From: Kopsa, Ryan
To: Kopsa, Ryan
Cc: Pinkerman, Justin
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 8-14-20
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image002.png

Ag Valley Co-op
Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Aug 2020	3.03	-20.00	08:26
Corn	Dec 2020	2.95	-41.00	08:26
Milo	Aug 2020	3.26	3.00	08:26
Milo	Dec 2020	3.39	3.00	08:26
Soybeans	Aug 2020	8.09	-85.00	08:26
Soybeans	Dec 2020	8.14	-80.00	08:26
Wheat	Aug 2020	3.81	-44.00	08:25
Wheat	Jul 2021	3.79	-80.00	08:23

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KETV: 'It's a disgrace': Disabled veteran finds inconsistencies with DHHS, county COVID-19 tracking
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LJS: Ricketts expects no problems with mail voting in Nebraska

Gov. Pete Ricketts said Thursday he believes the U.S. Postal Service will be able to efficiently deliver ballots cast by mail in November's general election in Nebraska.
"I don't have any concerns about (the) ability to deliver mail-in ballots in Nebraska," the governor said

in answer to a question during a Capitol news briefing.
"I certainly can't address other states," he said.
Ricketts said he was not aware of any problems in mail delivery during the May primary election and he said he expects more Nebraskans to vote in person during the November election.
Recent concerns have emerged nationally about President Donald Trump's administration's restructuring of the agency's operations with Democratic congressional leaders contending that they may be designed to impede postal delivery of mail-in ballots during November's presidential election.
On other matters, Ricketts said "we have seen increasing (COVID-19) cases" in the state, "but we have been able to manage this with hospital capacity."
Current statewide figures show 36% of hospital beds available, 36% of intensive care unit beds available and 80% of ventilators available.
As of Thursday night, there have been 29,660 total cases and 360 deaths in Nebraska.
Ricketts said Nebraskans should be made aware that testing results for the virus conducted through Test Nebraska, the state's testing program, are available faster than those conducted through commercial testing.
Testing results from commercial vendors have taken between eight and 10-plus days to be available, he said, while the average for Test Nebraska results has been 2.13 days, although that figure has risen to 3.5 days during the past few days.
By Don Walton

OWH: Ricketts expected to sign bill banning abortion method after Nebraska Legislature passes measure

LINCOLN — Last-minute drama didn't stop Nebraska lawmakers Thursday from passing a bill banning one type of second-trimester abortions in the state.
Legislative Bill 814, introduced by State Sen. Suzanne Geist of Lincoln, passed on a 33-8 vote after barely surviving a filibuster.
The bill would prohibit an abortion method known medically as dilation and evacuation. The procedure involves dilating a woman's cervix and removing the fetus in pieces. Abortion opponents call the procedure dismemberment abortion.
The measure now heads to Gov. Pete Ricketts, who is expected to sign it into law. Ricketts praised passage of the bill Thursday and, earlier this year, put out a column in which he called for an end to "this horrendous form of abortion."
Opponents said they will be exploring potential legal challenges during the three months before the bill takes effect.
"Bottom line, we don't back down from fights and this fight isn't over," the ACLU of Nebraska said in a statement. "Whether through the courts or the Capitol, we are committed to doing everything we can to protect access to abortion care in Nebraska."
Geist said lawmakers "did the right thing" in passing the bill, although she acknowledged that banning one abortion method would not end abortions.
"It is a step in the right direction in the sense that when babies are aborted, this is more humane," she said.
But Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue sat out the vote after saying she had serious concerns that had not been addressed in the bill.
She said LB 814 would not end dismemberment abortions because it only bans procedures done with clamps, forceps or similar instruments. The ban would not apply if suction is used to remove pieces of a fetus. The ban also would not apply if the fetus was killed before being removed, a process that Blood

called equally horrific.
Blood had voted for the bill after the first and second rounds of debate based on a proposed amendment. The amendment was never debated as opponents filibustered the bill at each stage.
Her decision meant supporters of LB 814 were short one vote to cut off the final-round filibuster. Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte, who has been absent since lawmakers rejected a last-minute attempt to get his student discipline bill passed, arrived to provide that last vote midway through the roll call.
Opponents, led by Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha, predicted that the bill will face a legal challenge and be found unconstitutional.
Courts have blocked similar bans in all but three of the dozen states that have passed them. Two states where the bans have taken effect have no abortion providers that perform second-trimester abortions. Legal proceedings are ongoing in a third state. On Friday, the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals lifted the injunction against the Arkansas ban and sent the case back to the district court, instructing the court to reconsider its previous ruling in light of a U.S. Supreme Court decision this summer.
Earlier this week, Attorney General Doug Peterson's office issued an opinion concluding that LB 814 is "likely constitutional" and would not impose a "substantial obstacle" to access to abortion because the majority of second-trimester abortions in Nebraska are done using other methods.
Marian Miner, associate director for pro-life and family at the Nebraska Catholic Conference, and Karen Bowling, executive director of Nebraska Family Alliance, praised the Legislature's action. Miner said the bill makes Nebraska a national leader while Bowling called the bill a "landmark victory."
"Life has won today in Nebraska," he said. "By ending dismemberment abortion, our state has demonstrated and reaffirmed its deep respect for the human dignity of pre-born children and their mothers."
But officials with Planned Parenthood North Central States, which operates clinics in Omaha and Lincoln that offer abortions, said the bill inserts politics into what should be private medical decisions between patients and their doctors.
"Today lawmakers continued their attack on reproductive health care in Nebraska, creating arbitrary barriers to safe, legal abortion," said Andi Curry Grubb, the organization's Nebraska executive director. "This egregious law is not about improving the health care of Nebraskans and, instead, is about shaming them and placing additional burdens on women."
She said abortions may be done during the second trimester for various reasons, including health risks to pregnant women and fetal anomalies that aren't detected until that stage of a pregnancy. Women also may not get abortions early in pregnancy because of problems such as mandated waiting periods, delays in getting money and a lack of providers.
LB 814 passed two days after the family of Julie Schmit-Albin, the longtime executive director for Nebraska Right to Life, announced she had gone into hospice. She has been battling cancer.
By Martha Stoddard

LJS: Nebraska Legislature takes anti-abortion bill over finish line

A bill that would stop D&E abortion procedures on a living fetus passed the last legislative hurtle Thursday.
It will go to Gov. Pete Ricketts, who is expected to sign it into law.
The bill (LB814) was stuck in committee after its hearing in February, and Lincoln Sen. Suzanne Geist, who introduced it, successfully moved to pull it from committee so it could be debated. Because of that, it came to the floor with no committee work or amendments, and so was passed as it was originally introduced.

Omaha Sen. Megan Hunt, who led filibusters against the bill on all three levels of debate, continued to say the bill was given special treatment by Speaker Jim Scheer in scheduling. And she said Lt. Gov. Mike Foley, who presides over the Legislature and is an outspoken supporter of the bill, was allowed to run legislative strategy on it from the president's chair.

Hunt said that at a Nebraska Family Alliance Forum in Grand Island to discuss anti-abortion strategy for Nebraska, Foley told senators and advocates that Hunt had extreme views on the life issue. Hunt reported that Foley said legislation she had introduced was going nowhere, and they shouldn't spend energy worrying about her "silly, little bill."

LB814 is a model of anti-abortion bills that have been introduced in at least 31 other states, Hunt said. "Bills like this are written poorly on purpose," she said. "They have problems with the language on purpose."

There's no exception for rape and incest in the bill. There's no cause of action for an unmarried father. The injunctive relief section is messed up, she said.

These bills are used as purity tests for moderates, she said. They are used to put pressure on lawmakers who are often anti-abortion but are thoughtful about language and policy.

Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue, who supported the bill but insisted it needed work, was one of those. And she was angry, she said, because the bill is poorly written and will cause unintended problems.

"This bill fails to ban the actual dismemberment process," she said. "I am not going to perpetuate a lie."

Geist said she had not been allowed to open on her bill. And she did file compromise amendments she worked on with Blood, but she was never allowed to introduce them because of all the motions thrown onto it.

"I stand by the veracity of this bill. It's well written. The people that wrote this bill know what they are doing," she said. "You can tell me it's unconstitutional. I don't believe that."

The inhumanity of pulling apart a fetus before causing its demise is what this bill is about, she said.

By JoAnne Young

National Review: Nebraska Legislature Passes Ban on Dismemberment Abortions

The Nebraska legislature on Thursday passed a ban on dismemberment abortions in the state, except in emergency situations.

The bill, LB814, passed 33-8 and allows for professional injunctions and civil action against any abortion provider who violates the ban, besides in the case of a medical emergency.

The definition of dilation and evacuation (D&E) abortions in the bill does not apply to an abortion in which only suction is used to dismember a fetus or to the removal of a fetus that is already dead. The bill specifically bans the use of clamps, forceps or similar instruments in abortion procedures.

“Life has won today in Nebraska. By ending dismemberment abortion, our state has demonstrated and reaffirmed its deep respect for the human dignity of preborn children and their mothers,” said Marion Miner, Associate Director for Pro-Life and Family at the Nebraska Catholic Conference, the Catholic News Agency reported.

“Passing LB814 will again establish Nebraska as a national leader in the cause for life. We are committed to affirming the humanity of every single life and making every form of abortion unthinkable.”

The bill now awaits approval from governor Pete Ricketts, who has expressed support for the ban, to be signed into law.

The legislation may be challenged in court by pro-abortion advocates who claim the ban is unconstitutional under Roe v. Wade. A federal judge blocked Indiana’s D&E ban from taking effect last

year, ruling that the ban was likely to burden a woman's right to access an abortion.
However, Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson recently said the bill is "likely constitutional" because it "does not appear that it will impose a substantial obstacle on abortion access in Nebraska."
By Brittany Bernstein

LJS: Ricketts salutes senators for tax, economic development action

Gov. Pete Ricketts heaped praise on the Legislature Thursday for its enactment of expanded property tax relief and economic development legislation, describing the package as "generational in its scope."
The bill (LB1107) paves a path toward $650 million in annual property tax relief, once it is fully operational, the governor said in closing remarks to the Legislature shortly before it completed its coronavirus-interrupted 2020 session.
That's four times the level of property tax relief that was in effect when he became governor in 2015, Ricketts said.
The governor's property tax figure includes $275 million in annual relief already in effect that is provided through the state's property tax credit cash fund.
Ricketts saluted the senators for "spirited debate and fast action" once they returned to Lincoln in July to complete their 60-day session.
In shaping its multifaceted package, the governor said, the Legislature "reformed and renewed our (business) incentive program so we can be competitive with other states."
And, he said, senators demonstrated the state's commitment to a proposed new mega-project at the University of Nebraska Medical Center that would "help keep our state and our nation safe" by pledging $300 million in state funding support.
The proposed $2.6 billion UNMC project would center on a new national pandemic response center if the federal government chooses the Omaha campus for its site.
By Don Walton

OWH: After two years of wrangling, Nebraska Legislature passes property tax relief package

LINCOLN — It took two years, some major amendments and some last-minute deal-making, but state legislators on Thursday gave final approval to a bill that includes some property tax relief.
Lawmakers voted 41-4 to give final approval to the package, sending it to Gov. Pete Ricketts for his signature, which is anticipated.
Besides a new state income tax credit to defray property taxes paid to support K-12 schools, Legislative Bill 1107 updates the state's main economic incentive program and pledges $300 million toward the proposed $2.6 billion NExT Project at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.
The new income tax credit is expected to provide a 3% reduction in overall property taxes initially, but funding for the credit is anticipated to grow from $125 million in the first year to $375 million after three to five years, dependent on growth in state tax receipts.
Initially, lawmakers considered a major revamp of the state's system of doling out state aid to K-12 schools, as well as expanding the tax base, to tax more services. But that plan failed to pass a year ago, and opposition from educational groups blocked the plan from advancing earlier this year.
That prompted a group of senators, known as the "super seven," to ditch the state aid changes and instead opt for a state income tax credit against a portion of what someone pays in property taxes. That credit will be claimed on yearly income tax filings.
The owner of a $200,000 home in the Omaha school district would be looking at a $142 income tax

credit under the measure.
State Sen. Justin Wayne of Omaha led a last-minute effort to defeat LB 1107, saying it "handcuffed" the state in dealing with future economic struggles caused by COVID-19, which he predicted will not be clear until September or October.
Omaha Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh said that the tax break she'll get from LB 1107 amounts to only $150 and that it was morally wrong to prioritize property tax relief over funding for schools and helping those who lost paychecks because of the pandemic.
"I would be devastated if our public education system will suffer so I can get $150 more. It's not worth it," Cavanaugh said.
But Elkhorn Sen. Lou Ann Linehan, one of the major backers of LB 1107, said that property tax relief is what Nebraskans have been seeking for years. After three to five years, she said, the bill would deliver $739 in tax breaks — if combined with the current property tax relief credit — for the owner of a $250,000 home in her district.
"The $739 is still a lot of money to me, guys," Linehan told her colleagues. "It is significant relief for people."
She added that if economic woes require it, the Legislature can alter LB 1107 in the future to fit the state budget situation.
Gov. Ricketts, in his session-ending speech to lawmakers, said that when LB 1107 becomes fully funded, it will combine with the $275-million a year property tax credit program to provide $650 million in state funds to defray property tax bills, a four-fold increase since he took office six years ago.
The powerful Nebraska State Education Association, the state teachers' union, called on lawmakers on Wednesday to vote no on the bill, saying it will reduce spending on K-12 education. But supporters on Thursday said that LB 1107, while not the best the Legislature could do to address the state's high property taxes, was a compromise that was passable.
"We could have done better, but we ran out of time," said Sen. Curt Friesen of Henderson.
By Paul Hammel

AP: Nebraska lawmakers OK property tax credits as session ends

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska lawmakers approved new tax credits for homeowners, farmers and businesses and put more restrictions on abortions Thursday as they finished a session marred by ugly public disputes and criticism that they didn't do enough to address the coronavirus pandemic.
The 60-day session ended after several last-minute, unsuccessful attempts to derail the tax and abortion bills. Lawmakers gave both measures final approval and sent them to Gov. Pete Ricketts, who's expected to sign them.
Lawmakers convened as normal in January but suspended their session in March out of concern about the pandemic. They returned in July with new safety precautions, including plastic barriers to separate senators and new restrictions on who could access the legislative chamber.
Debate among senators turned nasty at several points this year, with one lawmaker publicly telling another to "shut up" and others lamenting that the ostensibly nonpartisan, one-house Legislature has become more openly partisan and dysfunctional.
Speaker of the Legislature Jim Scheer acknowledged that the session was often rocky. But he pointed to major new laws passed, including measures to help expand broadband internet, improve oversight of state-run juvenile rehabilitation centers and provide a tax cut for military retirees.
"We've accomplished a lot, whether we realize it or not," Scheer said.
The property tax and business incentives package drew opposition from some lawmakers who said it

would pull money away from people who will need financial assistance because of the pandemic.
"We have people waking up not knowing if they can feed their kids, not knowing if they can pay their mortgage," said Sen. Justin Wayne, of Omaha.
Lawmakers did approve Ricketts' emergency request for $83.6 million for the state's pandemic response before they paused their session, but some argued that the state should do more. The package included funding for personal protective equipment, scholarships and unemployment benefits.
Wayne said lawmakers were "putting handcuffs on our opportunity to help people," and noted that the pandemic's full impact may not have registered. He pointed to the Big Ten's decision to cancel its 2020 football season, a significant blow to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Lincoln's economy.
But Sen. Lou Ann Linehan, chairwoman of the Legislature's tax-focused Revenue Committee, said the bill reflects a compromise that will ultimately help Nebraska residents by reducing their tax bills. Lawmakers have faced pressure for years to lower property taxes, and the tax credit would help put a dent in some of the recent increases.
"What I'm not hearing right now is how important this bill is to the vast majority of Nebraskans," Linehan said. "It is significant relief to people."
Ricketts likewise praised lawmakers for their work on the tax package
"You are to be commended for the hard work you put in during the most trying and difficult circumstances," he said in his end-of-session remarks to lawmakers.
Nebraska Farm Bureau President Steve Nelson said the measure "takes a major step forward to provide significant, meaningful and much-needed property tax relief for Nebraskans," but added that his group will continue to seek "long-term solutions" to reduce those taxes.
The property tax and business incentives package measures were merged into one bill because neither measure had enough support to pass by itself. Rural lawmakers who want lower local property taxes initially threatened to block the business incentives bill, but politically powerful business groups argued that Nebraska can't be the only state without major tax incentives. The state's current business incentive program, the Nebraska Advantage Act, expires this year.
Lawmakers also passed new restrictions on a second-term abortion procedure, despite protests from abortion-right supporters. The measure would outlaw the use of clamps, forceps, tongs or scissors to perform what's known as a dilation and evacuation abortion. Abortion opponents refer to the procedure as a dismemberment abortion because it often requires doctors to remove a fetus in several pieces. Similar laws in other states have been struck down as unconstitutional.
This session could also be the last for Sen. Ernie Chambers, the state's longest-serving and best-known lawmaker, who will have to leave the Legislature for at least four years before he can run again. Chambers is famous for his ability to single-handedly filibuster bills, often bringing the Legislature to a standstill.
Chambers was forced out of office for four years in 2009 due to newly enacted term limits, but returned to his old seat in January 2013. He served two more terms and will be forced out of office again in January 2021. On Thursday afternoon, more than 100 people gathered outside the Capitol to celebrate his tenure.
State law restricts lawmakers to two consecutive four-year terms, but allows them to return after sitting out for one term. Chambers, now 83, hasn't said whether he'll run again.
By Grant Schulte

OWH: Nebraska Legislature closes unprecedented session with emotional debate and big votes

LINCOLN — State legislators closed out a unique, coronavirus-interrupted session Thursday by passing a

modest property tax relief bill and barely mustering the votes to adopt a ban on an abortion method. Unlike most past sessions, there wasn't a "soft landing" on the final day. Senators, including one fighting back tears, launched into an emotional debate that pitted personal liberties against the science of wearing face masks to fend off COVID-19.

It was somehow fitting — the final 17 days of the session were marked by angry exchanges and lectures to behave, at a tenor and volume not usually seen at the State Capitol. The session shut down in mid-March because of the coronavirus outbreak and resumed in late July with new safety practices and precautions.

But Gov. Pete Ricketts still made the traditional end-of-session appearance to thank senators for their work. This year, he highlighted the property tax bill, money for flood relief, a veterans tax cut, creation of a new career scholarship program and passage of the abortion method ban.

"You've accomplished much in these unprecedented — that word's been used a lot — and difficult times," he said.

Thursday marked the final day on the legislative floor for State Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, whose fiery speeches about racism and legendary procedural blockades of bills he hated often fomented frustration, discomfort and grumbling.

Chambers, who is term-limited for a second time after spending 46 years in the Legislature, got in a couple of final verbal punches, calling some senators who are anti-mask "dumbbells" and saying the phrase "and liberty for all" will never apply to Blacks.

And, one last time, the registered-nonpartisan senator called "Repel-icans" (Republicans) "hypocrites."

On the north steps of the Capitol, about 100 people gathered for a surprise farewell rally for Chambers. Participants held signs that said "Fight for Justice" on one side and "Thank You, Senator Chambers" on the other.

Other departing senators took the opportunity to say their farewells in the legislative chamber, including Sens. Kate Bolz of Lincoln, Sue Crawford of Bellevue, Sara Howard of Omaha, Rick Kolowski of Omaha and Speaker Jim Scheer of Norfolk.

Senators gave final approval to a so-called "grand compromise" on property tax relief and the state's economic development incentives, as well as an abortion bill that detractors said would be immediately challenged as unconstitutional.

It took a last-minute save to pass the abortion measure, Legislative Bill 814.

State Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte, who had been absent since Tuesday, appeared in the nick of time to provide the necessary 33rd vote to shut down a filibuster and pass LB 814. It reaffirmed, backers said, Nebraska's place as a "national leader in the cause for life."

"This is a landmark victory for the pro-life movement," said Karen Bowling of the Nebraska Family Alliance.

The compromise on the property tax relief bill was pulled together by a "super seven" group of veteran senators convened by Scheer. But he said it took "the fabulous forties" to pass the bill — referring to the 41 senators who voted for the package.

In the final days of the session, amid the pandemic, senators were stationed behind clear plastic barriers and had their temperatures checked before entering the legislative chambers. The Rotunda, usually filled with noisy lobbyists, was empty. Three senators who came into contact with people who had tested positive for COVID-19 had to briefly separate themselves from colleagues by sitting in the balcony.

And, on the last day, the debate over whether people should wear masks found its way to the floor.

A round of condemnations followed statements by Sen. Steve Erdman of Bayard that wearing masks causes disease, isn't effective in stopping the coronavirus and that mandates infringe on personal

liberty. Hydroxychloroquine — a treatment that some trials have shown is ineffective or dangerous — has worked to prevent infections in India, Erdman added.
The statements, said Sen. Tony Vargas of Omaha — whose father died of COVID-19 — were "reckless."
"If you think this (virus) is a joke, please come and talk to me," he said.
Sen. Mike Moser of Columbus, who spent several weeks in the hospital battling the virus, fought off tears as he said his infection left him so weak that he couldn't roll over in bed.
"For someone to come in and say that wearing a mask is somehow a communist plot is irresponsible," he said. "I can't describe it in any other way."
By Martha Stoddard and Paul Hammel

WOWT: Gov. Pete Ricketts back-to-school update

LINCOLN, Neb. (WOWT) - Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts will have a back-to-school news conference at 9:30 a.m. Thursday.
Ricketts will be joined by Greg Adams, executive director of the Nebraska Community College Association, as well as a representative from the Catholic Schools of Grand Island.
The state's hospital capacity is at 36% availability for hospital beds, 36% of ICU beds available, and 80% of ventilators are available.
The governor also reminded Nebraskans to stay home when they don't feel well. Stay home, he said, even if you've been tested and the results came back negative.
Ricketts also said that commercial testing vendor Quest Diagnostics has been taking too long to get results, averaging from 8.37 and 10.51 days and in some cases even longer. That turnaround makes those results potentially useless, he said. But Test Nebraska's average is 2.13 days overall, though he acknowledged the results have slowed for those labs as well, to an average of about 3.5 days, but they're working to expand staff and lab capacity in order to reduce wait time for those results.
Community colleges ready to go
"With the next two weeks, all six community colleges will be open, and we will be open as close to normal as we can possibly open up," said Greg Adams, executive director of the Nebraska Community College Association.
The leadership has been meeting over the past several months with other learning institutions, health officials, and students to determine that they can open for in-person learning productively and safely, he said.
"We also understand we're going to have be flexible," he said. "If something isn't working, we're going to have to turn on a dime, and try something different."
The colleges are prepared to reduce class sizes, go to remote-learning, or whatever is needed to accommodate their students safely, he said, either altogether or as needed for a specific college.
"Masks will be required of faculty, of staff, and of all students on all six campuses," he said, noting that there some exceptions will be allowed as needed, but under specific circumstances.
Test Nebraska will be providing voluntary testing on all the campuses, and they will also be working with the local health systems, Adams said.
Dorms will have reduced capacity, and officials are looking for alternative environments to house students as needed, or for use as quarantine.
"Our No. 1 priority, of course, is to make sure that we have a quality experience for everybody," he said.
For community colleges, the technical vocational classes are the top priority, and protecting the hands-on lab experience is of the utmost importance, he said.

So they are planning for 100% one-on-one lab learning, with extra distancing and separation
“We’re moving forward with people having their hands on the tools that they need to learn those careers,” Adams said, noting that students have indicated in surveys that they’re in support of these plans.
In other classes, they’re still planning for person-to-person classroom experiences, but will be able to provide remote-learning if needed.
The colleges are also front-loading the curriculum to get the most important parts of the class at the beginning of the semester in case they aren’t able to maintain the same learning environments in the later months.
The retraining grant is off and running, Adams said, working to help those who are unemployed or underemployed because of COVID-19. The accelerated programs are varied among the colleges but are targeting those sectors most available in each area.
By Gina Dvorak

KMTV: Gov. Ricketts discusses back to school plans, COVID testing in Nebraska

LINCOLN, Neb. (KMTV) — Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts and other officials held a press conference to discuss a variety of issues, including back to school plans for the state's community colleges and Catholic schools.
Ricketts started off by talking about delays in test results when using services other than TestNebraska sites.
On average, the governor said results from TestNebraska are taking 3.5 days while some other providers are taking up to 15 or 16 days to provide results. Ricketts said TestNebraska is working on lowering the turnaround by looking at options such as additional staff.
Speakers from Nebraska’s Community College Association and Catholic schools of Grand Island talked about safety measures they are taking to carry out in-person education and mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.
Both said they committed to providing in-person education to students but are willing to work with students and families that would rather learn remotely or learn via a hybrid of in-person and remote education.
For people that are underemployed or out work due to the pandemic, community colleges in Nebraska are ready to help.
Ricketts and Greg Adams of the Nebraska Community College Association said grants are currently available for people wanting to pursue a new career and advised anyone who's interested to contact one of the state's community colleges.

WJAG: Nebraska Community College Association gearing up for fall semester

LINCOLN - With classes kicking off next week, Governor Pete Ricketts continued his back to school press briefings at the capitol.
Greg Adams, Executive Director of the Nebraska Community College Association joined Ricketts and highlighted their plans for the fall semester.
Adams says all six community college campuses are planning a hundred-percent in-person classes.
"In the last several months, all of our college leadership have been meeting together. They have been meeting with our colleagues in the other higher education institutions here in the state. They've been meeting with local health departments. They've been meeting with the governor's office and, we've

been talking to our students through surveying, finding out what their level of precaution is and what their intention trends are. And what we know is that we can open up, we can do business, we can do in person."

Adams says their number one priority is to make sure they have a quality education experience for everybody.

He added they're prepared to reduce class sizes, go to remote-learning, or whatever is needed to accommodate students safely.

By Nick Stevenson

OWH: Nebraska makes clear it's committed to Big Ten and will be 'in compliance' with league rules

LINCOLN — Nebraska broke 24 hours of quiet tension with the Big Ten on Thursday by affirming its commitment to the prestigious academic conference and agreeing that it would not seek to play any football games this fall in the wake of the Big Ten postponing fall sports until 2021.

NU President Ted Carter and UNL Chancellor Ronnie Green on Thursday morning released a brief, crisp statement reaffirming the university's commitment to the Big Ten, but it was Husker Athletic Director Bill Moos, talking on the Husker Sports Network on Thursday night, who finally closed the door on any Nebraska plans to build its own schedule.

The Big Ten told NU on Wednesday that it wouldn't be permissible. Nebraska, which spent that day trying to figure out if it could, has accepted the decision.

"We like the Big Ten," Moos said. "We're going to compete in the Big Ten and be successful in the Big Ten. That was a decision made 10 years ago, the decision stands, and our future plans are to compete and be successful in all of our sports programs in this new conference."

Moos' comments dovetailed with the statement prepared by Carter and Green.

"The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a fully committed member of the Big Ten Conference. It is an unparalleled athletic and academic alliance," the statement read.

"We have the greatest fans in college athletics. This has been a difficult and disappointing week for the Husker family. We all look forward to the day when we can cheer on our student athletes, on the field and in the arena."

The Thursday morning statement, a UNL spokesperson said, was sent out in part because "the false 'leaving-the-Big Ten' narrative was starting to take a life of its own," particularly at UNL, where the Faculty Senate sent out a single-question survey Wednesday asking whether professors thought Nebraska should leave the Big Ten so it could play football this fall.

While coach Scott Frost said Monday that Nebraska was a "proud member" of the Big Ten — and the Huskers' Tuesday statement after the Big Ten's decision, while full of disappointment, said nothing of leaving the league for the Big 12 or another conference — the national media seemed to take NU's statement as a threat to bolt the Big Ten, and even World-Herald columnist Tom Shatel asked in Wednesday's editions if it will be remembered as the beginning of the end of Nebraska and the Big Ten. He answered his own question: "Absolutely." ESPN personalities — Michael Wilbon and Desmond Howard — suggested that the Big Ten should kick Nebraska out of the league. Howard said Commissioner Kevin Warren should demand an apology from NU.

Ohio State coach Ryan Day briefly joined Nebraska's cause Wednesday morning, but by Wednesday afternoon OSU A.D. Gene Smith said in a statement that the Buckeyes were focused solely on spring football plans because fall football wasn't "allowable." No other league teams — including Iowa, whose in-state rival, Iowa State of the Big 12, remains on track to play football this fall — took up the Huskers' cause.

Moos' comments Thursday night echoed Smith's statement. In essence, the Big Ten said, it was postponing, not canceling, a season, which limited league members from crafting their own schedules. "That means hopefully in the spring, or sometime after the first of the calendar year, and that would have made it difficult to still play a series of nonconference games in the fall, and then come back and play a conference season in the spring," Moos said. "At least that's how the conference felt. It wasn't how Scott and I felt. But, at the end of the day, we are proud members of the Big Ten, it's a prestigious conference, and we will be in compliance."

As of Thursday, the ACC, Big 12 and SEC remain on track to play this fall with modified schedules, as do several leagues like Conference USA and the American Athletic Conference. The College Football Playoff — chaired, ironically, by Iowa A.D. Gary Barta — plans a postseason for the teams remaining in action.

Meanwhile, the Big Ten reportedly got to work on a 2021 plan Wednesday. Purdue coach Jeff Brohm submitted his own plan Thursday morning that starts in late February and accommodates a shortened fall season that would start in October. Day was looking for a plan that started the first week of January — with training camp in December — and allows for a regular fall season to be played.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts said Thursday he supports Carter and Green's position that the university should stay in the Big Ten.

"I support them 100%," Ricketts said. "The Big Ten has been great for the University of Nebraska, and obviously there's a lot of considerations that go into this.

"I know that fans would like to see football games. So would I. The Big Ten has made the decision they're not going to do football games."

Thursday afternoon, NU sent to season ticket holders a one-week extension on a questionnaire related to season ticket rollovers.

"The Big Ten has postponed all athletic events for the Fall 2020, including football," the email read in part. Nebraska also told season ticket holders in the email that it will "reach out for additional feedback when we have more details about a possible spring season."

Moos said the financial hit to Nebraska athletics — should no football season be played — was $100 million. His senior administrators were in a conference room as he spoke trying to figure out how to deal with the deficit, although some income may be recouped if league football is played in the winter.

Nebraska's concern for the financial health of its athletic department, coupled with knowing the local Lincoln economy may take a $300 million hit, came out in Frost's passionate Monday speech imploring the Big Ten not to cancel its fall sports so quickly.

"How he has handled this, and what his priorities have been, is what he's all about," Moos said. "I watched him, listened to that, and never have I ever been in doubt that he's the right guy leading this football program."

By Sam McKewon and Joe Dejka

LJS: UNL Chancellor Green, NU President Carter reiterate commitment to Big Ten

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln says it's not going anywhere.

Two days after the Big Ten Conference canceled its fall football season and some national pundits incorrectly said that Nebraska officials were threatening to bolt the Big Ten, campus leadership rebuffed that notion in a brief statement shared on social media.

"The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a fully committed member of the Big Ten Conference. It is an unparalleled athletic and academic alliance," UNL Chancellor Ronnie Green and NU President Ted Carter said in the joint statement Thursday morning.

"We have the greatest fans in college athletics. This has been a difficult and disappointing week for the Husker family. We all look forward to the day when we can cheer on our student-athletes, on the field and in the arena."

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts also expressed "100% support," on Thursday during a news conference, saying, "The Big Ten has been great for the University of Nebraska."

Earlier this week, Green and Carter, along with athletic director Bill Moos and head football coach Scott Frost, expressed disappointment at the conference's decision to cancel fall sports and left open the possibility of trying to find ways to still compete in sports this year.

The Thursday morning statement was the first public comment from NU leadership since Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren said Tuesday night that Nebraska could not play games outside the conference and "still be a member of the Big Ten."

Nebraska athletic director Bill Moos confirmed Thursday that the Huskers will not try to play this fall and a letter sent to football season ticket holders on Thursday outlined revised refund options and timelines and said in part, "We will reach out for any additional feedback when we have more details about a possible spring season."

The notion of defying the commissioner's stance, though, sparked rounds of speculation UNL would perhaps try and leave the Big Ten, where it has been a member since 2011, for a different conference altogether.

As the rumor mill churned online over the next 24 hours, leadership in UNL's Faculty Senate asked members their feelings about leaving the conference, which provides a boon to the academic, research and extension missions of the university, in an online poll.

"Should UNL leave the Big Ten to allow athletics to be played this fall?" read the Survey Monkey poll, which was emailed to faculty members. Respondents could answer "yes" or "no" and then leave a comment.

"While we are not aware of serious deliberations to this effect, we wanted to be sure we could speak with one voice should the need arise," said Faculty Senate President Nicole Buan, who is an associate professor of biochemistry.

About an hour after the survey went out Wednesday evening, roughly 400 faculty had responded, with some 90% indicating they believed UNL should remain in the Big Ten, Buan said.

But then the informal survey was shared on social media and caught fire among Husker fans, who cast their own votes and shared their own comments — some of them multiple times — before Green and Carter issued their statement at about 8:30 a.m. Thursday.

Judy Walker, the associate vice chancellor for faculty affairs, said faculty have experienced the benefits, both tangible and intangible, that have come with UNL joining the Big Ten Conference, which is as much a collaboration of academic institutions as it is athletic departments.

"There's an instant name recognition that you're at a Big Ten institution, and that raises your credibility among your colleagues both across the country and internationally," Walker said.

It's reflected in the number of graduate student applications as well as hiring pools, she added.

Each year, a handful of faculty and department chairs from all 14 Big Ten member institutions are selected for leadership development programs, Walker added, and the relationships forged have become instrumental as higher education attempts to navigate teaching and learning during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Big Ten members and their 600,000 students will for the first time enjoy an online course sharing program this fall, allowing students at UNL to take classes from faculty at Ohio State University or Penn State University, for example.

UNL faculty and students also benefit from a library collaborative giving them access to 22% of the print

titles, including special collections and hard-to-get copies, held in libraries on the North American continent.
When it joined the Big Ten, UNL was also admitted into the Big Ten Plus Engineering Consortium, what has been called “the single-best collection of colleges of engineering in the world.”
Becoming a member of the new consortium spurred Nebraska Engineering to embark on a major overhaul of its facilities on campus, nearly $150 million in upgrades paid for through a combination of state and private funding.
College of Engineering leaders say the projects will help grow the college’s faculty and student enrollment in an effort to meet a workforce need in the state.
And the conference membership, in addition to routinely putting Nebraska athletes on television, has also helped the university expand how it helps nonathletes through a scholarship program designed to attract high-achieving students.
Walker said no other conference engages the academic side of a university the way the Big Ten does, which may have contributed to the response from UNL's faculty.
"People outside the Big Ten often don't understand the power the Big Ten has," she said. "It's a whole different ballgame."
By Parker Gabriel and Chris Dunker

OWH: Some call for faster — but less accurate — coronavirus tests as influx causes delays at TestNebraska

Lots of Nebraskans want to get tested for COVID-19, and that appears to be at least one factor slowing turnaround times for the state’s testing program.
TestNebraska has seen a dramatic increase in the number of swabs being conducted on a daily basis over the last month, according to Taylor Gage, a spokesman for Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts.
In addition, the Lincoln lab that processes those tests was shut down for a time for an audit, which it passed, Gage said.
As of early July, the lab had been averaging just short of 41 hours, from the time that nasopharyngeal swabs were collected at a drive-thru site until people received their test results. But during July, the average turnaround time was 57.9 hours.
And anecdotal reports in Omaha in recent days have included TestNebraska turnaround times of 70- and 80-plus hours.
Gage said the state’s team is aware of the elevated turnaround time and is working to resolve it, including adding staff and expanding capacity.
Ricketts has announced that the lab is in the midst of an expansion that will increase its daily capacity from 3,600 to 7,000 tests a day. Testing capacity nationally, too, has increased.
But delays in getting results, even temporary ones, have begun to raise questions in Nebraska and elsewhere about whether the testing currently available can quickly identify people who are infected with the coronavirus — a significant number of whom don’t have symptoms — so that they can go into isolation and their close contacts can be quarantined.
Nationally, delays of seven to 10 days — or more — in getting results have been reported at various times during the pandemic, particularly at times when cases have surged and testing materials are in short supply.
One concern is that people who get tested after having a close encounter with someone who’s positive may not wait for the results, particularly if they’re not ill and feel the need to get back to work or school.
Keeping teachers out of quarantine and in schools, for instance, is expected to be a key factor in

whether schools can stay up and running this year in Nebraska. Avoiding close contact with infected people will be one important step for school staff.
But Millard Superintendent Jim Sutfin said Monday that testing also will play a role.
“We absolutely need rapid testing,” Sutfin said. “If we don’t come to a point where we have rapid testing, that might be what shuts the entire city down of every school district, because you cannot wait a week to get a test result on a teacher. You’re going to run out of people.”
In an opinion piece in The World-Herald on Wednesday, Thomas Murray, provost of Creighton University, backed a call by a Harvard epidemiologist and others for frequently screening larger populations using “faster, cheaper and acceptably less accurate tests.”
Antigen tests, like those commonly used in doctor’s offices for influenza, detect viral proteins in saliva or a nasal swab. They’re less sensitive than the gold standard test used by TestNebraska and many other large labs, which finds and amplifies the virus’s genetic material.
Murray also cited a modeling study published by a Yale researcher indicating that screening college students every two days using a rapid and less sensitive test, matched with strict behavioral interventions including mask-wearing, would dramatically limit the number of COVID-19 infections and permit the safe return of students to campus.
The aim, he wrote, would be to catch those who are most contagious. Those who are too early in the course of disease to be caught one day could be detected a couple of days later when their viral loads are higher.
Creighton will test everyone living on campus before they move in, using the gold standard method, known as RT-PCR.
But Dr. Steven Hinrichs, chairman of the University of Nebraska Medical Center’s pathology and microbiology department, said a less sensitive test could be considered dangerous in the current situation.
“If they are significantly less sensitive, individuals will be identified as negative when they are truly positive,” he said. “And falsely negative individuals could continue to spread disease.”
Hinrichs said he understands the desire for a fast, inexpensive test. But mask-wearing already provides an inexpensive means of preventing the spread of the virus.
An editorial accompanying the Yale study in JAMA Network Open also noted that the best-prepared campuses would use a layered approach aimed at reducing the influx of the virus from outside and limiting its spread on campuses, including masking and social distancing.
Hinrichs also said that getting test results returned rapidly is important.
The Nebraska Public Health Laboratory and a clinical lab jointly operated by UNMC and Nebraska Medicine continue to focus on returning results within 24 to 48 hours, he said, with a 24-hour turnaround the most common.
The public health lab continues to run about 450 tests a day. The clinical lab currently can run about 600 a day, about half of its capacity before recent cutbacks on tests from two large suppliers.
“I don’t believe a fast, wrong answer is better,” Hinrichs said. “The pressure needs to be back on the (labs) to get the turnaround time better, because it can be done.”
There’s little doubt TestNebraska has been busy. According to state data, the testing program averaged more than 1,700 tests a day in July, nearly 1,000 more than the next largest in Nebraska, the UNMC/Nebraska Medicine lab.
The state program’s turnaround time for the past two weeks averaged a little more than 3.5 days, a day or more longer than local university and health system labs but significantly faster than one national lab.
Still, some area residents already are seeking out the faster antigen tests.

TotalWellness in Omaha has been doubling the volume of antigen tests it conducts every week and is up to about 200 appointments a day, said owner Alan Kohll.
Results typically are sent to patients within 20 to 30 minutes. The testing platform, manufactured by Quidel, has an emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration. “You’re not losing much in sensitivity by using the test,” he said.
Federal officials, in fact, have pledged to significantly ramp up the availability of such so-called point-of-care tests as early as fall.
Currently, the test costs $80. By Monday, Kohll said, the company will have the ability to verify and bill insurance companies.
The results of antigen tests are reported to and tallied by state and local health departments, said Gage, the governor’s spokesman.
Kohll said people come to TotalWellness because they want results right away. “That’s the whole point, is it should be convenient and fast to get the results,” he said.
After all, the quarantine time for the infected and those who come into contact with them isn’t short. Those who were in direct contact, closer than 6 feet for 15 minutes or longer, with a COVID-19-positive person are advised to self-quarantine for 14 days, according to guidance from the Douglas County Health Department.
For those living with someone with the virus who can’t determine their last exposure, the clock runs out 14 days after the positive person ends their isolation, typically 10 days, for a total of 24 days.
By Julie Anderson

NTV: Gov. Ricketts warns of delays getting COVID-19 test results

LINCOLN, Neb. — Governor Pete Ricketts says your COVID-19 test results may be delayed.
Ricketts said Quest Labs is averaging between 8.37 and 10.51 days over the past two weeks.
Ricketts said TestNebraska’s average since the program started has been a little over 2.13 days.
"We have seen that our test results have been coming back slower as well with the increase volume and so forth,” said Ricketts. “Over the last couple of weeks we've been about 3.5 days on average to get results back. That's longer than what we'd like. We're working to expand capacity in the lab. We're staffing up. We've got a team looking at how we can reduce the time further."
The governor said, whether you test positive or negative, if you’re experiencing COVID-19 symptoms you need to stay home.

Scottsbluff SH: Morrill County Commissioners pass resolution opposing mandated masks, other health measures

Morrill County Commissioners took a “symbolic gesture” of opposing mandatory directed health measures during its meeting Thursday. The commissioners have become the latest to add their voices to those opposed to mandated masks.
Two out of three board members voted to approve a resolution, Morrill County Clerk Kathleen Brandt said.
Morrill County Commissioner Jeff Metz, who serves as chair of the board, said. “It basically is a symbolic statement that we recognize the constitution of the state of Nebraska, the U.S. Constitution as, you know, we are sworn elected officials. We have certain rights that are inalienable and cannot be infringed upon.”
Quoting the resolution, Metz said, as a county board, the express intent had been to “both encourage the public to make appropriate virus-related health care decisions for themselves and their families,”

while also expressing that the board would refrain from “enacting or supporting on the county level” mandates that “might infringe upon the rights of citizens of Morrill County.” The resolution, in its entirety, is available on starherald.com.

Panhandle Public Health District Director Kim Engel answered questions about the resolution during the health district’s daily briefing Thursday.

“It is disappointing to see a resolution like that where during this time we are really in it together,” she said. “It is going to take all of us, with the same message, going in the same direction, to get control of this virus.”

Morrill County is a member of the Panhandle Public Health District, which has had directed health measures in place since March 30. At that time, Gov. Pete Ricketts put in place directed health measures that required the closures of schools, moved restaurant lobbies to be closed and other measures. In the Panhandle, as in the rest of the state, Ricketts enacted the directed health measures currently in place, used a phased approach. Right now, Morrill County and the 11 other counties are covered by the PPHD, which is tasked with overseeing the enforcement of the state directed health measures.

PPHD has had discussions with the governor’s office and been advised that directed health measures put in place by the state override any measures taken on the county level, Engel said. However, she expressed concern that the resolution would create confusion for people about the directed health measures.

Basically, Metz said, the county as a board won’t take any action to put into place or support any mask-related or other mandatory requirements. In the resolution, the commissioners cite mandatory mask requirements, mandatory contact tracing, mandatory social distancing, mandatory business closure/curtailment and restrictions on peaceable assembly among the measures opposed.

“It’s my opinion that some of these rights (afforded by the state and U.S. Constitution) have been trampled on,” Metz said. “By certain businesses being forced to close or you couldn’t go to church or gatherings, you know, things like that. I feel it’s a clear violation of the U.S. Constitution."

Mask orders in Douglas County and in Lincoln that Metz said he opposes generated discussion among commissioners about passing a resolution. Citizens should be able to choose for themselves whether to go to church, to wear a mask or to go to a restaurant.

“We’re just saying, leave it up to the folks, you know, the residents of the county to make choices for themselves,” Metz said.

He said he knows health officials, such as those at PPHD, have “important jobs to do and I appreciate the work they have done. I just do not think that one size fits all.”

Metz said he feels that citizens in Morrill County have tried to be cautious to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The county currently has the second most cases of the coronavirus in the Panhandle. Currently, Morrill County has six active cases of COVID-19 and has had a total of 64 cases of the virus. Only Scotts Bluff County has had more cases of COVID-19 in the Panhandle, with 315 total cases reported as of Thursday.

In July, Morrill County had been cited as one of the state’s largest growth centers over a two-week period. With 4,600 people in Morrill County, Dr. Mark Rupp, chief of the infectious disease division at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, compared case numbers to Douglas County experiencing hundreds of new cases daily, according to the Omaha World-Herald. Over an approximately two-week period from June 24 to July 3, Morrill County had 36 positive cases of the coronavirus, according to figures on PPHD’s website, pphd.org.

A rodeo held over the July 4 weekend was also cited as a community exposure site after at least one person who attended the event, tested positive for the coronavirus and health officials said the person

had not socially distanced or wore a mask while attending various activities at the event.
Fortunately, Engel said, no other cases were tied to the event. She said that announcing community exposure sites is only done when officials are unable to identify all persons who were potentially exposed as a cautionary measure for people who attended the event to monitor for symptoms as they may have been exposed.
Bridgeport Public School district was one of the first schools to close in March, when four students and a teacher quarantined after a student from another high school tested positive at the girls state basketball tournament. The district closed before Ricketts' health measure required school closures. As school is set to re-open, the district won't require masks and is leaning on social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19, according to its re-opening plans.
On the county level, Morrill County Commissioners continued to meet in-person, at a time when many boards moved to online meetings, and most of its county offices remained opened. Only two offices moved to taking appointments for a short-period of time, Metz told the Star-Herald.
Metz said Morrill County Commissioners modeled the resolution after a similar resolution passed by Goshen County Commissioners earlier this month. In Wyoming, some directed health measures there that affect businesses remain more stringent, with restaurants required to enforce spacing, limiting parties to six or fewer and even cleaning guidelines.
The Morrill County board has a history of passing similar resolutions on issues. In January, the Morrill County Commissioners adopted a motion opposing red flag laws and declaring itself a sanctuary county. Some other boards followed, including the Scotts Bluff County Commissioners.
"Like most resolutions at the county level, they're just statements or issues that we support, like supporting local law enforcement or livestock-friendly programs," Metz said. "You know, they really don't have much teeth. There isn't any teeth attached to a resolution like this. It's just a symbolic statement of support for the residents of the county."
The Star-Herald reached out to Morrill County Commissioner Susanna Batterman, who did vote to oppose the resolution and is a member of the board of health that oversees PPHD. The Star-Herald also reached out to Gov. Pete Ricketts for comment and heard from a representative of his office, but had not yet received comment as of publication.
By Maunette Loeks

Imperial Republican: Covid Cases Continue To Keep Health District Busy

In the past seven days the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) has been notified of 11 more people who have tested positive for COVID-19.

New cases include the following:

- One Chase County resident: a male in his 60s, related to travel.
- Two Perkins County residents: a male in his teens and a female in her 80s, both related to direct contact.
- Five Keith County residents: a male in his 60s and a female in her 30s related to direct contact, a female in her 40s and a female in her 60s both related to travel, and a female in her 50s related to community spread.
- One Hitchcock County resident: a male in his 30s, related to direct contact with another confirmed case of COVID-19.
- One Furnas County resident: a male in his 50s related to direct contact.
- One Red Willow County resident: a female in her 60s related to community spread.

These cases bring the total to 90 confirmed COVID-19 cases, according to Myra Stoney, Health

Director at SWNPHD.

Of those 90 cases, 54 people have recovered.

The district has recorded eight deaths in all due to COVID-19 in its nine-county area, most of which were reported last week in this newspaper.

"The higher numbers of cases and deaths in the last few weeks highlights the importance of separating those who are sick from the rest of the public," said Melissa Propp, RN Public Health Nurse.

"Please stay home if you have any symptoms—don't wait until you feel 'sick enough' to stay home. It doesn't take severe symptoms to pass it on," she added.

Friday's statewide report from DHHS showed Nebraska had an increase of 1,893 cases since the July 31 report. Cases grew to 28,104, but 20,333 have recovered.

During the past week, 13 new COVID-19 related deaths were recorded in the state for a total of 345.

Perkins County numbers

While the COVID-19 outbreak in the Golden Ours Convalescent Home in Grant has slowed, two more positive tests came back last week—one resident and one employee.

Perkins County Health Services CEO Neil Hilton said the employee case was confirmed on Aug. 4 while the resident's case, a woman in her 80s, was confirmed Aug. 7.

He said the resident remains at Golden Ours in a wing dedicated to COVID-19 patients.

Hilton said all 14 residents in Golden Ours and 10 in Park Ridge assisted living were tested early last week.

He was hopeful all 24 would come back negative—23 of

To read more go to: https://etypeservices.com/Imperial%20RepublicanID359/

By Russ Pankonin and Jan Schultz

LJS: Lancaster County confirms 31 new COVID-19 cases

Lancaster County health officials confirmed 31 new cases of coronavirus but no new deaths on Thursday.

The new COVID-19 cases raised the overall total to 3,415, including 1,518 documented recoveries since the pandemic began, the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department reported.

Lancaster County's death toll remained at 19.

Lincoln hospitals cared for 13 COVID-19 patients, down slightly from Wednesday. Of those, four patients resided in Lancaster County. Three of the 13 patients needed a ventilator, the department said in a news release.

With the new cases, the county remained on pace for a third straight week of declining new cases, but the county also remained on pace to have its third straight week of declining new tests.

By Riley Johnson

AP: Omaha-area schools report COVID-19 cases days after opening

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Schools in the Omaha area are reporting new cases of the coronavirus just days after opening classes to in-person attendance during a global pandemic.

Officials with Millard Public Schools disclosed two confirmed cases this week at the district's Reagan Elementary School, while Ralston Public Schools also sent notice of a confirmed case in its Blumfield Elementary School, the Omaha World-Herald reported.

The Millard district opened classrooms on Monday and has been on a staggered attendance system this week, with a quarter of its students attending each day. The district was set to bring back all students

who have chosen in-person learning by next week, but Superintendent Jim Sutfin acknowledged that could change, given the new virus cases. Sutfin said he might decide to divide high school students into two groups who would attend classes in person every other day.

Blumfield Elementary Principal Casey Knight informed parents Wednesday that a person who was involved with the pre-kindergarten classroom but who is not a student had tested positive for the virus. The notice came a day after Ralston schools opened to students. Ralston is also on a staggered attendance system, with students divided into two groups and attending school on alternate days.

Both districts said that the people infected and those who have been in close contact with them have been told to self-quarantine, and both schools where the infections were reported were being deep-cleaned.

Nebraska continues to see new virus cases reported daily. The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in Nebraska decreased from 281 new cases per day as of July 29 to about 265 new cases per day as of Aug. 12. However, the seven-day daily average of COVID-19 deaths over the past two weeks has increased, to 2.71 deaths per day as of Aug. 12, from 1.57 deaths per day as of July 29.

OWH: Building walls, buying robots: Douglas County Jail scrambles to contain coronavirus outbreak

A surge of coronavirus cases at the Douglas County Jail has Corrections Director Mike Myers pulling out all the stops, from building walls to buying robots.

In the past 10 days, positive tests for COVID-19 have skyrocketed 61% among corrections officers. In just the past three days, the number of units with inmates who have the coronavirus has doubled, from three to six.

That has Myers trying to batten down the hatches by:

- Bringing in disinfecting robots that look like rolling space heaters. Myers plans on spending $500,000 from the federal coronavirus relief bill on the UV-dispensing robots, normally used in hospitals, to try to disinfect everything from clothing to holding areas to transport vehicles.
- Hiring contractors to build temporary walls to create zones for when staff members enter and exit sections of the jail.
- Informing court officials that it isn't safe to transport inmates right now. In turn, Douglas County District Judge Horacio Wheelock issued an order Thursday barring any transfer of inmates from the jail to the courthouse through Aug. 28.

"Bottom line, from what we're hearing, it's getting bad at the jail," Wheelock said.

Myers didn't disagree but said officials are working hard to try to contain the virus among the 1,150 inmates housed in the state's largest county jail. In the five months since the pandemic began, 66 inmates have tested positive — and most have had mild symptoms. One inmate has been hospitalized and has since recovered, Myers said. The jail long has had protocols under which staff wear protective gowns, masks and face shields; inmates wear masks; and incoming inmates are quarantined to ensure that they don't have symptoms.

Despite that, Myers said, he's certain that the overall positive rate is higher than the numbers show. The jail had walled off three units where inmates tested positive. Then came this week. Three more inmates tested positive — all from different units. At least one of the inmates was in an open-barracks unit.

That prompted Myers to do some "serious musical chairs" — transferring inmates who had not been exposed to the top level of the unit and those who had been exposed to the bottom level. He then had contractors build walls that require staff to go through a three-step process of putting on protection and disinfecting before entering and leaving the unit.

As of Thursday evening, 208 inmates — 18% of those in jail — were in some form of an isolated unit,

being monitored to see if they develop symptoms.
“We kept our bubble intact for a long time,” Myers said. “And when it popped, it popped.”
As with the recent increase of cases in the Omaha area, Myers said, corrections officers have seen the bulk of their positive tests in the past month. On Aug. 4, officials counted 57 employees who had tested positive in the five previous months. In the 10 days since, 35 more employees have tested positive, Myers said.
The last few months, three corrections officers have been hospitalized. So far, none have required ventilators. The vast majority of the officers have had mild symptoms and have quarantined at home. Fortunately, Myers said, they have recovered and come back to work about the time that someone else has gone home.
Rumors began to swirl that the county would tap sheriff’s deputies to fill in for quarantining corrections officers. But Myers said he has been able to avoid that by instead temporarily ending work-release and community-based programs to bring “all hands on deck.”
Myers praised the jail workers’ resilience. The jail has about 370 corrections officers — 25% of them have tested positive.
“Between the pandemic and the civil unrest, if you find a year more difficult for corrections in the past 100 years, I’d be interested in hearing what that was,” he said. “To keep coming to work like this is something that deserves recognition. They’re keeping the facility safe. They’re keeping the community safe, even while three of their own have gone to the hospital.
By Todd Cooper

LJS: Legislature approves big property tax relief, state investment package

The Legislature handed commanding 41-4 approval Thursday to a huge compromise proposal constructed around increased property tax relief after rejecting a last-ditch effort to wait until senators could gauge the growing economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.
Sen. Justin Wayne of Omaha attempted to apply the brakes to the proposal (LB1107), arguing that the Legislature could make a wiser decision when it convenes in January for the 2021 legislative session.
At issue is the commitment of hundreds of millions of dollars to fund local property tax relief, a new business development tax incentives program and a $300 million pledge to help fund creation of a proposed national pandemic response center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.
"We are facing unprecedented times," Wayne argued. "My issue is the timing of what we are doing."
But Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn, chairwoman of the Legislature's Revenue Committee and the driving force behind the legislative package, noted that Appropriations Committee Chairman John Stinner of Gering had helped forge the final agreement with an eye focused on protecting the state's budgeting capacity.
"If he thought this was impossible, he wouldn't have joined" in fashioning the proposal, Linehan said.
The package is built around creation of a new program that would initially deliver $125 million in property tax relief through state income tax cuts with that commitment of state funding rising to $375 million no later than 2025.
In addition, 70% of casino gambling revenue generated in Nebraska would be delivered to property tax relief if voters approve a gambling initiative at the general election in November.
Also included in the legislative package is incremental funding for a new business tax incentive program that could cost $150 million in its fifth year and the pledge of $300 million in state funding for the ambitious $2.6 billion project at the Medical Center campus in Omaha.
The Medical Center project depends on federal designation of UNMC as the national pandemic

response center.
The property tax component of the agreement begins with relief for about 6% of local school property taxes paid, rising to an estimated 18% in the fifth year.
That new program will be in addition to the current $275 million in property tax relief currently provided by the state's property tax credit cash fund.
Growing economic losses and challenges flowing from the COVID-19 pandemic need to be measured before the state makes such a large commitment, Wayne said, noting that recent Big Ten cancellation of the 2020 Husker football season will add to the state's economic losses.
The economic impact of the pandemic means that "people are waking up not knowing how they're going to feed their kids and pay their mortgage," Wayne said.
Commitment of this funding now would "put a handcuff on our opportunity to help people," he said. "My issue is the timing of what we are doing."
Sen. Curt Friesen of Henderson told Wayne that "while I share your revenue concerns," agriculture needs assistance now.
During the debate, Sen. Steve Erdman of Bayard praised Madsen's Bowling & Billiards in Lincoln for its challenge to Lincoln's local health directive requiring employees and patrons to wear masks to guard against spread of COVID-19.
"This is about control," Erdman said. "Take your masks off, go out and live your life. We're so afraid of dying that we forgot how to live."
Those remarks prompted a swift tweet by Sen. Matt Hansen of Lincoln: "One of the most uninformed and reckless speeches I've ever heard on the floor of the Legislature."
Wayne was joined by Sens. Machaela Cavanaugh of Omaha, Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha and Erdman in a 4-39 vote to support his motion to shelve the bill.
Voting against enactment of the measure were Sens. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, Steve Halloran of Hastings, Erdman and Hunt.
By Don Walton

OWH: Nebraska lawmakers approve 'micro-TIF' for homeowners, earlier parole eligibility

Nebraska lawmakers passed a final round of bills Thursday before adjourning for the year, including one that would allow homeowners to postpone an increase in property valuation for doing major remodeling projects. The bill passed 49-0.
Legislative Bill 1021 was introduced by State Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte, who dubbed it a “micro-TIF” measure.
TIF, or tax-increment financing, has been used to encourage commercial redevelopment projects in the past. The mechanism allows developers to pay property taxes on the predevelopment valuation for a fixed number of years.
LB 1021 would extend a streamlined version of the same process to the repair, rehabilitation or replacement of homes in counties with fewer than 100,000 residents, as long as the home is at least 60 years old and the remodeling project costs less than $250,000.
Parole eligibility. Prison inmates would become automatically eligible for parole within two years of their mandatory discharge date under a bill passed 29-11 on Thursday.
LB 1004, introduced by Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha, aims to help with the overcrowding of Nebraska prisons. Inmates now become eligible for parole when they have served half of their minimum sentence.
The new bill would make them eligible to be considered for parole at whichever date is earlier. Inmates

still would have to go before the Parole Board and win approval to be released.

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Workforce housing. Affordable workforce housing development in urban areas would get a $10 million boost under LB 866, which passed 29-7 on Thursday.

Sen. Justin Wayne of Omaha introduced the measure, which also encourages large and medium-size Nebraska cities to set up a density bonus program for building housing in areas designated as blighted and substandard.

The urban workforce housing development program would be similar to an existing rural workforce housing development program. Lawmakers approved a $10 million boost to the rural program earlier in the session.

Flood mitigation. The State Department of Natural Resources would be required to develop a statewide flooding mitigation plan and local plastic bag bans would be prohibited under a bill passed 46-0 on Thursday.

LB 632, introduced by Sen. Dan Hughes of Venango, incorporated several other bills.

Among them is one that would limit the amount that utilities can charge for disconnecting and reconnecting customers. The bill also would help people keep utilities hooked up if they need the utilities to prevent an illness or disability from getting worse.

By Martha Stoddard

LJS: Senators offer advice as they depart the Legislature

Lincoln Sen. Kate Bolz is one of six senators leaving the Legislature after this year, and she was the first in line Thursday to deliver her goodbye speech.

Senators gave eight years' worth of advice to their peers, and lots of thanks to family, staff and constituents. Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, who is leaving after 46 years and two terms in this stretch, did not choose to do a speech.

"So much of public service is choosing your words and choosing your battles," Bolz said, "but today, colleagues, I speak to you from my heart."

Under the glass on her desk, she said, there is a piece of paper with four names written with a black Sharpie:

Juan, Jorge, Curtis, Andrea.

They are the victims of an 11-day killing spree in 2013 carried out when 26-year-old Nikko Jenkins was released from solitary confinement in a Nebraska prison after warning for months he would kill if released without mental health treatment or a mental health commitment.

He killed Juan Uribe-Pena and Jorge Cajiga-Ruiz randomly as they sat in their car. He shot Curtis Bradford in a garage and Andrea Kruger in the street.

"Those names are there to remind me how important our work is. It literally can save lives," Bolz said.

She served on the Department of Correctional Services Special Oversight Committee that was prompted by the Jenkins case and that uncovered deep problems in the department.

It was important work, tedious and politically fraught, and that work still isn't done, she said. But progress has been made in her eight years in the Legislature.

Those names, those lives, remind her to focus on the ideas that are bigger than politics, her district and her, she told senators.

"What's written in Sharpie on your desk?" she said.

Those bigger ideas senators could serve are justice, fairness, compassion, their neighbors, she said.

"Whatever it is, make it your North Star. Write it in permanent ink.

"I want to leave you with this sincere request," she said. "Don't worship the false god of politics. Don't sacrifice at the altar of leverage. … And don't tell yourself that the ends justify the means and then ask yourself for forgiveness. We've seen too much of this. We've gone too far."

She asked the senators to strive for big ideals, justice, integrity and what's best for Nebraskans.

"Because your work matters. It matters to every school kid and every hospital patient, to every truck driver and every basketball coach. It matters to every farm, village, city and suburb.

"Please believe that when your striving is in the name of service, not political gain, when your work is in the name of others and not your own ego, when your efforts are to make the lives of your constituents better, your efforts matter and are not in vain."

Omaha Sen. Sara Howard left senators with five pieces of advice:

* Be resilient: When you fall, get up, dust off and get back to work. You are far stronger than you know.
* Keep your good humor: It will break the tension. And leave disagreements in the chamber. Don't take them home. Don't put them on social media.
* Take care of yourself and each other: Each person here brings their own unique brand of magic, and all progress moves at the speed of the trust people have for one another.
* Focus on the work: Learn how to count votes. Stay close to the process and debate in good faith. Be a workhorse and not a show horse.
* Be intentional about the institution: Traditions are only as strong as the people who are willing to participate in them. Keep having conversations about what it means to uphold the highest values.

Sen. Sue Crawford of Bellevue said a critical lesson she learned was to build as many personal relationships with as many senators as possible.

"Respect and productive relationships flow from friendship and trust," she said.

Seek to follow the better angels of your nature and bring to life the lofty ideals that the artists have so beautifully memorialized in the Capitol, Crawford pointed out. From the angels of virtue in the Rotunda to the representations of justice in the chamber, to the symbolism of the heritage throughout. Those ideals are owed to those who came before, and the diversity of the people who are served, she said. And seek to live up to the ideals of a nonpartisan, unicameral legislature.

Sen. Rick Kolowski of Omaha, who spent 41 years in an education career before coming to the Legislature, found joy this session in that former work by spending time with middle school students from Prairie Hill School on their climate change resolution.

He looked around at the Plexiglas and barriers senators have had to deal with in the past 17 days and recognized this as a challenging and even dangerous time.

"It's a issue that we must meet and overcome in our future. Keep goals alive that are meaningful, and mean so much to us in all, that we've been able to accomplish," Kolowski said.

Speaker Jim Scheer of Norfolk was the most emotional as he spoke to senators and thanked his wife and family.

When he first considered running for speaker four years ago, he heard that long-time Clerk of the Legislature Patrick O'Donnell might be retiring. He had to know O'Donnell would be there if he was elected speaker, because he would need someone who knew what he was doing. He didn't want to put the institution in the position of being run by two inexperienced leaders, he said.

"It's been a wonderful eight years," he said.

While he didn't have any golden advice how to live life within the Legislature, he said, he did share these thoughts.

These bills senators introduce are not their own; they are for people or groups or institutions outside the Legislature, and meant to improve the state. And there's always more that senators could do, and more they should have done," he said.

Scheer has been in elected office since 1978, beginning with the Norfolk School Board, then mayor and state Board of Education before the Legislature.
"My time here is over. This has been the best thing I have ever been involved with," he said.
By JoAnne Young

LJS: People celebrate tenure of Sen. Ernie Chambers on Capitol steps

It was a surprise party that had to wait a few hours because the man to be celebrated was busy taking the last of his term-limited time to draw out voting on bills Thursday afternoon.
"Because I wasn't informed of this happening," Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers told the group gathered on the north steps of the Capitol, "I was on the floor of the Legislature doing what it was my job to do."
Educating, slowing things down, offering up words of wisdom or criticism. On this his last day, his goal was to determine how things were going to go and say the things he wanted to say. Or to be like the death angel at Passover, and let a bill proceed without a visit from the spirit of extended debate.
But when he finally showed up, they cheered, and shouted their love for the 46-year veteran of the Legislature. And held up thank-you signs and Fight for Justice signs. One man even had what appeared to be an old reelection sign that read: "Friends of North Omaha Support Ernie Chambers State Legislature."
"I do appreciate your being here, but when it comes to celebrations and gatherings, that is not my strong suit or my long suit," he said. "Most of what I've done during my life has been me and my shadow."
Chambers, 83, said what he got from his reading of the Bible when he was young is that he has an obligation to do what he thinks is right, no matter what anybody else said or did.
"And throughout my life, as I got older, I understood that for various reasons people were afraid to do what they said they believed," he said.
It wasn't necessarily that they were evil or hypocritical but they had so much to lose if they did what they believed, he told the group. Or they just didn't have the strength to do it.
Former Sen. David Landis showed up to the celebration and Chambers acknowledged his old friend.
"I paid attention to him. He was one of the most thoughtful people while he was there," Chambers said. "And even when it was only me, David would stand up and speak for what was right, not what the majority were saying."
Landis thought everybody had a right to be heard and it was not good to change the rules to stifle one man, knowing it would work against them, anyway, Chambers said.
Anybody born of a man and a woman is his sister or brother, he told the crowd.
"To the extent that it can be possible, I am my brother's and my sister's keeper," he said. "And that has guided me. It has not failed me. It has led me to help people who later on stabbed me in the back. And when time came and they needed help, I would help them again."
But the next time he would help them, he said he assured his longtime legislative aide Cynthia Grandberry, he would do it with his back to the wall.
If everyone would turn against him, he said, there's one friend he would always have, the one deep inside of him.
"And that friend is a hard taskmaster who knows me," he said. "In order for me to have peace of mind, I have to keep peace with what's inside of me."
Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, in a tribute to Chambers on Wednesday on the floor of the Legislature, said he was a teacher, philosopher, poet, advocate, theologian, protector of children, agitator and an indomitable force.

Illustrated by the T-shirts and jeans he wears in Legislature and everywhere else, he is the consummate common man, she said.
He was the first to stand for Black lives in the Legislature and one of the first there to fight to close the liquor stores in Whiteclay by suggesting the revocation of liquor licenses.
"His entire 46-year mission was for the least, the last and the lost," she said.
Thank you, Senator Chambers, Pansing Brooks said, for being true to you.
"You have been irascible, aggravating, impossible and mind-boggling. You have followed the mission of Finley Peter Dunne, a 1898 writer who suggested the need to 'comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.' You have also been powerful, gentle, inspiring, compassionate, kind and, yes, loving.
"In short, you have been exactly what Nebraska has needed for 46 years."
By JoAnne Young

OWH: Overwhelming number of UNL professors surveyed say: Stay in Big Ten

About 90% of University of Nebraska-Lincoln professors who took an online survey Wednesday expressed support for staying in the Big Ten Conference.
UNL Faculty Senate President Nicole Buan said Thursday that about 400 professors had responded to the survey.
The Huskers' membership in the Big Ten became an issue for some Nebraskans when the conference decided this week against playing football this fall because of the coronavirus pandemic. Husker coach Scott Frost and others said their football team had taken appropriate precautions and still wanted to play games.
The UNL Faculty Senate's executive committee decided to see how professors felt about the Big Ten. Buan said other than citing the results, she would have nothing more to say about it, especially with NU leaders saying Thursday morning that UNL "is a fully committed member of the Big Ten Conference."
The two-paragraph statement issued by NU President Ted Carter and UNL Chancellor Ronnie Green acknowledged that this was a disappointing week for the Huskers. They went on to say that they "look forward to the day when we can cheer on our student-athletes ."
The Big Ten includes some of the nation's academic powerhouses, including Michigan, Wisconsin and Ohio State.
By Rick Ruggles

LJS: Unemployment filings continue to decline in Nebraska

Initial filings for unemployment continued their downward trend in Nebraska.
According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 2,640 Nebraskans filed initial claims in the week that ended Sunday, down 306 from the previous week. Initial claims have fallen for three straight weeks and are now down nearly 90% from their peak in late March, but they are still more than three times higher than they were before the coronavirus pandemic started.
Continuing claims, which are a better gauge of overall job market conditions, fell by more than 8,700 to 37,643 for the week ending Aug. 1.
Nationally, initial claims fell below 1 million for the first time in more than four months. Claims were down about 228,000 from the previous week to 963,000.
By Matt Olberding

OWH: Naval officer who worked at StratCom charged with leaking secrets to Russian

contact

A Navy chief petty officer who formerly worked at U.S. Strategic Command faces court-martial in Virginia on charges that he leaked classified information to a Russian national, Navy officials disclosed Thursday.

Chief Petty Officer Charles T. Briggs served as an information systems technician at Offutt Air Force Base from April 2018 to July 2019, according to Navy documents. He has been held since August 2019 at a Navy brig in Virginia near his last duty station at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth.

Briggs is accused of sending an email containing classified information to a Russian national "with reason to believe the information could be used to injure the United States or benefit a foreign nation" while working at Offutt in January 2019, according to a charge sheet.

Other charges include:

- Relaying U.S. national defense information to a Russian national from October 2018 to January 2019.
- Obstructing justice by telling the Russian national about an ongoing investigation into their relationship in January and February 2019.
- Failing to disclose on a security clearance questionnaire about whether he had maintained a "close and continuing relationship" with a noncitizen.
- Lying on a leave-request form by falsely claiming he would be staying in Nebraska during an 11-day leave in late 2018.
- Violating a general regulation by failing to report a monthlong trip to Serbia in December 2018.
- Failing to report connections to Italian and Russian nationals.
- Possession of and attempting to view child pornography.

Briggs, who is originally from Wisconsin, enlisted in the Navy in October 1998. If convicted, he could face up to 64 years of confinement and a dishonorable discharge.

A trial date hasn't yet been set, a Navy Region Mid-Atlantic spokeswoman said.

StratCom officials referred questions to the Navy. Briggs' civilian attorney, Frank J. Spinner, couldn't be reached for comment.

By Steve Liewer

OWH Editorial: Nebraska lawmakers navigated a difficult session

The Nebraska Legislature's 2020 "short session" ended Thursday. Its main accomplishment was the practical compromise reached on property tax relief and business incentives.

A strong majority of lawmakers sent a much-needed message to the public by refusing to surrender to political division and stalemate. The compromise forged agreement on doable property tax relief and a measured approach to business incentives.

Such action well served the state, not least given the alternatives: gridlock; a wide-ranging school aid revamp and property tax approach that never had anywhere close to enough votes; or frantic last-minute efforts to maintain the status quo, which meant dismissing any property tax efforts and ignoring the need for a business incentives revamp and support for a major project at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Some lawmakers left the session quite frustrated, it's true. (The 2020 session is by no means unusual on that score.) A small number of rural senators demanded far more property tax relief. Urban progressives said it was unfair and harmful not to take additional action to address needs related to COVID-19.

But two powerful obstacles stood in the way: Not nearly enough votes. And not nearly enough time.

As it was, the Legislature did about as well as could be expected, given the central challenges senators

faced: The wide divergence in views and philosophy separating lawmakers. The complexity of the issues. And the complications created by the virus, which split the 60-day session in three segments and left lawmakers with only 19 days to decide remaining issues when they reconvened on July 20.
Gov. Pete Ricketts has a particular obligation now to exercise his veto power with the utmost discretion and responsibility. Because the Legislature reached the 60-day limit and had to adjourn for the year, Ricketts can veto any bill he likes and lawmakers will have no opportunity to vote on a possible override. The governor must be mindful not to come across as abusing his advantage due to this unusual situation caused by the virus.
This year's session provided lessons for the Legislature as it looks to the 90-day "long session" coming up in January. Three examples:
» The need for bridge-builders. Term limits unfortunately are pushing out some capable lawmakers who fill a vital role by promoting consensus-building and defending the Legislature's operations against partisan power plays. Returning members must step up and defend constructive dialogue and responsible legislative operations.
» Honest differences, yes; Congress-style behavior, no. The political spectrum in the Legislature is huge, and the appetite of many lawmakers for fierce rhetoric is keen. The political differences are honest ones. But state senators must not allow their differences to harden into contempt for each other. Otherwise the Legislature will go the way of Congress, where grandstanding and stalemate too often prevail over sound legislating.
» Consensus on rules. Disagreements over rules are nothing new at the Legislature, but senators would benefit next year from a focused effort to work out broad agreement on rules, to lessen complaints and frustration.
The Nebraska Legislature can accomplish much if senators understand the ingredients for effective lawmaking.

OWH Midlands Voices: Closer look reveals major flaws in Legislature's 'grand compromise'

As Nebraska legislators worked to pass a "grand compromise" regarding property tax relief, business tax breaks and funding for a future University of Nebraska project, many in the body, including some who would ultimately vote for the measure, expressed significant concerns about the state's ability to fund the bill's provisions.
Looking at the projected costs of the package, which provides property tax "relief" through a refundable income tax credit, grants hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate welfare and sets aside another $300 million for the University of Nebraska project, it is easy to see why they were concerned: Over the next 11 years, these pieces will combine to cost the state $4.6 billion, Department of Revenue data show.
That is a significant hole for future legislators to have to dig out of, especially since the plan is to be paid for using one-time funds and revenue projections that are speculative at best. If the Legislature had actually held a hearing on the 150-page bill instead of handing it to senators a mere 24 hours before they had to vote on it, there may have been an opportunity to do more than just cross our fingers and hope optimism surrounding future revenues is not misplaced. Given that we are currently in the middle of a global pandemic and record economic downturn, there is ample reason to question that optimism.
This potential fiscal hit with little offsetting revenue means Nebraska is entering terrain similar to what our southern neighbor encountered when it passed income tax cuts in 2012 and 2013. The Kansas tax cuts, which also lacked significant offsetting revenue, devastated the state's economy and led to nine

rounds of budget cuts over four years. The wreckage included crumbling roads, school years ending early because of low funds and wait lists for disability services that were several years long.
The "Kansas Experiment" finally ended when lawmakers, facing a nearly $900 million budget gap, rolled back the bulk of the cuts in 2017. Some legislators who supported the tax cuts were ousted amid the fallout.
While the structure of Nebraska's plan may keep the revenue loss from being as immediate as Kansas saw, the fiscal damage will likely rise to similar scope as Legislative Bill 1107's costs grow and the one-time funds end. This means future lawmakers may be forced to pay for LB 1107 by cutting key services like education or by raising other taxes and fees.
In the end, the grandest compromise to come from this deal likely won't be the bipartisan support it had in passing, but rather the compromises future state legislators will face as fiscal reality takes hold and cuts to education, health care, infrastructure and other vital services become unavoidable.
Renee Fry is executive director of the OpenSky Policy Institute, a Lincoln-based think tank focusing on Nebraska state issues.

LJS Editorial, 8/14: Postponement of football will hurt, but is right amid pandemic

For 128 consecutive years, the University of Nebraska has played a football game in Lincoln. For 57 straight seasons, Memorial Stadium has been filled to capacity with fans
Sadly, with the Big Ten Conference's Tuesday decision not to play fall sports, those streaks will come to an end in 2020
For about 24 hours, speculation ran rampant that Nebraska would go "rogue" and try to put together a season outside the conference and even leave the Big Ten -- an idea embraced by legions of "football over all" Husker fans.
Thursday, however, UNL Chancellor Ronnie Green and NU President Ted Carter shot down that ridiculous notion, wisely confirming that Nebraska is a "fully committed member of the Big Ten Conference," noting that the alliance is academic as well as athletic.
Nebraska, and its fans, wanted to play football and volleyball this fall, arguing that it could keep its athletes safe from the coronavirus before, during and after competitions, perhaps more so than if they rejoined the general student body that will return to campus this month.
The Big Ten, however, agreed with Commissioner Kevin Warren, saying that there is too much uncertainty about playing during the pandemic and that the amateur athletes deserve to be fully protected from any risk. Unstated, there are rightful liability concerns if an athlete would contract COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die.
So erring on the side of caution won out, leaving Husker fans at home to, perhaps, watch games from the SEC, ACC and Big 12 on television -- assuming those leagues indeed play.
That's not an outcome anyone wanted. But the national inability to, after five months, contain the coronavirus made calling off the games nearly inevitable.
Nebraska's desire to play was as much economic as competitive. Nebraska Athletics stands to lose upward of $60 million this year, an amount that would have been reduced if not eliminated had football been played. Lincoln will also take an economic hit from losing the football weekends that bring tens of thousands to the city to spend tens of millions.
In 2014, the UNL Bureau of Business Research studied the spending of fans who attended the games that year, finding that they generated just over $5 million per game. Adjusted for inflation, in 2020, that number would have been $5.5 million per game.
The original 2020 Nebraska schedule had seven home games, which would have generated upwards of

$38.5 million in spending. The pandemic-adjusted slate of five games would have dropped that amount to $27.5 million. Tuesday's no-sports decision zeroed it out.
That nearly $40 million loss will largely be taken by hotels, bars and restaurants, businesses hit the hardest by the coronavirus pandemic. But it won't, as some have maintained, devastate the multibillion dollar local economy.
The biggest hit from the decision will be to the state's psyche. Husker football is the great, perhaps only, unifier in Nebraska, and a source of much of the state's pride.
But football is now gone for four more months, and there's nothing we can do but sit here and hate it.

LJS Local View: Helping ag help the world

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, uncertainty was everywhere. Would the virus spread, and where? What did this mean for day-to-day life? Pretty quickly, that uncertainty showed up at our grocery stores. We saw partially-empty shelves as people panicked and stocked up on food.
Today, while much uncertainty remains, our grocery store shelves are full again. Thanks to its thousands of essential workers putting their own health and lives on the line, America's food supply chain has held up.
America's farmers are at the beginning of that supply chain, including our Nebraska producers ranking us among the top five agricultural states in the nation. Here in Nebraska, where agriculture is our No. 1 economic sector, our farmers and ranchers have never missed a beat delivering agricultural products, even during these tumultuous times. I'm so grateful for their efforts.
But COVID-19 is not the only challenge facing our country or our agricultural communities. A changing climate, with its unpredictable precipitation, rising heat and stronger extreme weather events, brings another level of uncertainty to America.
It's time for Congress to enact legislation that will combat climate change. We depend on Nebraska's producers to contribute to producing an abundant and safe food supply. Now, there is an opportunity before Congress for us to count on them to be part of the solution to mitigating climate change. The point is that they are our nation's resource stewards on the front lines of this challenge. And yes, their boots are on the ground every day!
Encouragingly, a bipartisan group of senators and representatives have recently introduced the Growing Climate Solutions Act. This legislation provides the incentive for farmers and foresters to engage in climate-smart management practices by helping them to access lucrative carbon credit markets.
Basically, it will remove technical entry barriers for farmers to get paid for emissions they reduce and carbon they sequester in the soil. The bill gives farmers technical assistance to develop practices that are eligible for carbon credits, measure the value of those credits and certify them for trading on the market.
The bill assigns the U.S. Department of Agriculture the authority to certify knowledgeable third-party verifiers and technical service providers. Climate-smart management practices also improve soil health. Healthy soil leads to increased profitability, improved water quality, reduced erosion, healthier crops and ecosystem benefits. This is all good news for farmers, ranchers, the public and for the planet.
Here in Nebraska, extreme weather events are already affecting us all, especially our farmers and ranchers. The "flash drought" of 2012 cost more than a billion dollars of losses to them, followed in 2019 by epic storms and floods costing precious loss of life and livelihoods with yet another estimated agricultural economic loss in the billions.

The Growing Climate Solutions Act would help farmers and ranchers combat these concerning trends and reap financial benefits while they improve their stewardship.
Our own Nebraska congressional delegation is already lining up in support of this legislation. Rep. Don Bacon is a co-introducer of the House bill, and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, who is co-leader of the House Soil Health Caucus, has signed on as an original co-sponsor.
Sen. Deb Fischer is presently studying the Senate version of bill intensely. A genuine thank you goes to our representatives who are seeing Nebraska as being a potential national leader in this effort with opportunity for our agricultural community to benefit economically.
In July, the Senate Agriculture Committee held a hearing on this legislation. Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, the ranking member on the committee and a cosponsor of the Growing Climate Solutions Act, said, "While farmers are uniquely affected by the climate crisis, they are also a critically important part of the solution."
I couldn't agree more. Even as farmers and ranchers need support of us all to navigate and adapt to our changing climate, they have huge potential to help prevent/mitigate the worst of the possible changes. Congress should continue to work together to pass bipartisan legislation that values highly our agricultural producers' contributions to feeding America and solving the challenge of climate change.
Bruce Johnson is emeritus professor of agricultural economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is a volunteer in the Lincoln chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby and a member of the Nebraska Elder Climate Legacy Initiative.

OWH: Chuck Hagel will be among Republicans speaking at Democratic convention

WASHINGTON — Next week's Democratic National Convention will feature Republican critics of President Donald Trump, and one of them should be familiar to Nebraskans.
Former Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., says Trump's performance in office is a big part of why he's officially endorsed presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden.
"I think Donald Trump has done great disservice and damage to this country, the institutions of governance," he told The World-Herald. "I think he has been corrupt in how he has used his office for his own personal gains."
Hagel cited personal behavior such as refusing to release his tax returns and a penchant for insulting tweets as evidence that Trump has "degraded the office of the presidency." But he also criticized Trump's policies on agriculture, trade, the federal budget deficit and the coronavirus pandemic. He slammed Trump's approach to foreign affairs, such as pulling out of international agreements and pushing to withdraw U.S. troops from Germany.
"How does that enhance our security and our alliances?" Hagel said.
Hagel recently recorded a video in support of Biden to be played during next week's largely virtual nominating convention.
He and Biden traveled around the world together during their time in the Senate. And when Biden served as President Barack Obama's Vice President, Hagel was the secretary of defense.
"I've worked with him and known him closely for over 20 years," Hagel said. "I know what he's about. I know the kind of human being he is. I know the honesty he brings, the competency he brings."
This isn't the first time Hagel has crossed the aisle to support a Democrat for office. He backed another one-time Senate colleague, Nebraska Democrat Bob Kerrey, in his 2012 Senate campaign against Republican Deb Fischer.
Top GOP officials at the time downplayed the impact of Hagel's endorsement by noting that he had alienated many Republicans with his sharp criticism of President George W. Bush's handling of the Iraq

War and pointed questioning of Sarah Palin's fitness to be the 2008 GOP vice presidential nominee. Fischer went on to win that Senate race by a double-digit margin.

Trump campaign officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Hagel's backing of Biden, but Nebraska Republican Party Executive Director Ryan Hamilton questioned its effect.

"I am not sure a single individual will be persuaded one way or another by this endorsement," he said. "Secretary Hagel is an ex-Obama administration official who has been out step with the party for the better part of a decade, and Republicans do not look to him for cues."

While Nebraska is not expected to be competitive overall in the presidential race, the state splits three of its Electoral College votes by congressional district.

Democrats are hopeful that they can recreate the 2008 "Blue Dot," in which Obama won the Omaha-based 2nd District's Electoral College vote.

At the time, Democrats took to calling the city "Obamaha," and they have recently floated a new Biden-focused moniker: "Jomaha."

Nebraska Democrats are also touting poll numbers that suggest that Biden could compete in the state's 1st District as well.

Hagel's decision to back Biden seems to track the thinking of John Kasich. Ohio's former Republican governor is scheduled to speak during the convention as the Biden campaign seeks to demonstrate broad appeal.

When it comes to policy, Hagel said he disagrees with Biden in plenty of areas and noted that their Senate voting records were worlds apart. And although Biden ran as a moderate during the Democratic primary, Hagel acknowledged that a President Biden would be under pressure from the more liberal elements of his party to skew hard to the left.

But Hagel said that's the challenge of governing and that Biden is capable of building a governing coalition that includes Republicans.

"I don't know anybody in the political world today who understands that better than Joe Biden, who has more practice at it, who has had more experience at it than Joe Biden," he said.

While he served in a Democratic administration and has backed Democrats for office, Hagel said he remains a registered Republican.

"And I'm hoping that the Republican Party will some day get back to where it was when I joined the Republican Party and voted for a Republican president and a Republican congressman in 1968 sitting on top of an armored personnel carrier in Vietnam," he said. "I've seen an erosion of Republican principles over the years."

Hagel said the party has lost touch with its roots in fiscal discipline, free trade and international engagement.

"There is no Republican Party," he said. "There's a Trump party. And the Republicans have essentially enabled Trump to do what he's done to really damage this country the last 3 1/2 years. That's, again, what led me particularly to support Biden. Because I don't think this country can take another four years of this guy. Our international standing can't, our defenses can't, our relationships can't, our trade can't."

By Joseph Morton

AP: Americans eager for virus aid may have to wait until the fall

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans counting on emergency coronavirus aid from Washington may have to wait until fall.

Negotiations over a new virus relief package have all but ended, with the White House and

congressional leaders far apart on the size, scope and approach for shoring up households, reopening schools and launching a national strategy to contain the virus.
In related developments Thursday:
The number of laid-off workers applying for unemployment aid fell below 1 million last week for the first time since the viral pandemic intensified five months ago, yet still remains at a high level. The level of weekly applications declined to 963,000, signaling that layoffs are slowing.
The presence of new buyers seeking more space combined with a sharp drop in the numbers of homes on themarket drove home prices to record highs in most parts of the United States, according to an analysis of housing price data by the Associated Press and Core Logic. The average home price in the U.S. in May rose 4.2% compared to a year ago.
President Donald Trump's top negotiator, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, tried to revive stalled talks Wednesday, but House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer dismissed the overture, saying the Trump administration is still refusing to meet them halfway. Congressional Republicans are largely sitting out the talks.
With the House and Senate essentially closed, and lawmakers on call to return with 24 hours' notice, hopes for a swift compromise have dwindled. Instead, the politics of blame have taken hold. All indications are talks will not resume in full until Congress resumes in September.
For Americans, that means the end of a $600 weekly unemployment benefit that has expired, as has a federal ban on evictions.
Schools hoping for cash from the federal government to help provide safety measures are left empty-handed.
States and cities staring down red ink with the shattered economy have few options.
Trump's executive actions appeared to provide a temporary reprieve, offering $300 in jobless benefits and some other aid if states are willing to meet some requirements. Officials with the Nebraska Department of Labor said Thursday they were reviewing the order.
However, it could take weeks for those programs to ramp up, and the help is far slimmer thanwhat Congress was considering. More than 20 million Americans risk evictions, and more are out of work.
Congressional Republicans, who have left the negotiating largely to Democrats, seem satisfied there is enoughmoney still available from previous aid packages, for now.
Because Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has such cool support from his ranks for any bill, Democrats are trying to push the White House to go bold. They want to maintain the $600 jobless benefit and provide nearly $1 trillion to the states and cities, nonstarters for the White House.
Pelosi and Schumer said Democrats have compromised, noting that they dropped their initial $3 trillion-plus proposal by $1 trillion and expect Trump's team to raise its $1 trillion offer by a similar amount to $2 trillion.
But Mnuchin shot back with his own statement, saying, "The Democrats have no interest in negotiating."

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