

# Editorial, 9/30: Lincoln Can't Overlook its Lower-Income Population

2017, September 30 By Journal Star editorial board

In his State of the City address last week, Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler extolled the city's many successes in terms of economic development and quality of life.

Yes, Lincoln has many visible, glittering signs of its growth – Pinnacle Bank Arena, the West Haymarket and public-private partnerships for development, among several others. These are good things, without question. But the city has many needs, particularly among its residents of low socioeconomic status, that aren't related to monetary milestones – and they can't be forgotten.

Released last month, the annual Lincoln Vital Signs report focuses on demographic trends across the city. This year's edition highlights the stark divides that exist within Lincoln, particularly as they relate to geography and income levels.

Perhaps none was more sobering to discover than a life expectancy differential of 20 years in different areas of Lincoln.

Citing data from the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, the report noted that far southeast Lincoln had an average life expectancy of 86.9 years between 2011 and 2015. The same figure in the areas surrounding downtown was only 66 years. Even the gap between North Lincoln and South Lincoln ranged from seven to 10 years' difference.

The list of struggles borne primarily by residents in these Lincoln neighborhoods is long – and comes with lasting impact. Whether it's growing up in poverty, coming to the city as a refugee, needing to learn English, failing to advance to higher levels of academic achievement, grappling with underemployment or unemployment or many other daily battles, these residents experience a different side of Lincoln.

It's often said that any group is only as strong as its weakest member. Lincoln, while in an enviable position compared with many similar-sized cities, still has plenty of work to do in elevating its most disadvantaged residents. They, too, deserve to share in the amazing growth their city has seen.

This booming and increasingly diverse city cannot splinter into two Lincolns, one for the richer and another for the poorer. Instead, leaders must fervently labor to ensure that the benefits of Lincoln's stunning growth are felt by all who call this community home.

The two bullet points on Lincoln Vital Signs' executive summary may present the most succinct snapshot of this divide:

\* Lincoln is experiencing positive economic recovery.

\* Opportunity gaps persist.

Despite Lincoln's resounding success in bouncing back from the Great Recession, poverty – and the life-or-death ramifications it can sometimes have – remains present in this city.

Nebraska prides itself on having the Good Life, as the signs entering the state proclaim. But its capital city must strive to allow that Good Life to be accessible to residents of all classes, income levels, races and backgrounds.