From: Kopsa, Ryan
To: Kopsa, Ryan
Cc: Pinkerman, Justin
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 7-27-20
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Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jul 2020	3.00	-24.00	13:11
Corn	Dec 2020	2.93	-41.00	13:11
Milo	Jul 2020	3.09	-15.00	13:11
Milo	Dec 2020	3.19	-15.00	13:11
Soybeans	Jul 2020	8.05	-95.00	13:11
Soybeans	Dec 2020	8.20	-80.00	13:11
Wheat	Jul 2020	3.96	-44.00	13:11
Wheat	Jul 2021	3.95	-80.00	13:09

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NET: Legislature Adjourns For The Week Following Meltdown
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KNEB: Test Nebraska reaches milestone of testing 100,000 Nebraska residents
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OWH: High cost of insulin: Son's diabetes diagnosis prompts Nebraska father to fight back

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Stateline: Pandemic, trade deal with China fuel U.S. farmers' doubts

OWH: Ricketts urges passage of property tax relief and other priorities in waning days of session

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts used an unusual second speech to state lawmakers Friday to urge them to find "common ground" and pass a package of bills that includes a property tax relief plan.

Without providing details on where that common ground is, Ricketts used a 20-minute address to express gratitude that the state has not seen the harsh impact of COVID-19 that many other states have. He then called on the Nebraska Legislature to step up as citizens have in addressing the pandemic and pass the state's top priorities.

"I'm not saying these things are going to be easy," the governor said. "There will be passionate opinions on how to accomplish this. But just like Nebraskans stepped up, we must work together to accomplish the people's work."

His top four priorities: property tax relief, updating the state's business incentive program, setting aside $300 million in state funds for the proposed NExT Project at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha and providing a better tax break on military pensions.

Ricketts said that a new tax revenue forecast issued on Thursday should provide "guidance" to state lawmakers on how much tax relief can be included within the state budget.

That forecast was more optimistic than expected given the unemployment, struggles of agriculture and business closures caused by the coronavirus. It projected that nearly $90 million would be available for tax measures and other priorities in the current fiscal year, about $50 million less than had been forecast before the pandemic hit.

A group of state senators has already begun work on a so-called grand compromise between the property tax relief and tax incentive bills after both measures failed to advance earlier this week.

Thirteen days remain in the 2020 session, which was suspended in March due to the coronavirus.

State Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn, the main architect of the property tax relief proposal, Legislative Bill 1106, said she'd be willing to spread out the $520 million in additional state aid to K-12 schools in the bill over more than three years to make it fit within the budget, but added that her polling shows

that such relief is the top priority of Nebraska voters. The extra state aid would allow for lowered valuations on homes and farmland, lowering property taxes for schools by an average of 15%.
Another key senator on property tax issues, Sen. Tom Briese of Albion, made another pitch on Friday to "decouple" from the $250 million in income tax cuts that are part of the CARES Act passed by Congress to help businesses recover. If the state declined to allow that tax cut, it would provide the "critical" extra revenue to provide property tax relief, Briese said,
The governor traditionally gives one speech a year to the Legislature, the State of the State speech, shortly after a legislative session begins in January. But this year, after lawmakers suspended their session for four months because of the virus, Speaker of the Legislature Jim Scheer of Norfolk said he invited the governor to give a second speech.
By Paul Hammel

LJS: Governor talks coronavirus, legislative priorities with senators; restrictions lifted in more counties

Gov. Pete Ricketts addressed the Legislature on Friday morning to review Nebraska's coronavirus response and tell them his four priorities for the remaining days of the session.
He spoke by invitation from Speaker Jim Scheer, he said, because of the extraordinary times resulting from the pandemic and the interrupted session. The speaker offered that courtesy as it was reconvening and he accepted, he said.
He reviewed for them plans on testing, contact tracing, quarantine space, personal protective equipment and the efforts Nebraskans have made in stepping up and sacrificing to slow the spread of the virus.
And he encouraged senators to get four priorities done in the remaining 12 days of the session: property tax cuts, a new business tax incentives plan, the University of Nebraska Medical Center NExT project and a 50% exemption for military retirement benefit income, which is on final reading.
The NExT project, which UNMC describes as both a national defense strategy and 21st century health innovation, will be beneficial to Nebraska and create about 8,700 jobs with an average salary of $70,000 annually, Ricketts said.
"I do think it's part of the overall package that helps us get to that 33 votes (for property tax cuts and business tax incentives) by finding something where everybody can feel like they got something done out of the overall legislation," he said after the speech.
The tax cuts and tax incentives measures are stalled because Revenue Committee leaders have not been able to find the votes needed to break a filibuster on the bills.
"These are trying times," Ricketts said at a followup news conference. "I know it's difficult given the environment," in the chamber of having to wear masks and negotiate around barriers because of the coronavirus threats.
At the news conference, Ricketts told reporters he was still looking into the legality of Lancaster County's mask mandate and the consideration of a mandate in Douglas County.
"I believe we ought to continue to encourage people to wear masks," he said. "A mask is a tool to help you control the spread of the virus."
A better approach than a mandate is education and helping people understand the importance of masks. Cities don't have enough police officers to enforce a mandate, he said.
Any city or county has to have the legal authority to mandate masks, he said.
"But I think we need to be cautious about making something a crime that we want people to adopt voluntarily."
Ricketts wore a red mask into the chamber for his address but took it off to speak. A number of senators

either don't wear masks in the Capitol or take them off frequently. A handful wear them consistently, even during speeches.
He said he has been tested three times for COVID-19, and just recently got his results back in 36 hours.
On Friday, Test Nebraska, the primary virus testing program in the state, announced it reached a milestone of testing more than 100,000 since the program launched in April.
“The importance of being tested cannot be overstated,” said Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary J. Anthone in a news release. “We are seeing an increase in the number of cases in our state, and if we’re going to keep the spread of the virus under control, and open schools within the next month, it is vitally important that residents wear a mask when you go to the store, use social distancing and get tested if they believe they may have been exposed or are showing symptoms."
The state also announced it will relax coronavirus-related restrictions in more counties, moving the North Central District Health Department to Phase 4 of the state's reopening plan as of Aug. 1. The North Central District includes Antelope, Boyd, Brown, Cherry, Holt, Keya Paha, Knox, Pierce and Rock counties.
Phase 4 removes capacity restrictions on bars, restaurants, child care centers and a number of other indoor businesses. It also allows outdoor venues to operate at 100% of capacity and indoor venues such as arenas and event centers to operate at 75% of capacity, although events of 500 or more people still must submit plans to the local health department.
Phase 4 also makes social distancing a recommendation rather than a mandate.
Loup Basin, a health department that covers a nine-county area in central Nebraska, moved to Phase 4 on Friday.
By JoAnne Young

Scottsbluff SH: Gov. Ricketts outlines legislative priorities

Gov. Pete Ricketts outlined his legislative priorities during a Friday morning speech before state senators and chief among them were the stalled property tax relief and business incentives.
Ricketts outlined four priorities in a short speech before the Unicameral which has struggled with passing bills and instead spent time exchanging comments over "racist" mailers, tweets, the existence of human-caused climate change and abortion. Thirteen days remain in the 2020 session.
“I’m not saying it’s going to be easy,” Ricketts said, adding that the struggle of legislators to pass legislation was comparable to the struggle of citizens to endure COVID-19.
Among his four priorities, the property tax relief bill (LB 1106) was outlined first. The bill is sponsored by Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn and has so far seen a lot of debate but made no progress to becoming law.
The proposed bill would lower valuations and subsequently lower taxes by 15%. However, this would also reduce the revenue that schools were allowed to collect. To counter this, the bill increases state spending on education by $500 million.
The state’s education community opposes the measure entirely.
ImagiNE Nebraska Act, a business incentive package, was another of Ricketts’ call-outs. The bill (LB 720) proposed to update the current set of incentives called the Nebraska Advantage Act.
The proposed bill provides wage and income tax credits, sales and use tax refunds and exemptions, and a personal property tax exemption to businesses that met a minimum qualifying wage floor for employees.
A comprise amendment to the bill would also require those businesses to offer employees health insurance
That bill was introduced in 2019 by Sen. Mark Kolterman of Seward and is being blocked by Sen. Steve

Erdman, of Bayard, along with a collection of other rural senators.
Erdman said the bill prioritizes aid to out-of-state companies and that property tax relief would have a greater effect on Nebraska businesses.
There's been talk of packaging the property tax bill with the incentives bill for both to receive the votes they need to pass. As of the publication of this article, no such plan had been officially proposed.
The governor's other expressed priorities were the $2.6 billion the Nebraska Transformational Project (NExT) at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and the Veterans Tax Relief bill, which is scheduled for final reading.
The NEXT Project is seeking $300 million from the state to help fund the multi-billion dollar revamp of the University of Nebraska's Medical Center.
The governor also touted the state's COVID-19 response and economic resilience.
Senators held an early session Friday, before leaving at lunch for the weekend. A portion of Friday's proceedings saw the introduction of a tweet.
Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte told Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln to "shut up" during an abortion debate. The comment inspired a tweet from another senator, which Groene took offense to.
Sen. Julie Slama of Peru used the opportunity to fire back at Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha in their continuing verbal dogfight over mailers dubbed racist by Chambers that were sent out in April.
The session continues on Monday.
By Justin Garcia

NCN: Ricketts Urges Virus Vigilance...Passage of Top Legislative Priorities

BEATRICE - Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts cautioned today that citizens must remain vigilant in the state's fight against the coronavirus. In an appearance before the Nebraska Legislature, he also used the occasion to urge approval of four top legislative priorities.

Ricketts spoke briefly before lawmakers about the progress made by the state during the pandemic.
"This has been, perhaps the greatest challenge our state has faced in a generation. But, with typical Nebraska grit and determination, our people have risen to the challenge. When we've asked them to stay home and follow the restrictions, they have. They've sewed masks, for their friends. They've supported food pantries".

Ricketts thanked public health officials, the University Medical Center, the State's Chief Medical Officer and National Guard for their roles during the pandemic.
"We must remember that this pandemic is not over. And, we still need Nebraskans to continue to exercise their personal responsibility and civic duty to fight it. We must continue to focus, to keep the virus in check".

At the end of Friday, there will be a dozen days left in this year's legislative session, and Ricketts urged lawmakers to step up to the challenge on four priority areas.....property tax relief, a new business incentives program, a University of Nebraska Medical Center project and a Veterans Tax Relief Act.

"I am not saying these things are going to be easy. There's going to be passionate opinions about how to accomplish these, and differences on how to do it. But, just like Nebraskans who have stepped up to serve their communities in this pandemic, so to we must work together to accomplish the people's work.....to lay that groundwork for the future growth of our state".

Ricketts said because of the sacrifices made by citizens, Nebraska has been able to maintain hospital capacity during the coronavirus pandemic. He said the state is testing more than surrounding states such as Kansas, Missouri and Colorado…and being diligent in the area of contact tracing.
The state has also used CARES Act money to help recover from the pandemic.
By Doug Kennedy

AP: Ricketts touts revenue, virus response in legislative speech

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Gov. Pete Ricketts touted Nebraska's pandemic response and rosier-than-expected revenue outlook in his address to the Legislature on Friday, while pushing for lawmakers to adopt his signature property tax relief and tax incentives packages within the remaining 13 days of the session.
"Just as Nebraskans have stepped up to the challenge as we work through this pandemic, we've got to work to get Nebraska's economy thriving," Ricketts said.
The Republican governor made a rare second address within the same session, which was suspended in March over fears of spreading the COVID-19 virus. The session resumed Monday.
The governor's address came a day after the Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board predicted that while the state's tax revenue will likely dip below earlier projections because of the pandemic, the budget picture won't be as bad as previously expected.
Ricketts used that forecast to again push for lawmakers to lower property taxes and approve new tax incentives for businesses. The property tax measure would pump millions of state dollars into local school districts while putting new restrictions on how those districts can generate revenue through local property taxes. The business incentives bill would replace an existing program for businesses that's set to expire at the end of this year.
But the plan is not without its detractors, including Nebraska's public schools, which fear being shortchanged by the plan. Sen. John Stinner, chairman of the budget-writing Appropriations Committee, said this week that he plans to take a cautious approach to the rosy revenue predictions given this week.
Ricketts also urged lawmakers to push through a bill intended to attract millions in funding to the University of Nebraska Medical Center and a proposal to exempt as much as half of military retirement benefits from the state income tax.
By Margery A. Beck

LJS: State of Nebraska ignored drug manufacturers demands to return execution drugs

Less than three weeks before the fentanyl made by a company based in London was used to carry out an execution in Nebraska in 2018, its top executive fired off a letter to Gov. Pete Ricketts, Attorney General Doug Peterson and Corrections Director Scott Frakes.
The letter was to "remind you again" on Hikma's position on the misuse of their products.
"We object in the strongest possible terms to the use of any of our products for the purpose of capital punishment," said Daniel Motto, executive vice president of Hikma/West-Ward Pharmaceuticals.
He said it was the company's understanding the Nebraska Department of Corrections may possess fentanyl made by Hikma and it that may be used in a pending execution.
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Records released Thursday, as the result of three lawsuits filed by the Lincoln Journal Star, Omaha World-Herald and the ACLU of Nebraska, revealed the manufacturers of each of the drugs in the state's unique four-drug cocktail used Aug. 14, 2018, to execute Carey Dean Moore.
The records also showed that Community Pharmacy in Gretna, which had a contract with the Department of Corrections to manage its pharmacy, purchased the drugs for the state.
The department paid Community Pharmacy $492,000 for the two-year contract that ran from Oct, 1, 2016, to Sept. 30, 2018, plus $400 for temporary staffing by a pharmacy technician in August 2017, the contract showed.
All of the manufacturers for those drugs have objected to them being used in executions.
One of the companies, Fresenius Kabi, had sued in 2018 to delay Moore's execution because it believed its drugs were to be used, but was turned down by both a federal district court and appeals court. The records request revealed that two of its drugs, cisatracurium, a muscle relaxant, and potassium chloride, which stops the heart, were used in Moore's death.
The company's position is that it does not allow the sale of certain drugs to correctional facilities. For its products made in Europe, the unauthorized use of them for lethal injection could also lead to sanctions by the European Union and could threaten the U.S. supply of important drugs, potentially putting patients at risk.
Reached Friday, two others — Hikma and Pfizer — both said they also asked the state to return their drugs, which didn't happen.
Pfizer said in a statement Friday it makes its products to enhance and save the lives of the patients it serves.
"We strongly object to the use of any of our products in the lethal injection process for capital punishment," said Pfizer spokeswoman Sally Beatty. "Since 2016, we have informed the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services on multiple occasions that Pfizer strongly objects to the use of its products as lethal injections for capital punishment."
She said the company asked the department to return any Hospira or Pfizer manufactured restricted product in their possession and provided them with procedures to follow to return for a full refund.
Teva, which manufactured the hydromorphone, a strong opioid painkiller purchased by the state initially for use as a lethal injection drug but not used, took a stand in 2013 that its drug propofol not be used in executions. It wanted to limit its sale and distribution to customers who agreed to use best efforts not to sell or distribute it to correctional facilities.
Laura Strimple, Corrections Department chief of staff, was asked whether the department has purchased lethal injection drugs since those purchased for the Moore execution have expired, or how actively the department is attempting to purchase drugs.
"It is the responsibility of NDCS to carry out the order of the court, which includes continuing to pursue procuring the necessary substances," Strimple said.
Gov. Pete Ricketts said Friday at a news conference his administration will continue to carry out the sentences the court ordered and the people of Nebraska support using the current execution protocol.
The protocol, created in 2016, says the director will determine which drugs and their quantities would be used for lethal injection. The drugs can be directly purchased or obtained through the pharmacy department or other sources, including pharmaceutical or chemical compounding.
Death row inmate Jose Sandoval was notified in late 2017 of the lethal injection drugs that would be administered in his death if an execution takes place. Those drugs were to be the same as those used in

Moore's execution.
Community Pharmacy, which contracted with the Department of Corrections leading up to and during the time of Moore's execution, would not answer questions on whether it violated the policies of drug manufacturers by purchasing the drugs for purposes of lethal injection, or whether it could be held liable or sued for those purchases.
"The statement from Dr. Kyle Janssen (Thursday) is our only statement," the pharmacy responded.
With the contract, Community Pharmacy had oversight of 10 facilities, including managing and reviewing medications, records inventory, logs, quality control checks and prescriptions.
Strimple said the department now oversees its pharmacy.
The Gretna company posted its statement regarding its involvement with supplying the lethal injection drugs on its website, Facebook and Twitter. Comments on Facebook ranged from defending the company for simply fulfilling a contract to shaming it and asking if the company would refund the money if it really regretted its decision to supply those drugs.
By JoAnne Young and Lori Pilger

OWH: No vote this year, but efforts to repeal Nebraska's affirmative action ban will continue

Leaders of an effort to repeal Nebraska's ban on affirmative action will keep pushing to remove it from the state constitution, even though they were unable to put the issue before voters this fall.
Omaha City Councilman Ben Gray and Douglas County Board member Chris Rodgers had launched a hurried effort to get a repeal of the ban onto the November ballot. They were hoping that an urgency to address racism would help reverse Nebraskans' overwhelming vote — 58% to 42% — to adopt the measure, Initiative 424, in 2008.
The City Council and County Board both passed resolutions in mid-July asking the Nebraska Legislature to put an initiative on the November ballot to repeal the amendment. But it was too late, even if legislation could have cleared a steep uphill climb during a pandemic-shortened session. The language needed to have been submitted by July 2, Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen said.
Now the soonest that the issue could be put before voters would be November 2022, the next general election in Nebraska. Rodgers said it may be better to wait even longer, until the next presidential election in 2024, and in the meantime make greater use of measures currently available.
"Right now, emotions are high," Gray said. "The anger is great, but you know how that goes. A lot of times that lasts for a month and it goes away. But those of us who are committed to this, we're going to keep this going. I'm hoping that it'll be a whole group of us, but if it's just a few of us, we're still going to keep it going, because it's an important discussion we've got to have."
State Sen. Ernie Chambers said the Legislature is not likely to put a repeal on the ballot.
"There was no way that whatever little affirmative action they may have had going on harmed white people in any way," he said. "So by having been conceived in racism, and executed on that basis, this Legislature in my opinion is not going to put that on the ballot for people to vote for it because they don't want to look like they favor it."
State Sen. Justin Wayne was willing to try to introduce a bill in the Legislature this month, but decided not to when it became clear it was too late. He said he would focus instead on Legislative Bill 1218, which seeks to make minority-owned businesses more likely to obtain state contracts.
Also, the ballot in November will include two measures sponsored by Wayne: additional time for people to pay back tax-increment financing in high-poverty areas, and an amendment to remove language in the Nebraska Constitution that allows people to be enslaved as punishment for a crime.
Nebraska had a lively debate on the affirmative action ban 12 years ago.
Initiative 424 was promoted by the out-of-state American Civil Rights Institute and local supporters.

They formed an organization, the Nebraska Civil Rights Initiative, with the backing of an anti-affirmative action California businessman named Ward Connerly. He had successfully promoted similar measures in California, Washington and Michigan.

Supporters sought to prohibit programs that offered public higher education scholarships or government contracting and jobs to minorities and women. They contended that those practices amounted to discrimination, and that banning them would put everyone on an equal footing.

A petition drive collected 136,589 valid signatures, more than the 112,152 needed to put the proposal on the ballot in 2008. The 58-to-42% margin of victory for the initiative was the same in Douglas County as it was statewide — in a presidential election in which metropolitan Omaha's 2nd Congressional District gave its electoral vote to Barack Obama.

The initiative survived a lawsuit claiming that thousands of the signatures were fraudulently collected.

Gov. Pete Ricketts, who donated money to the Initiative 424 campaign before he became governor, remains a supporter today.

"Governor Ricketts is opposed to racial discrimination, and especially state-sponsored discrimination, which is why he continues to support the amendment which the people of Nebraska passed in 2008," said his spokesman, Taylor Gage. "Rather than recycling the failed policies of the past that divide communities, the governor is focused on bringing people together and working with communities around the state to help more Nebraskans take great opportunities that will help them achieve their dreams."

As adopted, Nebraska State Constitution Article I-30 says, "The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting."

Opponents argue that banning affirmative action doesn't create equal opportunity; rather, it preserves inequality and prevents equal opportunity. They say Black people and other people of color face discrimination in education, business and employment, and that affirmative action is needed to overcome historical disadvantages so that they can compete equally.

The initiative was opposed by the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce and Warren Buffett.

Critics contend that the wording of Initiative 424 was misleading and that the advertising for it was deceptive.

"The ban has perpetuated disparities, racial injustice and systematic racism in our state and represents a barrier to improving diversity, inclusion and equity at local government and community levels," said Vickie Young, president of the Omaha chapter of the NAACP.

Young was one of about 30 people who testified in support of the repeal resolutions at the Omaha City Council or Douglas County Board. Another person who testified, Willie Barney, noted how diverse the supporters were — white, Black, Hispanic, young, old. They included a white man who said he knows from personal experience that discrimination still exists because he got a truck driving job over a Black applicant who was more qualified.

Barney, president of the Empowerment Network in Omaha, called it "huge" that the local legislative bodies passed the resolutions and that Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert said she supports repealing the affirmative action ban. Barney interpreted the public hearing testimony as a sign that public opinion on Nebraska's affirmative action ban is shifting. He said he has had many conversations with business people and other Omahans acknowledging racial disparities and looking for ways to overcome inequality.

"What was really encouraging was the overwhelming support from individuals, organizations from around the city, across race, across geography, across age, that recognized that this is something that has to be addressed," he said. "Secondly … this is just one tool of many, one opportunity of many. It's not the whole answer. It's really about looking at every avenue possible to really close those gaps."

Rodgers said he will work with Gray and others to use and improve currently available tools, such as the Small and Emerging Business Program that the City of Omaha created after the affirmative action ban passed. Rather than considering race, the program aims to increase city contracting and purchasing with businesses from low-income neighborhoods, many of which are in parts of the city with majority Black or Hispanic populations.

The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and protests that followed "have opened the eyes of people, and right now we have to take every opportunity we can to chip away at systemic racism."

In what could be a sign of shifting public opinion, a conservative University of Nebraska-Lincoln chemistry professor who supported Initiative 424 — so much that he helped collect signatures for it — now supports repealing the constitutional amendment it created.

"My views on it are not what they were in 2008," Professor Gerard Harbison said by email last week. "America has changed, and so have I. … Back in 2008 I thought racism was mostly a thing of the past. That was incredibly naive of me, as the last 10 years have proven."

By Christopher Burbach

OWH: Nebraska first lady Susanne Shore criticizes Ernie Chambers for comments about Sen. Julie Slama

Nebraska first lady Susanne Shore criticized State Sen. Ernie Chambers on Saturday for comments he made about fellow Sen. Julie Slama.

On the floor of the Legislature on Monday, Chambers criticized Slama and Gov. Pete Ricketts for a campaign mailer that former Gov. Dave Heineman and Bob Kerrey, a former governor and U.S. senator, have called racist. The mailer juxtaposed a photo of Slama's opponent, Janet Palmtag of Nebraska City, with a photo of Chambers.

The ad said, in part, "Janet Palmtag sides with Lincoln liberals, atheists and radical extremists."

Chambers said the ad was an attempt to scare voters in District 1 into voting for Slama, of Peru.

He called the flyer dirty politics and called on Slama to respond to criticism of it and to apologize to Palmtag.

Slama has not commented on the flyer since it began drawing criticism.

He said if Slama wanted to engage in dirty politics, she should not be surprised if people repeat rumors about why Slama, whom he called a young woman with little life experience, was appointed by Ricketts.

Slama fought back, chastising Chambers for his comments. She also pointed to comments that Chambers made about the relationship between Thomas Jefferson, a slave owner and founding father, and Sally Hemings, the enslaved woman who bore him six children. Chambers likened that to him enslaving Slama and raping her.

"How dare you talk to a woman like that," she said.

In a Public Pulse letter published Saturday in The World-Herald, Shore called Chambers' statements "horrifying."

"How are the young women of Nebraska to receive Mr. Chambers' message and the lack of response by most of the leaders of our state?" Shore wrote.

"I wonder how I can ask my daughters to make their home and build their careers in a state where that type of comment goes unchallenged? This comment isn't hurled at one woman — it's hurled at us all. But it is especially insulting to the smart, talented and amazing young women of our state."

Shore called on public and private sector leaders in the state to condemn Chambers' words.

On Tuesday, Theresa Thibodeau, the chairwoman of the Douglas County Republican Party and a former state senator, called on the Legislature to censure Chambers for his comments, which she called "sexist and outright disgusting."

Chambers, speaking on the floor of the Legislature on Tuesday morning, made no apologies and said his comments were being manipulated for political purposes.
By Reece Ristau

OWH: Majority of City Council supports Omaha mask mandate; county health board to meet Monday

Public support for a mask mandate in Omaha gained momentum on Friday, capping a week in which Douglas County saw its highest three-day run of new coronavirus cases since the end of May.
A majority of the Omaha City Council on Friday voiced support for a mask requirement in the city, joining a growing body of teachers, health officials and other public figures who say the measure is necessary to get the pandemic under control.
Meanwhile, the Douglas County Board of Health plans to meet Monday to signal its support for a mask requirement in the city and county.
Chris Rodgers, president of the County Board of Health, said officials will have to take a "two-pronged path" to implement a mask requirement in Omaha and the county at large.
The first path involves Douglas County Health Director Adi Pour exercising her power to require masks in the City of Omaha. Mayor Jean Stothert earlier this week said the city code gives Pour the authority to make rules and regulations for the city during epidemics and public health emergencies.
Rodgers said a mandate in Omaha could come as soon as early August, depending on how Pour decides to proceed.
The second path — implementing a countywide mandate — will take more time. In counties with a population of more than 400,000, state law requires the completion of a 30-day waiting period after a three-week public notice before a new regulation can take effect. The county attorney also would have to sign off on it.
If the Board of Health moves ahead next week on a mandate, it would not go into effect in the county until mid-September.
Pour this week said she believes the time is right for a mask requirement. She said she and members of the health board began considering their options after the Lancaster County Health Department announced that people would be required to wear masks in indoor public places there, with some exceptions. That measure took effect this week.
Rodgers said Monday's meeting is meant to signal to the public that Pour is acting in concert with the board.
The four Democrats on Omaha's officially nonpartisan City Council signed a letter, dated Friday, that says they're supportive of Pour taking action to require masks in indoor spaces.
"This is a simple and practical measure we can all take to help make sure our kids can return to school safely in coming weeks," Councilman Pete Festersen wrote in an email.
The letter was signed by Festersen, Council President Chris Jerram and Councilmen Ben Gray and Vinny Palermo. It was addressed to Pour and members of the Douglas County Board of Health, including Rodgers.
The council's three Republican members did not sign the letter, and Stothert has said she wants people to wear a mask, but doesn't like the idea of a mandate.
Council members Aimee Melton and Brinker Harding said businesses and residents shouldn't need a mandate to act responsibly during the pandemic. Melton said making it a criminal offense to go without a mask would be an overreach of government.
"I'm following the mandate without being mandated to do it, and I think that most people are responsible enough to do that," Melton said.

Harding questioned the effectiveness of a mandate that won't be enforced. Officials in Lincoln have said police officers there won't ticket people who violate the mandate.
The letter by the other four Omaha council members said a requirement similar to the one in Lincoln would be appropriate for Omaha.
"We support an order for preventative measures until such time that the public health risk is, in your judgment, sufficiently abated," the letter states.
Lancaster County's mask order will be in place through at least Aug. 31.
Councilman Rich Pahls, the third councilman not to sign the letter, said he doesn't endorse the mask requirement. But he said he will support Pour if she decides a mandate is necessary.
Pahls and Melton both noted that many businesses, including Walmart and Baker's, have begun to require customers to wear masks.
But Rodgers said it's clear to him that not enough people are choosing to wear masks in public, and mandating masks would "close the loop" on places that have not opted to require them.
A member of the seven-person City Council could add his or her own mask ordinance to a future agenda. Such an ordinance would require a simple majority of four votes to pass. If Stothert decided to veto that ordinance, the council would need five votes to override her veto.
On Thursday, the Republican mayor said she would prefer that every Omahan voluntarily wear a mask when they can't distance from others. When asked whether she would stand in the way of Pour issuing a mask mandate, Stothert said she and Pour would have to discuss the matter.
Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts on Friday said he's still reviewing the legality of Lincoln's mask mandate and one being considered in Omaha.
He repeated his stance opposing a mandate, although he encouraged Nebraskans to wear masks in public when they can't distance from others.
"We have to watch making something a crime that we want people to adopt voluntarily," he said during a press conference.
By Reece Ristau

The Conversation: The Americans with Disabilities Act at 30: A cause for celebration during COVID-19?

When President George Herbert Walker Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law on July 26, 1990, we doubt he was thinking about protecting people with disabilities during a pandemic. How could he? It was unimaginable to conjure up the catastrophe wrought by the coronavirus. We can excuse that oversight.
But Congress should have known better. Of the US$3 trillion dollars appropriated in the CARES Act in response to COVID-19 pandemic, less than $1 billion was dispersed to the states to support older people and individuals with disabilities. This neglect of people with disabilities impairs the ADA on its 30th anniversary.
But advocacy from the disability rights community has had a marginal effect. The Democratic House version of the HEROES Act now being debated in the Senate has done much better. It includes significant funds to assist people with disabilities during the pandemic, earmarking $10 billion to $15 billion to pay for home and community based services for the next year. This Medicaid funding can help keep people with disabilities in their homes and out of congregate and institutional settings where they are especially vulnerable to COVID-19.
The House version of the bill also helps to fund hazard pay and needed access to personal protective equipment for essential health care workers who support people with disabilities. And it offers $200 million in funding for housing and provisions for paid leave for family caregivers. It also provides $500

cash payments to dependent adults with disabilities – individuals who did not qualify for stimulus checks in the original CARES Act in March.

But all this remains aspirational. As of this writing it is doubtful that the Republican Senate version will be as attentive to the needs of disabled Americans. Senate Republicans seek to slash the $3 trillion House bill by a third. Hopefully, the needs of people with disabilities will make the cut just as we commemorate the passage of the ADA.

No doubt this will be a weekend of celebrations lauding the ADA. And there is much to celebrate. Jon Meacham in his biography of the first President Bush hailed the ADA as "the most sweeping civil rights measure in a generation."

A central mandate of the ADA is to make the goods of society accessible to people with disabilities and overcome their segregation in civil society through reasonable accommodation that allows them to go to work, live with their neighbors, and avoid institutionalization.

But let's not delude ourselves with historic sentimentality as disability law is placed under tremendous stress by the pandemic. It would be especially tragic, and run counter to the ADA, if the disabled community were returned to the shadows by COVID-19 either through neglect or inattention.

Disability rights are civil rights

It is too easy to forget disability rights as the nation rightly addresses the legacy of structural racism prompted by the Black Lives Matters movement. But to do so would be to ignore the deep intersections between racial and disability injustice. And it would fundamentally misread the legacy of the civil rights movement, one of whose many contributions – and derivatives – was disability rights.

The stories of civil and disability rights are intertwined. One historical anecdote speaks to the close linkage: Before the passage of the Rehabilitation of Act of 1973, a precursor of the ADA, Sen. Hubert Humphrey first tried to amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to ban discrimination against people with disabilities in federally funded programs. As the nation gains a deeper appreciation of civil rights, it is important to remember that disability rights are civil rights.

And they are not fair weather rights. In our view, the ADA must be operative in good and bad times. People with disabilities are especially vulnerable during the pandemic. They disproportionately live, or are at risk of living, in congregate settings where they can become tinder for the virus. And the everyday inconveniences of the pandemic suffered by folks without a disability are doubly challenging for people with a disability.

ADA compliance during COVID-19

Those without disabilities complain about wearing a mask or being deprived of dinner at the neighborhood bistro. But people with disabilities have more formidable challenges. Just imagine you're disabled and need to get a COVID-19 test. Your state has set up a drive-through testing center. The problem is you can't drive or are unable to sit in a car for several hours to wait for the test.

Disability Rights Nebraska has filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services about TestNebraska, the state's COVID-19 mobile testing program, claiming the program discriminated against people with disabilities. Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts essentially conceded the discrimination when he told Nebraska's PBS and NPR that "what we needed to do is to continue to work on getting the system down for the regular customers, so to speak, if you want to think about it – the drive-up customers that the system was originally designed to serve."

What did Gov. Ricketts mean by regular customers? Are people with disabilities somehow irregular and unworthy? Invoking a Rawlsian theory of justice, not to mention the mandates of the ADA, shouldn't people with the greatest need be who the state prioritizes?

In a letter to Roger Severino, the director of the HSS Office of Civil Rights, Disability Rights Nebraska cites one responsible citizen with a disability who had trouble getting tested. She had developed a sore throat, fatigue, nausea and muscle aches, all potential signs of COVID-19. She lived at home and

depended upon a ventilator. Her doctor told her to go to the drive-through testing site. But she was unable to drive there safely by herself and was worried that she might expose someone else if they drove her to the site. Her doctor told her to wait and see how things went and call an ambulance if she needed to go to the emergency room. Clearly this barrier to care is a violation of the letter and spirit of the Americans with Disability Act and cannot stand.

The endless lines of cars snaking through parking lots in Florida, Arizona and Texas waiting for COVID-19 testing reminds us of the final scene from "A Field of Dreams." The headlights stretch out into the Iowa twilight affirming that if you build it they will come. But in the context of COVID-19 that's not enough. You need to build it so that everyone can come. This means accommodating all who are currently living with disabilities and the newly disabled survivors of COVID-19 who will be left with lifelong challenges. As we celebrate every life that is saved, we need to remember that those lives deserved to be lived.

As the nation celebrates the 30th anniversary of the ADA, this law is more important than ever. Congress must include adequate funds in the forthcoming HEROES Act to ensure ADA compliance during the pandemic. Anything less turns any celebration into a hollow bromide.

AP: Nebraska sees continued high virus counts, more deaths

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska continues to see high numbers of coronavirus cases, according to state health figures, as the state's prison system reported four additional staffers testing positive for the virus. The Lincoln Correctional Center, Diagnostic and Evaluation Center in Lincoln, Omaha Correctional Center and the Nebraska State Penitentiary in Lincoln each reported a staffer testing positive for the virus, according to a news release late Thursday from the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. All four were self-isolating at home, officials said. The announcement brings the total number of prison employees across the state to be infected with the virus to 37.

The state's online virus tracker shows 332 cases were confirmed on Thursday, bringing the state's total to 23,818 since the outbreak began. Another five deaths from COVID-19 — the disease caused by the virus — also were recorded Thursday. So far, 316 Nebraskan have died from the virus.

Nebraska's hospitals also showed signs of being affected by the rising case numbers. The tracker showed 34% of the state's hospital intensive care unit beds available Friday, a drop of four percentage points since Monday. Available ICU beds also dropped to 35% from Monday's 42%. The state's availability of ventilators remained steady at 80%.

OWH: As Nebraska sees surge in COVID cases, experts warn things could 'go sideways'

Nebraska's count of new COVID-19 cases has taken a definite turn higher, with totals not seen since late May.

While two hospital systems say they are not experiencing a surge in patients, health experts warn that hospitalizations will rise even more in the coming weeks as the new cases progress.

Dr. Kelly Cawcutt, an assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and the associate medical director of infection control and epidemiology, said the Nebraska Medical Center has seen an increase in patients after experiencing a low several weeks ago.

She urged people to take steps now to prevent spread of the coronavirus. She said that includes taking masks and social distancing seriously.

Said Cawcutt, "We could really see things kind of go sideways and see substantial increases in cases if we're not all cautious."

On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday this week, Nebraska saw its highest three-day count of new cases — 971 — since May 27 through 29, when cases were coming down from the state's initial peak.

Douglas County this week saw its highest three-day run of new cases — 476 — since the end of May. The case trends caught the attention of Nebraska health experts.

Dr. Ali Khan, a UNMC epidemiologist and dean of the College of Public Health, said on Twitter this week that the data is unequivocal that Nebraska and Douglas County experienced a surge in cases. He said they may be resetting at a higher rate of community transmission.

The increase comes as Nebraska steps up testing over the last two weeks. Nebraska now is typically getting results for 10,000 tests over a three-day period.

But the increase in cases results from more than just a higher number of tests. The rate at which tests are coming back positive is moving higher — a sign of increasing community spread of the virus.

Douglas County's weekly positivity rate passed 9% for the first time since mid-June. Lancaster County's rate jumped to 9.4% — a weekly figure the community hadn't seen since early May.

On Friday, Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird moved the Lincoln-Lancaster County COVID-19 risk dial higher — still in the high risk, orange color range, but higher on the dial.

Officials cited increasing cases overall, increasing cases among young people and the increasing positivity rate.

This week, the mayor and Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department implemented a mask mandate for indoor places.

Gaylor Baird said the choices people make this weekend and next week will affect the trends in the coming weeks.

Said Gaylor Baird, "The actions we are asking you to take are common sense precautions, small steps that make a big difference."

Pat Lopez, Lincoln-Lancaster County's health director, said Lincoln is in a great position on hospitalizations now, but she anticipates an increase in patients in the coming two to three weeks.

Even if the hospitalizations aren't surging, the count is rising in Nebraska.

As recently as last week, Nebraska had fewer than 100 patients hospitalized with COVID-19. But from a week ago Thursday to this Thursday, the number rose from 96 to 126, according to data from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Hospitalizations are the leading pandemic data point that Gov. Pete Ricketts factors into his reopening plans.

As of Friday, 34% of all Nebraska hospital beds were available, along with 80% of the ventilators, according to the state's data.

Dr. Cliff Robertson, CEO of CHI Health, said the health system's Nebraska hospitals are experiencing a slow decline in COVID-19 patients going back to a peak in late April. CHI Health had 50 patients hospitalized locally with confirmed cases as of Friday.

But Robertson said he believes different communities around the country will see rolling waves of cases over the months ahead, and "everybody will take turns."

Dr. Bill Lydiatt, chief medical officer at Methodist Hospital and Methodist Women's Hospital, said the Methodist system's number of COVID-19 patients remains generally stable in the teens.

Lydiatt said he believes the overall rise in positive cases is slight and gradual, which can be seen as good news considering more than a month has passed since the Nebraska economy reopened and the social justice protests occurred.

But with the economy open, Lydiatt said people need to stress wearing a mask, keeping socially distant, washing hands and staying home from work and school when they feel sick.

"If we can continue to hammer at that," he said, "I think we can continue to see a manageable number."

Adi Pour, Douglas County's health director, cited several trends she considered worrisome when she announced this week that she was moving toward a mask mandate: the increase in cases, the increasing positivity rate, increasing cases among young people, a spread into western Douglas County and deaths

among people without underlying conditions.
On Monday, the Douglas County Board of Health will consider a mask mandate in both Omaha and Douglas County.
Pour said she also was motivated by the positive response to the City of Lincoln's mask mandate and her experience visiting Colorado, which has a statewide requirement. "It feels like everyone is in it together, and we are making it through," she said.
Cawcutt called preventing COVID-19 spread a "team sport" — and as many people as possible need to engage in it.
"None of us are loving having to do all of these things," she said. "But it's what we need to do to make sure that our community stays as healthy as possible."
By Jeffrey Robb

NTV: Two Rivers Public Health Department reports 10th death in district

The Two Rivers Public Health Department announces the 10th death in the district due to COVID-19. The individual was a male in his 80s in Dawson County. "Our hearts are saddened to learn of this loss. Two Rivers will continue to be diligent in our efforts to protect the health of our community in the hopes that no other families will have to suffer more loss," according to Health Director Jeremy Eschliman.
TRPHD strongly encourages the use of face coverings and avoiding any social gatherings as cases continue to rise in the district, indicating COVID-19 is still circulating in the area. Two Rivers recommends continued actions to prevent the spread of any illness such as:

- Know how it spreads
- Wash your hands often
- Avoid close contact
- Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others
- Cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue or your sleeve
- Clean and disinfect
- Monitor your overall health and specifically monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19
- Stay home if you have symptoms or are awaiting test results

Recent studies show that a significant portion of people with COVID-19 lack symptoms and those who eventually develop symptoms can pass the virus to others before showing symptoms, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Cloth face coverings may help prevent the spread of COVID-19 from people who are infected to those who are not, including those who may be at higher risk. Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for social distancing. Public health officials continue to emphasize that maintaining 6-feet social distancing, avoiding large gatherings, and wearing cloth face coverings are crucial to slow the spread of the virus.
If you have been tested through Test Nebraska, call 402-207-9377.
Two Rivers continues to advise citizens to stay home when experiencing illness and seek medical care when necessary.
The Department of Health and Human Services opened a statewide coronavirus (COVID-19) information line to help answer general questions and share the latest information and resources with Nebraskans to keep them informed. The number is 402-552-6645. Hours of operation are 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

Platte River Radio: South Heartland District Health Department Investigating Large Cluster of COVID-19 Cases

HASTINGS – South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD) officials reported they are investigating a large cluster of cases and exposures associated with multiple events. Some of the cases

were reported by SHDHD earlier in the week and some are newly identified since Friday.
SHDHD is reporting that the cases in this cluster attended one or more of several events, including a large gathering at Lovewell Lake in Jewel County (Kansas) on July 11-12, a private party near Exeter (Fillmore County) on July 15, and Sutton High School Graduation and related private graduation parties on the weekend of July 18.
The positive cases included in this cluster so far are nine Clay County residents, one Adams County resident, two individuals who reside in other health districts, and one individual from another state.
Michele Bever, SHDHD executive director, said that more than 40 close contacts have been identified so far and these individuals were instructed to self-quarantine and monitor for symptoms. Some have tests pending. "This investigation is ongoing," Bever said. "Unfortunately, because not all individuals were physically distanced at these events and activities, and mask use was not widespread, we do not know how many others may have been exposed."
"Therefore, anyone who attended these activities and thinks they may have been exposed should contact the health department," said SHDHD executive director Michele Bever. "If symptoms appear, you should self-isolate and contact a health care provider and the health department to determine next steps. This is crucial in order to stop the spread and protect the most vulnerable in our families and in our communities."
"This cluster underscores the ease with which the COVID-19 virus can spread from person to person, even when people only have mild symptoms or have no symptoms at all," Bever said. "The risk of bringing the virus back to members of your family, to your co-workers, or to others you may interact with, increases significantly when prevention is not in place."
Bever noted that gatherings are still restricted according to the state-directed health measures in effect in Nebraska at least through July 31st. A gathering is any event or convening that brings together more than ten (10) individuals in a single room or single indoor or outdoor space at the same time. "There are overall capacity restrictions and limitations of eight people per any one party at gatherings," Bever said.
Key prevention actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 include: staying at home if we have any symptoms, even mild symptoms that are consistent with COVID-19; keeping six feet between ourselves and others; wearing a face covering as a barrier to keep our germs from spreading to others, especially when we are unable to be physically distanced; washing our hands frequently with soap and water; and cleaning and disinfecting any frequently-touched surfaces.
"All of us – ALL ages – should practice these prevention actions everywhere we go: at work, at the store, at graduations and sports events, at weddings and receptions, at church and at the fair," she said. "If people are not staying six feet apart, these are the settings where we see new close contacts and, from that, new cases."
South Heartland District case counts and trends can be found on SHDHD's dashboard of local COVID-19 case statistics. This dashboard, along with updates, guidance, news releases and other COVID-19 information and links can be found on the SHDHD website: www.southheartlandhealth.org. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provides daily updates to Nebraska's coronavirus COVID-19 cases on their Data Dashboard at http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Coronavirus.

LJS: Risk dial moves closer to red as 49 new COVID-19 cases reported in Lincoln

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department's COVID-19 risk dial has been moved closer to red, Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird announced at a Friday afternoon news conference.
The dial's move from low to mid orange comes as worrying trends have emerged in the community, she said, and the dial reflects the Health Department's concerns about increased spread in the coming weeks.

Gaylor Baird announced 49 new lab-confirmed cases in Lincoln on Friday, bringing the community total to 2,718. The number of deaths remained at 14.
Recoveries are up to 1,008, and hospitalizations are down to 15 from 18 the week prior. Four of the 15 patients hospitalized in Lincoln are from other counties.
Interim health Director Pat Lopez identified a few key indicators that led her and her staff to raise the dial. While day to day case reports are often sporadic and uninformative, weekly case counts have trended upward dramatically, increasing from 85 cases the last week of June to more than 300 each of the past two weeks.
"Our local situation is still far from normal," she said.
The most substantial increase in cases continues to be among young adults, Lopez said, particularly those aged 20 to 29. While this demographic accounts for only 18.9% of the community's population, they comprise 53% of new cases this month.
Much of this spike can be attributed to a few bars in downtown Lincoln, she said, where people have described crowded areas and low rates of mask wearing. As core drivers of increased infections locally, Lopez said younger residents should consider staying home or wearing masks when they attend bars and parties.
“I urge young adults to consider the risks before you go out," she said.
An increase in the cumulative positivity rate of tests in the community from 6.4% at the beginning of the month to 6.8% this week was also a factor in raising the dial, Lopez said.
Gaylor Baird hopes the city's new mask mandate, which was implemented Monday, will significantly temper the increase in cases.
While there has been some backlash, she said, feedback on the measure has been predominantly positive.
“We continue to urge everyone in our community to embrace the practice of wearing masks," she said.
Statewide, there were 24,174 cases and 316 deaths linked to the virus as of Friday evening.
The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services said Friday there had been four new cases among its staff members this week, bringing the department's total to 37. Of those cases, 33 have recovered. The staff members who tested positive this week work at the Lincoln Correctional Center, the Diagnostic and Evaluation Center, the Omaha Correctional Center and the Nebraska State Penitentiary.
In Douglas County, 15 correctional officers and one contractor for the Douglas County Department of Corrections have tested positive in the last two weeks, as well as seven inmates. Four of the inmates tested positive before they were booked into the facility. Contract tracing is being conducted, and 130 staff members and inmates are being tested as a result.
By Nick McConnell

LJS: Lancaster County sets record for weekly COVID-19 cases

Lancaster County broke last week's record for the most cases of COVID-19 reported in a single week.
For the week ending Saturday, the county reported 363 new cases, topping the previous week's total of 331. Prior to that, the most cases confirmed in a single week in the county were 299 the week ending May 9.
The weekly positivity rate jumped to 8.4% compared to 6.5% the previous week.
The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department announced Sunday that it had confirmed 44 additional cases of the coronavirus, bringing its total to 2,802. No new deaths were reported, leaving the county's total at 14.
The state reported 223 cases Sunday to bring Nebraska's total cases to 24,618. There are 316 deaths linked to virus in the state.

The Nebraska Department of Corrections announced Sunday that a staff member at the State Penitentiary tested positive for COVID-19. The case marks the 38th staff member to contract the virus. Twenty-four have recovered, the department said in a news release.
By Nick McConnell

OWH: 3 inmates, 15 correctional officers with Douglas County Corrections test positive for COVID-19

Three inmates, 15 correctional officers and one contractor with the Douglas County Department of Corrections have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last few weeks.
Four other inmates tested positive for the virus before being booked into the jail. All who tested positive have been moved to a COVID-19 quarantine unit where they are receiving close medical supervision, according to a press release from the Douglas County Department of Corrections.
All correctional officers who have tested positive are isolating at home.
Mike Myers, corrections director, said in a press release that all staff members are required to wear masks while working, and masks have been provided to all inmates as well.
"While our recent jump in cases among staff and incarcerated individuals is concerning, we continue to follow the expert advice of leaders at both Nebraska Medicine and the Douglas County Health Department," Myers said.
More than 80 staff members and about 50 inmates who may have come into contact with the virus are being tested.
Since the pandemic began, a total of 23 employees and one contractor have tested positive. In total, 14 inmates have tested positive for COVID-19, with 11 of those individuals testing positive for the virus before booking.
Douglas County corrections has about 500 employees. As of Friday, there were about 1,165 incarcerated individuals.
By Jessica Wade

KNEB: Test Nebraska reaches milestone of testing 100,000 Nebraska residents

LINCOLN, Neb. – Today, Test Nebraska, which is currently the number one source of testing in the state of Nebraska, reached a milestone having tested more than 100,000 Nebraska residents since the program launched in April.

"The importance of being tested cannot be overstated," said Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary J. Anthone. "We are seeing an increase in the number of cases in our state, and if we're going to keep the spread of the virus under control, and open schools within the next month, it is vitally important that residents wear a mask when you go to the store, use social distancing and get tested if they believe they may have been exposed or are showing symptoms.

Through Test Nebraska, the state has the capacity to test 3,000 residents a day across 30 Test Nebraska drive-up and clinic sites statewide. According to a state-by-state comparison by the New York Times – https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-testing.html, Nebraska is testing an average of 176 people per 100,000 residents in the state. Six percent of residents who have tested returned positive test results; 5 residents per 100,000 have been hospitalized.

"As Test Nebraska completes its 100,000th test, the entire country should be looking at this state's

testing program as a model for how to efficiently and effectively test for COVID-19," said Nomi Health CEO Mark Newman. "In the last two weeks alone, Test Nebraska has accounted for over 70 percent of the State's tests while keeping the average test result turnaround time to under 43 hours. Governor Ricketts deserves great credit for his swift, innovative approach to stop the spread of the virus by bringing the best technology and clinical lab experience together in one seamless operation. We are grateful to the Governor and our local lab partners for their relentless work and support to get Nebraskans back to work under these unprecedented circumstances."

Approximately 30% of all COVID-19 tests in Nebraska have been conducted through Test Nebraska. The program is open to every Nebraskan who wants to be tested. A summary of testing data as of July 24 at 3:30 p.m. follows:

Total completed assessments: 770,406
Total unique completed assessments: 246,508
Total scheduled appointments: 110,028
Total tests: 101,357
All-time average turnaround time: 45.44 hours or 1.89 days
Inconclusive: 255

As part of the effort to prevent virus spread, the Test Nebraska program includes additional follow-up with residents who have already tested negative as well as those who have completed an assessment, but opted not to be tested to encourage those residents to continue monitoring their health.

"I do want to emphasize that just because a person receives a negative test result does not mean that they are not at risk for contracting the virus at a later time," Anthone said. "It may mean the person was not infected at the time the test was performed or that the person was very early in the stages of infection at the time of the test. A negative test result does not rule out the possibility that a person could get sick later. Therefore, people have to remain vigilant and continue taking precautions—wearing masks and practicing social distancing consistently."

About Test Nebraska

Test Nebraska is a statewide effort and collaboration between the Nebraska Department of Public Health, Nebraska National Guard, Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Transportation, Nebraska Public Health Lab and local public health officials, emergency managers and health care providers across the state.

Continued testing encouraged, especially for students and staff set to return to school

Nebraskans can complete an assessment at TestNebraska.com or TestNebraska/es for Spanish. Once the assessment is completed, applicants will receive an email from Test Nebraska informing them of eligibility. For those who are eligible, the email will direct them to select the location, date and time that is convenient for them. A confirmation email will include a bar code, which residents need to print off and bring with them to the testing site. The assessment can be completed via computer or by phone. If an individual does not have Internet access, a relative or friend can help them complete the assessment.

Residents who have general questions about testing or need help completing the online assessment can call the Test Nebraska hotline at (402) 207-9377.

DHHS will continue to update Nebraskans through the DHHS website and on Facebook and Twitter as we have new information. The CDC's website is also a good resource for COVID-19 information –

https://www.cdc.gov/covid19.

DHHS opened a statewide COVID-19 information line to help answer general questions and share the latest information and resources with Nebraskans to help keep them informed. The number is (402) 552-6645 or toll-free at (833) 998-2275; hours of operation are 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. CDT, 7 days a week.

Find tools and resources for individuals and families, schools, communities, businesses, healthcare facilities, and first responders on the DHHS website – http://dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus and CDC's website – https://www.cdc.gov/covid19 .

LJS: Two bars and Railyard commons area ordered to close for violating coronavirus health measures

For several weeks the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department has expressed concern over the number of young people who have tested positive for the coronavirus after spending time at downtown bars and other crowded settings without wearing masks.

On Saturday, the department cracked down on businesses it said were operating in an unsafe way, ordering the temporary closure of two downtown bars and the Railyard commons area for violations of the city's directed health measure.

Longwell's and Iguanas Pub, along with the Railyard commons area, were ordered to close from 5 p.m. Saturday to 5 p.m. Sunday for violating the latest COVID-19 health measures, the Health Department said.

A mask mandate went into effect Monday, which requires business owners to ensure their customers wear face coverings any time they cannot social distance. Bars must also limit parties to eight people or less.

The bars were closed after attempts to educate and work with the establishments failed, interim Health Director Pat Lopez said in a statement. All bars had access to the health measures though hand-delivered information, local media and the city's website.

Lincoln municipal code allows the health director to order the closure of any business for the purpose of controlling communicable diseases, according to a city news release.

The Health Department received a number of reports alleging that certain bars were in violation, so the department conducted investigations Friday night and early Saturday morning.

There were significant violations at the two bars and the Railyard, according to the release.

The closure comes two weeks after Dine Out Lincoln, a program that permits restaurants and bars to expand onto sidewalks and streets amid social distancing restrictions, began in the Railyard.

The Railyard, which includes Longwell's, was one of the areas that added additional outdoor seating and activities, including movie nights and pickleball.

Longwell's owner Eric F. Marsh expressed frustration Saturday with the Health Department's decision.

"Longwell's reached out to the Lancaster Health Department repeatedly over the past week to ask for guidance as to how to best handle the 'peak crowd' each weekend," Marsh said. "Not sure what got lost in translation, but the result was an undercover inspection at the exact time of our request for assistance. I would have hoped that the Lancaster Health Department would have used their 12:30 a.m. visit to provide guidance and best practices so we can all work together to get through this troubling time."

The Railyard as a whole is continuing to navigate how to enforce the health measures in an outdoor space, a spokesperson said.

"We plan to work with the Health Department to follow the directed health guidelines to keep the

community safe," said Katy Martin of Hurrdat, the marketing company that manages the Railyard.
A statement from Iguana's Pub also expressed disappointment in the order to close, pointing out that the bar took an extra week more than was required before reopening to observe what was working, or not working, at other businesses.
“In the time between today and when we reopened our doors (June 8th), our staff members have been wearing masks throughout the entire duration of their shift,” the statement said. “In the past two weeks as we noticed the situation wasn’t as under control as it should have been, we put signage on the bar top and each table top with messages encouraging patrons to stay seated with their group unless ordering a round at the bar. In addition to these measures, we also have limited our capacity to the amount of physical seats we have inside our establishment. … We will revisit our measures and how we can adhere to the guidelines further so that we can minimize community spread and avoid a repeat closure.”
The city's COVID-19 Risk Dial moved from low-orange to mid-orange Friday, indicating the risk of virus transmission remains high. Several downtown bars continue to be identified as possible places of exposure, as much of the recent increase in cases is among young adults.
“The mask mandate and the other restrictions were issued to slow the spread of the virus and to help prevent further restrictions like the closing of bars,” Lopez said. “We need these businesses to work with us to prevent the further spread of t