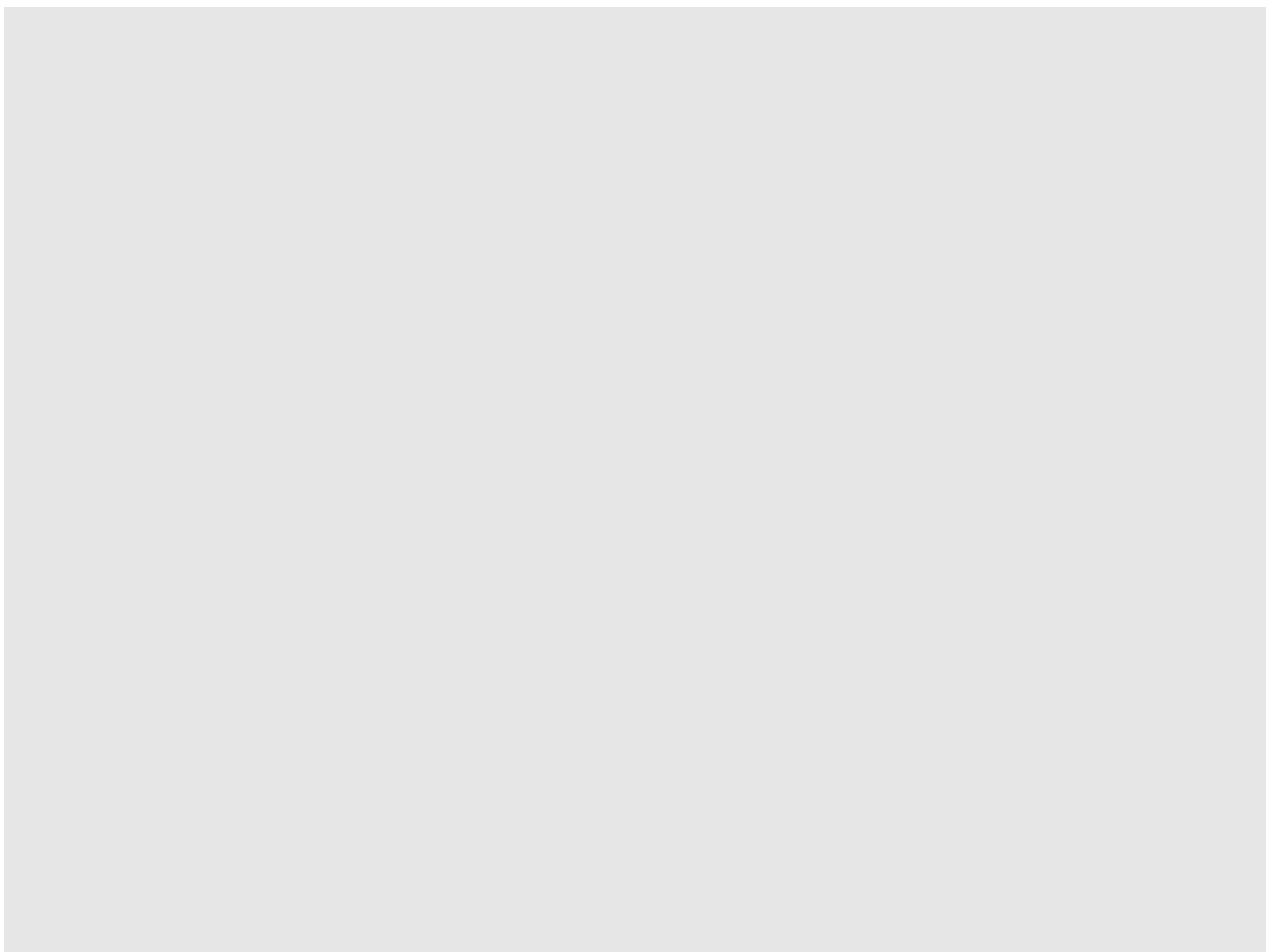
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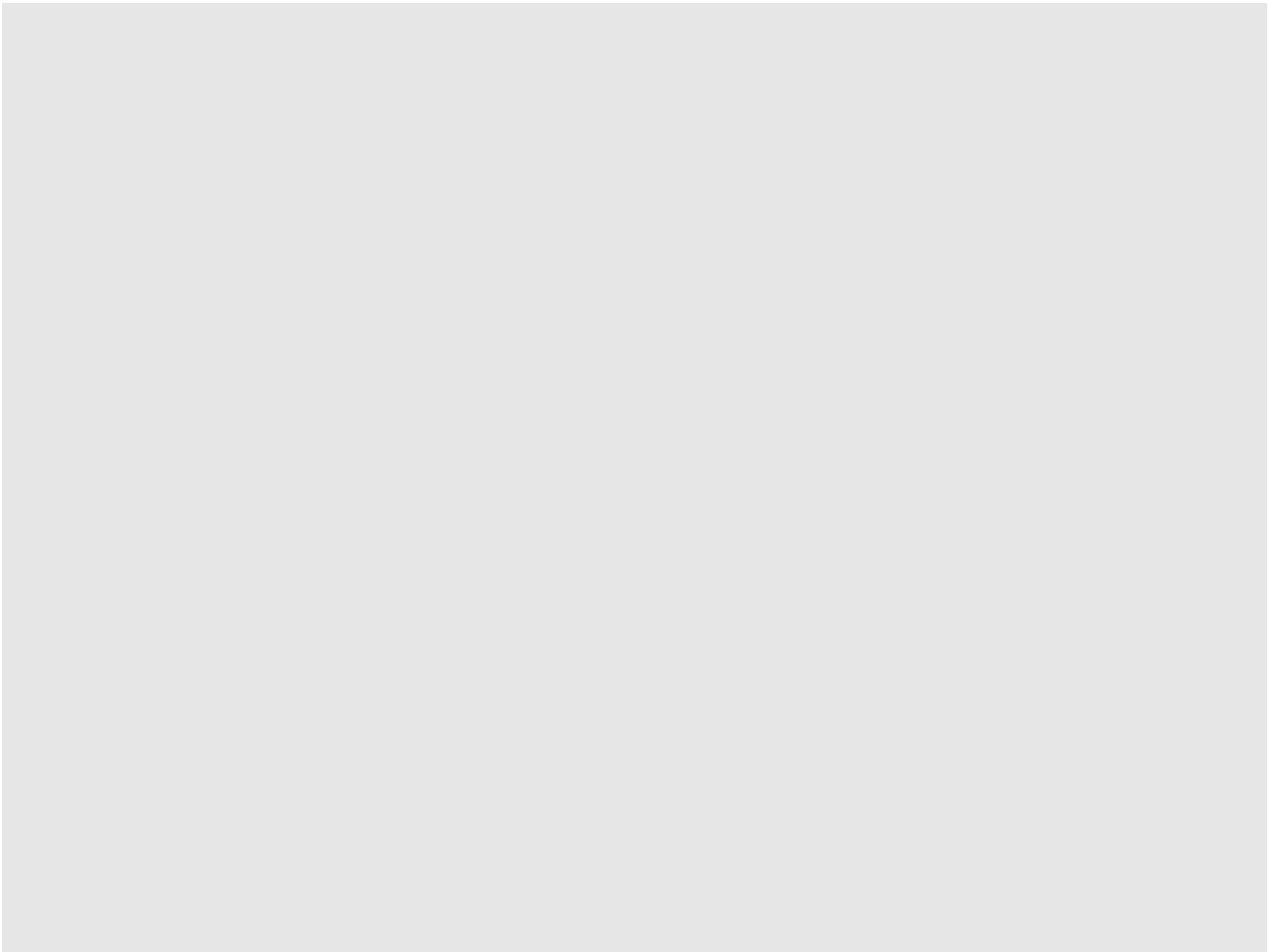
Sidney's Cayson Boltjes is introduced before he wrestles Omaha Skutt's Cade Ziola during the Nebraska Class B 215-pound boys championship match at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025.

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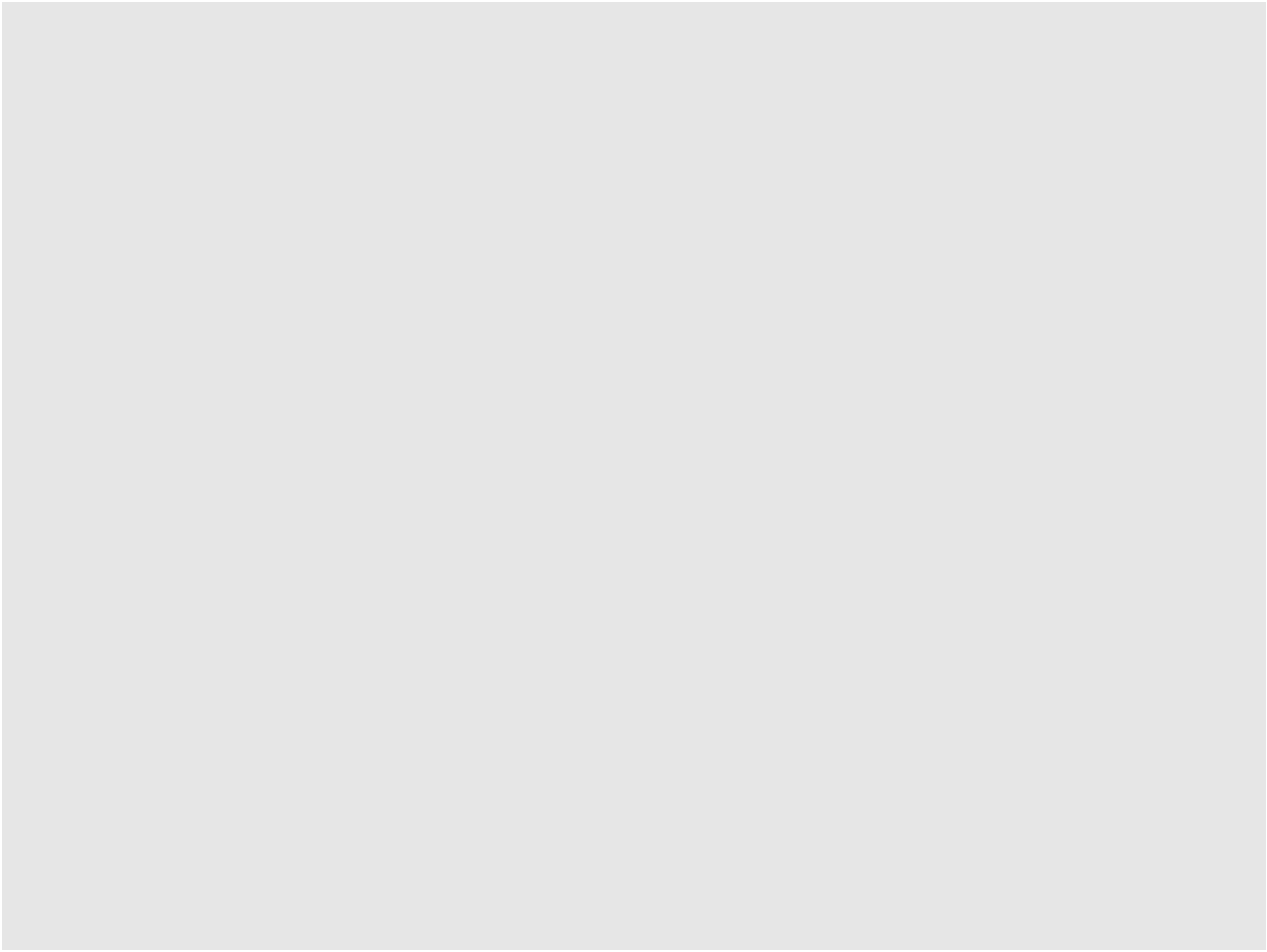
Sandy Creek's Rowan Jarosik celebrates his win over Wilcox-Hildreth's Graiden Ritner during the Nebraska Class D 165-pound boys championship match at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025.

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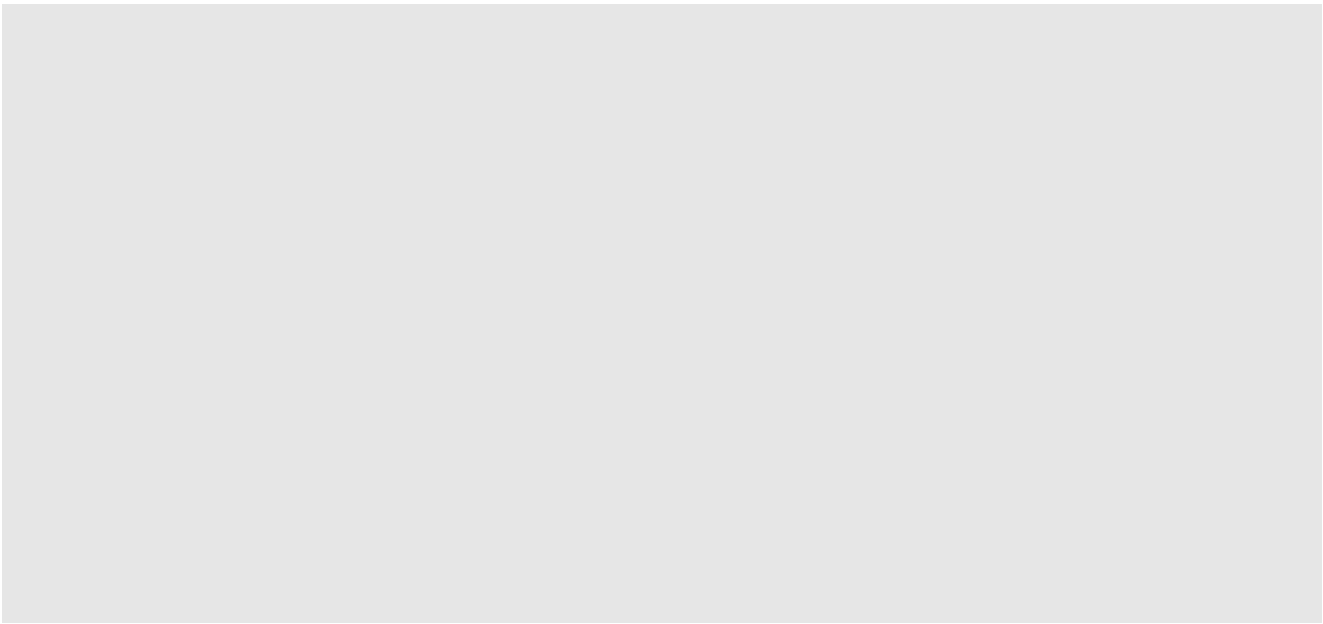
Palmyra's Evelyn Bryan-Aldrich celebrates her win over Winnebago's Precious DeCora wrestles during the Nebraska Class B 235-pound championship match during the Nebraska girls state wrestling tournament at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2025.

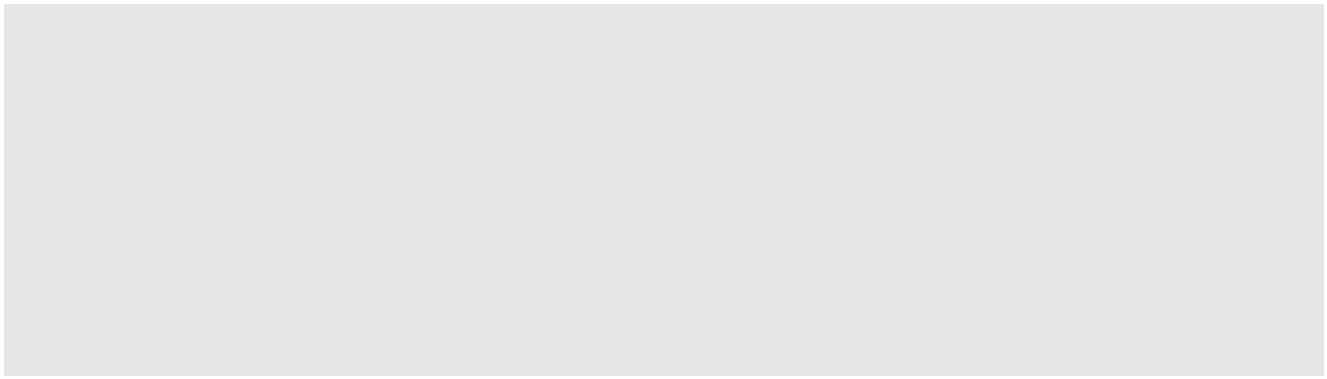
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Sutherland's Addison Arvdal waits to be introduced before her match with Broken Bow's Ida Bumgarner during the Nebraska Class B 190-pound championship match during the Nebraska girls state wrestling tournament at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2025.

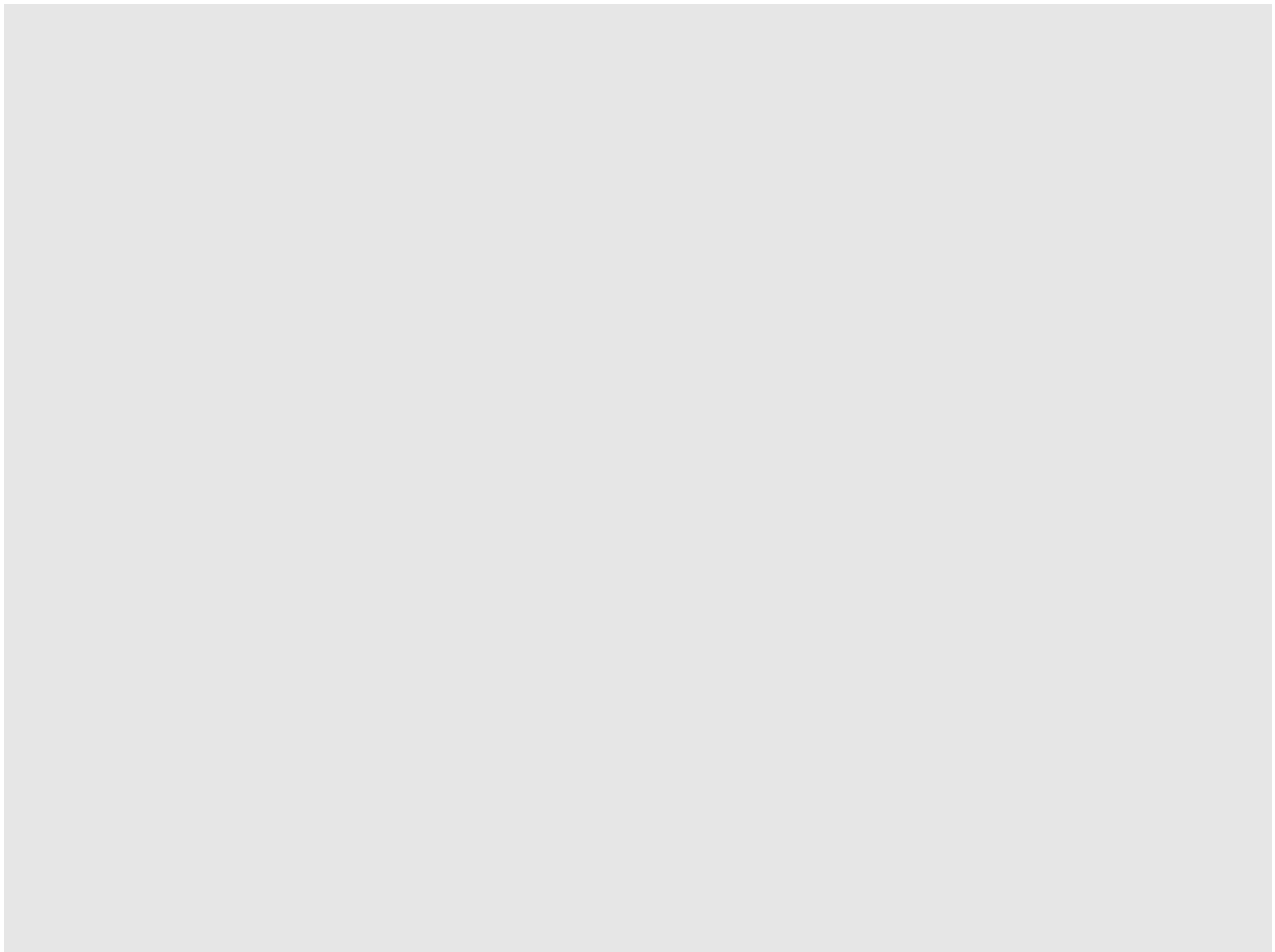
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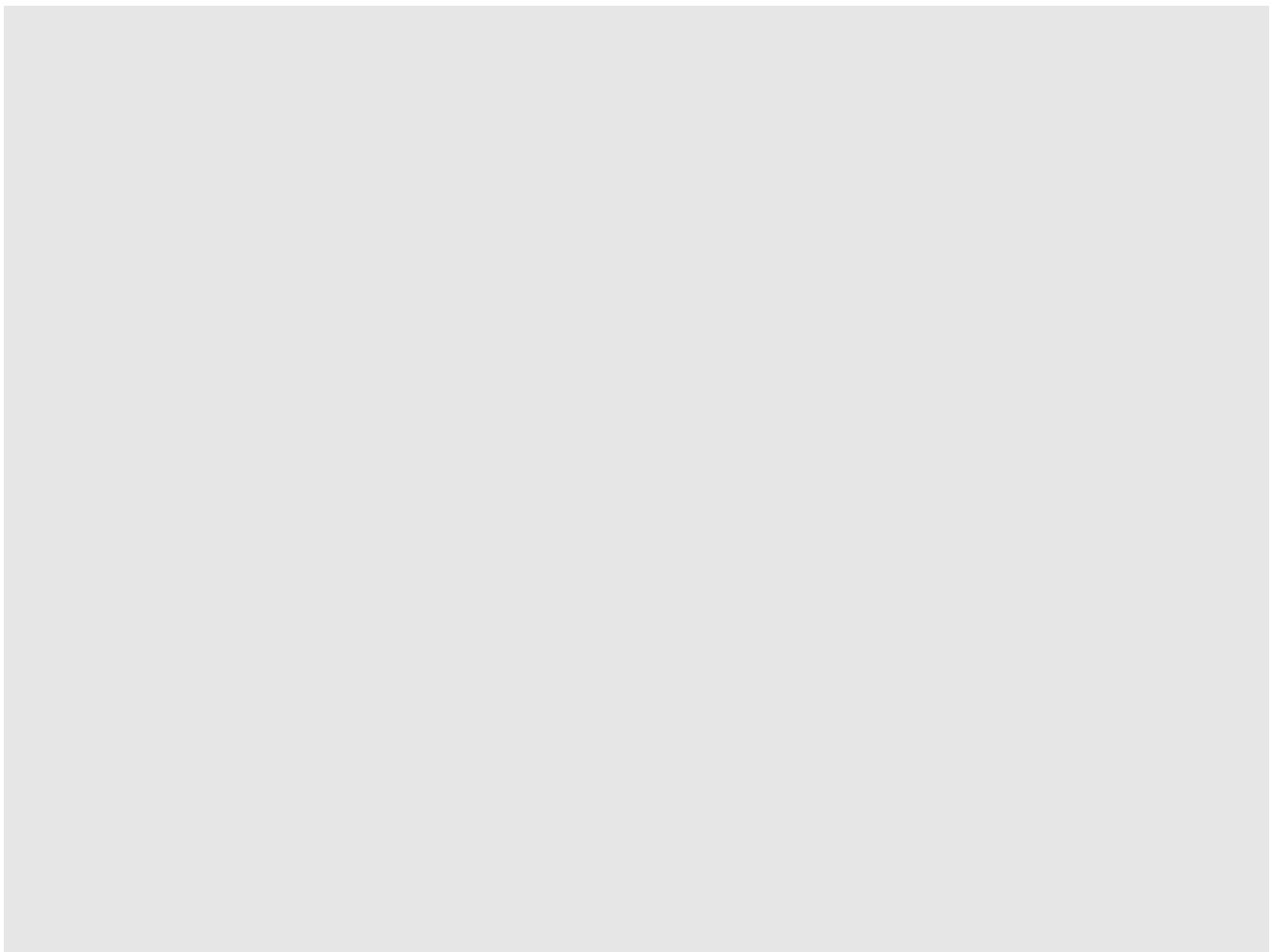
Crofton/Bloomfield's Rylie Arens, standing, wrestles Battle Creek's Taylor Ahlman during the Nebraska Class B 140-pound championship match

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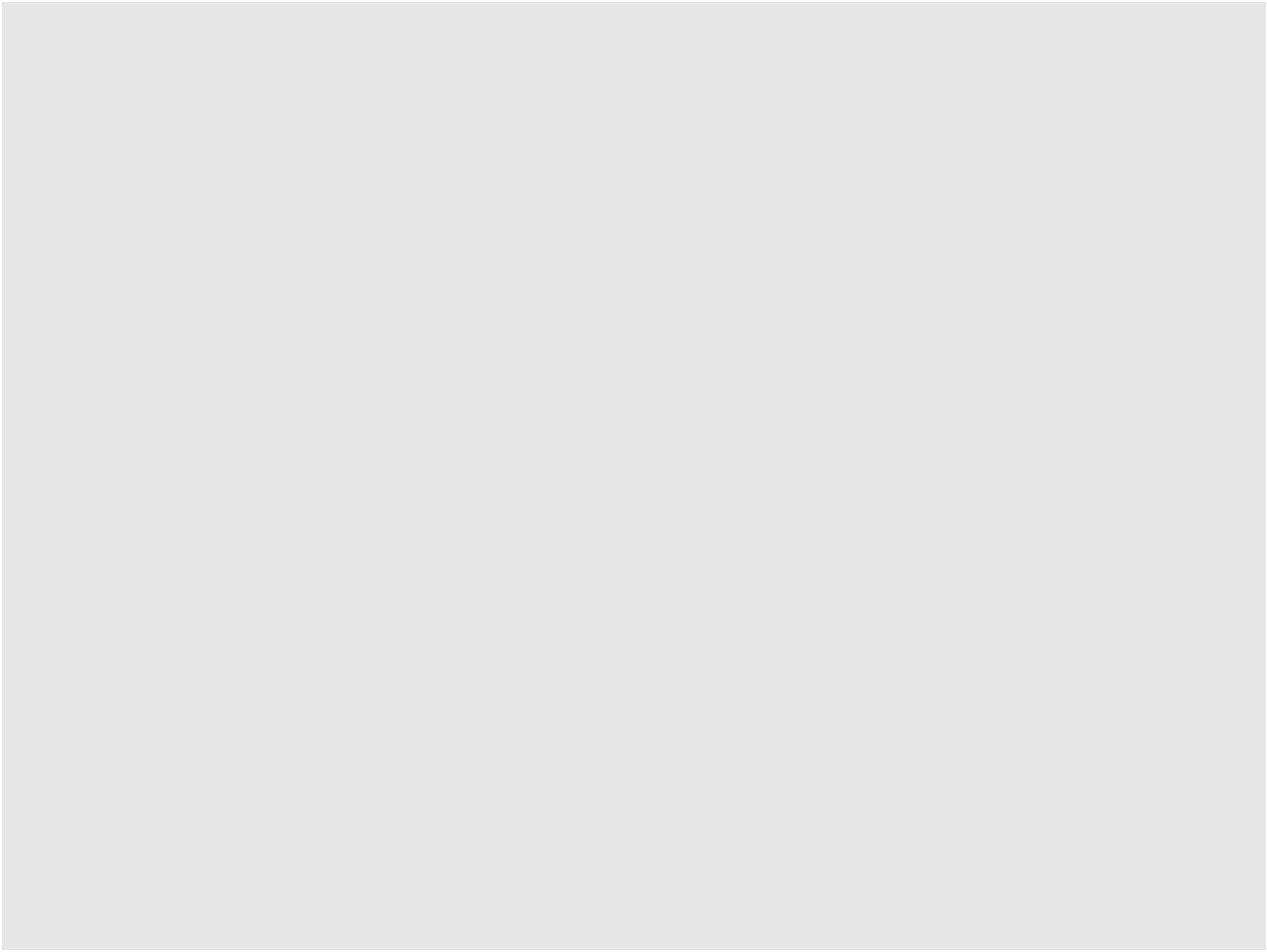
Lincoln East's Lesli Guerra-Avalos, left, wrestles Fremont's Daisy Alonso Gomez during a Class A 125-pound first round match

CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD



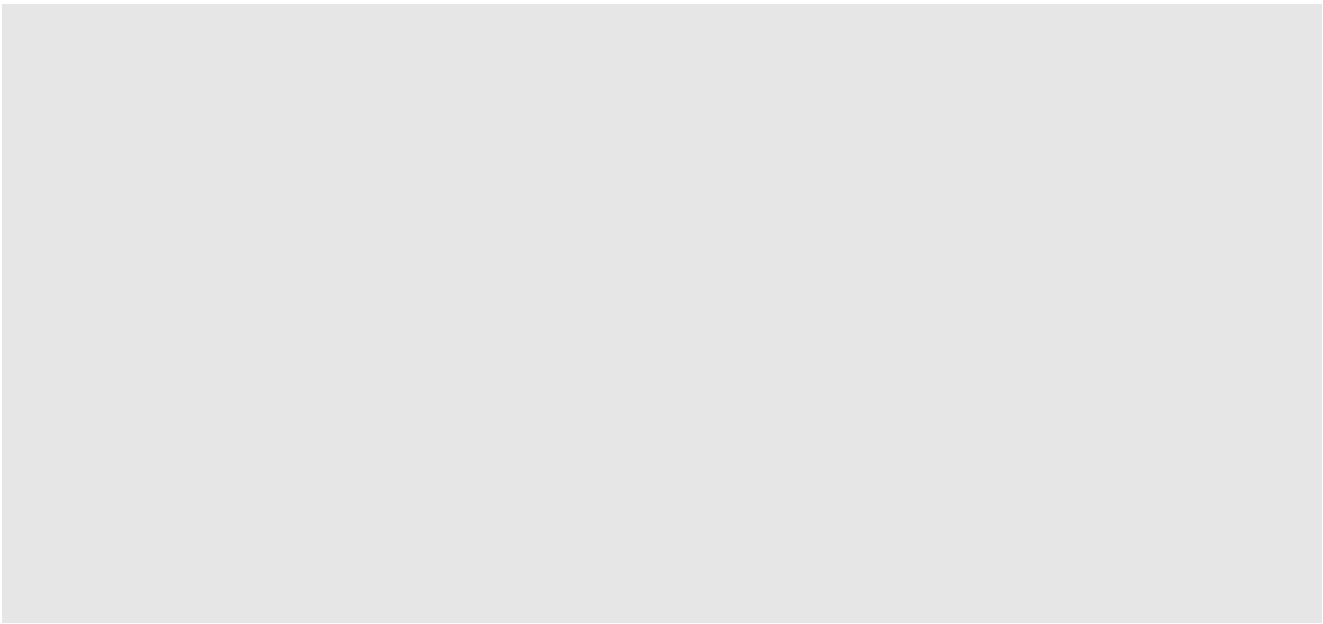
Grand Island's Bella Arrants wrestles Crete's Trinity Williamson during a Class A 130-pound first round match during the Nebraska girls state wrestling tournament at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025.

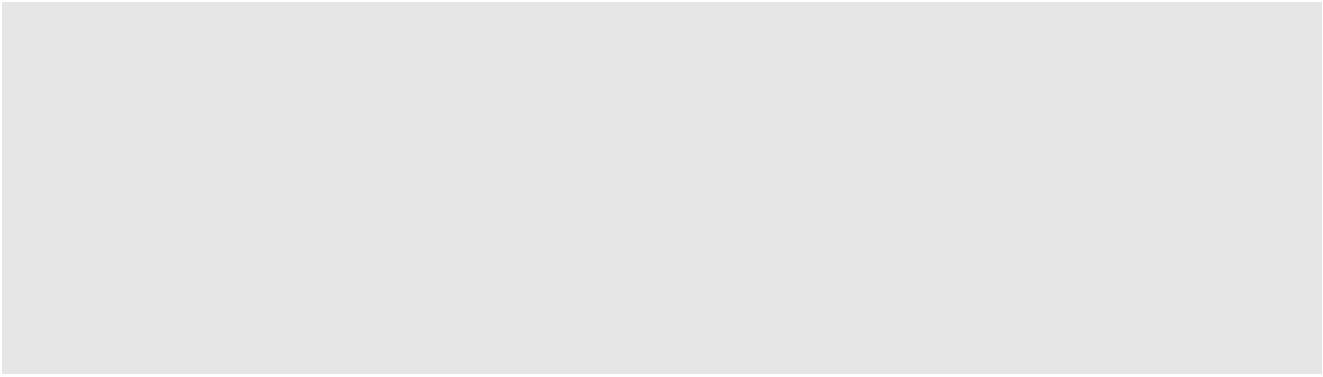
CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD



Carl Schrat, a World War II veteran who served in the navy, greets his neighbor, who he considers to be more of his grandchild, Ellie Murphy, 6, at a World War II medal presentation ceremony at the Disabled American Veterans in Omaha on Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2025.

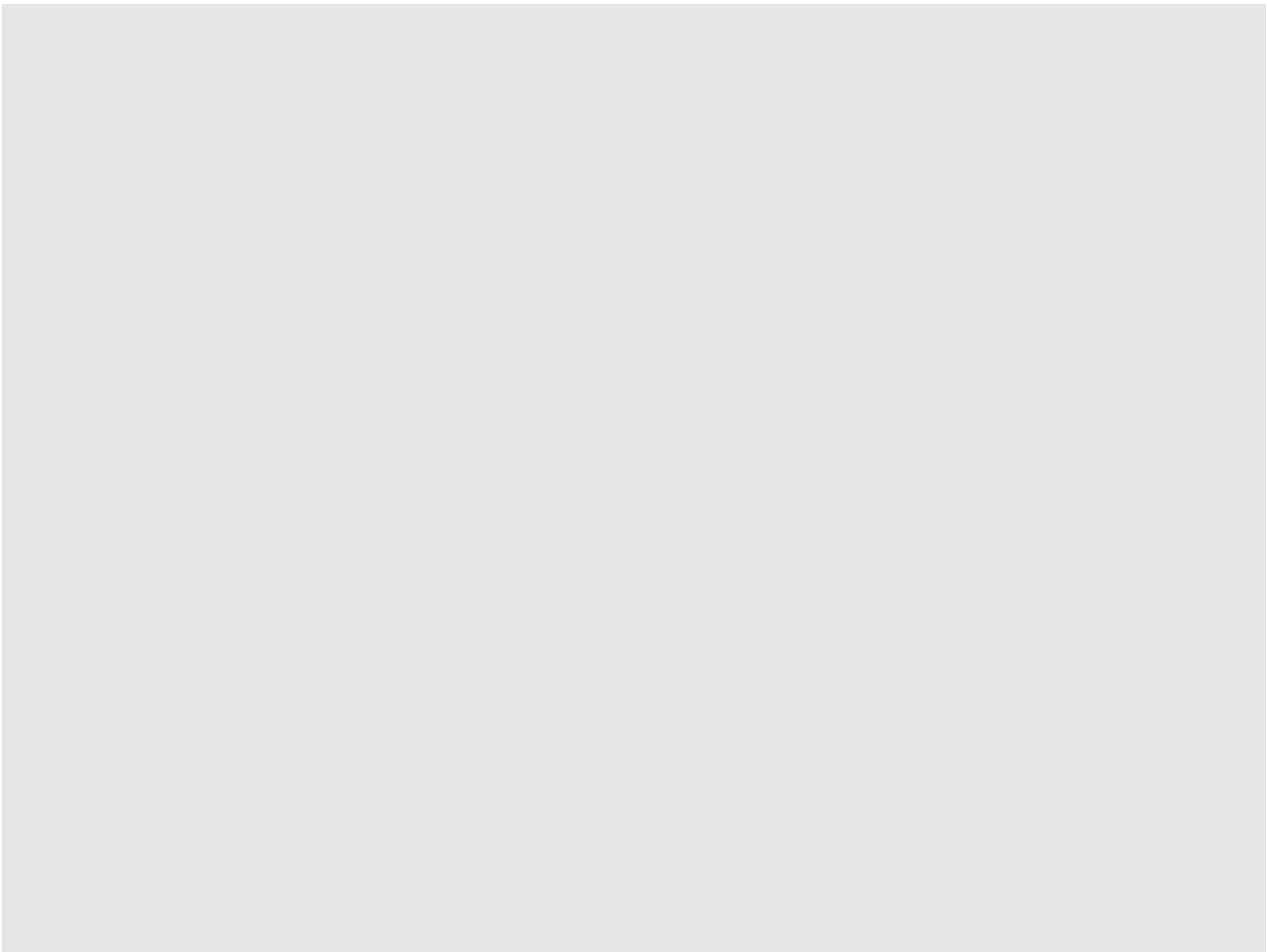
MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD





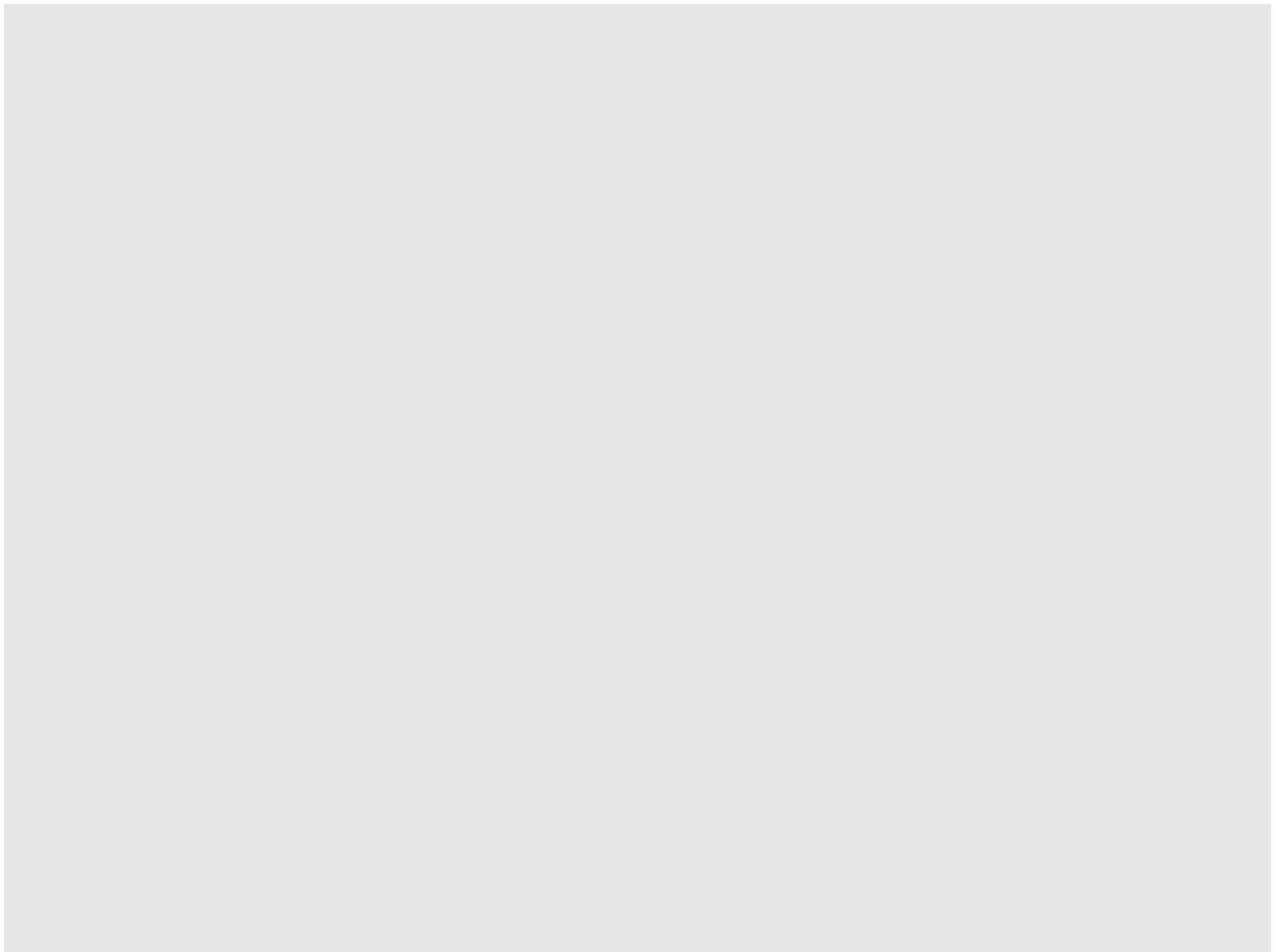
Riverside's Trevor Carraher celebrates after beating Central Valley's Landon Shoemaker during a Nebraska Class D 138-pound quarterfinal round match at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025.

MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD



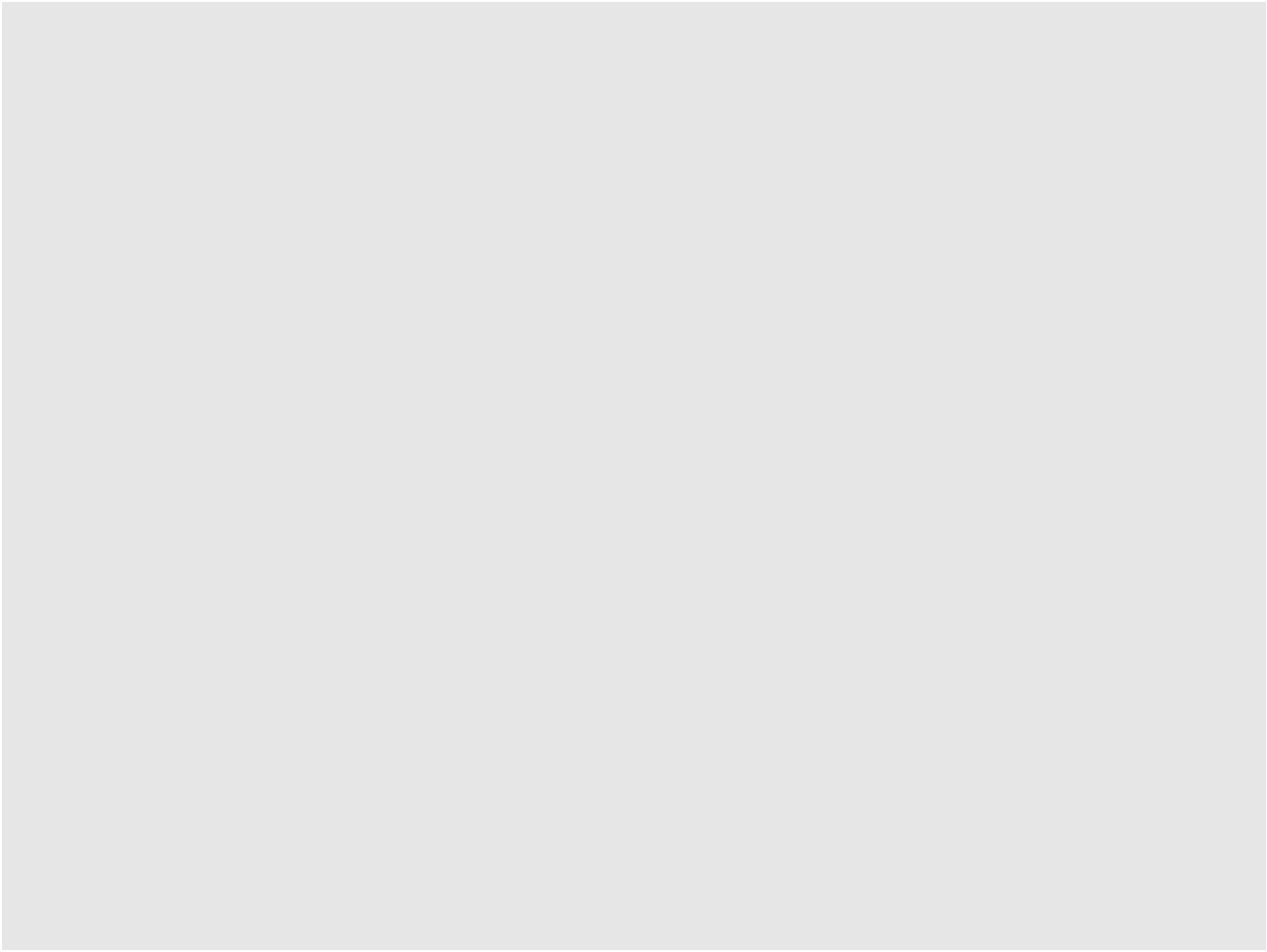
Battle Creek's Tyan Thompson reacts after his loss to Tekamah-Herman's Blayne Williams during a Class C 120-pound first round match at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025.

MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD



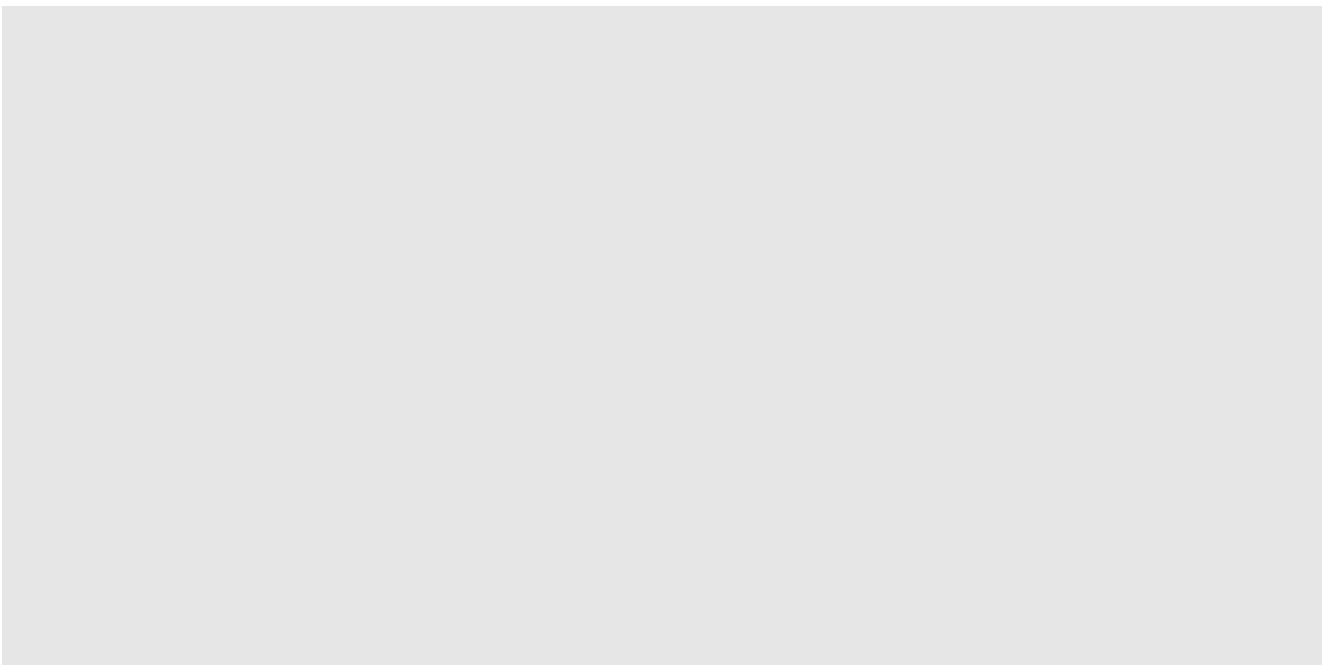
Pender's Nate Sanderson wrestles St. Paul's Derrick Ruzicka during a Class C 120-pound first round match at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025.

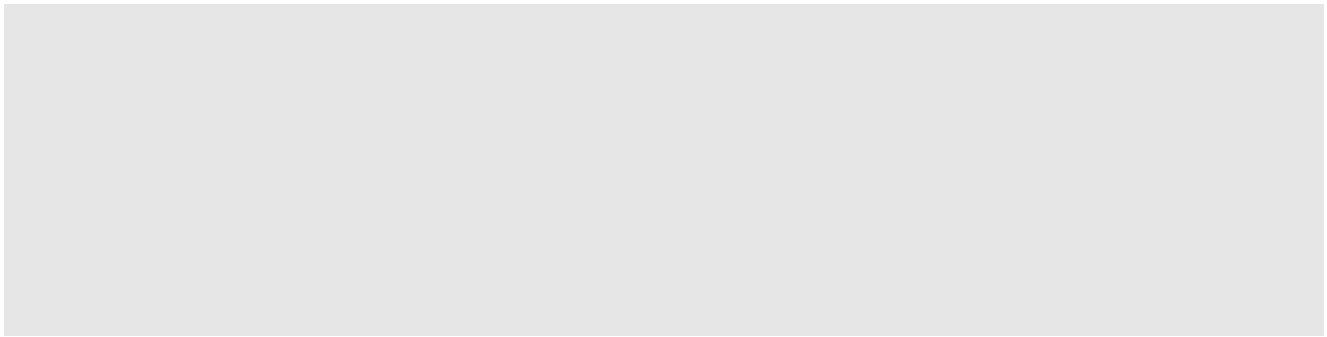
MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD



Omaha Skutt's Cade Ziola warms up before his Class B 215-pound first round match at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025.

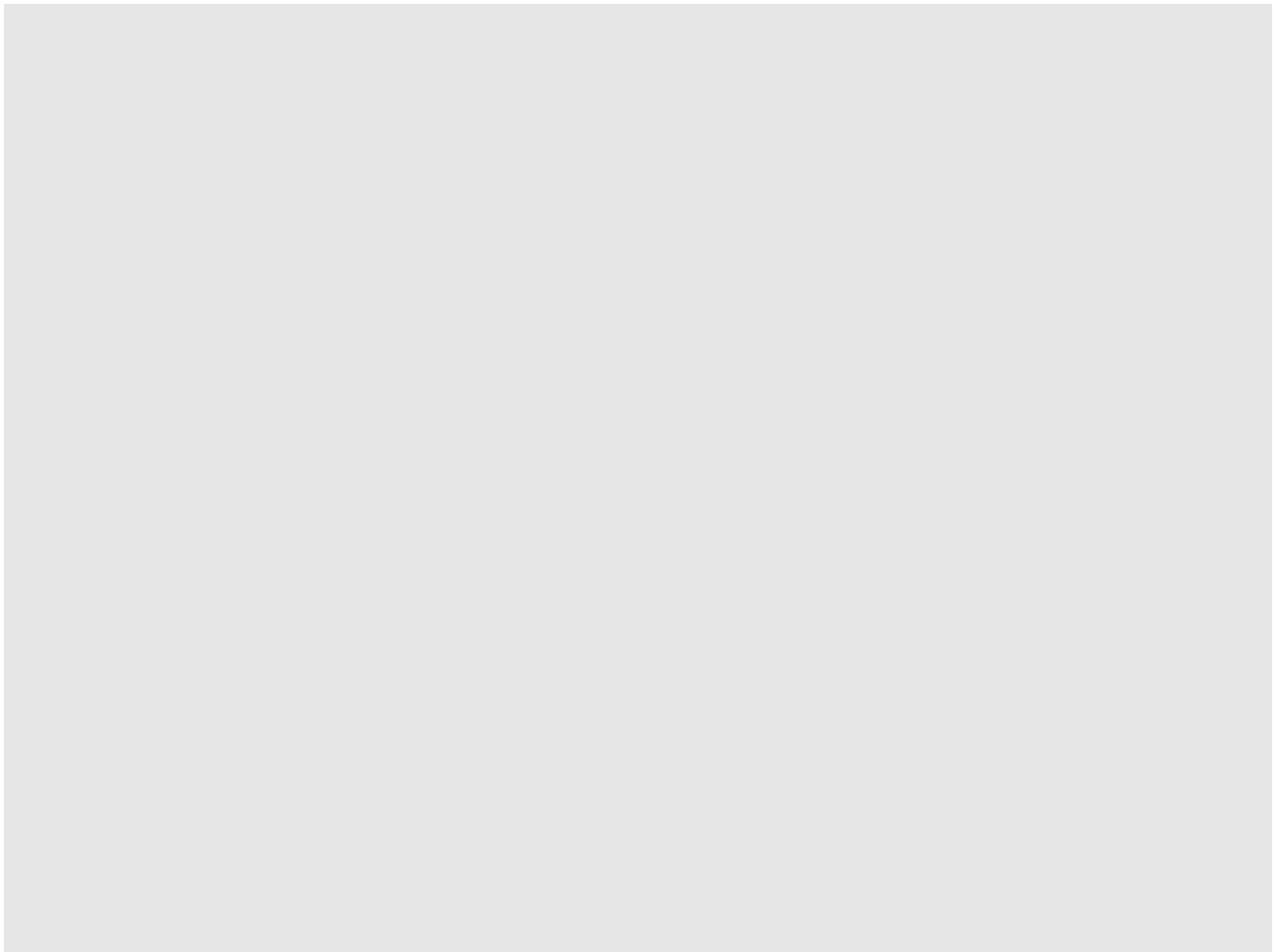
MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD





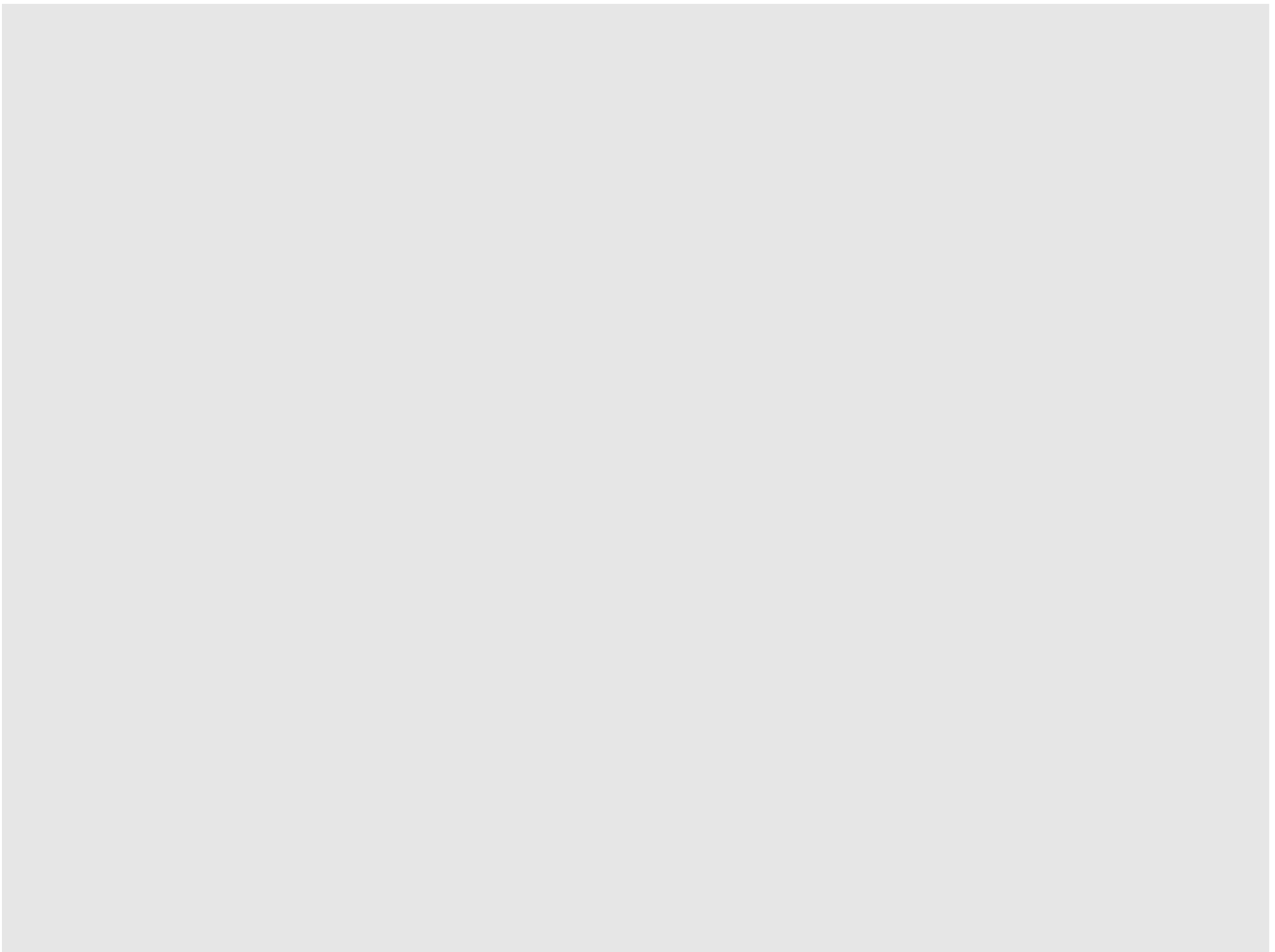
Bennington's Kyler Lauridsen warms up before wrestling Omaha Skutt's Nikolas Rotella during the Nebraska Class B 157-pound boys championship match at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025.

MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD



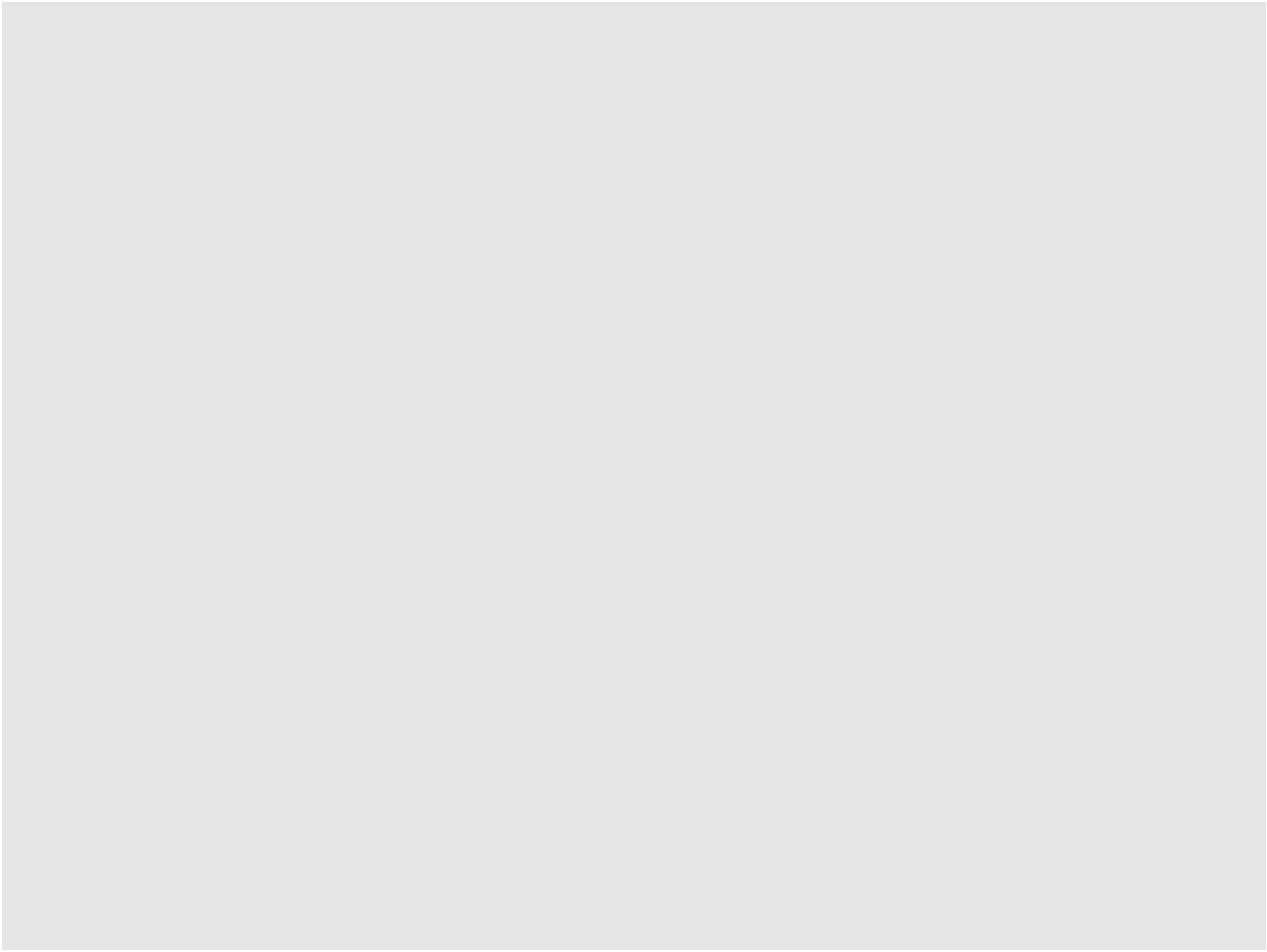
Winnebago's Jared Doxey brings Winnebago coach Adam Tranmer down to the mat in celebration after his win over Chase County's Zach Tarin for the Nebraska Class C 285-pound boys championship match at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025.

MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD



Creighton's Ryan Kalkbrenner (11) shoots the ball with Georgetown's Micah Peavy (5) jumping up to defend during the first half of a college men's basketball game at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025.

MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD



Creighton's Ryan Kalkbrenner (11) celebrates going into a timeout after dunking the ball during the second half of a college men's basketball game against Georgetown at the CHI Health Center in Omaha on Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025.

MEGAN NIELSEN, THE WORLD-HERALD

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