From: Shelburn, Andrew
To: Shelburn, Andrew
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 8-4-22
Date: Thursday, August 4, 2022 8:31:56 AM

AG VALLEY CO-OP

Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Aug 2022	6.92	99.00	08:12
Corn	Oct 2022	5.63	-35.00	08:14
Milo	Aug 2022	5.68	-25.00	08:12
Milo	Oct 2022	5.28	-70.00	08:14
Soybeans	Aug 2022	13.99	15.00	08:15
Soybeans	Oct 2022	13.14	-70.00	08:15
Wheat	Aug 2022	7.65	-75.00	08:01
Wheat	Jul 2023	7.46	-100.00	08:14

TV and Radio

KETV: Gov. Ricketts orders flags to half-staff honoring late Indiana congresswoman
KETV: Nebraska gas stations selling ethanol are now able to apply for tax credit
KPTM: Local group sees Kansas vote as 'victory,' calls for abortion advocates to stay engaged
KLKN: Nebraska Speaker now pursuing a 12-week abortion ban, according to Sen. Hunt
NPM: Fight Continues over Initiative Signature Requirement (no video)

Governor

LJS: Tax credits available for Nebraska retailers that sell fuel with higher ethanol blends
OWH: Nebraska abortion-rights advocates say Kansas vote hints at rising support
LJS: Kleeb says Kansas abortion vote reverberates in Nebraska
Washington Examiner: Midterm Memo: Republicans concerned Kansas anti-abortion ballot measure loss a bad sign for fall

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LJS: Tax credits available for Nebraska retailers that sell fuel with higher ethanol blends

Fuel retailers that sell higher ethanol blends can now apply for tax credits.

The Nebraska Department of Revenue started taking applications for the credits on Monday, which are available to retailers that sell fuel with more than 10% ethanol.

The credits were made possible through the passage earlier this year of LB1261. Gov. Pete Ricketts signed the bill into law this spring after it was passed unanimously by the Legislature.

Currently, 124 stations in Nebraska sell E85 gasoline, which contains anywhere from 51% to 83% ethanol, while 112 sell E15, which contains 15% ethanol.

Only flex-fuel vehicles can use E85, but any passenger vehicle produced in 2001 or later can use E15.

"At the retail level, very simply put, E15 is better fuel and it costs less," Randy Gard, chief operating officer of Bosselman Enterprises and secretary of the Nebraska Ethanol Board, said in a news release. "We are excited about the passage of LB1261e and what it can do for our customers. If you are a retailer, there is now nothing standing in your way today to make the transition from E10, the standard fuel most people use today, to joining this mass conversion to E15."

For more information or to apply for the tax credit, go to ethanol.nebraska.gov/resources/nebraska-higher-blend-tax-credit-act.

By Matt Olberding

OWH: Nebraska abortion-rights advocates say Kansas vote hints at rising support

LINCOLN — Abortion-rights advocates in Nebraska said Kansas voters' decision to uphold abortion protections "sends a clear message" of where the public stands on the issue, while abortion opponents cautioned against reading too much into the results and vowed to continue fighting for additional restrictions.

On Tuesday, Kansas voters overwhelmingly rejected a measure that would have added language to the state's constitution stating that it does not grant a right to an abortion, thereby allowing state lawmakers to regulate abortion as they see fit. It was a major victory for abortion-rights advocates following weeks in which many states in the South and Midwest largely banned abortion following the U.S. Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade.

State Sen. Adam Morfeld of Lincoln, a Democrat who has opposed abortion restrictions, said he wasn't surprised by the news, claiming that abortion rights have support from voters regardless of political affiliation. What did surprise him was the "landslide" result, in which votes against the proposal prevailed by roughly 20 percentage points, according to unofficial results.

Scout Richters with ACLU of Nebraska said the outcome in Kansas resembles Nebraskans' opinion on the issue. A recent ACLU poll found that 55% of Nebraskans were against an abortion ban.

Morfeld said abortion rights have always had support across political lines, despite repeated claims from conservative lawmakers that Nebraska is "a pro-life state."

Anti-abortion advocates disagreed. Nate Grasz, policy director for the Nebraska Family Alliance, said the level of support largely depends on how the question is framed. He said the majority of voters don't support extreme options like late-term abortions.

Currently in Nebraska, abortions are legal up until 20 weeks after fertilization.

Sen. Joni Albrecht of Thurston said the Nebraska Legislature's count of lawmakers who support abortion restrictions is proof that a majority of voters are also against abortion access. She said she consistently hears affirmation of that from her constituents.

"In my arena, I hear it loud and clear," Albrecht said.

Earlier this year, Nebraska lawmakers attempted to pass a trigger bill that would have banned abortion in the event Roe v. Wade was overturned. The bill failed to get the 33 votes necessary to end a filibuster against it.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's abortion ruling in June, Gov. Pete Ricketts said he would work with Speaker of the Legislature Mike Hilgers to determine what policies could pass in the Legislature during a potential special session. Ricketts, who has voiced support for a ban on abortion, hasn't made any announcements regarding a special session and has refrained from commenting on the topic.

Even if a special session isn't called, abortion restrictions will likely be proposed in the next regular session.

Albrecht, who introduced the trigger bill, said that bill is "completely off the table." She said she is not writing the legislation that could be proposed in a special session, but believes it will be a less extreme version of her previous bill — one that proposes abortion restrictions, rather than a complete ban.

Richters said the Kansas vote could be an indication that voters in largely conservative states are shifting their support to candidates and causes that support abortion rights. Tuesday's election was the first test of voters' feelings about abortion since Roe v. Wade was overturned.

The high court ruling likely motivated many voters in Kansas to "vote like their rights depend on it," Richters said.

“Now, more than ever, they really do,” she said.
Grasz said the Kansas vote reflects the magnitude of the fight for and against abortion rights, but he doesn’t believe it is an indicator of what’s to come in the November midterm elections. He said Tuesday’s vote was mostly fueled by “panic” in the aftermath of Roe being overturned, and that abortion-rights groups funneled millions of dollars into spreading “fear and false information.”
Sandy Danek, executive director of Nebraska Right to Life, said she believed rhetoric from abortion-rights groups “confused the voters” into thinking the initiative would have banned abortions and other health care procedures, rather than amend the state’s constitution.
The need to amend the constitution stemmed from a 2019 Kansas Supreme Court decision that declared access to abortion as a “fundamental” right under the state’s Bill of Rights. Abortion opponents in Kansas wouldn’t say what legislation they’d pursue if the amendment passed and bristled when opponents predicted it would lead to a ban.
Danek said leading up to the midterms, anti-abortion groups must put more effort into educating voters about abortion-restricting policies and alternatives to abortion. She said the nearly 50 years since the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling created a “culture” that normalized abortion for many of today’s voters, and supporters of abortion bans must work to change that culture.
By Erin Bamer

LJS: Kleeb says Kansas abortion vote reverberates in Nebraska

Democratic State Chair Jane Kleeb of Hastings said Wednesday she believes the voters of Kansas sent a clear message on Tuesday to candidates and political parties to protect abortion rights and that the outcome has impacted the election battleground in Nebraska.
"The message is loud and clear to the national (Democratic) party and to national donors that red states (like Nebraska) are worth investing in," Kleeb said during a telephone interview.
And in Nebraska the Democratic nominees for two House seats and for the governorship are state senators who voted to protect abortion rights during the closing days of the 2022 legislative session, she noted.
"People are waking up today shocked by the 60-40 vote in Kansas," Kleeb said, "but I'm confident a similar vote in Nebraska would have the same results."
"Patty's race was the first indicator to Democrats that this issue has the potential to overwhelm predictions of a big red wave" that would favor Republican candidates across most of the nation this election year, she added.
Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln lost a special election in June to Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk, the Republican nominee, by a narrow 6,234 votes in a race for the 1st District House seat that has not been won by a Democrat in 58 years.
They will meet again in the November general election when voters will determine who represents the eastern Nebraska congressional district for the following two years.
Abortion rights are "a major motivating factor" particularly for women and young voters, Kleeb said.
Sen. Tony Vargas of Omaha, who is challenging Republican Rep. Don Bacon in metropolitan Omaha's competitive 2nd District, has been "very clear" in his support for abortion rights, Kleeb said.

Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue, the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, joined Pansing Brooks and Vargas in voting during the closing days of the 2022 Legislature against a motion that would have ended a filibuster blocking a bill that would have banned abortions in Nebraska once the U.S. Supreme Court overturned abortion rights that had been guaranteed in its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision.

Since then, opponents of abortion rights in Nebraska have been unable to secure sufficient support to call a special session of the Legislature to act on abortion before Gov. Pete Ricketts completes his second and final term.

Kleeb said she has additional reasons to feel optimistic "when the Republican Party is eating its own" in Nebraska, pointing to the change in GOP state party leadership that wrested control away from traditional Republican leaders during a state party convention in Kearney.

"The reality is the extreme took over the leadership and infrastructure of the party," she said.

The ongoing challenge for her party in being able to win statewide races in Nebraska once again is to reduce the overwhelming 80%-20% Republican advantage in rural counties to 70%-30%, "or ideally 60-40," Kleeb said.

That means showing respect and support for rural concerns, she said.

Nebraskans have not elected a Democratic governor since Ben Nelson was re-elected in 1994 or a Democratic U.S. senator since Nelson was re-elected in 2006.

Looking ahead, Kleeb said President Joe Biden should make his own decision about whether to seek a second term in 2024.

"If he decides to run, we are in full support," she said.

If not, Kleeb said, she sees Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg as top contenders along with Vice President Kamala Harris.

By Don Walton

Washington Examiner: Midterm Memo: Republicans concerned Kansas anti-abortion ballot measure loss a bad sign for fall

What's the matter with Kansas?

You might recall the 2004 book by journalist Thomas Frank. It made waves for exploring why voters in the heartland were rejecting liberal policies ostensibly beneficial to them and their families — and increasingly voting Republican for local, state, and especially federal office. Over time, GOP victories in states like Kansas became, with occasional exceptions, a sure thing, leaving Democrats to scratch their heads and wonder what they were doing wrong.

But 18 years later, it might be Republicans asking that titular question.

On Tuesday, voters in this culturally conservative red state, which chose then-President Donald Trump over now-President Joe Biden 56.2% to 41.5% in 2020, rejected a ballot initiative to remove abortion rights protections from the state constitution. It wasn't even close, with votes against Constitutional Amendment 2 defeating those in favor 59% to 41%. This, on a primary election day, in an election cycle in which Republicans are riding a growing electoral wave and whose base is more

enthusiastic about showing up and pulling the lever than are grassroots Democrats.
"This is a [expletive] earthquake," a Republican operative with Kansas ties told me, requesting anonymity to speak candidly. "This was put on [the] primary ballot to ensure victory." This Republican insider worries that the battle over abortion has awakened apathetic Democratic voters poised to sit on their hands this fall because they are disappointed with Biden's and their party's leadership on Capitol Hill.
"The size of the defeat is what's shocking here," this operative continued, fretting that the outcome suggests Amanda Adkins, the Republican challenging Rep. Sharice Davids (D) in the newly configured 3rd Congressional District, a suburban Kansas City swing seat, could face a much tougher race than initially anticipated. "She could be [a] casualty of this," this individual said. "I wouldn't put [a] dime on her race right now."
Democrats heralded the results as fresh evidence that a Republican takeover of Congress on Nov. 8 is far from guaranteed despite the thin five-seat majority they are defending in the House and Senate control that rests on 50 seats and Vice President Kamala Harris's tiebreaking vote. Why were they so heartened by the results, other than the win? Helen Kalla, a spokeswoman for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, highlighted the following statistics:

- Of the 19 counties that voted no on the abortion amendment, Biden won five. Trump won the other 14.
- Nearly 7 in 10 voters in the 3rd District opposed the Republicans' push to "rip away a woman's right to abortion."
- In a state Trump won by 15 percentage points, nearly 6 in 10 voters "sent Republicans a clear message: The American people reject your attack on women's freedom."

Democrats also feel warm and fuzzy about this stat:
Biden won just five Kansas counties in 2020. But Tuesday, Amendment 2 fell in 19 counties while outperforming the president's 41.5% from 2020 by 17.5 points. This happened partly because voter registration among women increased in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's June 27 ruling in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization that overturned Roe v. Wade. But it also was a function of turnout. Voters motivated by the loss of federal protections for abortion rights showed up when they otherwise might not have.
If Democrats can bottle that and sell it this fall, they might stem midterm losses. Don't bet it, Kansas Republicans assured me. They argue the peculiarities of the Amendment 2 campaign always made the initiative a tough sell from the get-go. How so? For one, it was difficult to understand, and voters tend to reject confusing ballot initiatives regardless of their position on the underlying issue being addressed. Plus, a sizable percentage of voters walked into the booth, voted down Amendment 2, and walked out, meaning zero coattails for Democratic candidates.
"There was no enthusiasm on the pro-life side," said Matt Schlapp, chairman of the American Conservative Union and a Wichita native. He said Amendment 2 was too benign. Had the initiative been an aggressive anti-abortion bill that outlawed the procedure once a fetal heartbeat is detected, Schlapp said, it might have won. He said a future campaign is likely to succeed as Kansas voters grapple with their state affirming abortion rights and attracting people from states with stringent restrictions other than to save the mother's life.
But one veteran Republican strategist in Kansas I spoke to offered his party a cautionary tale and Democrats a glimmer of hope — if not for this year, at least for the 2024 presidential contest — but first, some important context.
In a recent conversation I had with a national Republican pollster, he told me focus groups and survey data on abortion have convinced him the GOP can be competitive on the issue. But, this

pollster emphasized, that's only in instances in which Republicans support "reasonable" restrictions, such as banning late-term abortions, while making allowances for rape and incest. Multiple red states that have banned abortion post-Dobbs have declined to approve such carveouts, making exceptions only for the life of the mother.

In a presidential contest in which Supreme Court nominations are salient, and after a time of (likely) Republican governance in at least one chamber of Congress plus the realities of life in the United States with strict abortion bans driven by the GOP in red states, the issue could boost Democrats in key battlegrounds, which gets me back to the veteran Republican strategist in Kansas. When I asked this operative why Amendment 2 tanked so badly (proponents expected it to lose, just not by 16 points), this is what he said:

"Kansans are basically pro-life with exceptions, and the no side sufficiently convinced Kansans, probably correctly, that this amendment would lead to a total abortion ban. With Roe in place, there was always that backstop, so the pro-life movement was just pushing for restrictions like a partial-birth abortion ban, no taxpayer funding, no late-term [abortions], parental consent — all stuff Kansans largely support."

Now, to the field…

Michigan's 10th Congressional District. John James is hoping the third time's the charm. The Republican won the GOP nomination in Michigan's newly drawn 10th District on Tuesday, marking the third consecutive election cycle he is running for federal office.

But unlike 2018 and 2020, when James mounted underdog bids for Senate, this time, he is running for a House seat for which his odds of victory are considerably better. Not only is James seeking office in an election cycle with the political winds definitively at his back, a first for him, but he is also campaigning in a seat configured to elect Republicans.

That should give James, a businessman and military combat veteran, the advantages he needs to defeat Democrat Carl Marlinga and help Republicans add to their growing ranks of black lawmakers in Congress.

Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court this week upheld universal mail-in voting. The ruling is sure to upset Trump, who claims this voting method enabled Biden to "steal" the election from him in 2020.

At the very least, Trump supporters argue, universal mail-in voting in Pennsylvania is plainly prohibited by the state constitution, making Biden's victory there in 2020, which relied heavily on mail-in voting, a form of "legal" theft. But the high court in Pennsylvania ruled that while the commonwealth's constitution does detail the specific instances in which mail-in voting is to be allowed, there was nothing unconstitutional about the decision made by the GOP-controlled legislature and Gov. Tom Wolf (D) in 2019 to approve legislation creating universal, no-excuses mail-in voting.

The law, Act 77, was not controversial at the time. Only later, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, when Trump began complaining Biden would use mail-in voting to steal the election from him, did Republicans, including those who approved the Pennsylvania law, turn on mail-in voting.

2024 watch. South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem (R) is headed to Nevada for the seventh annual "Basque Fry." The Silver State votes fourth on the Republican presidential nominating calendar, and over the years, the midsummer Basque Fry in rural northern Nevada has become a must-stop for aspiring GOP presidential contenders.

To wit, the roster of speakers for the Aug. 13 event includes Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts (R). Noem, who is out with a new book, Not My First Rodeo: Lessons from the

Heartland, regularly insists she is not interested in running for president in 2024, saying she plans to endorse Trump if he runs. Noem is running for reelection this fall, so that's what she might be expected to say.
But the governor's national travel to such events as the Basque Fry, plus digital advertising she is running in key early primary states Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina, tell a different story. The Basque Fry, founded by Republican Senate nominee Adam Laxalt, is now run independently of him by supportive political operatives.
By David M. Drucker

OWH: COVID relief grants gave $98 million of support to Nebraska child care providers

LINCOLN — Federal pandemic relief funds delivered Nebraska child care providers a $98 million lifeline over the past nine months, according to state officials.
Reports from the Department of Health and Human Services show that 2,269 providers — or 80% of all licensed child care centers, family child care homes and preschools — have gotten help through the Child Care Stabilization Grant program since October.
Stephanie Beasley, children and family services director for HHS, said the money has been critical in supporting a key part of the state's economy and in keeping quality child care available for children and working parents.
"The successful grant cycles impacted the statewide provider network and brought stability and reliability to a vital industry in Nebraska," she said. "The (grants) also ensure Nebraska families have access to quality child care options and the child care workforce is rewarded for the important work they do each day for the benefit of Nebraska children."
State officials established the grant program with Nebraska's share of some $24 billion in federal child care relief dollars provided through the American Rescue Plan Act.
Nebraska's portion amounted to $140 million. State officials awarded a total of $104 million in two rounds of grants, with the bulk of the money already disbursed. The last $6 million is set to be disbursed to second-round recipients in September.
An agency spokesman said HHS officials are working on plans to distribute the remaining $36 million and will be making an announcement when they are final.
Susan Sarver, director of workforce planning and development with the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, said the stabilization grants "really helped" providers keep their doors open and called the 80% response rate "pretty tremendous."
Grants were awarded in every county with at least one licensed child care provider. Twelve Nebraska counties have no licensed facilities.
Sarver said the stabilization grants were in addition to money provided through the federal Paycheck Protection Program, an earlier COVID relief program.
Surveys done by the Buffett Institute found that most providers used COVID funds to pay rent and utilities, followed by purchasing personal protective equipment and sanitation supplies, buying general goods and services for their business, improving their facilities and boosting wages and benefits.

However, the surveys also showed that Nebraska child care providers continue to struggle, Sarver said. The most recent survey found that two-thirds of providers made less money in the past year, staff turnover was widespread and nine in 10 providers employing staff had difficulty hiring for open positions.

“There is still a lot of stress and pressure on the system,” she said.

Nationally, the pandemic exacerbated the shortage of reliable and affordable child care, which in turn has restricted the growth of the broader economy. The shortage forced many people — mostly women — to leave the workforce and contributed to a deepening labor shortage.

A shortage of child care options creates particular problems in Nebraska. Pre-pandemic figures showed that more than 76% of Nebraska children under age 6 lived in homes where all adults worked, higher than the national average of 68%.

By Martha Stoddard

LJS: UNL to offer voluntary, free COVID testing for fall semester

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln won't require students, faculty and staff to test negative for the coronavirus before they return to campus for the 2022-23 school year.

Nor will the state's largest university campus require masking when the semester starts Aug. 22.

UNL will largely continue the voluntary testing protocol that was in place at the end of last school year and through the summer, the university announced Wednesday.

Students, faculty and staff at UNL will continue to have access to free saliva-based PCR testing Sunday through Friday outside the Nebraska Union as well as the East Union.

Individuals needing to test can walk up to one of the testing locations on either campus, show their NCard, and submit a saliva sample.

The results will be available a day later at UNL's COVID-19 testing portal. Or, members of the campus community can receive a push notification that their results are ready through the Nebraska app, which is currently used by most students.

The change in testing protocol also means UNL will allow students to delete the Safer Community app from their phones.

The app, which went into use in January 2021, was used to schedule COVID-19 tests and send results, and also had a feature allowing students to opt-in to receive alerts if they were potentially exposed to someone who had recently tested positive.

UNL discontinued using most of the features on the app last November.

While UNL has not required students, faculty or staff to get vaccinated against COVID-19, the university is once again encouraging those who will be on campus to get a shot.

Deb Fiddelke, UNL's chief communications officer, said the vaccine registry will continue to be available to individuals to submit details on the date and type of vaccine they received.

In partnership with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, UNL will use the vaccine registry to determine potential exposure rates if a COVID-19 hot spot shows up on campus.

But, nearly two and a half years after the pandemic forced campuses to close, Fiddelke noted UNL and other colleges and universities across the country have become more consistent in their plans

for managing COVID-19.
"People have a good sense of what to do to keep themselves safe," she said.
On its COVID-19 dashboard, UNL recorded 38 positive cases out of 314 tests for the week of July 30. The positivity rate is 12.1%, down from 17.4% a week earlier.
By Chris Dunker

GII: Grand Island Public releases 2022-23 masking guidance

According to a press release Wednesday evening, a “Masks Optional” policy will begin at the onset of GIPS’s coming school year.
This means individuals may wear masks, but are not required to, based on personal preference and level of risk, according to the district’s news release. Masks in all activities hosted on GIPS grounds and district buildings at the onset of the 2022-2023 school year.
Grand Island Public Schools will begin the ‘22-’23 school year as Masks Optional in all district buildings and activities hosted on GIPS grounds.
This is similar to the policy at close of school year 2021-2022.
In a statement, GIPS Superintendent Tawana Grover said:
“Maintaining a masking optional protocol allows for us to maintain vibrant learning environments while empowering our staff and students to feel confident in how they choose to engage in our buildings. Our protocols for mitigation, naturally, will remain fluid as we continue monitoring data as part of our Safe Return to School Plan. We’re looking forward to a strong, fun start to the ‘22-’23 school year and cultivating valuable learning opportunities for our students.”
According to GIPS’s Safe Return to School Plan states that masks will be encouraged, supported, and optional unless “Substantial Transmission” of 50 cases per 100,000 occur in Hall County as indicated by total new cases.
By Jessica Votipka

OWH: Western Nebraska wildfire about 85% contained

A wildfire near Gering, Nebraska, is about 85% contained, and firefighting operations are expected to be turned back over to local authorities Thursday.
The Carter Canyon Fire that began with several lightning strikes Saturday evening has destroyed an estimated 15,630 acres, Ben Bohall of the Nebraska Forest Service said Wednesday. Three homes were destroyed and seven more were damaged, but no lives have been lost, he said.
Bohall said a request has been made to survey the area with aircraft. That survey was expected to occur Wednesday afternoon.
“We’re hoping to have aircraft up to give us a good picture,” Bohall said. “Barring anything unexpected happening, the plan is to transfer the command back to the Gering (Volunteer) Fire Department on Thursday.”
Thunderstorms moving through the area produced some rain Tuesday night, but only “a minimal

amount," Bohall said. Two lightning strikes from the storm did cause new fires to ignite, but they were quickly extinguished.
"The first strike hit near Robidoux Road," Bohall said. "That burned up about 3½ acres, but an air tanker put it out right away."
Another lightning strike about 7 miles south of Carter Canyon in Banner County caused a fire that burned over 5 acres, he said. It was also put out with the aid of aircraft.
Utility crews with the Roosevelt Public Power District have restored power to all residences throughout the area. Crews are still working to repair damaged infrastructure such as downed power lines and utility poles, Bohall said.
Landowners impacted by the fires should contact the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Services Agency for information about assistance programs. Assistance is available to help with fences, water structures, grazing lands and other issues, he said.
Bohall said the public's donations of food, water and other resources were essential to keeping up to 200 firefighters from 35 fire departments working. He said donations can still be made through the Firefighter Ministry of Scottsbluff, Nebraska.
"The success that we've had can be attributed directly to the public support," he said. "Everything they did was essential to keeping the firefighters on the fire line."
By Kevin Cole

OWH Midlands Voices: Pathways to Decarbonization could harm Nebraska economy

The July 28 Midlands Voices piece by the Citizens' Climate Change Lobby regarding OPPD's decarbonization policy left out many important facts that OPPD ratepayers would be surprised to learn.
In 2019, OPPD adopted a goal to achieve net zero carbon by 2050. OPPD then created its Pathways to Decarbonization program. As part of that program, OPPD hired E3, Inc. to prepare a report that cost about $1.5 million. In February of this year, the consultant's report was delivered.
In order to achieve net zero carbon, OPPD was told to build 3,800 megawatts of new wind power and 3,000 megawatts of new solar polar. The cost to save the planet did not come cheap as it would require OPPD to spend at least $28 billion by 2050. Readers should know that OPPD only has about $1 billion in annual revenues. If OPPD continues down this foolish and expensive pathway, electric rates will necessarily skyrocket. OPPD's misguided policy is the single biggest threat to the Nebraska economy as every person and business within OPPD's service area is required, by law, to buy electricity from the OPPD monopoly.
Germany has been implementing net zero carbon policies for a number of years and electricity there is three times more expensive than in America. McKinsey & Company estimates that the global energy transition would require a capital expenditure of $3.5 trillion per year. This pipe dream of a net zero carbon would require a land area roughly twice the size of California. Nebraska would have to become the Chinese solar panel state instead of the Cornhusker State.
Right now, ESI Energy, LLC (a subsidiary of NextEra Energy) is attempting to build a 3,200-acre industrial solar development for $300 million in Cass County. There is strong local opposition to this

project, in part, because this company was recently fined $6 million and placed on probation in federal court for killing American eagles. About 80% of solar panels and solar panel materials come from China. At the June OPPD board meeting, I asked that OPPD adopt policies of not doing business with criminals and entities that benefit from slave labor. My request has not yet been adopted.
Solar and wind interests have been subsidized for decades by American taxpayers. The Des Moines Register reported that Warren Buffett's MidAmerican Energy has received $10 billion in federal income tax credits from 2004 to 2018.
The so-called Inflation Reduction Act would continue the federal handouts with $370 billion in free money. This includes an immediate investment tax credit of 30% for solar and wind projects and a production tax credit. The subsidy is for another decade. Arguably, the federal government would write a check to OPPD for all the expensive and unreliable solar and wind projects it builds.
With regard to delaying the closure of the coal units of North Omaha Station, I'm confident that OPPD's engineers told the Board that there was a substantial risk of forced blackouts if the initial unrealistic timeline had to be honored.
Nebraskans shouldn't be crucified by OPPD on a cross of wind turbine blades. It is imperative for the economic health of Nebraska that OPPD's Pathways to Decarbonization be stopped.
David D. Begley is an attorney in Omaha.

OWH: Photo I.D.

This is a follow up to my letter of June 25 about the attempt to get my 88-year-old mother-in-law a Nebraska photo ID. My wife took her back to the DMV (her second trip) with the requested documents. Those were a birth certificate to prove citizenship, current mail to prove her current address and Social Security card. The birth certificate was recently obtained from the state, taking three to four weeks and costing $17.
Again they were denied. Her birth certificate doesn't show her married name. A marriage license is required to prove her name change back in 1952. I checked the requirements for a photo ID on the state website. It says other documentation may be required. It doesn't say what. It would have been helpful for the DMV clerk (Sarpy County) to mention this requirement, but he did not.
So, we've sent a request to Douglas County for a certified copy of her marriage license at a cost of $9. When it's received, we'll take her back to the DMV with the documents and $28.50. Total cost $54.50, two months (at least) and three trips (at least) to the DMV.
It appears the amendment for a photo ID requirement has made it to the November ballot. These documents are not easy to get and they are not free. The photo ID requirement is a thinly disguised poll tax intended to keep poor people and old people from voting. How does it not violate the 1964 24th Amendment? Perhaps Pete Ricketts or Julie Slama could explain.
Frank Logan, Bellevue

LJS Editorial, 8/4, Funding of StarTran should come from those who use it

We can all agree that an efficient and dependable public transportation system is a key infrastructural component to any thriving city.
The challenge comes in how it is funded.
Should it be subsidized entirely by the city? Should it be self-sustaining? Or should there be a nominal ridership fee that combines rider and city support?
The StarTran Advisory Board — a group of citizens that weighs in on city bus route changes and operations — voted to oppose Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird's budget proposal to end free bus fares, which were put in place during the pandemic.
Journal Star city reporter Margaret Reist wrote last week that the board voted 5-1 to reject the mayor's proposal to reinstitute fares, though at rates lower than those before the pandemic, and voted unanimously to recommend a pilot program to continue fare-free busing for another two years.
A public hearing on the budget was held during Monday's City Council meeting and members of the bus community voiced their opinions, however it is expected that the council will side with the mayor.
We agree with the mayor.
Lincoln Transportation and Utilities Director Liz Elliott said continuing no-fare busing — paid for with 2020 federal stimulus funds that will soon run out — would cost the city an estimated $1.2 million each year. Instituting the lower fare would decrease the city's financial obligation to $48,000 to $100,000 annually, she said.
That's a significant difference in the city budget.
A study done by a consultant as part of the city's update to its Transportation Development Plan found no-fare busing would increase ridership by 28% to 41%.
Under the mayor's proposal, regular bus fares would decrease from $1.75 to $1.25, paratransit rides from $3.50 to $2.50 and senior rates from 85 cents to 60 cents. Although ridership would initially decrease, the lower fares would eventually increase ridership by 0.7% — or about 18,000 riders, the study found.
There are mitigating factors that should be acknowledged, including the number of citizens from marginalized communities who rely on public transportation each day. In addition, if more people were to turn to public transportation, it would do a small part in the push toward combating the release of greenhouse gas emissions.
We'd hope concessions will be made to those in need, the Lincolnites who rely on StarTran each day to get to and from work or to run their daily errands.
For everyone else, asking them to pay a little more than a buck for a ride across town seems reasonable. And their daily investment adds perceived value to an oft-overlooked municipal amenity.
It forces everyone who uses StarTran to have some skin in the game -- and that's not a bad thing.

LJS: Wealthy Christians can step up

As a former homeschool teacher in the largest homeschool in Lincoln in 1990s, I would like to warn against state funding for private education.

One, state funding means years of legal battles, millions of dollars to maintain and being at odds with your neighbor. Two, this is the time to reinvent the schooling paradigm. Let's give Christians and public-school students more educational choices.

The millionaire and billionaire Christians could provide scholarships, startup costs for new schools and educational choices you want, without government interference and political battles.

How about an educational "free market" system that creates a system for certified, experienced teachers to offer credit classes outside of the school that parents pay for. Currently students can take classes, but it doesn't count for graduation.

A system could let the state certify teachers to indicate the curriculum meets standards and could evaluate methods. Schools provide a list of qualified programs to parents. A student's school of choice would receive grades and grant credits.

These options provide a multitude of courses and more cheaply -- individual choices, without switching schools and no school wars with neighbors.

Gov. Pete Ricketts, Charles Herbster, Jim Pillen and their think-thank buddies have an opportunity to do more than simply switch who pays for a private education while leaving the public schools in an old, "certifying attendance in a school" paradigm.

They could show us how a "free market" for certified teachers could open multitudes of options for learning and acquiring state credits to graduate, according to various beliefs.

Laureen Greenwood, Lincoln

AP: EPA: Chemical in medical-device cleanser poses cancer risk

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency is warning residents who live near medical sterilizing plants in 13 states and Puerto Rico about potential health risks from emissions of ethylene oxide, a chemical widely used in their operations.

Laredo, Texas; Ardmore, Oklahoma; and Lakewood, Colorado, are among the communities facing the highest risk from ethylene oxide emissions, EPA said.

The agency has notified 23 commercial sterilizers — 19 in the continental U.S. including one in Columbus, Nebraska, and four in Puerto Rico — that their operations pose an elevated risk of cancer and other ailments. The notice follows a recent survey of emissions data from almost 100 commercial sterilizers nationwide.

Ethylene oxide is used to clean everything from catheters to syringes, pacemakers and plastic surgical gowns.

While short-term or infrequent exposure to ethylene oxide does not appear to pose a health risk, EPA said long-term or lifetime exposure to the chemical could lead to a variety of health impacts, including lymphoma and breast cancer. EPA said it is working with commercial sterilizers to take appropriate steps to reduce emissions.

"Today, EPA is taking action to ensure communities are informed and engaged in our efforts to address ethylene oxide, a potent air toxic posing serious health risks with long-term exposure," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement Wednesday.

EPA will conduct public outreach campaigns in each of the communities where elevated risks have

been found, including an Aug. 10 webinar.
Laredo, one of the communities targeted by the EPA notice, is a border city where the vast majority of residents are Latino and more than a quarter live in poverty. Missouri-based Midwest Sterilization Corp. operates a sterilization plant in Laredo. The company also owns a plant in Jackson, Missouri, that is on EPA's watch list.
More than 40% of Laredo's nearly 70,000 schoolchildren attend campuses in areas with an elevated risk of cancer due to ethylene oxide emissions from the Midwest plant, according to an analysis by ProPublica and the Texas Tribune.
A spokesperson for Midwest declined immediate comment. But the company told ProPublica and the Tribune last December that cancer risk from its Laredo plant is overstated. Emissions it reported to the EPA are "worst case scenarios," rather than specific pollution levels, the company said.
The Ethylene Oxide Sterilization Association, an industry group, said in a statement that ethylene oxide has been used for decades by the health care community to sterilize a wide variety of medical devices and equipment. More than 20 billion health care products are sterilized each year in the U.S. alone.
In many cases. there are no practical alternatives available to ethylene oxide, the group said, adding that use of less effective cleaning methods "could introduce the real risks of increased morbidity and mortality'' at hospitals throughout the country.
EPA called medical sterilization "a critical function that ensures a safe supply of medical devices for patients and hospitals.'' The agency said it is committed to addressing pollution concerns associated with EO, sometimes called EtO, "in a comprehensive way that ensures facilities can operate safely in communities while also providing sterilized medical supplies.''
Proposed rules to update control of air toxic emissions from commercial sterilizers and facilities that manufacture EtO are expected by the end of the year, with final rules likely next year, EPA said.
Scott Whitaker, president and CEO of the Advanced Medical Technology Association, another industry group, applauded EPA "for its forthrightness about what it does and doesn't know" about EtO, but added: "It's critical that the EPA get this right."
A potential shutdown of medical-device sterilization facilities "due to misinformed political pressure, as well as uncertainty regarding which regulations the facilities must adhere to .... would be disastrous to public health," Whitaker said in email.
At least seven sterilizers on EPA's watch list are AdvaMed members, including both Midwest plants and two owned by industry giant Becton, Dickinson and Co., also known as BD.
Besides medical cleaners, EtO is used in a range of products, including antifreeze, textiles, plastics, detergents and adhesives. It is also used to decontaminate some food products and spices. Two of the 23 facilities targeted by EPA — in Hanover and Jessup, Maryland — are used to sterilize spices. Both are operated by Jessup-based Elite Spice.
Other commercial sterilizers cited by EPA are located in Groveland, Florida; Salisbury, Maryland; Taunton Massachusetts; Linden and Franklin, New Jersey; Erie and Zelienople, Pennsylvania; Memphis and New Tazewell, Tennessee; Athens, Texas; Sandy Utah; and Richmond Virginia.
Four plants are Puerto Rico: Anasco, Fajardo, Salinas and Villalba.

AP: Biden signs executive order to protect travel for abortion

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday signed an executive order aimed in part at making it easier for women seeking abortions to travel between states to obtain access to the procedure.

More specifically, one of the directives Biden will issue will allow states that have not outlawed abortion to apply for specific Medicaid waivers that would, in effect, help them treat women who have traveled from out of state.

The order will also call on health care providers to comply with federal nondiscrimination laws and streamline the collection of key data and information on maternal health at the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Biden described as a “health care crisis” the Supreme Court’s decision overturning the landmark 1973 ruling Roe v. Wade, and “every part of the federal government does its part at this critical moment where women’s health and lives are on line.”

he order came one day after Kansas voters protected the right to abortion in the conservative state, an outcome that Biden celebrated.

The new order nonetheless falls short of what many Democratic lawmakers and abortion advocacy groups have demanded of the Biden administration. One chief ask has been for Biden to declare a public health emergency on abortion, which White House officials have said would do little to free up federal resources or activate new legal authorities.

Very Respectfully,

Andrew Shelburn
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