From: Kopsa, Ryan
To: Kopsa, Ryan
Cc: Pinkerman, Justin
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 3-31-20
Date: Tuesday, March 31, 2020 9:44:40 AM
Attachments: image001.png

Ag Valley Co-op
Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Mar 2020	3.06	-34.00	09:30
Corn	Dec 2020	3.17	-40.00	09:29
Milo	Mar 2020	2.55	-85.00	09:30
Milo	Dec 2020	2.72	-85.00	09:29
Soybeans	Mar 2020	7.87	-95.00	09:30
Soybeans	Dec 2020	7.73	-100.00	09:29
Wheat	Mar 2020	4.18	-70.00	09:29
Wheat	Jul 2020	4.29	-65.00	09:29

TV and Radio
NCN: Ricketts "April is Going to be a Tough Month..."
KETV: Gov. Ricketts discusses unemployment during Monday afternoon COVID-19 update
NET: Ricketts Warns People To Avoid Gatherings Despite Mild Weather
10/11: Gov. Ricketts encourages citizens to support local restaurants during COVID-19 pandemic
KETV: Local leaders ask shoppers to put those home projects on hold
KETV: Creighton students collecting protective equipment for medical professionals
NET: 'That Is Something You Really Never Want To See Happen:' Nursing Home Residents Face The Challenges Of Social Isolation
NET: Entire Panhandle Under State Restrictions After Community-Spread COVID-19 Case Confirmed
NET: Mask Decontamination, Increased Testing In Process For Long Haul
KNOP: North Platte family grateful mom could be with dad

Governor
LJS: Ricketts warns tough month ahead; coronavirus expected to peak in state in April
OWH: Gov. Ricketts predicts a 'tough' April as state records 153 coronavirus cases, third death
WJAG: Gov. Ricketts: coronavirus to hit its peak in Nebraska in late April
AP: Ricketts: April will be another 'tough month' for Nebraska
NCN: Ricketts Applauds Trump's Extension To April 30
NET: Governor Ricketts Declares "Take-Out Tuesdays" To Help Support Local Restaurants
OWH: 19 cases in 6 days: Blair case shows how COVID-19 spreads quickly at nursing homes
AP: State: 3rd Nebraska COVID-19 victim lived in Lincoln County
Scottsbluff SH: Scotts Bluff coronavirus case identified as 'community spread,' results in directed health measure
OWH: Omaha prosecutor tests positive for COVID-19, had contact with many courthouse regulars
Seward Co Independent: Tuesday, March 31: District confirms first case of COVID-19

Scottsbluff SH: Ricketts announces Panhandle counties now included in State's Directed Health Measure
OWH: 30 Nebraska counties under tighter restrictions
OWH: New health directives to take effect in Sarpy, Cass Counties; 5 community spread cases reported
OWH: Temporary surge tent at Nebraska Medical Center just one of the ways hospitals prepare for virus
NCN: Panhandle placed under Directed Health Measure. What does that mean?

Coronavirus
LJS: Lincoln County man is third Nebraskan to die from COVID-19
OWH: Nebraska records third coronavirus death, a Lincoln County man in his 90s
OWH: Number of coronavirus cases in Nebraska jumps to 153; Douglas County cases reach 82
LJS: Travel exposure leads to 7 of Lincoln's 8 cases so far, officials say
OWH: Big-box stores in Omaha appear to be implementing social distancing guidelines
OWH: Wi-Fi's time to shine: Internet usage at home cranks up as people stay put
The Farmer: COVID-19 challenges rural hospitals and health care

State Capitol
KMTV: Pilot program to extend grocery deliveries to SNAP participants
LJS: Write-in candidate enters District 1 legislative race

Opinion
OWH Editorial: Nebraska's state, local officials have shown strong leadership in this crisis
OWH Midlands Voices: Medical professionals are coordinating care in wake of the crisis
OWH Public Pulse

1. Moral reasoning, faith, doubt
2. A distressing political move
3. Sasse was right
4. Nebraska Civil War history

LJS Local View: History offers pandemic perspectives
LJS Letters

1. Fischer, Ricketts helped get them home
2. Bring Lincoln gas prices in line with state
3. Raise for Frakes is slap in face

National/Federal
AP: Coronavirus response highlights deepening partisan divide

LJS: Ricketts warns tough month ahead; coronavirus expected to peak in state in April

Gov. Pete Ricketts cautioned Nebraskans on Monday to expect "a tough month ahead" as the state anticipates that the coronavirus threat will peak in Nebraska in mid- to late-April.
March already has been "a trying month," the governor said during his daily coronavirus news briefing, with the virus beginning to creep into communities throughout the state and claim its first victims, including a Lincoln County man in his 90s, whose death was announced Monday.
The Washington Post on Monday published the results of a national modeling study by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington that projects there will be 424 coronavirus deaths in Nebraska by Aug. 4.
That study matches projections by federal scientists, the Post story said.
Ricketts said the state is "actually still working through our models and has nothing yet to compare" with those projections.

"All our efforts are to reduce the impact on the people of Nebraska," he said.
Ricketts said the state is actively working now to help ensure there will be sufficient ventilators and personal protective equipment for medical personnel in Nebraska when the peak demand occurs.
"We have purchase orders in," he said, and expect deliveries soon.
"We've got the next couple of weeks to get prepared and be ready," he said, and "we're working on those processes right now.
"We're all in this together," Ricketts said.
Testing is expanding in Nebraska now with a corresponding increase in the number of identified coronavirus cases anticipated.
The state's third death was announced by the state Department of Health and Human Services late Monday.
The Lincoln County man in his 90s had underlying health conditions.
First cases of COVID-19 were reported in York, Kimball and Antelope counties, bringing the state's total cases to 155.
On Monday, the Douglas County Health Department alone announced 16 new cases in the hard-hit metro Omaha area.
And in Washington County, the Three Rivers Public Health Department said Monday night that 10 additional cases have been identified related to the Carter Place senior living home outbreak. The department said it would provide more information Tuesday.
Lancaster County, meanwhile, reported two new cases Monday.
Ricketts said he is in constant contact with other governors as they share what they have learned in confronting the virus.
"We share ideas," he said. "We learn from everybody."
Ricketts said "it was great to see people out" and enjoying the warm weather in Nebraska during the past weekend, but he said there's still a need to maintain physical distancing.
Thirty of the state's 93 counties, including Douglas and Lancaster, are included in directed health measures that restrict gatherings of more than 10 people. The heightened restrictions are triggered by cases of community spread, positive tests in which health officials are unable to trace the source of the virus.
The majority of cases in Nebraska are travel-related, and Nebraskans who may be returning to the state now after wintering in Arizona or Florida, or elsewhere, should quarantine themselves for 14 days as a precautionary measure, the governor said.
Ricketts praised President Donald Trump for extending restrictions that limit gatherings to no more than 10 people until the end of April, describing that decision as "great leadership."
The president had previously expressed an aspiration to have Americans free to gather in churches together on Easter Sunday two weeks from now.
In an effort to assist Nebraska's restaurant industry, which has been severely impacted by recent orders to limit service to take-out, drive-thru or delivery sales in Omaha, Lincoln and other areas threatened by spread of the virus, the governor officially proclaimed Take Out Tuesdays in Nebraska through April.
In addition to urging take-out restaurant purchases, Ricketts suggested that Nebraskans purchase gift cards to help restaurants.
"Everybody in the restaurant business is having a tough time now," the governor said.
By Don Walton

OWH: Gov. Ricketts predicts a 'tough' April as state records 153 coronavirus cases, third death

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts on Monday urged Nebraskans to redouble their efforts at social distancing while warning that April is “going to be a tough month.”
“The name of the game is slowing the spread of the virus,” he said. “The way we do that is by avoiding

large public groups."
On Monday, the state recorded its third death from the virus, a Lincoln County man in his 90s with underlying health issues.
Speaking at his daily coronavirus briefing, Ricketts said people should expect cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, to peak in mid- to late April.
As of Monday evening, the number of cases reported by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services had hit 153, more than double the 61 cases reported a week earlier.
The number of confirmed cases is expected to rise as the state starts getting results from expanded testing. Dr. Gary Anthone, the state's chief medical officer, said about 20 people with positive tests were hospitalized as of Monday morning. But hospitals also are treating a number of people presumed to have the virus but who do not have test results yet. Omaha's three major hospital systems each reported between 10 and 20 such cases, he said.
Those numbers mean Nebraskans need to be diligent about avoiding large groups, keeping their distance from others and washing their hands, Ricketts said. People with symptoms of the disease, as well as their household members, should stay home until they can check with a health care provider.
Social distancing also needs to apply to outdoor activities and shopping, Ricketts said, warning about the crowds of people who headed to parks and trails over the weekend to enjoy the beautiful weather or flocked to big-box stores to shop.
He said parents should not be inviting all of their kids' friends to come over or playing organized sports. He said people should go out shopping only when they need to go and maintain their distance from others.
"We need every Nebraskan to be participating in our social distancing guidelines," he said. "This is the way we're going to keep Nebraskans, particularly the most vulnerable Nebraskans, healthy and safe."
As of Monday, Nebraska had earned a "C" grade for social distancing in an analysis of cellphone data by Unacast, a New York-based technology company. Company data showed that state residents decreased their travel by 20% to 30% since the epidemic started.
Following social distancing steps will slow the spread of the coronavirus so that health care resources are not overwhelmed, Ricketts said.
Toward that end, Ricketts has imposed directed health measures on 18 counties encompassing 70% of Nebraska's population. The measures include orders to close all sit-down dining in restaurants and bars and enforceable limits on the number of people at gatherings.
He has asked people in other areas of Nebraska to voluntarily limit gatherings to 10 people or less. In keeping with President Donald Trump's weekend announcement, the voluntary guidelines will remain in place until April 30.
Among other topics:

Takeout Tuesday

Some eateries have shifted to deliveries and takeout service, though many have closed in response to governor's orders. To help those that are trying to survive, Ricketts declared every Tuesday through the end of April "Takeout Tuesday."
He said ordering takeout meals from local restaurants would help the state's restaurant industry. Under an executive order that Ricketts joked was "probably the most popular thing I've done as governor," those meals can include takeout mixed drinks in containers with lids.

Unemployment benefits

State Labor Commissioner John Albin said it may take two weeks to install and test the software necessary to process checks under the federal stimulus bill.
But he urged anyone who believes they may be eligible for the unemployment programs included in the bill to get their application in soon. That includes people who are self-employed or "gig" workers, who are not usually eligible for unemployment benefits.
Those self-employed people could qualify for the new pandemic unemployment assistance program if they

are unable to work because of the coronavirus and cannot qualify for any other unemployment program. Albin said they may get an initial message saying that they are not eligible for unemployment but that their application will still be considered.
Under another part of the federal bill, people qualifying for both traditional unemployment and the pandemic unemployment will get an extra $600 weekly benefit. The maximum benefit otherwise is $440 weekly.
The federal bill also allowed people to draw unemployment benefits for an additional 13 weeks beyond the usual 26-week limit.
Snowbirds
Ricketts called for people returning to Nebraska after wintering in warmer states to quarantine themselves for the first 14 days. He issued a similar call for people who are coming to the state to visit a vacation cabin or to see family over Easter, if they are coming from areas where the coronavirus has spread in the community.
April Fools'
Reports that children will have to repeat a grade in school because of coronavirus closures are false, Ricketts said. He called the reports an early April Fools' joke. Last week, both he and Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt said he expect children will be able to advance as usual.
By Martha Stoddard and Paul Hammel

WJAG: Gov. Ricketts: coronavirus to hit its peak in Nebraska in late April

LINCOLN - Governor Pete Ricketts says April will be another tough and trying month for Nebraskans as that's when the coronavirus will hit its peak in the state.
Ricketts made that announcement during his daily coronavirus press conference at the Capitol Monday. He said he's signed and submitted a disaster declaration request for the state to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and President Donald Trump.
"The President has signed a number of these disaster requests for other states and I expect him to sign it for us very quickly. What it will do is allow us to tap into both individual assistance and public assistance which is designed for our counties and public institutions. The individual assistance for example will also us to get disaster unemployment, disaster management, and disaster crisis counseling."
Ricketts also proclaimed the next four Tuesdays in Nebraska as Takeout Tuesday, encouraging people to support their local restaurants.
Nebraska Department of Labor Commissioner John Albin said thanks to the CARES Act, there are six new unemployment programs included in it for people.
Those programs and more can be found by visiting DOL.Nebraska.Gov.
By Cody Ronnfeldt

AP: Ricketts: April will be another 'tough month' for Nebraska

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Gov. Pete Ricketts on Monday extended Nebraska's statewide restrictions on social gatherings until at least April 30 and urged residents to brace for another "tough month" in April, when the number of new coronavirus cases is expected to peak.
Ricketts said state public health officials are predicting that the number will continue to increase until mid- to late-April before it gradually declines. He implored residents to continue following the state's "social distancing" requirements, including a 10-person limit on social gatherings. State officials have imposed even tougher restrictions on some hard-hit counties that include Omaha, Lincoln and other population centers.
"We can expect that April is going to be a tough month," Ricketts said at his weekday news conference at

the Capitol.
Nebraska had 153 confirmed cases as of Monday evening, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services. More than 2,700 people have tested negative.
For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. Older adults and people with existing health problems are among those particularly susceptible to more severe illness, including pneumonia.
Ricketts said the 30 counties that are now under a “directed health measure” order should adhere to the deadlines that were imposed on them individually, which may be later than April 30. For instance, 15 of those counties have been ordered to wait until May 6. Another three directed health measures are set to expire April 30 but could be renewed. On Friday evening, Ricketts announced 12 more counties in the Panhandle were placed under similar orders, with a May 11 expiration.
Counties with “directed health measure” orders face tougher restrictions than other parts of Nebraska because public officials have identified coronavirus cases in those areas that can’t be traced.
A directed health measure requires restaurants and bars to close their dining areas and only offer takeout or delivery. In counties that aren’t affected, those businesses can keep their dining areas open but can’t have more than 10 people inside at once. The restrictions are designed to slow the virus’ spread and prevent it from overwhelming the state’s hospitals.
On Sunday, Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert admonished residents who continue to crowd big-box stores such as Walmart, Costco and Menards. City officials have implored residents to only venture out to buy groceries when it is absolutely necessary.
Meanwhile, Nebraska Labor Commissioner John Albin announced residents will soon be able to collect new unemployment benefits administered by the state. Some benefits will extend to people who have exhausted other unemployment and those who are self-employed and independent contractors.
By Grant Schulte

NCN: Ricketts Applauds Trump's Extension To April 30

LINCOLN – Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts asked Nebraskans to continue social distancing and applauded President Trump’s directive to extend health directives to April 30.
Ricketts: “Don’t get into large groups of more than 10 people. Keep that social distancing. I know it was a great weekend, great weather, we still need people to keep that social distancing. The name of the game is slowing the spread of the virus. The way we do that is avoiding large public groups.”
The President’s order extends the 10-person rule to April 30 and Gov. Ricketts agrees.
Ricketts: “Yesterday President Trump made the announcement that his 10 (person) rule is being extended. I want to thank President Trump, I think when he made that announcement two weeks ago with regard of the 10-person rule – no public gatherings larger than 10 people – that he really kick-started the country into awareness about what we need to do to slow the spread of the virus here in our state. I think the President showed great leadership.”
He said the six-feet distance is to be applied when you go to the park and the store.
Ricketts: “So here in the state of Nebraska we will continue to extend that 10-person rule to large public gatherings statewide.”
He said 18 Nebraska counties are subject to state directed health measures that take precedence. Directed health measures are extended as far as May 6.
The governor also instructed anyone returning to the state from an area where is community spread of COVID-19 to self-quarantine for 14 days.
By Dan Swanson

NET: Governor Ricketts Declares "Take-Out Tuesdays" To Help Support Local Restaurants

Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts has proclaimed every Tuesday in April "Take-Out Tuesday" in an effort to support the industry taking one of the largest financial hits from the coronavirus and restrictions on large gatherings.
Ricketts said ways to help include ordering takeout or buying a gift card from a local restaurant to help soften the financial hardship.
"Everybody in the restaurant industry is having a tough time right now and your ability to go out there and support these local restaurants means all the difference in the world to the people who own these restaurants and people who work at these restaurants," Ricketts said.
RJ Vega, who owns Copal Progressive Mexican Restaurant in Lincoln, said each day has presented new challenges for restaurants.
"But you know as business owners, as those of us who are servers and bartenders and hourly staff, you know, these changes have affected our way of living," Vega said.
Vega said Copal has implemented delivery service and has increased social media posts. Restaurants across the state are taking similar steps to increase interest and incentives for members of the community to get take-out or get food delivered.
By Kelsey Eihausen

OWH: 19 cases in 6 days: Blair case shows how COVID-19 spreads quickly at nursing homes

Less than one week.
That's how long it took for the novel coronavirus to sink its hooks into just one assisted-living facility in Blair.
The first announcement came on March 24: A woman in her 90s living at Carter Place had tested positive. By Monday morning, five more residents and three workers also had COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. Five were hospitalized.
Just hours later, that number more than doubled: 19 coronavirus cases were tied to Carter Place as of Monday night.
All 23 workers and 23 residents have been tested now, with more results pending. The facility is temporarily shut down for deep cleaning, and all residents have been moved to neighboring health care facilities or hospitals.
Like similar outbreaks in Washington state and elsewhere, the Carter Place cluster shows how quickly and stealthily the virus can move among residents and their caretakers at nursing homes and other care facilities.
At least four nursing facilities in Nebraska have confirmed cases of coronavirus — 19 at Carter Place, one resident at Papillion Manor in Papillion, two patients at the Douglas County Health Center in Omaha and two health care workers at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospitals' Omaha campus. Two cases in Buffalo County involving a couple in their late 80s and early 90s are currently under investigation, but it's possible that they were exposed by a home health care worker, a public health official said.
Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said Monday that 21 cases are tied to one long-term care facility in Cedar Rapids. That's roughly 30% of the total cases in Linn County.
Because testing for the coronavirus is limited and people with the virus may not show symptoms right away — or at all — the actual numbers in Nebraska are almost certainly higher, said Heath Boddy, president and CEO of the Nebraska Health Care Association.
While most people aren't expected to become seriously ill from COVID-19, older people, starting at age 60, and those with underlying health conditions are considered more vulnerable to complications and even death.
"If this gets into a facility, it has dire consequences for (those) who live there," Boddy said.

Pemberly Place Senior Living in Lincoln, where 103 people receive care, began taking precautions weeks ago. Visitors have been barred since March 16, earlier than some facilities in Nebraska.
While that and restrictions on communal dining and group activities resulted in some grumbling from families and residents, executive director Helen Crunk said facilities like hers must be proactive.
"It is my responsibility to keep these people safe, and I take that very seriously," she said.
As she read about the Carter Place outbreak, she decided Monday to take more drastic steps: the entire facility in Lincoln is now essentially in quarantine. Residents receive all meals in their rooms and are not supposed to leave for doctor's appointments unless absolutely necessary. Some can talk to their doctors through telehealth appointments. Families are allowed to visit only if a resident is dying.
The 60 or so workers there are self-monitoring for symptoms and taking their temperature before every shift — they cannot work if it's above 99.7 degrees.
Bellevue-based Hillcrest Home Care is using a virtual service to remotely check staff members and at-risk patients for a fever, declining oxygen levels and other potential COVID-19 symptoms.
Facilities are already worried about a lack of personal protective equipment — masks, gowns and gloves — for workers, Boddy said. The Nebraska Health Care Association has asked anyone with a surplus of those supplies to consider donating them to senior living centers.
The association is also asking Gov. Pete Ricketts and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to consider loosening some staffing and licensing restrictions. Staffing shortages existed even before COVID-19 hit.
Crunk and other officials said workers who bathe, feed, dispense medication to and care for seniors and other patients have a difficult job under the best of circumstances. A pandemic only magnifies that.
Now those workers are being asked to reconsider even going to the grocery store. Residents aren't leaving facilities. Their families aren't visiting. So employees coming and going daily remain one of the few ways the virus can enter and multiply inside a nursing center.
On Sunday, Douglas County Health Director Adi Pour pleaded with people who work at long-term-care facilities to refrain from shopping.
"Honestly, I hope I do not see one single one of them in the community going to a grocery store," she said. "Usually the residents, they don't go out. So how are they going to be infected? By a staff member bringing it into the facility."
Harsh, but true, Crunk said.
"It's hard to say, you're a front-line health care worker, I know you have a life outside of work, but realize what you may be bringing into work," she said.
Her staff understands the importance of limiting contact with the outside world.
"It's important for us as health care professionals to be the ones who step up and go above and beyond what's expected of us," she said.
Terra Uhing is the executive director of the Three Rivers Public Health Department, which covers Blair and Carter Place. The workers there are taking their responsibility to social distance seriously, she said.
She's not so sure about other people.
"I'm seeing some of the scariest things I've ever seen," she said. "Individuals need to realize these are unprecedented times and you need to stay home."
By Erin Duffy

AP: State: 3rd Nebraska COVID-19 victim lived in Lincoln County

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska's third COVID-19 death was that of a Lincoln County man in his 90s, health officials said.
The man had underlying health conditions and had tested positive along with a woman in her 80s, the executive director of the West Central District Health Department said Monday. The woman remains

hospitalized, said Shannon Vanderheiden, the department director.
Nebraska's first two fatal COVID-19 victims were an Omaha man in his 50s and a Hall County woman in her 60s, officials have said.
For most people, COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. Older adults and people with existing health problems are among those particularly susceptible to more severe illness, including pneumonia.
The state's total of confirmed COVID-19 cases has risen to 155, the Nebraska Health and Human Services Department said in a news release Monday night. More than 2,700 people have tested negative.
Earlier Monday, Gov. Pete Ricketts extended Nebraska's statewide restrictions on social gatherings until at least April 30. He urged residents to brace for another "tough month." State public health officials are predicting that the state COVID-19 number will continue to increase until mid- to late April before it gradually declines, Ricketts said.

Scottsbluff SH: Scotts Bluff coronavirus case identified as 'community spread,' results in directed health measure

Panhandle public health officials have announced that directed health measures that limit public gatherings will be put into place as the result of a coronavirus case in Scotts Bluff County.
Panhandle Public Health Director Kim Engel said the office of Gov. Pete Ricketts has issued a directed health measure that will be put into place for the 11 counties of the Panhandle and Grant County. That directed health measure was issued early Monday evening after Panhandle health officials released Sunday that a man in his 30s tested positive for COVID-19.
Authorities have conducted an investigation with him, and identified his case as one of community spread, meaning that where he contracted the coronavirus is not known. As a result of the investigation, authorities have identified places where the man and persons close to him may have been. A list of places that the man or persons close to him may have been included Walmart, Staples, Main Street Market and a funeral earlier this month. The complete list, including times, accompanies this story.
Scotts Bluff County Public Health Director Paulette Schnell said that the man, who has no underlying health conditions, has isolated at home since March 24.
"He continues to isolate at home and is showing signs of improvement," she said. "We are identifying his close contacts and 10 of his close contacts have been in and have tested and we expect the results from that within the next 24 to 48 hours."
Until those close contacts' test results are in, Schnell said they are considered "presumptive positive."
Health officials are continuing to identify persons that the man or his close contacts may have had contact with, as well as additional locations, whether work or social, that may be involved.
"We want them to continue with that good hand washing, distancing and staying at home," Schnell said of the persons close to the man diagnosed with coronavirus.
As for the list of locations issued, "This list is pretty broad," Engel said. "And that's because we are not able to determine the exact place where this gentleman contracted this. "Persons who visited any of the locations at any of the dates and times below and are not showing symptoms should self-quarantine and monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days from the time that they went to one of the locations below. Persons who are showing symptoms — such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath — should contact their health provider or public health. Testing may be warranted. You should call before going to any health care facility for treatment.
If its been 14 days since you were at any of the locations and you have not experienced symptoms, Engel said that it is not necessary to quarantine. Schnell said health officials ask that anyone asked to quarantine or isolate in connection with the cases do so to prevent spreading the coronavirus to others.

People are asked to continue to abide by social distancing guidelines, proper hand-washing and avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth. Engel said people should also prepare, as if a snow storm were coming to the area, and ensure they have medications and other needs taken care of.

Also Monday, Panhandle Public Health District confirmed that a man in his 50s residing in Kimball County has tested positive for COVID-19. This case is travel-related to Colorado, and the person is currently hospitalized.

Contact investigations are underway to identify people who may have come into close contact with the individual for the past 14 days to help prevent further spread. All identified close contacts will self-quarantine and be actively monitored twice daily by public health officials for fever and respiratory symptoms.

Also, last week, a coronavirus case was identified in Goshen County as well. Though public health officials from Goshen County have not responded to questions on whether that case is community spread, Jennifer Childs, the woman diagnosed and having identified herself in groups on social media, said in posts on the Star-Herald Facebook page Sunday that she had contracted the virus somewhere in the community.

Schnell said that a person close to the woman has been identified as having traveled between Scottsbluff and Goshen County and potential locations or contacts are still being determined as part of Wyoming's investigation.

A lot of questions during Monday's briefing included questions about the directed health measure. The directed health measure is enforceable and limits gatherings to 10 people or less, which is the key part of the measure that affects most people or businesses. Earlier this month, Gov. Pete Ricketts had already issued guidance on social distancing and that gatherings be limited, which resulted in voluntary compliance such as churches canceling services, organizations canceling events and schools dismissing. However, with Ricketts' directed health measure, restaurants and bars are directed to close lobbies and move to take-out, delivery or curbside options. The directed health measure also sets out parameters in which a person, or persons close to them, can also be required to quarantine. A copy of Ricketts' directed health measure and additional details are available on starherald.com.

To date, Nebraska has not issued any stay-at-home orders, though the surrounding states of Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota and Kansas have. Anyone who has traveled between those locations or others that have had coronavirus cases are asked to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Businesses are advised to make changes to help "flatten the curve" of the coronavirus. Officials noted during Monday's call that financial worries have been among the biggest worries expressed, but that unemployment and other options for small businesses can be researched to see if they are available.

"People have options other than to put themselves or their employees at risk," Engel said. "Now is the time to take advantage of those programs."

For business owners or workers, PPHD will host another call to answer specific questions on Thursday, April 2, 11 a.m. Additional details will be available on the pphd.org website.

By Maunette Loeks

OWH: Omaha prosecutor tests positive for COVID-19, had contact with many courthouse regulars

Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine's office has advised the County Health Department and elected officials as they have sought to impose orders to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Now, one of Kleine's deputies has been diagnosed with COVID-19, and officials are trying to ensure Nebraska's largest county courthouse doesn't become a coronavirus cluster.

In the wake of Monday's news, the Douglas County Health Department has closed the County Attorney's Office for the rest of the week so that a deep cleaning can take place, Kleine said.

The longtime prosecutor who tested positive had been in contact with about 25 employees in the

attorney's office, about a dozen in the Public Defender's Office and several more in other parts of the courthouse. Kleine said he has advised all of his employees who had contact with the prosecutor to quarantine for as long as the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention requires.

The prosecutor had traveled to Kansas in early March for training unrelated to work. He returned the week of March 16, didn't feel well and went home for a couple of days.

He then was cleared by his doctor to return to work, so he worked the rest of that week and the week of March 23, officials said. He learned late last week that one of the attendees at the training had tested positive for the virus.

The prosecutor was tested Friday. On Monday, he learned the results. Other than not feeling well, he has not had serious complications, and he has not been hospitalized.

"When it starts hitting close to home, it really makes a difference," Kleine said. "We're obviously thinking of him. And we're going to work with the Health Department to track every place that he's been in the courthouse as we try to make sure everyone's fears are allayed."

One longtime attorney who learned of the positive test on Monday said, "I'm (not) happy … because I think it's crazy courts are open."

Concern, if not fear, has permeated the courthouse since Nebraska Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike Heavican issued an order March 12 declaring that Nebraska courts would remain open for business.

Heavican's order technically was in compliance with Gov. Pete Ricketts' admonition that no more than 10 people congregate in Douglas County. Courts and other essential business were an exception to those limits.

Still, even as it was legal, several attorneys and courthouse officials grumbled about its logic. Their primary concern: How can you maintain that jury trials should still go on?

"It's absurd," a clerk said at the time.

The week following Heavican's order, crowds of 10 to 40 people gathered, awaiting hearings on the second floor of the courthouse.

Courthouse crowds became more sparse as presiding judges of a few counties, including Douglas, imposed more restrictions than the chief justice had, delaying jury trials and encouraging attorneys and litigants to either delay hearings or appear by video or teleconference.

Even so, the Douglas County Courthouse, while quiet by normal standards, has been brimming with dozens of attorneys, litigants, clerks, sheriff's deputies and security personnel who have to check all courthouse-goers. (Employees are waved through but typically come within a few feet of personnel.)

Kleine said a team of five prosecutors who didn't have contact with the deputy county attorney will work out of the department's civil division in the Civic Center building. Juvenile court prosecutors also shouldn't be affected. The deputy county attorney who has the virus is a felony prosecutor.

Attorneys in the County Attorney's Office already were working remotely when possible. Certain functions such as charging decisions require a prosecutor to be present, Kleine said.

Kleine's office is near the prosecutor's. However, Kleine said, he doesn't think he had contact with him in those two weeks.

"It's important for us to do our jobs — we're public servants," Kleine said. "But obviously the whole idea is we need to stop this virus from spreading."

Douglas County Public Defender Tom Riley said his attorneys understandably had been a bit tense over the past two weeks as they've dealt with clients and courthouse regulars, amid concerns about the virus. Then came Monday.

After reports of the positive test, Riley sent an email to county health authorities noting that his attorneys had "regular contact" with the prosecutor, "appeared in court with him and shared the same crowded elevators."

He closed his office Monday afternoon and sent attorneys to work from home. While a dozen attorneys had contact with the prosecutor, Riley said he doesn't think the prosecutor stepped foot in the public

defender's office during the two weeks.
Riley said Monday evening that he was deciding whether to request a prolonged closure and a deep-cleaning. The dozen public defenders who had contact with the prosecutor will quarantine at home for the next two weeks.
"I'm getting frazzled," said Riley, an attorney for four decades. "I've got a lot of young lawyers who have little kids at home and have parents in my age group. In some cases, their mom or dad lives with them. …
"I have a bunch of people who have been pretty calm until this morning. Now their hair's on fire."
By Todd Cooper

Seward Co Independent: Tuesday, March 31: District confirms first case of COVID-19

York man tests positive for virus after travel
As of Monday, March 30, Four Corners Health Department has confirmed its first case of COVID-19. A man in his 50s in York County has tested positive for the virus. This case has been determined by Four Corners to be travel-related.
Four Corners covers York, Seward, Butler and Polk counties.
The man has minor symptoms and is currently self-isolating at home. He has had minimal contact with others and is considered a low-risk to the community.
To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, everyone should do the following:

- Wash your hands often
- Avoid close contact
- Stay home if sick
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Clean and disinfect
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth

As a reminder, Directed Health Measures have been issued for Butler, Polk, Seward and York counties through May 6. For a copy of the Directed Health Measures, visit www.fourcorners.ne.gov. For questions, contact the Four Corners Health Department at (402) 362-2621.
Ricketts not planning stay-at-home order
Gov. Pete Ricketts signed a major disaster declaration request that was submitted to FEMA Region VII to be forwarded to President Donald Trump for his approval. The federal declaration would allow for Individual Assistance and Public Assistance to help Nebraska respond to the COVID-19 disaster.
Ricketts has not issued a stay-at-home order nor does he plan to issue one. There are directed healthcare measures for 18 counties, including Seward, that people should refer to that impose an enforceable limit of 10 or fewer people at public gatherings.
However, there is no essential staffing list maintained by the State of Nebraska for people who have jobs to perform. Individuals leaving their homes in order to perform an activity or function for their jobs DO NOT need to carry or present any letter, identification card or other paper proving that they are allowed to leave their home.
Area businesses may be eligible for loans
In a matter of a few days, some business owners and employees have seen their worlds flip completely upside down.
The threat of the coronavirus has prompted business models to shifts, some to shut down and others to layoff employees.
In response, the federal government and Small Business Association are offering some relief.
Zane Francescato, development director for the Seward County Chamber and Development Partnership, said Nebraska was declared an economic disaster area March 20, which allows small and medium-size businesses to apply for low-interest or forgivable loans to help them get through this financial rough patch.
Details and applications are available at sba.gov/disaster. Users need to fill out some PDF forms, then

upload them to an online portal.
Francescato said additional “bridge” loans from the SBA will be available for financial institutions for up to $25,000. Additional information is still coming about those.
He said employers should keep up to date on unemployment and short-time compensation requirements.
“If businesses have to do mass layoffs, a service businesses can offer their employees is to help them file for unemployment if it comes to that point,” Francescato said. “We sure hope it doesn't.”
The U.S. Senate passed the CARES Act last week that will provide $86 million in COVID-19 response money from the legislature. The House of Representatives passed it the following day.
Sarah Skinner, constituent services representative for U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer, shared Fischer's stance on the bill March 25.
“This is a national crisis, and it requires a national response,” she said.
The CARES Act will provide funding for the following highlights:
• respirators for health care workers and first responders;
• recovery assistance checks of $1,200 to eligible individuals;
• benefits for livestock producers and those in the agricultural sector who are seeing depressed prices;
• grants and loans for small and medium businesses to keep employees on the payroll, help with debt obligations and pay benefits
Jonathan Jank, president and CEO of SCCDP, said Partnership employees began working from home March 30, but have forwarded office calls to their cell phones. They are still available to help connect both member and non-member businesses to resources.
“Member or not, please feel free to reach out to us for support during this time,” Jank said.
Many of those resources are posted on SCCDP's website, www.cultivatesewardcounty.com.
“All of these business resources are free and available to the public. Those needing help with cash flow or people who have been let go, reach out to us,” Jank said. “We're problem solving with each business based on their individual needs.”
He said businesses need to communicate honestly right now with their vendors, creditors, suppliers and others who may also be impacted.
Owners and managers should maintain records of their costs and losses related to COVID-19.
Most importantly, Jank said, local residents can still order online, call to place pick-up orders and support their local businesses as much as possible.

Scottsbluff SH: Ricketts announces Panhandle counties now included in State’s Directed Health Measure

LINCOLN – On Monday, March 30, Governor Pete Ricketts announced that the state’s fifth COVID-19 related Directed Health Measure (DHM) includes Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Grant, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux counties. It will be in effect until May 11 unless renewed.
The first DHM, issued on March 18, applies to Cass, Douglas, and Sarpy counties and is in effect until at least April 30.
The second DHM, issued on March 25, applies to Dodge, Lancaster, Saunders, and Washington counties and is in effect until at least May 6.
The third DHM, issued on March 28th, applies to Butler, Hall, Hamilton, Merrick, Polk, Seward, and York counties and is in effect until May 6th unless renewed.
The fourth DHM, issued on March 29, applies to Burt, Cuming, Madison, and Stanton counties and is in effect until May 6 unless renewed.
The fifth DHM, issued on March 30th, applies to Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Grant, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux counties and is in effect until May 11 unless

renewed.
The DHM and quarantine directions covering all of these counties can be found by clicking here.
The DHM imposes an enforceable limit on public gatherings. Among other steps, the DHM requires restaurants and bars in these areas to close their dining areas immediately and move to takeout service, delivery, and/or curbside service only until further notice. Additionally, schools in these areas are directed to operate without students in their buildings. This restriction does not apply to school staff working in school buildings. It also does not apply to daycares that may be operated at a school per the Governor's executive order regarding childcare, which you can access by clicking here.
Counties other than those noted above remain under the guidance issued March 18th by the Governor's Office. You can find it by clicking here. If further community transmission cases of COVID-19 occur in other regions of the state, the Governor will announce DHMs covering the additional regions.
In addition to the DHMs issued by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Douglas County Public Health Director Dr. Adi M. Pour has issued an order covering Douglas County from March 18, 2020 through April 30, 2020. Full details of the order can be found on the Douglas County Health Department website (douglascountyhealth.com) or by clicking here.
The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department also issued a DHM, which can be found by clicking here. The order lasts until May 6, 2020.
Furthermore, the Sarpy/Cass Health Department issued a DHM, which can be found by clicking here. The order lasts until April 30, 2020.
UNDERSTANDING THE STATE'S DIRECTED HEALTH MEASURE
Who does the Directed Health Measure apply to?
It applies to places such as theaters, churches, houses of worship, gyms, social clubs, salons, and social gatherings, including weddings, funerals, concerts, and athletic events. This is not an exhaustive list, but illustrates the types of locations the DHM applies to.
Do I need to shut down my bar or restaurant?
At bars and restaurants, it applies to patrons, not to your workforce. Restaurants and bars are encouraged to ask their patrons if they can prepare their order for takeout upon arrival. Restaurants will play a key part in feeding people throughout the pandemic.
Do I need to shut down my daycare?
No. DHHS has issued new guidance that daycares need to follow. You can find it by clicking here.
Do I need to shut down my office?
No. The Directed Health Measure does not apply to places such as office buildings, grocery stores, pharmacies, hospitals, nursing homes, correctional facilities, court houses, court rooms, banks, car dealerships, auto repair shops, nursing homes, long-term care facilities, small shops, golf courses, big box stores, gas stations, convenience stores, shopping malls, manufacturing facilities, packing facilities, construction jobs, and other traditional office settings. This is not an exhaustive list, but illustrates the types of locations the DHM does not apply to.
Furthermore, we do not expect these facilities to be impacted by additional limits at this time.
Do I need to cancel a wedding or a funeral?
Weddings and funerals are also subject to the 10-person limit. Event planners and facilities are encouraged to be flexible with people who are rearranging their plans.

OWH: 30 Nebraska counties under tighter restrictions

Thirty of Nebraska's 93 counties are now under Directed Health Measures imposed by Gov. Pete Ricketts. The measures require that bars and restaurants close, but permit the sale of meals and alcoholic beverages to go. The order imposes enforceable limits on public gatherings to no more than 10 people and requires that schools provide remote learning. Weddings and funerals must comply with the order.

The limit on gatherings does not apply to:

- Office buildings
- Grocery stores
- Pharmacies
- Hospitals
- Nursing homes
- Jails
- Courtrooms
- Banks
- Car dealerships
- Auto repair shops
- Long-term care facilities
- Small shops
- Golf courses
- Big-box stores
- Gas stations
- Convenience stores
- Shopping malls
- Manufacturing facilities
  Packing facilities
- Construction jobs
- Other traditional businesses

The newest counties to be placed under the order are: Sioux, Scotts Bluff, Banner, Kimball, Dawes, Box Butte, Morrill, Cheyenne, Sheridan, Garden, Duel and Grant. The order for these counties extends to May 11.

By Nancy Gaarder

OWH: New health directives to take effect in Sarpy, Cass Counties; 5 community spread cases reported

Beginning Tuesday, a health directive in Sarpy and Cass Counties will require a 6-foot distance between people at gatherings or businesses to help prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

If a 6-foot distance can't be maintained, then businesses — including tattoo parlors, massage therapy businesses, barber shops and beauty and nail salons — must close.

The order by the Sarpy/Cass Health Department will go into effect at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday and last until April 30, unless changed by officials.

Affected businesses could remain open to sell products, said Sarpy County spokeswoman Megan Stubenhofer-Barrett. But many won't be able to provide their primary services.

"There's no way to wash someone's hair from 6 feet away," she said. "There's no way to get a tattoo from 6 feet away."

Parts of the order match directives issued in Douglas County and by Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts that prohibit most gatherings of 10 or more people. That includes places like gyms and day cares as well as events such as weddings and funerals.

"While we understand the hardship these restrictions put on dedicated, hardworking service professionals in our community, this is the right decision to help slow the spread of the virus," said Sarpy County Board Chairman Don Kelly. "We highly encourage businesses to shut down as soon as possible, as we will begin enforcing this on Tuesday."

If a venue is subdivided by physical walls or "sufficient airspace," each area may contain 10 people, the order states.

Sarpy County reported two more cases of the novel coronavirus Sunday evening, bringing the county's total to 13.

Those two cases are people in their 30s and 40s, according to a county spokeswoman.

Sarah Schram, director of the Sarpy/Cass Health Department, said during a press conference Tuesday that those two cases bring the department's jurisdictional total to 15 cases — five of which have been deemed community spread cases.
As of Sunday evening, the Sarpy/Cass Health Department had tested 242 people in Sarpy County and 32 in Cass.
Bellevue Mayor Rusty Hike on Tuesday commended people for following guidelines to stay at home and social distance from one another.
"We need participation from all our citizens," Hike said.
By Reece Ristau

OWH: Temporary surge tent at Nebraska Medical Center just one of the ways hospitals prepare for virus

It's not unusual to hear helicopters overhead outside the Nebraska Medical Center's emergency room entrance near 43rd Street and Dewey Avenue.
On Monday, however, the scene got another element straight from the archives of the television show "M*A*S*H" — a big green tent that will provide temporary surge capacity, if needed, for patients who arrive with symptoms of COVID-19.
Dr. Michael Wadman, an emergency room physician with Nebraska Medicine, said the tent will provide additional space where health care workers can see patients with respiratory symptoms separately from those visiting the emergency room for other reasons. Many of those patients are vulnerable because of other health conditions.
The hospital already is using a space in the nearby Doctor's Building South to see patients with symptoms of the virus, including cough, fever and difficulty breathing. The tent, which probably won't open for business until next week, will offer additional room if needed.
"We're hopeful we won't need it for a large numbers of patients," said Wadman, who also serves as chairman of emergency medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. "But when we need it, it will be ready."
Hospitals throughout the area are preparing overflow space and repurposing employees as they brace for what experts predict will be a coming spike in cases of COVID-19, the novel coronavirus disease.
Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts repeated during his daily press conference Monday that the state could see a peak of coronavirus cases in mid- to late April and encouraged Nebraskans to continue to prepare.
Local hospitals in mid-March opted to postpone and reschedule most nonessential surgeries and medical procedures for 90 days in an effort to conserve medical supplies, prevent staff burnout and free up beds as more coronavirus cases emerged in the state.
Nebraska Medicine previously relocated pediatric patients from the seventh floor of the hospital's University Tower in order to clear that space for additional coronavirus patients, if needed. By Monday, the tower's fifth floor had been converted to negative airflow to accommodate patients suspected of having COVID-19. Patients in the hospital's pediatric intensive care unit are being moved to the ninth floor of Clarkson Tower to create additional space in University Tower.
Nebraska Medicine also is consolidating labor and delivery services at the midtown medical center. As of April 4, all patients scheduled to deliver at the Bellevue Medical Center will deliver on the fourth floor of University Tower instead. Labor and delivery staff also will move from the Bellevue hospital to the Nebraska Medical Center. Affected patients have been notified of the change.
CHI Health, meanwhile, is working on a plan to set aside space at Midlands Hospital in Papillion and on the sixth floor at St. Elizabeth Regional Medical Center in Lincoln.
Dr. Cliff Robertson, CHI's chief executive, said the health system currently has plenty of capacity. The newly designated areas most likely would be for use in special circumstances.

“I hope it’s a plan that we put together and it just ends up being a big waste of time,” Robertson said.
CHI Health, he said, also can tap resources from across the health system’s larger network, CommonSpirit Health, if needed.
The Methodist Health System is designating a respiratory floor or department at each of its hospitals to care for patients who are under investigation for COVID-19 or have for the illness. Methodist Hospital has designated 7 North and 6 North for that purpose. In addition to other steps, the health system has established plans for using negative pressure rooms. It also has the ability to use preoperative and postoperative rooms for additional capacity.
Methodist has created labor pools so officials can tap additional staff when needed and cross-train staff to work in other areas. Supply teams are working to keep protective equipment stocked for staff. The health system also has invested in UV light technology so it can disinfect protective N95 masks if needed.
Nebraska Medicine’s Wadman said most people with symptoms of COVID-19 will be able to care for themselves at home. Some 80% or more of people with the illness will have mild symptoms. Those who are concerned, however, should contact their health care provider to make arrangements before going to a clinic.
All three large health systems in the Omaha area have help lines or web-based screening tools that allow patients to be assessed and referred for testing if necessary.
“That’s the safest way to be assessed and tested,” Wadman said.
Those who arrive at the medical center’s emergency room in stable condition but with more serious symptoms will be taken to the overflow clinic or, if it’s busy, the tent, he said.
Nebraska Medicine has a second tent it could erect on the patio in front of the nearby Munroe-Meyer Institute if necessary.
The tent erected Monday is equipped with heating, cooling and Internet and can serve about eight patients at a time. Patient areas are separated by dividers so those inside can adhere to guidelines for social distancing. Patients with life-threatening symptoms will be seen in a designated area in the emergency department.
By Julie Anderson

NCN: Panhandle placed under Directed Health Measure. What does that mean?

SIDNEY - Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts issued a Directed Health Measure for the Nebraska Panhandle Monday afternoon, hours after the Panhandle Public Health District announced the COVID-19 case in Scotts Bluff County was community spread - meaning someone is infected, but is unsure how or where they became infected.
The measure for Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Grant, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan and Sioux Counties is in effect until May 11. Gov. Ricketts says the measure could be extended past May 11.
Public gatherings of more than ten people are prohibited and can now be enforced. Failure to comply with the order will result in legal action, according to the measure. This is not an order to shutdown businesses.
The restrictions include daycare facilities, salons, theaters, meeting and conference halls, libraries, gyms and fitness centers. Weddings and funerals are also included.
All restaurants and bars in the panhandle must close their dining areas, and move to takeout and delivery only.
Elective surgeries and procedures are prohibited during the time period the health measure is in place.
Nebraska has 153 confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus, with three deaths - the most recent in Lincoln County.
The case in Scotts Bluff County is the lone case in the panhandle.
By Hunter Arterburn

LJS: Lincoln County man is third Nebraskan to die from COVID-19

A third person in Nebraska has died from the coronavirus, the state Department of Health and Human Services announced in a news release late Monday.
A Lincoln County man in his 90s with underlying health conditions died from COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, bringing the state's death toll to three.
The DHHS also announced that Scotts Bluff County's first case, which was announced Sunday, was community-spread.
First cases of COVID-19 were also reported in York, Kimball and Antelope counties, bringing the state's total cases to 155.

OWH: Nebraska records third coronavirus death, a Lincoln County man in his 90s

A Lincoln County man in his 90s has become the third person in Nebraska to die from the coronavirus. The man had underlying health issues, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.
Nebraska's first two deaths involved a 59-year-old man from Omaha and a Hall County woman in her 60s.
Dr. Gary Anthone, chief medical officer for Nebraska, noted that older adults and people with serious chronic medical conditions are at higher risk from the virus.
Public health officials have advised that people over the age of 60 shelter at home as much as possible and stock up on supplies.
While older adults are especially vulnerable to serious illness from the virus, it has been hitting younger people hard, too. On Monday, more than half of the new cases in Douglas County were for people under the age of 50.
A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report has said 20% of those hospitalized for COVID-19 in the U.S. were 20-44 years old.
By Nancy Gaarder

OWH: Number of coronavirus cases in Nebraska jumps to 153; Douglas County cases reach 82

A jump in local cases has Douglas County officials warning that tougher measures are around the corner if the public doesn't take physical distancing more seriously.
On Monday, the Douglas County Health Department announced 16 new cases of the novel coronavirus disease, or COVID-19. These bring Douglas County to 82 confirmed cases, and health officials warn there are many others in the community who are undiagnosed.
Statewide, the number surged to 153 cases by Monday evening.
Among the new cases is a second employee of the City of Bellevue. The individual worked directly with the city's first employee who became ill. Bellevue officials have been in contact with other employees who were potentially exposed.
"The public has to take COVID-19 seriously," Douglas County Board of Health President Chris Rodgers said in a statement Monday. "We hope the public acts now to stop the spread of this disease, or we can and will take more strict measures to limit public activities."
Rodgers said people need to stay home and avoid crowds.
More than half of the new Douglas County cases were people in their 20s and 30s, and only three involved people in their 60s or older, according to the county. Five of the new cases are of unknown origin. The others had contact with a known ill person or were possibly travel-related.
By Nancy Gaarder

LJS: Travel exposure leads to 7 of Lincoln's 8 cases so far, officials say

Travel remains the predominant way Lincoln's eight confirmed patients contracted the coronavirus, interim Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department Director Pat Lopez said Monday.
The two newest patients — identified as a woman in her 40s and an older child — were both quarantined after respective trips to major U.S. cities and symptoms reported several days later, Lopez said during a news conference.
The child went on a family vacation to Washington, D.C., and New York City on March 6-14 and began experiencing symptoms a week later, Lopez said.
The other new patient, a woman in her 40s, was in Nashville, Tennessee, from March 12-15 and began experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 three days after her return. She self-quarantined and is now in isolation.
The relatives and close contacts of both patients have self-quarantined, Lopez said.
Of the city's eight confirmed cases, only one patient contracted the virus through community spread.
He is the only person hospitalized and his condition has improved, Lopez said.
Seventeen tests taken in Lancaster County remain pending at the state's public health lab in Omaha, and health department staff continue to monitor 113 people because of their travel or exposure to a known patient, Lopez said.
Three of the people tested by staff at Bryan Health's drive-thru clinic last week have tested positive for COVID-19 and are among the eight cases confirmed in the county, said Bryan Medical Center CEO John Woodrich.
Woodrich said that out of 244 people tested for COVID-19 last week at its drive-thru clinic, there have been the three positives and 40 negatives, with 201 results still pending.
On Tuesday, CHI Health will launch its own drive-thru coronavirus testing site at Lincoln North Star High School that prioritizes tests for health care workers, first responders, nursing home staff, correctional center staff and the residents of group homes with vulnerable populations.
Like the protocol at Bryan's drive-thru site, tests are only available to people with a doctor's order and an appointment, CHI Health announced in a news release Monday.
Increased testing and ramped-up test analysis capacity will likely lead to reports of new confirmed COVID-19 cases in the city on a daily basis, Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird said.
She hopes people will not see that and think social distancing measures are not working.
Rather, Gaylor Baird hopes people understand the rise in cases is part of the nature of an epidemic and the goal is to keep cases from rising too much, too quickly and overwhelming the medical system here, she said.
"Let them serve as a reminder that we cannot let our guard down," the mayor said.
By Matt Olberding and Riley Johnson

OWH: Big-box stores in Omaha appear to be implementing social distancing guidelines

A huge sign near the clothing displays greets shoppers at the Costco at 123rd Street and West Dodge Road. Icons of two customers with carts and an arrow marking 6 feet are printed under huge red words, “SOCIAL DISTANCING.”
Big-box stores such as Costco, Walmart and Menards appear to be trying to follow social distancing guidelines. On Sunday, Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert called out those stores, plus Sam’s Club and Home Depot, saying they all needed to get a handle on their crowds to reduce the risk of customers potentially spreading the novel coronavirus.
Over the weekend, Stothert said, she drove past a Home Depot and a Walmart, which she said looked like

“madhouses.” She advised residents to go shopping only if they absolutely must.
Christina Cornell, a spokeswoman for Home Depot, said company representatives have contacted the Mayor’s Office in order to talk about her concerns and talk about what the store has done proactively.
Cornell said some Home Depot stores in cities like Atlanta or Minneapolis are setting limits of 100 customers inside at a time, but that rule isn’t happening in Omaha stores yet. Company leaders are looking at the possibility of limiting customers in the future, she said, which would be based on a number of factors.
Omaha Home Depot stores have signs and announcements reminding shoppers about social distancing, have floor markers near checkout lines to mark 6 feet and have assigned a “social distancing captain” at each store to make sure people don’t congregate too closely.
She said Home Depot wants to continue to be open as a resource for important supplies, like tools and inventory to fix a refrigerator or air-conditioning unit.
“We really are remaining open as an essential retailer so that people don’t feel cut off from supplies that are needed in their businesses and their homes,” Cornell said.
Local managers of the giant stores were hesitant to talk to a World-Herald reporter about steps they have taken to limit crowds and referred the reporter to their company’s corporate media contacts.
A manager at the Menards at 120th Street and West Dodge Road said only that the store has put X’s on the floor near the checkout lines.
“There’s X’s marked all over the place,” he said. “We’re doing all we can for social distancing.”
A manager at the Costco at 123rd and West Dodge said the store was allowing “125 people in every 15 minutes.” He declined to clarify whether it was one person in, one person out when the limit was reached, but said the doors are shut if the number of people inside hits 125.
Monday morning, Costco employees counted shoppers as they entered, and some had to wait at least 10 minutes before they could go in. Shoppers waited in line outside about 6 feet away from each other.
A person with Costco’s corporate communications office did not specifically respond to a reporter’s questions, instead directing the reporter to the company website.
“Costco is following CDC recommendations to minimize risk to our members and our employees,” according to the website, which was updated Saturday. “We respectfully ask our members to use social distancing guidelines while shopping in our warehouses by allowing at least 6 feet of space between each person.”
Home Depot is also closing stores at 6 p.m. so workers have more time to restock shelves and clean.
Cornell said its stores are cleaned more often and workers are disinfecting high-touch areas such as self-checkouts, door handles and bathrooms.
Representatives from Walmart, which also runs Sam’s Club, did not immediately respond to requests for information.
By Alia Conley

OWH: Wi-Fi's time to shine: Internet usage at home cranks up as people stay put

The grade schooler has an early morning video session with her class on Zoom.
The high school sophomore has a Zoom meeting, too.
And the high school senior, also on Zoom.
Dad and Mom are working from home on their laptops.
Disney Plus was streaming in the background earlier.
Welcome to the new morning routine, brought to you by the Internet.
As work scatters remotely and schools switch to e-learning, Internet use around the country has swiftly shifted to a heavy daytime reliance on home networks. Suddenly, we’re calling on our Wi-Fi like never before.

If you're seeing a slowdown, don't be surprised — work laptops, school devices, cellphones with Wi-Fi, TVs with streaming video, even smart home devices and video doorbells are all tapping into modem capacity.
Ookla, a national company that measures Internet speeds, estimates that Douglas County's average download speeds are down 10% from earlier this month.
But Cox Communications says its network is well within capacity even as Internet traffic increases.
Calli Hite, senior manager for public affairs with Cox, said typical Internet traffic has shifted from businesses to a broader part of the Omaha area.
"We're experiencing higher levels," Hite said. "But things are working smoothly from a Cox perspective."
CenturyLink says its system is operating normally, too. The company said home Wi-Fi and broadband networks are experiencing tremendous pressure as families simultaneously connect, with its Internet traffic globally up 35%.
Both providers also have implemented changes to help customers.
They have signed on to the Federal Communication Commission's Keep America Connected effort — agreeing not to terminate service for the time being for customers affected by the pandemic, waiving late fees and suspending data limits.
Cox has increased speeds on several home Internet packages through May 15 and is offering 60 days of Internet free to low-income families.
The Nebraska Public Service Commission also is responding.
The agency has set aside $1 million to reimburse Internet carriers for providing broadband service so students in low-income families can access online classes.
The grants will apply to new lines of service for low-income families added after March 15 and continuing through the end of May.
Crystal Rhoades, a commission member from Omaha, said the commission wants to do everything it can to protect people's Internet service and increase availability for those who couldn't afford it, especially as schools and unemployment claims go online.
"We're trying to help," she said.
If you're having problems with Internet speed, you can perform some basic Wi-Fi housekeeping to try to improve it, said Adriane Blum, head of communications for Ookla.
First, make sure your Wi-Fi router is up to date, which might mean getting a new one, Blum said.
Otherwise, make sure you 're working near your Wi-Fi router, she said. If your router is in the basement and you're trying to work upstairs, move it to the floor with the most activity.
Blum also suggested some bargaining among family members to regulate Internet access, particularly if someone has an important online meeting. Don't assume you can access everything you want without any effect on your speeds, she said.
Other suggestions from Cox:

- Position your modem away from refrigerators, microwaves, baby monitors and other devices that emit electronic radiation.
- Keep your modem away from Bluetooth devices, which might operate on the same frequency.
- Avoid mirrors and reflective objects that can deflect router signals. Keep the router away from fish tanks that can obstruct and soak up signals.
- Watch for furniture, doors and thick surfaces like concrete that can obstruct the signals. Elevate the modem on a shelf or tall furniture.
- Password protect your Wi-Fi so others aren't using your signal.

By Jeffrey Robb

The Farmer: COVID-19 challenges rural hospitals and health care

While some rural towns and neighborhoods might be tempted to believe they are isolated from the COVID-19 pandemic, there are two converging facts that make rural areas more susceptible to the most

frightening aspects of the virus spread.
The average age in rural areas of the U.S. is often more than 60 years old — perhaps the most vulnerable demographic to the worst symptoms of the virus — and rural hospitals generally are smaller and lack the capacity for a huge influx of patients needing intensive care facilities and health care at the same time.
There are many unknowns as the outbreak spreads. How many people will be infected? How many providers could be needed? What will the demand be for intensive care and ventilators? While the health care industry grapples with these questions, rural health officials, in particular, are concerned.
"More than half the counties in America have no intensive care beds, posting a particular danger for the millions of people who are 60 and up — older patients who face the highest risk of serious illness or death from the rapid spread of COVID-19," says John Roberts, executive director, Nebraska Rural Health Association.
"In Nebraska, roughly 25% of counties have no hospital, let alone intensive care unit beds. Rural Nebraska hospitals have plans in place to transfer cases they can't handle to other facilities, though some patients may be too ill to risk the move."
Roberts also is concerned that if one or two nurses or doctors need to be quarantined because of COVID-19 in rural communities, this will heavily affect the ability of the local health care system to treat patients and combat the virus.
"To be sure, rural hospitals are not as equipped as larger hospital systems to handle the most serious COVID-19 cases," he says. "Many are not outfitted with ICUs or enough doctors and staff to handle multiple intensive care patients. That means they have to transfer those patients to larger hospitals."
Rural hospitals are required to have emergency operating plans in the event of a crisis. More than 90% of the hospitals in the U.S. use some form of the Hospital Incident Command System, which helps hospitals and health care professionals prepare for and react to disasters by establishing a clear chain of command.
"Nebraska has a high level of cooperation between providers, which is essential during this COVID-19 outbreak," Roberts adds.
Because of a combination of steep policy pressures and economic challenges, rural hospitals have had tough times over the past decade. "Nationally, more than 120 rural hospitals have been forced to close over the past decade," Roberts says. "Nebraska had only one hospital close during this same time period, but many hospitals in rural Nebraska are struggling with low or quickly declining operating margins."
The most recent data, Roberts says, shows that 39 out of the 71 rural hospitals in Nebraska have a 2% or less operating margin. Twenty-nine rural hospitals in the state operated in 2018 with a negative operating margin, and 22 of those have -3% or worse operating margin.
"So, the added financial hit from the coronavirus outbreak could be the final straw for many rural hospitals," Roberts notes.
That said, telemedicine available today is sure to help in the fight against COVID-19, especially in rural areas. In Nebraska, the telehealth network is a collaboration of more than 110 sites — including hospitals, health departments, mental health centers, physician offices and rural health clinics — with the purpose of using video technology to extend health care resources to those in need.
"Recently, the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced it was broadening access to telehealth services for Medicare, which is the federal health insurance program for individuals over 65," Roberts says.
Rural hospitals have a crucial role to play in the outbreak, Roberts says. "Rural facilities could be places for initial triage or eventual recovery care," he says. "I could argue that critical access hospitals in the state could be leveraged to keep potential COVID-19 cases out of the major hospitals."
By Curt Arens

KMTV: Pilot program to extend grocery deliveries to SNAP participants

OMAHA, Neb. (KMTV) — As early as April 1, Nebraskans enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) may be able to order groceries online and have them delivered to their door thanks to a new pilot program.

On Monday, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) released a statement saying the United States Department of Agriculture has chosen Nebraska to be part of the pilot program as part of the 2014 Farm Bill.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Nebraska Director of Children and Family Services Stephanie Beasley praised it, saying it couldn't have come at a better time.

“A natural response to getting groceries, while also practicing social distancing and self-quarantining, is to order online and get groceries delivered. Before, Nebraskans who relied on EBT to get their groceries had no option but to go to a brick and mortar store. Now they can help flatten the curve and order groceries delivered from home.”

Currently, eight retailers are authorized to participate in the program including:

- Amazon
- Dash’s Market
- FreshDirect
- Hy-Vee
- Safeway
- ShopRite
- Walmart
- Wright’s Markets

Of those eight, only Walmart and Amazon are "qualified retailers that will be able to handle SNAP purchases online in Nebraska."

Two Walmart stores will participate initially. One in Norfolk and one in South Sioux City.

Amazon will be able to deliver state-wide when the program starts.

DHHS says the program will also be of service to people who may have a tough time getting to brick-and-mortar stores for groceries.

By Matthew Haave

LJS: Write-in candidate enters District 1 legislative race

Mike Powers of Palmyra announced Monday that he will be a write-in candidate for the District 1 seat in the Legislature, joining three Republicans as the only Democratic candidate in the nonpartisan race.

Voters "deserve a choice," the manufacturing drafter and former school board member said.

Powers was a candidate for the legislative seat in 2000 and 2004.

If elected, he said, he would support local property tax reduction delivered through increased state aid to schools.

"If the state provided more aid to schools, then schools could lower their tax asking and thus lower property taxes," Powers said. "Land values, fueled by outside investment, have risen too steeply and crashed the school aid formula."

Sen. Julie Slama of Peru, Janet Palmtag of Syracuse and Dennis Schaardt of Steinauer are District 1 candidates who will be listed on the primary election ballot.

District 1 is composed of five counties in the southeastern corner of the state.

By Don Walton

OWH Editorial: Nebraska's state, local officials have shown strong leadership in this crisis

When a crisis strikes, it’s vital to have capable leaders to guide a state or city forward. Nebraska and Omaha are fortunate that our leaders, drawing on advice from medical and public health experts, have

risen to the occasion in responding to the coronavirus emergency.
Through their actions and public statements, leaders such as Gov. Pete Ricketts and Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert have kept their eye on the key considerations. They have shown a well-informed understanding of issues and explained matters clearly.
As a result, they have given the public confidence that important decisions are being handled with the needed deliberation and strong input from Nebraskans with expertise in medical issues and public health management.
To those who claim the concern over the virus is a mere hoax, Ricketts and Stothert have made clear that we're facing a serious public health crisis. As Stothert has observed, "The enemy here is the virus, not each other. We are at our best when crises are not politicized."
Indeed, to acknowledge the capable performance of these officials doesn't mean any Nebraskan is obligated to have blanket agreement with them on all issues; there's always room for legitimate disagreement. But this crisis has underscored the important point that not everything has to be about politics and partisan hostility. Some situations rise to an entirely different level, requiring all of us to work together in good faith beyond bounds of political affiliation.
Ricketts has aptly phrased the state government's relationship to the federal government in a situation such as this: "locally executed, state managed, federally supported." In this emergency, state and local officials need to be the key decision-makers on strengthening or relaxing restrictions, since they are best able to understand the facts on the ground and communities' specific circumstances.
Nebraska is fortunate that the University of Nebraska Medical Center has particular experience in appropriate responses to highly infectious diseases. Adi Pour, the director of the Douglas County Health Department, has been impressive in leading a coordinated local response. Nebraska's relative success so far is due in great measure, too, to the resolve of our medical community and a wide range of other professions.
We're only in the early phase of this crisis, unfortunately, with many challenges and decisions ahead. Big uncertainties remain, and the economic fallout is troubling. At the moment, a pre-eminent need is a major expansion in testing, on which many subsequent decisions will depend.
Our leaders can help greatly in coming weeks if they continue the responsible, data-driven approach they've taken thus far.

OWH Midlands Voices: Medical professionals are coordinating care in wake of the crisis

The writer is chief operating officer of Kubat Pharmacy.
I recently joined the team at Kubat Pharmacy as a co-owner and chief operating officer and, given the manner in which the COVID-19 situation has accelerated over the last several weeks, this was arguably one of the most angst-inducing and chaotic periods one could imagine being thrust into the health care industry. The rapid progression of the global response to this unprecedented challenge has obviously disrupted life in dramatic ways that will echo for years to come.
In the midst of this uncertainty I have one notable observation I would like to share and one request I would put forth for my fellow citizens.
Regarding my one observation, I have been absolutely stunned by the grace, courage and selflessness evident among health care professionals across the board. Through my perspective at Kubat Pharmacy, I have witnessed numerous health care professionals working tirelessly with humility, skill and compassion in order to continue serving their fellow community members.
Pharmacies and pharmacists everywhere help to coordinate care and interact with a number of professionals across the health care continuum such as physicians, nurses and respiratory therapists in addition to the broad spectrum of support staff that are often overlooked. Many of these professionals cannot simply self-isolate, as their jobs often depend on helping others in a hands-on capacity.

In short, if they do not do the job, the job does not get done. To witness this firsthand is truly an exhibit in the more noble traits of our character that rarely have an opportunity to surface in such a profound manner.

Related to my one request, I would ask all of us to be mindful of the fact that as this crisis continues — and hopefully trends toward resolution — the pressure on health care workers will continue to rise. Resources will continue to be taxed, and access to care will likely not be as timely or as personalized as we are accustomed to receiving.

Even independent pharmacies, long known for their superior customer service and patient care, have had to adjust daily operations and minimize public contact to ensure the safety of both workers and patients.

Nevertheless, as we go forward together and enter the next phase of the battle against the coronavirus, please know that your community pharmacies are prepared to coordinate specific health care, drug and immunization regimens that will be major factors in returning to a sense of normalcy.

By Steve Bullock

LJS Local View: History offers pandemic perspectives

Perspective helps.

When facing an individual or a societal challenge, humans crave perspective to frame the issue. An important source of perspective in a difficult time is history, the story of the human past.

Today, history offers us much to contemplate when addressing plagues and pandemics. Stories of these medical disasters are found throughout the writings of ancient chroniclers in every civilization.

In the late Middle Ages, repeated scourges of the bubonic plague spread across Europe, carried by fleas that infested the ubiquitous rats. Historians have estimated that a third of Europe's people died as a result of that "Black Death" in the 14th century.

It is impossible to image the terror experienced by the people of that time as friends and family succumbed to a mysterious and horrible illness. For a hair-raising account read Edmund Rutherford's 1997 historic novel "Sarum," in which medieval families flee the plague-ridden English city to shelter in militarized countryside redoubts.

There is no fiction in the tragic record of the destruction of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, as they contracted the pathogens introduced by the arriving Europeans.

Flu, measles and especially smallpox destroyed whole bands and villages. Some accounts estimate that 50%, and perhaps more, of the original inhabitants of what is now the United States died from these diseases.

To cite one example, the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs estimated that 17,200 tribal people living in the area of the Upper Missouri River (today's North Dakota and Montana), died of the smallpox when it spread across the nation in 1837-1838.

The suffering was not restricted to Natives, of course, as malaria and strains of the flu were regularly contracted by Euro-Americans throughout the states.

The feared Yellow Fever appeared again and again in American cities including Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, and drove the citizens of New Orleans fleeing for their lives on more than one occasion.

The generation of our great-grandparents lost millions worldwide to a vicious flu that followed on the heels of World War I. In my own youth, periodic polio outbreaks led to closures and cancelled summer vacations.

Over the course of the centuries, the Earth's peoples have suffered these plagues and pandemics, their unease, even terror, heightened by not knowing the actual cause of what they were experiencing or how the illnesses were spread.

In the light of this history, we can better appreciate the advances in medical science, the committed health professionals and the communications systems which are providing us with facts and proven protective actions. We are facing a difficult time today, but we can find in the long course of human history a

perspective that encourages us to act in ways that are positive, effective and hopeful.
Michael J. Smith is the retired director and CEO of History Nebraska.

LJS: Fischer, Ricketts helped get them home

We are five Nebraskans who recently returned from a trip to Morocco – not exactly in the way we had anticipated. Near the end of our trip, Morocco suddenly closed its borders to all international travel, in or out. We spent some anxious days scrambling to find some way to get back home, until the U.S. arranged evacuation flights out.
There were a number of media articles about American travelers stranded abroad, particularly in Peru and Morocco, expressing frustration and dissatisfaction with the lack of attention, information or response from the U.S. to the situation. We shared many of those frustrations, as we watched evacuation flights provided by various European Union countries for their citizens.
That said, we are home now and want to provide credit where it's due. From Morocco, we were in constant touch with staff in both Sen. Deb Fischer's and Gov. Pete Ricketts' offices. These officials were very proactive in communicating concerns about stranded Nebraskans to the White House and State Department, advocacy that was crucial in prompting action.
Eventually, consular staff in Morocco organized an evacuation effort out of Marrakesh, manned by young staffers who volunteered to conduct the process at the airport. It was masterful – well organized, efficient, smooth and friendly – supporting us through London and back to Chicago.
We don't know how to thank them all in person, but at least want to express our appreciation publicly in the local forum.
Pamela Griffin, Omaha
Jean Ann Ballinger, Omaha
Ward Peters, Omaha
Catherine and Terry Ferguson, Omaha

LJS: Raise for Frakes is slap in face

In the middle of a full-blown pandemic, Scott Frakes gets a $60,000 raise. So now he makes a quarter of a million dollars a year, at a time you would think Gov. Pete Ricketts would want to conserve tax payers money.
Never mind the fact Frakes is the director of the second-most-overcrowded and broken prison system in the United States. The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services has been and is in a crisis, and yet our faithful leader is giving a raise to the person at the root of it all.
If this doesn't speak volumes as to why our prison system is so broken, I don't know what does. This is a slap in the face to all Nebraskans. I encourage all Nebraskans to voice your opinion on such irresponsible tax money spending.
Albert Hauser, Lincoln

AP: Coronavirus response highlights deepening partisan divide

NEW YORK (AP) — In Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti has instituted a shutdown on a city of nearly 4 million people and threatened uncooperative business owners with power shutoffs and arrest.
In Mississippi, home to nearly 3 million people, Gov. Tate Reeves has allowed most businesses to stay open — even restaurants, so long as they serve no more than 10 people at a time.
The divergent approaches are evidence that not even a global pandemic can bridge the gaping political divisions of the Trump era. The fierce tribalism that has characterized debates over immigration, taxes and

health care is now coloring policy-making during a coronavirus outbreak that threatens countless lives and local economies across nation.

There are exceptions, but Republican leaders have been far more likely to resist the most aggressive social distancing measures, emboldened by President Donald Trump's initial rosy outlook and a smaller early caseload in their more rural communities across middle America. But in the more crowded population centers on the East and West coasts where the disease first appeared, the Democrats in charge have been more willing to embrace strict steps such as curfews, sweeping business closures and law enforcement assistance.

“This epidemic has been a window into our politics," said Larry Levitt, who leads health policy for the Kaiser Family Foundation, which has been tracking responses. “Particularly over the past couple of weeks, a political divide has emerged.”

It is an election year divide that could have deadly consequences.

As his campaign struggles for attention, leading Democratic presidential contender Joe Biden has called for a nationwide lockdown to replace the patchwork of local responses, which have varied even among neighboring communities in the same states. Trump, meanwhile, is largely allowing local officials to choose their own course and has encouraged them to compete for scant federal resources.

Politically, the strategy may be working for the first-term Republican president. With the election seven months away, Trump's favorable ratings are ticking up, even if his numbers have fallen short of past presidents during times of crisis. Yet the GOP's loyalty will almost certainly be tested in the weeks ahead as the virus spreads from the blue-state coastal communities deeper into red-state middle America.

Democrats like Garcetti fear the politics that are shaping conflicting pandemic responses will have real-world consequences far more important than the next election.

“I do worry that making this a partisan issue will kill more people in redder states,” the Los Angeles mayor said in an interview. “There is no way to keep this out of your city.”

In Mississippi, Reeves has adopted many social distancing measures such as limiting groups to 10 people, even if he's resisted some of the most aggressive steps. In an interview late last week, the Republican governor reiterated his opposition to a stay-at-home order, adding that he's heeding the guidance of state health officials and Vice President Mike Pence himself, who told him directly during a recent conversation that the Trump administration is not recommending a blanket shutdown.

Reeves dismissed those who think he's not doing enough as enemies of Trump who “don’t like the fact that I’m a conservative and I’m willing to pray.”

He warned that extended social distancing orders could cause a more dangerous fallout than the pandemic by destroying the nation's economy.

“I don’t think there’s any doubt that if the United States found themselves in a severe depression with 20% to 30% unemployment that the abject poverty that could create could lead to more health problems than this particular virus is causing,” Reeves said.

He added: “One size doesn't fit all in this country."

No nation has more documented cases of the deadly virus than the United States, which surpassed 143,000 total infections and 2,400 related deaths as of Monday morning. Yet Trump's coronavirus task force coordinator, Dr. Deborah Birx, reported Monday that the nation has perhaps only seen roughly 1% or 2% of the total number of deaths expected in a best-case scenario.

“If we do things together well, almost perfectly, we could get in the range of 100,000 to 200,000 fatalities," Birx said Monday on NBC's “Today.”

But she warned that every part of the country isn't perfectly responding “in a uniform way to protect one another.”

“Cities that don’t social distance, that don’t stay at home, that believe you can have social interactions, that believe you can have gatherings at homes of 20 and 10 people even, that is going to spread the virus even if everyone looks well,” Birx said.

The partisan divide in infections and responses is difficult to ignore.
Fifteen of the 21 states that have issued statewide stay-at-home orders so far are led by Democratic governors, according to Kaiser. The Republican-led holdouts include Florida, where Gov. Ron DeSantis has so far agreed with Trump's preference for a more incremental approach in the premier swing state, suggesting that restrictive measures be put in place only in the hardest-hit counties.
All 50 states have reported cases, but the seven with the most infections are led by Democrats. New York may offer a cautionary tale for other states: The state reported its first case on March 1 and nearly reached 60,000 infections and 1,000 deaths on Monday.
The bottom six states in total cases are rural states led by Republicans. Numbers have been escalating virtually everywhere, however, particularly in more populous red states like Louisiana, Tennessee and Texas, which reported more than 8,100 cases and 200 deaths combined as of Monday.
Some Republicans have been more assertive than others.
Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican, has split with Trump over when normal life might resume. And Ohio's Republican governor, Mike DeWine, has been one of the most aggressive leaders in either party, banning spectators from sporting events the first week of March. He was among the first governors in the nation to close public schools.
Aggressive steps by DeWine and others, however, have been complicated by Trump's inconsistent rhetoric. After repeatedly downplaying the threat at first, the Republican president adopted a more serious tone before suddenly suggesting last week that the worst could be over by Easter, which is April 12. He has now reversed that view, calling it an “aspiration,” with the extension of the social distancing guidelines through April.
Trump has also engaged in a war of words with Democratic governors in key states, like Michigan and New York, where elected officials have openly complained about the lack of federal assistance to stem a dangerous shortage of coronavirus tests and medical equipment.
Many conservatives have cheered Trump's response, particularly his reluctance to encourage a nationwide stay-at-home order.
“They have no right to tell me I need to stay in my house. They cannot impose a travel ban on me. They can’t. it’s unconstitutional,” said Texas-based activist Mark Meckler, a co-founder of the Tea Party Patriots who now leads the Convention of States Project.
Meckler began conversations in recent days with other grassroots conservatives leaders to explore the possibility of filing lawsuits to block some of the more aggressive social distancing measures. In the meantime, he's encouraging like-minded conservatives to embrace “peaceful resistance."
“I’m not going along with it,” Meckler said. “It doesn't mean we won't be smart, but we don't want to be sheep.”
Meanwhile, the numbers are shooting up in California, which has reported more than 6,300 infections and 130 deaths as of Monday morning.
Los Angeles Mayor Garcetti has assigned teams of city workers to ensure non-essential local businesses are complying with shut down orders. He is empowered to shut off their water and power if necessary, and the California Democrat has authorized the police to arrest those who continue to resist.
Garcetti said there have been no shutoffs or arrests so far and predicts that “99 out of 100 will comply.”
He also offered a dire message to Republicans who have resisted similar steps: “In the projections, you could see this taking tens of thousands of lives in America or millions. You chose. But I don’t think anybody wants the second to be on their hands.”
By Steve Peoples

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