From: Shelburn, Andrew
To: Shelburn, Andrew
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Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jun 2022	7.50	94.00	08:09
Corn	Oct 2022	6.05	-40.00	08:08
Milo	Jun 2022	6.48	-8.00	08:09
Milo	Oct 2022	5.75	-70.00	08:08
Soybeans	Jun 2022	15.11	-55.00	08:10
Soybeans	Oct 2022	14.04	-65.00	08:08
Wheat	Jun 2022	9.11	-80.00	08:00
Wheat	Jul 2022	9.11	-80.00	08:00

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WOWT: Governor talks about religious freedom in Nebraska
KMTV: Gov. Ricketts discusses abortion during press conference on religious freedom
WOWT: Ricketts says he would consider signing Nebraska abortion ban with exceptions
KETV: Local reproductive health physicians concerned about possible abortion ban impact on patients
NCN: Push for voter ID leaves unanswered questions
KMTV: Gov. Ricketts searches to fill vacant Nebraska Legislature Seat
WOWT: Ricketts seeks candidates to fill Flood seat in Nebraska legislature
KETV: Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts seeks applicants to fill Mike Flood's legislative seat
NPM: First District Result Seen as Signaling 'Horserace' in November
KMTV: Gov. Ricketts officially declared it Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week in Nebraska
NTV: Central Nebraska Veterans' Home celebrates 4th of July with Patriot Parade

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OWH: Fortenberry wastes little time in appealing his conviction and even his probation sentence
AP: Convicted ex-Nebraska Rep. Fortenberry begins appeal
AP: Clinics scramble to divert patients as states ban abortion

OWH: Ricketts says Nebraska schools should consider allowing 'religious accommodation'

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts voiced support for allowing more faith-based practices in Nebraska schools during an event Wednesday celebrating Religious Freedom Week.
Ricketts' comments came in response to a question regarding a tweet by Republican gubernatorial candidate Jim Pillen, a University of Nebraska regent and Columbus hog producer. Ricketts, who cannot run for reelection because of term limits, has strongly supported Pillen's campaign for governor.
"We need to put God back into our schools," Pillen tweeted Monday. "I strongly support efforts to put prayer back into our K-12 schools. We should be teaching the next generation to love God and our great country."
The tweet referenced news about Monday's U.S. Supreme Court decision that determined a Washington high school football coach was within his rights to pray at midfield following football games. Pillen's comments fueled strong backlash online, with more than 600 replies, many of them

critical.
Critics argued that instilling religion in the classroom would violate the Nebraska State Constitution and contradict the separation of church and state.
Matt Trail with the Pillen campaign told The World-Herald that Pillen has been campaigning to bring God back into schools since pretty much the beginning of his gubernatorial campaign. A booklet on his platform, referred to as "The Pillen Playbook," goes more in depth, saying he wants prayer brought back into K-12 schools, specifically Christian prayer.
"The erosion of Christian faith is hurting America," a section reads. "Secular humanism has taken over our schools because we allowed radical ideologues to silence our nation's Christian convictions."
Article 1-4 of the Nebraska State Constitution states:
"All persons have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences. No person shall be compelled to attend, erect or support any place of worship against his consent, and no preference shall be given by law to any religious society, nor shall any interference with the rights of conscience be permitted. ... Religion, morality, and knowledge, however, being essential to good government, it shall be the duty of the Legislature to pass suitable laws to protect every religious denomination in the peaceable enjoyment of its own mode of public worship, and to encourage schools and the means of instruction."
Ricketts said he had not seen Pillen's tweet, but he believes the Supreme Court's ruling establishes the rights of students and school employees to pray on school property.
"Allowing that sort of religious accommodation is one of the things I think would be a good thing for schools to be able to think about," Ricketts said.
Ricketts said the concept of the separation between church and state stemmed from concerns from Thomas Jefferson that the government might interfere with religion and push a specific faith on to the public. However, Ricketts argued that a separation does not mean government and religion shouldn't be connected at all.
Ricketts pointed out that U.S. currency bears the phrase "In God We Trust," and that the Nebraska Legislature begins each day it is in session with a prayer.
Earlier in the press conference, Rabbi Eli Tenenbaum suggested schools add a moment of silence during the day for students of all faiths to be able to reflect on their religion, and Ricketts supported this idea.
The governor later expanded on this, and said he would support letting local school boards and parents decide whether to implement a period for prayer into the school days for individual districts.
Critics of the Supreme Court ruling argued it was a departure from legal precedent. Rose Godinez, legal and policy counsel of the ACLU of Nebraska, said earlier this week the decision was "a blow to the principle that students have the religious liberty to be free from school-sponsored prayer."
By Erin Bamer

LJS: Special legislative session on abortion appears uncertain

The likelihood of a special session of the Legislature later this year to deal with abortion in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision that turns abortion rights decisions over to the states appeared Wednesday to be increasingly iffy.

Gov. Pete Ricketts, who would like to see legislation enacted to prohibit most abortions in the state, referred to "the potential special session" in responding to questions at a news conference.
Ricketts said he will continue to work with Speaker of the Legislature Mike Hilgers of Lincoln to "see what more we can do to protect unborn babies."
The governor made it clear that he would support an amendment to an abortion ban that would allow for necessary "medical treatments for the mother that could impact the life of the (unborn) child."
In a text message response to a question about whether a special session is likely or not, Hilgers said there is "nothing additional to add to previous statements for now."
Ricketts said he will "look for someone who is pro-life" in choosing a successor to Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk, who was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives on Tuesday in a special election to choose a successor to former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, who resigned after his conviction on charges that he lied to federal officials about illegal foreign contributions to his 2016 reelection campaign.
Flood captured the special election for eastern Nebraska's 1st District House seat, grabbing 53.2% of the vote against Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln. Just 28% of voters turned out, with Flood winning by a margin of 60,068 votes to 52,913.
Flood, who is expected to be sworn in no earlier than July 12, when the House returns from its current recess, was sponsor of the legislation that has banned abortions in Nebraska after 20 weeks of pregnancy.
During an interview days before the special congressional election, Flood said he would hope that the Supreme Court's decision would spark state legislation that provides support for prenatal care, access to adequate nutrition and other support that pregnant women may need.
Flood's successor will be appointed to serve the remaining two years of his current term in the Legislature representing District 19 in northeast Nebraska.
A so-called trigger bill that would have banned all abortions in Nebraska in the wake of the anticipated Supreme Court decision ending the abortion rights secured by the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973 was trapped by a filibuster in the closing days of the 2022 legislative session.
Supporters fell two votes short of the 33 required to free the proposal for advancement.
That 33-vote legislative target remains the key to ending abortion rights in the state.
In answer to a separate question at the news conference, Ricketts appeared to downplay the significance of former White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson's testimony on Tuesday before the House select committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol last year.
Ricketts said the testimony describing President Donald Trump's actions and his erratic and sometimes violent behavior represented "one person's perspective" and included second- or third-hand observations.
By Don Walton

LJS: Flood defeats Pansing Brooks in House race

Overpowering a strong showing of support for Democratic nominee Patty Pansing Brooks in Lincoln, Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk won Tuesday's special congressional election and kept eastern Nebraska's 1st District seat in Republican hands.
Pansing Brooks, a Lincoln state senator, held the early lead, but Flood edged ahead during the

second hour of vote-counting and steadily moved into position to claim the seat vacated by the resignation of Rep. Jeff Fortenberry in March.

Fortenberry, who hails from Lincoln, resigned following his conviction on charges that he lied to federal officials about illegal foreign contributions to his 2016 reelection campaign, setting the stage for the first special election in the district since 1951.

The Associated Press declared Flood the winner at 10:25 p.m. Tuesday.

“Nebraskans made their voices heard loud and clear,” Flood said Tuesday night during his election night party in Norfolk. “Tonight they sent an unmistakable message to Washington that America is on the wrong track.”

Lancaster County was the only 1st District county to hand its support to Pansing Brooks, who urged voters in the final days of the campaign to "fight back at the ballot box" in support of women's rights in the wake of last week's U.S. Supreme Court ruling overturning the 1973 decision in Roe v. Wade that had guaranteed a woman's right to choose to have an abortion.

Voters in Bellevue also gave Pansing Brooks an early lead until other precincts in Sarpy County turned the tide in favor of Flood, leaving Lancaster as the only one of the dozen counties that are totally or partially in the district to give her a majority.

Flood, a former speaker of the Legislature, won by huge margins in a number of counties, gathering 80% of the vote or more in six counties, including Madison County, his home territory.

Flood will fill the remaining six months of Fortenberry's term, and Flood and Pansing Brooks will square off again in November to serve a new two-year term beginning in January.

Both won primary election nominations in May and were chosen to compete in Tuesday's special election by party leadership.

Pansing Brooks told supporters at her election night party at Alchemy in Lincoln that she was not discouraged and their work continues.

“We know where we need to work harder. We know where we need to work smarter and that’s what we’re going to do,” she said.

With Republicans in reach of achieving a House majority in November, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California came to Lincoln to campaign for Flood in advance of the special election. If Republicans seize control of the House, McCarthy is positioned to become speaker.

Flood said he'd taken a congratulatory call from McCarthy earlier Tuesday.

It’s time for an “end to Washington’s magic money machine and the inflation it’s fueled,” Flood said.

During the campaign, Flood pledged to "fight the Biden-Pelosi agenda at every turn."

“It’s time for a change in leadership,” he told his supporters Tuesday. “Nebraskans are ready for action that reflects common sense, conservative values that have made our state and our nation great.”

Democrats have not won a 1st District House contest since 1964; since then, it's been 29 straight GOP victories, counting Tuesday's special election. Republicans hold a voter registration advantage over Democrats that exceeds 94,000.

A rematch in November to serve the next two-year term is likely to center on the new incumbent's voting record.

Following Tuesday's election, Nebraska's five-member congressional delegation will include three former state senators. Sen. Deb Fischer and Rep. Adrian Smith of Gering also previously served in the nonpartisan Legislature.

The two candidates expressed stark differences on abortion rights during the closing days of the campaign.

Pansing Brooks said "a majority of Americans and Nebraskans do not agree that abortion should be illegal."
Flood praised the Supreme Court for "returning abortion-related policy decisions back to the states and the people where they belong."
Gov. Pete Ricketts, who is considering calling a special session of the Legislature later this year to consider legislation banning abortion in Nebraska, will appoint a new state senator to succeed Flood.
By Don Walton

Nebraska Examiner: Flood's close win over Pansing Brooks shows Democrats motivated, Republicans complacent

LINCOLN — Rural voters carried Republican State Sen. Mike Flood to a seat in Congress in Tuesday's special election. But State Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks' better-than-expected results in urban and suburban counties could spice up the pair's rematch this fall.
Flood collected more than 80% of the vote in five of the 1st Congressional District's rural counties: Butler, Colfax, Cuming, Polk and Stanton. He also won more than 80% of the vote in Platte County (Columbus) and in Madison County (Norfolk), where he lives.
Pansing Brooks, who lives in Lincoln, tallied more votes in Lancaster County than other Nebraska Democrats running for the House in recent years. She won 57% of the vote in her home county, which has more than half of the district's voters and most of its registered Democrats.
Flood and his team said after the win that he needs to perform better this November in Lincoln, where he served as Speaker of the Legislature. He said he did well in northeast Nebraska because people know him there from his work in Legislature and while running News Channel Nebraska.
Pansing Brooks and her allies said they know she can do better in the 1st District's rural counties. The Lincoln lawyer said she needs to spend more time sitting down with rural voters and hearing more about concerns they want addressed.

Motivation matters

Local political observers, including University of Nebraska-Lincoln political scientist John Hibbing, said Republicans appeared less motivated than Democrats to vote in the special election, because Republicans expected the GOP to win.
It had been 18 years since the 1st District seat was open. Former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., trounced his last few opponents. The next closest race to Tuesday's was Fortenberry's first, in 2004. He beat Democrat Matt Connealy 54% to 43%.
Fewer voters in the 1st District's GOP-leaning counties voted in the special election than participated a month earlier in the May 10 primary election.
Voting in each of those counties was down by at least 18%, based on a post-election analysis done for Flood's campaign. Additionally, 3% more voters showed up for the special election in Democratic-leaning Lancaster County than voted during the primary.
"The Republican voters were a little bit complacent this time," said Jessica Flanagain, senior vice president with Axiom Strategies, a political consulting firm that works with Flood and other Nebraska candidates. "They're used to having the seat, and I'm confident the margin will increase in November."

Abortion was a factor

External factors late in the race encouraged more Democrats than usual to vote — ranging from Friday's Supreme Court ruling reversing Roe v. Wade to hearings the House is holding on the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol, political observers said.

Abortion was a factor, Hibbing said. So was the unusual timing of the special election, which drove down turnout and amplified the influence of more motivated voters on the outcome. About 27% of those registered in the 1st District voted.

"I think you really had to be motivated, and the Democrats were more so," Hibbing said.

Abortion rights moved up on the list of priorities for many women the Democrats interacted with during the campaign, by texts, calls or knocks on the door, said Jane Kleeb, chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party. She expects that interest level to stay elevated this fall.

"That's the first question many voters will ask to decide whether someone is worth considering for their vote," she said.

Flood opposes abortion. He helped pass restrictions that outlawed abortion in Nebraska after 20 weeks, and he tried to help the state pass a so-called "trigger bill" that would have banned abortion in the state after the Roe decision.

Pansing Brooks is an abortion-rights candidate who has framed attacks on abortion as attacks on women's bodily autonomy. She has said it's not a far climb from outlawing abortion to doing the same for same-sex marriage or certain methods of contraception.

Both candidates have said they are not as radical as the other side paints them. Flood said he wants Nebraska to make sure any abortion ban protects in vitro fertilization. Pansing Brooks said she wants the state to help mothers who choose to have their babies.

One Republican consultant said the GOP's problem on the issue is that its voters are feeling happy and hopeful after the Supreme Court's decision. Democrats, by contrast, are feeling angry and scared. Anger and fear are better motivators, the observer said.

Different race this fall

Flanagain said this fall's race will focus more on economic issues like inflation, the farther voters get from the Roe decision. But she said more anti-abortion Nebraskans will be motivated to vote as they realize states still need to restrict abortion post-Roe.

Chris Triebsch, Pansing Brooks' campaign manager, said abortion will remain important to many Democrats. Some of her supporters said they wouldn't vote for Pansing Brooks in the special election because they were worried about losing her in the Legislature and having Gov. Pete Ricketts, an abortion opponent, pick her replacement.

A bill that would have banned abortions in Nebraska fell two votes short of passage last session.

Triebsch said the Pansing Brooks campaign thinks her vote support can improve in suburban Sarpy County, where she finished within 6 percentage points, and in exurban Cass County, where she secured 35% of the vote.

Redistricting made the Lincoln-centric district slightly more Democratic and slightly more nonpartisan than in 2020 by adding more of Omaha's southern suburbs into the 1st District.

Both campaigns said potential voters in Papillion and La Vista did not know they are no longer in the Omaha-based 2nd Congressional District, represented by U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb. The bulk of both cities have been moved into the 1st District.

Kleeb said Pansing Brooks can also close the gap this fall in rural Nebraska with outside investment in rural organizing from national Democrats, if they decide to help her. The aim is to reach enough people to lose in rural counties 70% to 30%, not 80% to 20%.

Pansing Brooks is meeting with the Democratic National Campaign Committee and others in the coming days, Kleeb said.
During the special election, Flood outspent Pansing Brooks by more than $300,000, based on campaign finance reports. The Pansing Brooks campaign said Flood outspent her on TV ads 10-to-1. Her campaign had more than $350,000 in cash on hand at the end of the campaign.
A former Nebraska Democratic Party official said Pansing Brooks and congressional Democrats should have spent more on the special election because they could have won. Triebsch said he understands the urge to look back but said Pansing Brooks restrained spending on the special election to focus on this fall.
"Given that last-minute enthusiasm, we could second-guess," Triebsch said. "But we still feel like we are on the front end of that momentum."
GOP has edge, Dems a chance
Republicans hold a 16-point advantage in voter registrations in the revamped 1st District. This fall, more 1st District residents will have more reasons to vote, said Richard Witmer, a political scientist at Creighton University.
Having the governor's race on the ballot will help, he said. So will the typical November timing. Special elections, he said, are "just their own breed of cat."
"It's good news for Flood if turnout increases in the fall," Witmer said. "He's likely to win by a larger margin. If turnout is higher in the Lincoln area, she can keep it close."
Also on Wednesday, Ricketts called for applicants to fill Flood's soon-to-be-open legislative seat in northeast Nebraska's District 19.
Applications from people ages 21 and older who have lived in Madison County or southern Pierce County for at least a year will be accepted until 5 p.m. July 8. The governor's appointee will finish the remainder of Flood's term, through early 2025.
Those interested can apply online at governor.nebraska.gov/board-comm-req. Applicants can include a resume, cover letter and other materials with their application.
By Aaron Sanderford

OWH: Ricketts seeking applicants to replace Flood in Nebraska Legislature

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts is wasting no time in seeking applicants to replace State Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk in the Nebraska Legislature.
Flood, a Republican, won a special election Tuesday to fill out the remaining months of former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry's term representing Nebraska's 1st Congressional District. The election will not be certified until July 15.
But Ricketts announced Wednesday that he would start accepting applications from residents of Legislative District 19 wanting to fill the upcoming vacancy. The appointee will serve the remainder of Flood's current term, which expires in early January 2025.
The appointee may have his or her first taste of legislative action this year if Ricketts calls lawmakers into special session on abortion in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling overturning the Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion nationwide.

Nebraska, under legislation Flood introduced and shepherded to passage in 2010, currently allows abortions until the 20th week after fertilization. Ricketts has said he supports a ban on abortions, including in cases of rape or incest. But a proposed ban fell two votes short during this year's regular legislative session.

Abortion opponents gained one vote when Ricketts appointed Kathleen Kauth to replace Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha, who died in office. He was absent from the vote on the failed ban earlier this year.

During a press conference Wednesday, Ricketts said he plans on appointing an abortion opponent to replace Flood, given that he believes constituents in the district are also against abortion.

But opponents will need to find another vote for a special session to succeed.

Ricketts said Flood's victory Tuesday over Patty Pansing Brooks, a Democrat and supporter of abortion rights, won't have much impact on he likelihood of him calling a special session.

However, a Pansing Brooks victory Tuesday would have likely given anti-abortion lawmakers another vote in the Legislature.

Knowing that reality, some people, including Pansing Brooks' husband, Loel Brooks, speculated that voters who otherwise would have voted for Pansing Brooks may have stayed home.

Ricketts said he still needs to talk with Speaker of the Legislature Mike Hilgers of Lincoln about a potential special session. He said he is considering the fact that the Legislature's former attempt at an abortion ban failed, and that any future legislation should be clear about not including in vitro fertilization in the ban, which was a sticking point for some opponents.

District 19 represents Madison County and the southern portion of Pierce County. Applicants must have lived within the district for at least a full year, be registered to vote and be at least 21 years old. Applications are due by the end of the day July 8. Ricketts said he was reserving the right to seek out additional qualified candidates.

Interested individuals may complete an application for executive appointment online at governor.nebraska.gov/board-comm-req. Applicants may include a cover letter, résumé and any additional background materials with their applications.

Questions about the application process can be directed to Kathleen Dolezal with the governor's office at 402-471-2256 or kathleen.dolezal@nebraska.gov.

By Martha Stoddard and Erin Bamer

Scottsbluff SH: Senator John Stinner honored for a job well done

After almost eight years of serving in the Nebraska Legislature, Sen. John Stinner will leave office this year.

Members of the Scottsbluff/Gering United Chamber of Commerce's Government Affairs Committee threw him a celebratory luncheon at the Gering Civic Center Wednesday to thank him for his service and hear his report on this year's legislative session.

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Karen Anderson said they hold legislative wrap-up sessions every year, usually in June, regardless of who represents the district.

"In the past, we've done just breakfast or coffee at the Chamber ... but since we figured this is going to be the last time he's going to do a legislative wrap-up, we wanted to step it up a little bit, so we

decided to do a little lunch," Anderson said.
The Chamber staff also gifted Stinner a photograph by office assistant Jodi Lewellen. The artistic piece showcases the Scotts Bluff National Monument reflected in a glass ball in Lewellen's hand.
"There are many times where he said 'Well, if I had a crystal ball' so this is his crystal ball. It shows her hand, and we were in good hands with him. It shows the monument, and he was monumental," Anderson explained. "... We just wanted to say thank you because he's really done a great job. This is kind of his swan song for his legislative wrap-up."
Generally, she said, about 20 people attend the Chamber's legislative catch-up meetings with the senator, and a similar number came out to recognize him on Wednesday.
Stinner said this year's legislative session had been a short one. He discussed some of the appropriations the legislature passed, including one focusing on rail parks. He talked about the Unicameral's failure to pass meaningful prison reform. He also mentioned the property, corporate, income and Social Security tax relief the Unicameral was able to complete and how the state's budgets have been impacted by stimulus packages and inflation.
After Stinner spoke, guests dined on pulled pork sandwiches, potato salad and strawberry spinach salad. When they were done eating, he answered a handful of questions from the audience.
When Stinner was done answering questions, Gering Mayor Tony Kaufman and Kevin Spencer, Scottsbluff chief of police and current president of the Police Chiefs Association of Nebraska, came up to the podium to honor him further.
"We've had tremendous leadership in Lincoln, and ... we get to claim them back home," Kaufman said before presenting Stinner with a key to the City of Gering.
Spencer presented Stinner with the key to the City of Scottsbluff on behalf of Mayor Jeanne McKerrigan, who was unable to attend the luncheon. He also gave Stinner the official patch and coin of the Scottsbluff Police Department. This was only the fourth time he had given someone those honors, he said.
"(Stinner) guided us through some big pieces of legislation," Spencer said, "...and it wasn't but a few months ago we were at a bill signing and the message at that meeting was, with the rest of the nation considering defunding their police forces, Nebraska is funding theirs. The support that you and the other senators have given law enforcement is phenomenal."
Though this was his final wrap-up session, Stinner will still represent the 48th District through the end of the year. The Chamber of Commerce will host a legislative preview meeting in December featuring Stinner, his successor and, potentially, Gov. Pete Ricketts as well.
Dawne Wolfe of the Government Affairs Committee was among those who said Stinner had served well during his tenure in office.
"I think each one of us in this room could spend hours talking about the great things he's done not only for the state of Nebraska but for western Nebraska."
By Christopher Borro

Nebraska Examiner: Ricketts calls Jan. 6 hearings a 'partisan rehash of mostly old information'

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts on Wednesday called the congressional hearings into the Jan. 6

insurrection at the U.S. Capitol a “partisan rehash of mostly old information.”
The Republican governor was asked his opinion of the hearings during a press conference.
On Tuesday, Cassidy Hutchinson, a key aide to White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows at the time of the attack, provided explosive testimony describing how then-President Donald Trump knew the angry mob descending on the Capitol had guns and other weapons, that the former president did nothing to stop the violent attack, and that he ignored pleas to call for their retreat.

Keep hearings ‘in perspective’

Ricketts, who said last week he wasn’t paying much attention to the hearings, on Wednesday said that people need to keep the testimony “in perspective.”
“Ms. Hutchinson, she is reciting things that are second- or third-hand,” Ricketts said.
He said viewers of the hearings should not “fall into the same trap” as the Washington Post, which had to publish a correction to a January 2021 story maintaining that Trump had pressured a Georgia election investigator to “find the fraud” in the 2020 voting and become “a national hero.”
The Post’s correction later said those quotes were wrong and that Trump had instead urged the investigator to scrutinize ballots in Georgia, asserting she would find “dishonesty” there.

Need the ‘whole story’

“You have to have the whole story here,” Ricketts said of the recent testimony in Congress. “We’re getting one person’s perspective. It’s third-hand.”
When asked by a Nebraska Examiner reporter if Republicans in Congress should have placed members on the committee that would cross-examine witnesses, therefore providing a wider perspective, that’s when Ricketts responded that it was a “rehash of mostly old information.”
Not everyone has agreed with Ricketts’ assessment. On Tuesday, State Sen. John McCollister of Omaha, who is also a Republican, tweeted that “if you are a Republican politician who CONTINUES to bury your head in the sand to Donald Trump’s criminality, you are complicit. History will not remember you fondly.”
Hutchinson testified that Trump, besides trying to subvert the election results and doing nothing to stop a violent attack on the Capitol, tried to wrestle control of a vehicle away from the Secret Service to steer it to the Capitol and expressed support for the mob chanting to hang Vice President Mike Pence.
“Donald Trump is a mob boss,” McCollister also tweeted.
A week ago, when asked about the hearings, Ricketts said that he was too busy with the state’s business to watch the hearings and that Nebraskans were more concerned about inflation and the high price of fuel.

Complicated relationship

Trump and the Ricketts family, wo are major contributors to Republican and conservative causes, have had a complicated relationship. The family was initially opposed to Trump’s candidacy, giving $5.5 million to a PAC working to block his nomination. But later, when Trump became the clear frontrunner, the Ricketts family became major donors.
More recently, Gov. Ricketts and Trump diverged on who to support in the GOP primary for Nebraska governor. Ricketts endorsed and campaigned for University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen, who won the primary. Trump endorsed and made an appearance in Nebraska for Falls City businessman Charles Herbster.
The governor did not answer a question posed last week about whether he would vote for Trump if he ran again for the presidency in 2024.
By Paul Hammel

Rapid City Journal: Concerns arise over dueling Medicaid ballot measures

Some advocates for Medicaid expansion in South Dakota are concerned that two ballot measures with different language and separate backers but the same goals may confuse or diffuse voters, reducing the chances of success in the November election.

The ACA in 2010 expanded Medicaid to include nearly all adults with incomes up to 138% of the federal poverty level, which currently translates to an annual salary of about $18,000 for an individual (or $36,500 for a family of four). But the Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that states could reject the expansion and still get federal funding for traditional Medicaid costs, which all states currently receive.

South Dakota is one of just 12 states that hasn't expanded Medicaid, making it an outlier even among neighboring Republican-led states such as North Dakota, Iowa and Nebraska. But expansion proponents are optimistic after seeing voters reject Amendment C – which would have made ballot measures involving state spending more difficult to pass – in the primary election June 7 with 67% of the vote.

Constitutional Amendment D, which is sponsored by South Dakotans Decide Healthcare and will appear on the November ballot, seeks to expand Medicaid by changing the state constitution, viewed traditionally as a more iron-clad method of initiating new policies. Amendment D is supported by the state's major healthcare systems and the Fairness Project, a national advocacy group that assists in ballot measure campaigns.

The second Medicaid ballot measure, Initiated Measure 28, is spearheaded by former Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Rick Weiland, a frequent supporter of ballot measures who successfully campaigned to increase South Dakota's minimum wage in 2014. Weiland's group, Dakotans for Health, initially presented its measure as a way to give voters another option in case the 60% voting threshold was passed into law by the June primary vote.

"Historically, initiated measures have fared better than constitutional amendments," said Weiland. "There are groups of voters who just don't like to mess with the constitution and could see Medicaid expansion as more appropriately accomplished by statutory measure."

Since Amendment D had a later filing deadline to the Secretary of State's office, the fiscal note from the Legislative Research Council includes additional offsets extended by the Biden Administration as part of the American Rescue Plan, showing the state's share over the first five years of Medicaid expansion to be a total of $3.8 million. That information is not reflected in IM 28's fiscal note, nor does that measure specify an implementation date.

These differences – plus the significant financial backing of South Dakota's "big three" health systems: Sanford, Avera and Monument – led state Sen. Reynold Nesiba, a Sioux Falls Democrat who supports Amendment D, to call for Weiland to pull Initiated Measure 28 off the Nov. 8 ballot to create a unified statewide effort.

"Rick Weiland and the people bringing the initiated measure need to withdraw it," Nesiba told News Watch. "It's got an inferior fiscal note attached to it, it doesn't have an implementation date, and the constitutional amendment will have a more definitive impact."

Weiland, whose efforts to coordinate a petition-led campaign to pass Medicaid expansion date back to 2019, chuckled when informed of Nesiba's remarks.

"Give me a break," said Weiland, who served as an advisor to former U.S. Senator Tom Daschle. "The language in both these initiatives accomplish the same thing, and the implementation date is written into state law. As for voters being confused, there are only three measures on the ballot (the two Medicaid proposals and IM 27, which would legalize recreational marijuana). I don't think that's going to be too overwhelming for people."

If both ballot measures pass and have the same intent, state law dictates that "the initiated measure or amendment receiving the greatest number of affirmative votes at the election shall be given effect."

That provision could be construed as the measures competing against each other, though their aim is the same. The deadline to voluntarily remove a ballot measure is 120 days before the election (July 12 in this case), but so far both groups are holding firm.

"We are fully focused on campaigning for and passing a constitutional amendment that will expand Medicaid in South Dakota," said Zach Marcus, a spokesperson for South Dakotans Decide Healthcare.

General agreement on intent

One thing the factions agree on is that chronically underfunded Indian Health Service facilities and rural health clinics and nursing homes will receive a boost from federal Medicaid reimbursements if more low-income patients are covered. In addition to the 90% federal matching rate, states that implement expansion also see an increase in funding for traditional Medicaid populations under COVID-related American Rescue Plan provisions.

In South Dakota, the total cost of expansion over the first five years would amount to about $1.5 billion, of which the state's share would be $166.2 million, according to the Legislative Research Council. Since total savings to the general fund – from federal matching and incentive funds and fewer reimbursement payments to hospitals for treating uninsured patients – is estimated at $162.4 million over that five-year period, the state's net financial obligation would be $3.8 million.

"It will cost us less to expand Medicaid than it cost to buy the governor a new airplane," said Nesiba, referring to the state's $4.5 million purchase of a 2015 Beechcraft King Air 350 last year. "The failure of South Dakota to take this step is one of the most short-sighted economic decisions we have ever made."

Under South Dakota's current (non-expanded) Medicaid system, two-thirds of the roughly 130,000 enrollees are children who meet poverty level guidelines, while eligible adults include pregnant women, elderly or disabled individuals and parents of minor children up to 52% of the poverty level (for a household with three people, that means an annual salary of about $11,300).

Childless adults without a disability are ineligible for Medicaid coverage in South Dakota regardless of income level, and many don't qualify for ACA subsidies to help obtain private coverage unless their income is at least 100% of the poverty level.

The number of these residents who "fall through the cracks" of health insurance coverage is estimated at 42,500 in South Dakota, just under 5% of the total population. Nearly 40% of them are estimated to be Native American, according to Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute, compared with about 9% of the general population that is Native American.

The federal government pays 58% of the cost of standard Medicaid coverage, with slight increases made during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under Medicaid expansion, the federal government share increases sharply, especially with incentives added as part of the American Rescue Plan.

A study of state budgets from 2014-2017 by the Commonwealth Fund, a nonprofit that supports research on health policy reform, found that Medicaid expansion was associated with a 4.4% to 4.7% reduction in state spending on traditional Medicaid while also reducing the cost of uncompensated care, such as when the state reimburses hospitals for services provided to uninsured individuals.
Deb Fischer-Clemens, Avera Health senior vice president for public policy and a supporter of Amendment D, said that expanding coverage to uninsured residents helps not just those individuals or families but also entities that might incur those costs down the line, including state or county government, non-profit health systems or taxpayers.
"There's a lack of preventative care when you don't have insurance," said Fischer-Clemens, a former state legislator who also serves as president of the South Dakota Nurses Association. "When you don't have a lot of money, you're using it all to pay for rent or groceries or gas, meaning you're not getting that preventative colonoscopy. And when you find out there's something wrong with you, instead of a couple thousand dollars, it's tens of thousands of dollars, and a lot of time away from work and a lot of debt. The big picture of this is taking care of individuals who don't have the resources to access care at the appropriate time."
Medicaid expansion opponents, including GOP Gov. Kristi Noem and Republican Senate President Pro Tempore Lee Schoenbeck, counter that able-bodied individuals, such as currently uncovered childless adults, should be able to work and are not entitled to free health care. They also point to uncertainty about the state's share of expenses once COVID-related incentives from the Biden administration phase out and the nation's public health emergency expires, which is expected later this year.
Schoenbeck, who declined an interview request, made his position clear when asked about Medicaid expansion during a Senate primary event in May.
"I don't happen to support more welfare," he said.

Expansion talks fizzle in state government

In 2016, two years after being re-elected as South Dakota governor with more than 70% of the vote, Dennis Daugaard undertook an effort to expand Medicaid despite lingering rancor toward "Obamacare" among most of his fellow Republicans.
The fiscally conservative Daugaard saw it as a good deal for South Dakota, since the state was already paying in part for Native American residents who couldn't receive care at reservation IHS facilities because of lack of services or availability. The U.S. Health and Human Services Department agreed to an arrangement where those treated outside IHS facilities would be covered by federal Medicaid matching funds.
The problems Daugaard faced were not procedural but political, as state Republicans balked at expanding the ACA, the outgoing Obama's signature achievement, and voiced their concerns about government handouts for adults who were able to work and fend for themselves.
The governor convened a Health Care Solutions Coalition, which produced a 2016 report that found the state spent $182 million on health care for Native Americans in fiscal year 2015, about $97 million of which was federal funds and $85 million was state funds. The report noted that "$85 million is more than enough to cover state costs for expansion."
With legislative action stalled, Daugaard tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a work requirement provision with the federal government. Donald Trump's victory in 2016 – along with Trump's proclaimed goal to repeal the ACA – ended what little momentum had occurred, especially after Daugaard met with then-Vice President Mike Pence and discussed the new administration's repeal strategy, which ultimately failed in Congress.

Fischer-Clemens, who served on Daugaard's coalition, joined with other hospital officials and health associations to consider a new course, especially after Noem took office following the 2018 election and declared her opposition to Medicaid expansion. Advocacy groups in states such as Nebraska, Oklahoma, Missouri, Utah and Idaho had found success by taking the issue straight to voters with petition-fueled ballot measures, and that became the strategy.

"After seeing so many bills fail in committee over the years, we knew we couldn't do it with legislative movement," said Fischer-Clemens. "The philosophy in the Legislature is basically, 'We've done enough with Medicaid, and if the federal government takes dollars away, then it's going to lead to higher taxes.' There was nowhere else to go."

Taking issues straight to ballot

There were some early discussions with Weiland, who was well-versed in the ballot measure process and knew of its pitfalls. After his successful effort to raise the state's minimum wage in 2014, state legislators voted to exempt workers under age 18 from the required wage, so Weiland and other Democrats referred the law back to voters and won with 71% of the vote.

Two years later, Weiland spearheaded an electoral victory for IM 22, which revised lobbying and campaign finance laws while establishing a state ethics commission. But Republican legislators sought a preliminary injunction and later repealed the measure with an emergency clause that ensured it could not be sent back to voters.

Those South Dakota efforts against initiated measures, and delays in Nebraska as Gov. Pete Ricketts sought to restrict the implementation of voter-approved Medicaid expansion for several years, convinced South Dakotans Decide Healthcare and the Fairness Project that a constitutional amendment was the most logical course.

They used paid petition circulators to speed the process and submitted 47,000 signatures last November with the Secretary of State's office, announcing in January that the proposal had qualified for the November 2022 ballot officially as Amendment D.

"We had seen some of the things that the legislature does with initiated measures," said Fischer-Clemens. "Then some of us watched what was happening in Nebraska and basically said, 'We don't want to go through that – we're not going to live that long.' In the end we were more confident that we could reach our goal with a constitutional amendment."

Weiland, however, points to Amendment A, the South Dakota recreational marijuana effort that passed with 54% of the vote in 2020. Noem's administration challenged the measure, saying it violated the state's requirement that constitutional amendments deal with just one subject, and won a 4-1 decision at the South Dakota Supreme Court that prevented legalization from taking place.

That single-subject clause had been a response to IM 22, meant to discourage sweeping voter-based changes to state law. When it became clear that Medicaid expansion would be on the ballot in 2022, Sen. Schoenbeck tried to orchestrate a preemptive strike with Amendment C, which was backed by the Koch Brothers-funded Americans for Prosperity and would have required a 60% vote for ballot measures that raise taxes or spend $10 million in general funds in their first five years.

The resounding failure of Amendment C was viewed by some as a message from voters to lay off the petition process, which Weiland interpreted as a potential buffer for initiated measures as well. He noted that state Sen. Wayne Steinhauer, R-Hartford, who chairs the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, led an effort during the 2022 legislative session to endorse or prepare for Medicaid expansion, a proposal that fell short but indicated a desire to get out in front of voter-backed measures. Steinhauer did not respond to an interview request.

“I think state legislators realize that they’re on thin ice when it comes to messing around with the will of voters,” said Weiland, whose group’s measure was certified June 9 by the Secretary of State’s office with 17,249 valid signatures (the threshold is 16,961). “We have a chance to hold their feet to the fire, because they mis-stepped on minimum wage, they mis-stepped on corruption, they mis-stepped on cannabis and they’re getting tired of mis-stepping. This whole notion that the only way to get things done is through constitutional amendment is not really the case anymore. I hope they both pass. We’re encouraging people to vote for both.”

Finding support for Native populations

One of the most persuasive arguments for expanding Medicaid is its ability to address long-standing health care concerns that plague tribal communities in South Dakota, which has the fourth-highest percentage of Native American residents in the country.

A 2021 study by the Health Policy Institute at Georgetown found several predominantly Native counties (Buffalo, Oglala Lakota, Todd) with at least four times the national average of uninsured non-elderly adults.

Remi Bald Eagle, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe who is part of the Dakotans for Health group, pointed to the limitations of IHS services on reservations and noted how Medicaid expansion could improve the level of care.

Some Native residents don’t live close to an IHS facility, or they require services that aren’t provided. Expanding Medicaid would allow those patients to be referred to other hospitals or clinics, which would then be reimbursed. Currently, referrals are determined by a “triage” system, meaning cases are prioritized by level of medical severity.

“IHS facilities have a capped budget they operate under,” said Bald Eagle, a former Democratic candidate for public utilities commissioner. “If a person’s condition is not seen as high priority, that person might not get referred.” He added that third-party billing through Medicaid expansion could potentially help IHS facilities expand services or upgrade medical personnel.

Among Native Americans with IHS access, Medicaid enrollment increased by 45% in expansion states and 25% in non-expansion states from 2010 to 2018, according to the IHS Tribal Self-Governance Advisory Committee.

Montana, which approved Medicaid expansion in 2016, saw more than 15,000 tribal members newly enrolled in Medicaid in the first two years, according to the state Department of Public Health and Human Services. The tribal and IHS facilities on the Blackfeet Reservation in northern Montana saw an additional $13.6 million for services reimbursed by the federal government during that time.

Bald Eagle supports the initiated measure but said both proposals are encouraging to many in South Dakota – not as government handouts, but as ways to address problems that low-income residents and health providers have faced for a long time.

“It’s unfortunate that this life-saving issue has turned into a political bogeyman that people can use as a scare tool,” he said. “The more people you have using these services, the more it helps everyone, not just Indian Country, but South Dakota as a whole.”

By Stu Whitney

LJS: Nebraska Public Service Commission will conduct reverse auction to expand broadband

The Nebraska Public Service Commission will conduct a reverse auction to fund $13 million of broadband expansion in certain areas of the state.
Broadband companies can apply to take part in the auction through July 15, with the reverse auction set to take place Aug. 8.
In the reverse auction, each census block will receive a starting price, and through successive rounds, companies will lower their bid until a winner is determined.
Winners will be required to demonstrate they can provide broadband speeds of 100 Mbps download and upload to a certain number of areas within the census block.
The funds to pay for expanding high-speed internet access come from redistribution of the Nebraska Universal Service Fund.
The targeted areas are mainly in south-central and northeast Nebraska.
"We see this as another tool along with other NUSF programs and the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Grant Program to get broadband into our rural areas," said Commission Chairman Dan Watermeier.
The Public Service Commission approved the process for the reverse auction in March.
By Chris Dunker

LJS: 'Unbeatable success' — Nebraska colleges, universities reflect on 50 years of support from Pell Grant

Like thousands of students across the country, Abby Steffen was unsure of how she was going to pay for a college education.
The sophomore-to-be at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln said she didn't qualify for a Pell Grant when she first submitted her Free Application for Financial Student Aid, known as FAFSA, the document used to determine how much help she would be eligible to receive.
The oldest of eight children from a farm family that lives near Crofton, Steffen was assigned a high expected family contribution, meaning she'd have to find other ways to pay tuition and other costs.
"I was really considering dropping out for a year and working because I wasn't sure how I would be able to afford everything," said Steffen, who worked a second job during the school year, and took on a handful of others this summer.
But when she asked the Office of Federal Student Aid at the U.S. Department of Education to reconsider, citing special circumstances, Steffen learned that she would, in fact, be eligible to receive a Pell Grant.
The Pell Grant, which celebrated its 50th anniversary earlier this month, offers up to $6,895 in financial aid to students who demonstrate need, in order for them to pursue a college degree.
The money does not have to be paid back.
Steffen said learning she was eligible for a Pell Grant altered her future: "College is very stressful as it is, and I know a lot of students are very grateful for the Pell Grant."
According to data collected by the U.S. Department of Education and published through the College Scorecard, roughly 36% of students attending Nebraska's public and private colleges and universities received a Pell Grant in the 2019-20 school year.
At UNL, the number of recipients increased from 4,046 in 2010-11 to a high of 4,757 in 2017-18,

before leveling off at 4,481 in 2020-21, the office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics reported.

For first-time, full-time students, the number of Pell Grant recipients has jumped from 966 to 1,208 in the decade between 2010 to 2020.

As the number of students who receive Pell Grants has increased, so too has the average amount awarded, by a little more than $500, according to UNL.

In 2010-11, undergraduate students at UNL received an average grant of $3,813; the average rose to $4,489, while the average Pell Grant to first-time, full-time students increased from $3,728 to $4,489 over the same time period.

Other schools, including other campuses across the NU system, the Nebraska State College System, and community colleges across the state, as well as private colleges and universities, have also seen success among students who qualify for federal assistance.

At the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the University of Nebraska at Kearney, for example, roughly 34% and 36% of the student body received a Pell Grant in the 2019-20 school year, according to the College Scorecard.

NU President Ted Carter, who knew Sen. Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island for whom the grant is named — Pell wrote Carter's nomination letter to the U.S. Naval Academy in 1977 — said the award, when combined with a competitive tuition rate and support from private donors, "adds up to a story of unbeatable success."

About one-third of students who attend state college campuses in Peru, Wayne and Chadron used a Pell Grant to pay part of their way, most of whom are first-generation college students, Chancellor Paul Turman said. That's up slightly over the numbers from a decade ago.

The current funding of the Pell Grant — about $5,600 per semester — pays the full tuition rate for state colleges, and would cover additional costs of those students.

"The vision for those Pell Grants, when that program was first put in place, is how do we find opportunities for the students to continue their education?" he said. "If you look at all of our aid collectively, Pell is probably the biggest bucket our families draw from."

UNL Chancellor Ronnie Green said the support offered by the Pell Grant has played an important role for the 1 out of every 5 students who receive financial help from the federal government to go to college.

The Pell Grant is often "first-dollar" aid, reducing the $25,000 cost of attendance at UNL by $4,500 on average before other aid is applied.

"When you look at the level of support those students need in order to not go to school with a lot of debt, that's significant," Green said. "Pell becomes the foundation on which we stack all of the other aid to try and minimize the cost for these students."

That has helped UNL keep the average debt students graduate with at roughly $24,500, according to the Institute for College Access and Success, which is below both the state average of $30,500 and the national average of $32,700.

Green is a direct beneficiary of the Pell Grant program. As a first-generation student at Virginia Tech University in 1979 "who would have qualified for Nebraska Promise," Green received federal assistance.

Stacked with other scholarships, the grant helped Green graduate with no college debt — he acknowledges the difference in cost some four decades later — but says Pell helped him in ways similar to how it helps students now.

"I didn't work a lot when I was in college — I worked some as a student worker — but I was able to

go full-time as a student and not have to worry about 20-30 hours of workload a week," he said. "I was able to finish in 3 1/2 years instead of 5 or 6 years."

Reducing the need to work several jobs in addition to taking a full slate of classes is something more recent college students have experienced as well.

For Sadid Carrillo, who graduated from UNL in 2013 with a degree in finance and accounting, the Pell Grant allowed him to not only attend UNL, but to take part in opportunities he otherwise wouldn't have been able to pursue.

"The core of it, in my opinion, is that it just helped me focus on school," said Carrillo. "For me, I wouldn't have had the confidence or the overall ability to stay in school if not for the Pell Grant."

The oldest of five children, Carrillo said his parents couldn't cover the full cost of attendance at UNL. Under the Pell Grant program, however, the Schuyler native qualified for the maximum amount, roughly $5,000 a semester at the time.

When he considered dropping out and following his parents to work at Cargill — it was for "school reasons" and not financial, he said — Carrillo said he surveyed the wide assortment of help he had been offered and decided to stay.

That led to a college degree and, eventually, a job as a bank examiner at the Omaha office of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City.

"If it wasn't for the Pell Grant, I don't think I would have stayed in school," he said. "All of those resources definitely made the picture of going to college much more realistic and more possible."

By Chris Dunker

OWH: 55 nonprofits get combined $15 million of Omaha's federal COVID recovery money

Fifty-five local nonprofits will receive a combined $15 million in grants from the City of Omaha's allotment of federal American Rescue Plan Act money for pandemic recovery.

The grants, ranging in size from $50,000 for the 100 Black Men of Omaha to over $700,000 for Siena Francis House, will go to a wide variety of organizations that provide a host of human services, according to a list announced Wednesday by Mayor Jean Stothert and officials of the Omaha Community Foundation and United Way of the Midlands. The city contracted with the two nonprofits to manage the distribution of the money.

The selected organizations should begin receiving the grants in July. The money comes out of the City of Omaha's $112 million allotment from the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act, an economic recovery initiative of President Joe Biden's that Congress passed in 2021.

The grant program represents the single largest investment of funding the City of Omaha has ever made in the nonprofit community, the Mayor's Office said. Stothert called it a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity Wednesday.

The city allotted $10 million to the Omaha Community Foundation to distribute to nonprofits for programs including gang prevention and intervention, mental health, crisis response and assistance to unemployed workers, including workforce readiness training, certification and employment services.

United Way of the Midlands received $5 million to give to organizations that address such basic

needs as access to food, shelter and health care, as well as behavioral and mental health services, health promotion and education, financial literacy, family support and services for people experiencing homelessness.

The agencies sought to expand or enhance existing programs with the ability to sustain themselves beyond this infusion of one-time funding, officials said Wednesday. Nonprofits applied for grants through the United Way of the Midlands and Omaha Community Foundation.

Some of the larger amounts are $637,560 to Heartland Family Services, $610,000 to OneWorld Community Health Centers and $600,000 to Heartland Workforce Solutions. The Charles Drew Health Center will receive $600,000 for community-based crisis intervention, and Completely Kids will receive a combined $560,000 for three programs: out of school time for vulnerable youth, weekend food and mental health services for youths and families.

A complete list of grant recipients is on the City of Omaha website.

Leaders at United Way of the Midlands and the Omaha Community Foundation said they received many more applications than could be funded.

"The pandemic brought new challenges and it also revealed barriers to opportunity and widened gaps for many families," said Shawna Forsberg, president and CEO of United Way of the Midlands. "The ARPA dollars target high-need populations, agencies that have demonstrated specific and compelling uses of funding that respond to COVID and assist with recovery throughout the community."

Stephen Jackson, chief operating officer of North Omaha Area Health, said the nonprofit will be able to expand mental health support for people seeking services at its free clinic. He said the grants will help meet community needs that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Jackson said he was thankful to Biden, Congress and the city.

"They did acknowledge this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Jackson said. "However, the needs aren't once in a lifetime. The needs are ongoing."

By Christopher Burbach

LJS Editorial, 6/30: Study will save time, money, pain down the line

The Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska wants an environmental impact study on a pair of proposed carbon dioxide pipelines before permits are granted to build thousands of miles of pipeline across several Great Plains states to carry gas from ethanol plants to sequestration sites deep underground in North Dakota and Illinois.

The surprise, frankly, is that such a study is not already underway and the permitting process is moving forward without such an assessment.

In fact, a study of the proposals should, if it is found to have little negative environmental impact, reduce opposition to the pipelines, make it easier to obtain the rights to build the lines on private land and reassure the public that the pipelines will have the benefits its proponents claim.

By sequestering carbon dioxide, Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solutions, which is proposing some 2,000 miles of pipelines, and Navigator Ventures, which has proposed 1,300 miles, could take advantage of a tax credit passed in 2008 that would provide $50 for every ton of carbon stored for

up to 12 years – a recognition of the need to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to combat global warming.
Ethanol plants have been eager to sign up for the project because moving the CO2 will reduce their "carbon intensity" scores, maintaining their access to markets, such as California, with strict standards for fuel producers.
That would help Nebraska corn growers, who supply ethanol plants with roughly 280 million bushels of corn each year. That is nearly 40% of the corn grown in the state each year, grain that would likely have no market if the "carbon intensity" scores cannot be reduced and the plants are forced to shut down.
Opponents, however, argue that the pipeline proposals are nothing but a "cash grab," that the technology of burying carbon dioxide hasn't been proven and the project will not do enough to curb greenhouse gas emissions from the plants.
The "cash grab" allegations are, to be fair, political rhetoric aimed at stirring opponents. But the questions of the technology for transporting and burying the carbon dioxide and the amount of greenhouse gas emissions can be addressed in a study.
Permitting agencies, be they county boards in Nebraska, state agencies here and in surrounding states and at the federal level, should require such a study before giving the project a go-ahead.
Any delay created would simply be prudent and could likely prevent years of opposition over the use of eminent domain and environmental issues that, as of now, seems sure to occur, both in public bodies and the courts.

LJS: Ricketts wrong on gas prices

Possessing an MBA in marketing and finance from the prestigious University of Chicago Gov. Pete Ricketts, one would think, is capable of something more than cheap political theater regarding the high cost of gasoline. Sadly, the factual causes of high fuel prices have escaped Ricketts in in favor of the simplistic narrative "Blame Biden."
Perhaps I can help the governor. First, oil production has not fallen during the Biden administration. America produced 11.185 million barrels of crude oil per day in 2021, compared with 11.283 million a year earlier under Trump. The amount produced in Biden's first year exceeds the average daily amount produced under Trump from 2017 to 2018, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.
Second, the Keystone XL pipeline has had no effect on the current price of oil. The U.S. used nearly 20 million barrels of oil a day in 2021, while global consumption of oil was near 100 million barrels. The pipeline would have contributed less than 1% to the world supply of oil, a drop in the bucket.
Third, new drilling permits have not declined during the Biden administration,
Federal data provided by the Bureau of Land Management shows the Biden administration approved 3,557 permits for drilling on public lands in 2021 compared to 2,658 in Trumps last year.
So why is the price of gas $2 higher than when Trump left office? I think Ricketts knows the answer, the law of supply and demand. Grab that textbook Pete, it's there.
James H. Hoppe, Lincoln

AP: Democrats energized by tight race in GOP-leaning Nebraska

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A special election in Nebraska was supposed to be an easy win for House Republicans. It instead was the tightest race in decades in the GOP-dominated district, boosting confidence among Democrats hoping to energize voters by tapping into public outrage over the U.S. Supreme Court's abortion ruling.

Republicans still won the open seat as expected, but the margin surprised even some Democrats who have grown accustomed to lopsided, morale-crushing defeats.

Republican Mike Flood beat Democrat Patty Pansing Brooks with 53.2% of the vote in Tuesday's special election, according to unofficial results. Pansing Brooks received 46.8%, with less than 7,200 total votes separating the candidates. The win was the narrowest in decades in the Republican-heavy, mostly rural 1st Congressional District, which hasn't elected a Democrat to the House since 1964.

"It was a thrilling result," said Danielle Conrad, a former Democratic state lawmaker from Lincoln. "Patty far outpaced the conventional wisdom. I don't think anybody expected her to perform this well in such a tough district."

Flood and Pansing Brooks were competing to replace disgraced former U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, a Republican who routinely claimed at least 60% of the vote in his district before he was convicted in March on charges that he lied to FBI agents about an illegal campaign donation.

Fortenberry resigned shortly after a jury found him guilty and was sentenced to probation Tuesday in a federal court in Los Angeles. His departure left an open seat that needed to be filled before the November general election.

In the final days of the campaign, Pansing Brooks emphasized her support for abortion rights in response to the U.S. Supreme Court decision that overturned Roe v. Wade, the landmark 1973 case that had prevented states from banning the procedure.

Blasting the court's move as an assault on privacy, she appeared at crowded abortion-rights rallies and on street corners, where her supporters raised signs that said, "Honk for choice, vote for Patty." In a recent campaign speech, she proclaimed that the election marked "the first day in the entire country where we can fight back at the ballot box."

Flood, meanwhile, spent the final days of his campaign promising to fight inflation and casting the race as crucial for Republicans to win back a House majority and block the Biden administration's policy agenda.

Flood and Pansing Brooks will face each other again in November to determine who will serve a full term starting in January 2023. Pansing Brooks' campaign manager, Chris Triebsch, said the ruling "created a lot of momentum" that their team hopes to carry into the next contest.

"We're ecstatic to be where we're at," Triebsch said. "Obviously this gives us a really good roadmap into November, to see the areas where we can invest and improve on."

Adrienne Elrod, a Democratic political strategist who has worked at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and on Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign, said the Nebraska race was a sign of energy among Democrats following the Supreme Court ruling last week.

Pansing Brooks was "a really strong candidate and she really capitalized on the moment," Elrod said, and made clear that she would fight for abortion rights in Congress.

Elrod said national Democratic groups should see the race as a signal of momentum and consider investing in places where they might not normally think prospects are favorable.
"I think they're going to look at this as a bellwether, in a very positive way," she said.
On Tuesday night, Flood steamrolled Pansing Brooks in every rural county in the district.
But in Lancaster County, which includes progressive-leaning Lincoln, Pansing Brooks beat him by a healthy margin. Lancaster County provided nearly 75% of her total votes. The race was also tight in a portion of the district that includes suburban Omaha, which Flood narrowly won.
The 1st Congressional District became slightly less Republican in 2021 after state lawmakers redrew Nebraska's congressional districts, but the GOP still holds a towering advantage. The district has nearly 68,000 more Republicans than Democrats, according to the Nebraska secretary of state's office. And Democratic strength in Lincoln is more than offset by dozens of smaller, conservative towns that generally oppose abortion.
The results surprised national Democrats as well. Tim Persico, the executive director of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said the Nebraska race was "not on our list" of priorities because it wasn't seen as competitive. He said for Pansing Brooks to narrowly lose in a district that is still solidly Republican — and fare better there than Biden did in 2020 — is "extremely unusual."
"I think she deserves a lot of credit," Persico said. "And I also just think that it's a data point that maybe the environment is shifting."
Persico said the DCCC will evaluate whether to get involved in the general election, but the Nebraska results weren't enough to prompt an overhaul of their current strategy.
"I think that we're pretty focused on the map that we have right now," he said. "But when people are actually voting, especially post-Roe, this is a pretty interesting data point."
Flood, who lives 120 miles north of Lincoln in Republican-leaning Norfolk, said he was grateful to have won in the district. A fervent opponent of abortion, he said he would be a conservative advocate for the district but acknowledged that he needs to shore up his support around Lincoln and suburban Omaha.
"I recognize that I have work to do," he said.
By Grant Schulte and Michelle L. Price

OWH: Fortenberry wastes little time in appealing his conviction and even his probation sentence

That didn't take long.
A day after getting two years' probation, community service and a $25,000 fine for lying to federal agents investigating foreign campaign contributions, former Nebraska Rep. Jeff Fortenberry filed notice he will appeal his convictions and his sentence.
Appealing his convictions wasn't a surprise — Fortenberry, 61, has been adamant that he did nothing wrong. The same couldn't be said for the appeal of a sentence in which Fortenberry received no prison time.
The Republican from Lincoln could have received up to 15 years in prison, but Judge Stanley Blumenfeld Jr. ruled that Fortenberry's conduct was an aberration from his normally upright

character.
Technically, if the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals upheld Fortenberry's conviction but remanded his case for resentencing, Blumenfeld could impose a stiffer sentence.
Such a result wouldn't be likely but is a longshot risk. In one case where the Nebraska Supreme Court overturned a sentence in which a judge improperly quoted the Bible during the sentencing hearing, a new judge gave the defendant more prison time at resentencing.
Fortenberry had 14 days to file notice that he would appeal. It took his attorneys 24 hours.
Wednesday's filing was just a boilerplate form — both sides will file legal briefs on the matter in coming months. The crux of Fortenberry's appeal: He may have unwittingly misled federal officials investigating the crime, but any misstatements were not material or of substance to the feds' investigation.
Prosecutors have rejected that notion, noting that the jury considered the question of materiality and "swiftly" convicted Fortenberry after an eight-day trial in March.
Prosecutors also pointed out that Fortenberry lied repeatedly in an interview in his Lincoln home and in a follow-up interview in Washington, D.C., in 2019.
Although initially unaware, Fortenberry eventually was told that $30,000 in foreign "cash" was funneled to him at a suburban Los Angeles fundraiser in February 2016. The $30,000 was supplied by a controversial Nigerian billionaire, Gilbert Chagoury, as a reward for Fortenberry's support of In Defense of Christians, a group formed to protect Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East.
Prosecutors had cited Fortenberry's lack of remorse in asking Blumenfeld to reconsider and impose a prison sentence. Blumenfeld declined.
As the hearing wrapped up Tuesday, Fortenberry's attorney, John Littrell, urged the judge to reduce two parts of the sentence: his probation (from two years to one) and his fine. Littrell suggested that $25,000 was too steep for Fortenberry after his fall from grace. But prosecutors mocked any suggestion that Fortenberry is destitute.
Even after his convictions, they say, Fortenberry now works a job that pays him $144,000 a year. A court official preparing a presentence report placed his net worth at more than $1.1 million. And it doesn't appear he'll lose his federal pension, prosecutors say.
As he left the courthouse in Los Angeles Tuesday, a reporter asked Fortenberry if he would admit he made campaign mistakes.
"This is an ongoing part," Fortenberry said. "And I have a right as a citizen to continue my appeal."
By Todd Cooper

AP: Convicted ex-Nebraska Rep. Fortenberry begins appeal

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Former U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska began the process of filing an appeal Wednesday, one day after he was sentenced to two years of probation for lying to FBI agents about an illegal campaign contribution from a Nigerian billionaire.
Fortenberry, a Republican, made clear after he was found guilty in March that he intended to challenge his federal conviction.
His new attorney, Glen E. Summers, said in a statement that the federal law used to convict Fortenberry is "far too susceptible to abuse."

Fortenberry was charged federally after two meetings with FBI agents where he denied knowing that a $30,000 campaign contribution had come to him from a foreign national, which is illegal. At Fortenberry's sentencing, U.S. District Judge Stanley Blumenfeld said the congressman "turned a blind eye and deaf ear" to warnings that the donation was improper.

AP: Clinics scramble to divert patients as states ban abortion

They call her, desperate, scared and often broke. Some are rape and domestic violence victims. Others are new mothers, still breastfeeding infants. Another pregnancy so soon, they say, is something they just can't handle.

"Heart wrenching," said Angela Huntington, an abortion navigator for Planned Parenthood in Missouri, who is helping callers reschedule canceled abortion appointments — sometimes hundreds of miles away from their homes — after the fall of Roe v. Wade.

The ruling has set off a travel scramble across the country, with a growing number of states mostly banning the procedure. Clinics operators are moving, doctors are counseling crying patients, donations are pouring into nonprofits and one group is dispatching vans to administer abortion pills. Some cities — including Kansas City and St. Louis — also are drafting plans to help with the travel logistics.

Huntington has been preparing for this moment for months. Even before the U.S. Supreme Court's decision last week to end constitutional protection for abortion, the procedure had become difficult to nearly impossible to obtain in states such as Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri.

"Basically," she said, they were "living in a post Roe era."

Now a fresh round of laws are taking effect. Staff at a clinic in Nashville were flooded with calls from patients trying to understand the new legal landscape, after a federal court on Tuesday allowed the state's ban on abortion as early as six weeks into pregnancy to take effect.

In Arkansas, some patients already were headed to a Planned Parenthood clinic in Little Rock to obtain medication-induced abortions when the decision came down last week. Upon arriving, they were sent home.

"I cannot believe this is happening today," they told Huntington. Or alternatively, they muttered, their voices oozing with sarcasm: " Of course it's happening today."

Huntington and others try to help move their appointments to clinics in Kansas, Illinois and even Colorado. If a patient is broke but has access to a reliable car, Huntington can offer gas cards. She works with nonprofits to arrange commercial flights and lodging. In recent weeks, she said, a group called Elevated Access has enlisted volunteer light aircraft pilots to transport patients to abortion appointments, sometimes departing from small rural airstrips.

"It's been hell,'' said Dr. Jeanne Corwin, a gynecologist who works at a clinic in Dayton, Ohio, where most patients are being turned away after new state rules took effect banning abortions when a heartbeat can be detected. Many are being sent over the border to Indiana and the clinic's sister site in Indianapolis, where Corwin also works.

She said they are desperate, including a patient in her 30s, recently diagnosed with advanced melanoma and in her first trimester.

"She has to end her pregnancy'' so she can begin chemotherapy, and is going to Indiana, Corwin said, adding that patients who are beyond Indiana's 14-week cutoff are being sent to Illinois or

Michigan.
Time also may be short for women diverted to Indiana because lawmakers there are expected to re-consider the state's abortion laws at a special session starting July 6.
The situation is particularly difficult for immigrants, some of whom lack the documentation to take a commercial flights, said Lupe Rodríguez, executive director of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice.
"They're simply not able to go anywhere to get this care," she said, adding that the ruling has also created widespread confusion, with pregnant women fearful they could face criminal prosecution. "There's a lot of misinformation."
In Missouri, where abortions were already severely restricted, a new ban took effect Friday that only allows the procedure in "cases of medical emergency." Kansas City leaders are weighing a $300 stipend to help employees travel for an abortion. And across the state, in St. Louis, elected officials are considering another measure that would use $1 million in federal coronavirus relief funds to pay for transportation, lodging and other logistical support for abortion seekers.
"It's kind of an American nightmare that we're scrambling to find health care like this," said St. Louis Alderwoman Annie Rice, adding that she anticipated the measure would pass by mid-July. If that happens, abortion opponents have vowed to ask the state's attorney general to sue.
Just the Pill, a nonprofit health organization that helps patients obtain abortion pills, is hitting the road. It has purchased two vans — one medication van and another where surgical abortions will be done — with plans to begin operating those vans by mid- to-late-July in Colorado. The idea is to be close to the borders of states that have restricted or outlawed abortion.
Mississippi's only abortion clinic, which is nicknamed the Pink House because of its bright pink paint job, is facing closure if it loses its lawsuit that seeks to block a state law that makes most abortions illegal as of July 7.
"We're not giving up," said the clinic's owner, Diane Derzis, who plans to open a new abortion clinic called the Pink House West early next month in Las Cruces, New Mexico. "Women have always had abortions, no matter what it took."
Following the ruling, donations have been pouring in to abortion funds like South Dakota Access for Every Woman. Normally the group would get seven to 10 donations per month. Now they are getting 10 to 20 a day, said Evelyn Griesse, a co-founder of the group. The money goes straight to the abortion providers.
"If the woman says she's using some of her own personal money to pay for the abortion, we say use that money to do your travel expenses," Griesse said.
Some states are rolling out the welcome mat. Connecticut's governor has a new campaign ad that touts the state's laws protecting abortion rights for women. They include a soon-to-take-effect law that protects medical providers and patients from out-of-state legal actions.
"Women deserve the right to make their own decisions about their health care," Gov. Ned Lamont, a Democrat running for reelection in November, said in the 30-second commercial released over the weekend.
In Pennsylvania, where state law still allows abortions in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, call volume has increased by tenfold and the number of patients has tripled at Allegheny Reproductive Health Center in Pittsburgh.
"Patients are desperate and scared," said the clinic's CEO, Dr. Sheila Ramgopal, adding that it is plunging money into travel costs to help out-of-state patients — most of whom come from Ohio — afford the trip.

Pennsylvania abortion seekers also could be forced to travel, said Susan Frietsche, a staff attorney for the Women's Law Project, which represents abortion clinics in the state.
"Not because the law here has changed, but you won't be able to find an appointment soon," she said. "This is such a time-sensitive service."

Very Respectfully,

Andrew Shelburn
Digital Communications Manager

Office of Governor Pete Ricketts
CELL 402-890-2467
Andrew.shelburn@nebraska.gov
governor.nebraska.gov | **Facebook** | **Twitter**