From: Kopsa, Ryan
To: Kopsa, Ryan
Cc: Pinkerman, Justin
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 8-13-20
Date: Thursday, August 13, 2020 8:37:21 AM
Attachments: image001.png

Ag Valley Co-op
Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Aug 2020	3.00	-20.00	08:25
Corn	Dec 2020	2.92	-41.00	08:25
Milo	Aug 2020	3.18	-2.00	08:25
Milo	Dec 2020	3.31	-2.00	08:25
Soybeans	Aug 2020	8.08	-85.00	08:25
Soybeans	Dec 2020	8.13	-80.00	08:25
Wheat	Aug 2020	3.74	-44.00	08:25
Wheat	Jul 2021	3.76	-80.00	08:22

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NCN: Ricketts recognizes NPPD in proclamation for company's 50 years of service
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NET: Senators Pass Military Retirees Tax Break, LGBT Resolution
KSNB: Local agencies look to fill gaps after Salvation Army anti-trafficking program changes

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OWH: Gov. Ricketts bans TikTok on State of Nebraska electronic devices

The State of Nebraska will block TikTok on all state electronic devices due to security concerns, Gov. Pete Ricketts announced Wednesday.
"To maintain the security of data owned by the State of Nebraska, and to safeguard against the intrusive cyber activities of China's communist government, we've made the decision to ban TikTok on state devices," Ricketts said in a press release.

The TikTok app has been blocked on state workstations and state phones, according to the Governor's Office.
Last week, President Donald Trump ordered a sweeping but vague ban on dealings with the Chinese owners of popular apps TikTok and WeChat, saying they are a threat to U.S. national security, foreign policy and the economy.
TikTok, known for its short, catchy videos, is widely popular among young people in the U.S. and elsewhere. It is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, which operates a separate version for the Chinese market. TikTok insists it does not store U.S. user information in China, instead caching it in the U.S. and Singapore, and says it would not share it with the Chinese government.
TikTok says it has 100 million U.S. users and hundreds of millions globally. According to research firm App Annie, TikTok saw 50 million weekly active users in the U.S. during the week of July 19, the latest available figure. That's up 75% from the first week of the year.
By Kelsey Stewart

LJS: Ricketts to ban TikTok on state-owned devices

State-owned phones and other electronic devices will no longer be able to run the short-form video sharing app TikTok, Gov. Pete Ricketts said Wednesday.
Owned by Chinese company ByteDance, TikTok has been accused of sharing data generated by users with the Chinese Communist Party.
On July 31, President Donald Trump announced plans to ban the app altogether in the U.S., but later delayed the decision for 45 days after Microsoft indicated its interest in purchasing TikTok.
Other American companies have also expressed interest in the video app, which has 100 million users in the U.S.
Ricketts said Wednesday the Chinese government's "systematic, covert efforts to access sensitive data from U.S. governments, companies, and individuals" led to the state's decision to ban the app on government devices.
"As an app owned by a company based in China, TikTok is legally obligated to provide data from its users to the country's communist regime upon request," Ricketts said.
"To maintain the security of data owned by the State of Nebraska, and to safeguard against the intrusive cyber activities of China's communist government, we've made the decision to ban TikTok on state devices," he added.
By Chris Dunker

NET: Governor Ricketts Announces TikTok Ban On State-Owned Devices

Governor Pete Ricketts announced today that TikTok, a popular video sharing app, will be banned from devices owned by the state.

The move comes on the heels of national controversy around the platform. President Trump recently said TikTok poses a national security risk to the U.S, and issued an executive order sanctioning the app's parent company ByteDance.
Among concerns that the app collects scores of personal data about its American users, Trump also pointed to reports that the app censors content considered politically incendiary by the Chinese Communist Party, "such as content concerning protests in Hong Kong and China's treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities."
NPR later reported TikTok will sue the Trump Administration over the order, claiming it's

unconstitutional and not based in evidence of a security risk. Cyber security experts continue to debate whether the app truly poses a security risk.
In a statement, Ricketts supported the executive action. “As an app owned by a company based in China, TikTok is legally obligated to provide data from its users to the country’s communist regime upon request," he said. He added that blocking the app on Nebraska's government devices will bolster the cybersecurity of state offices.
According to the company's privacy policy, the app automatically collects some personal information, "IP address, geolocation-related data, unique device identifiers, browsing and search history (including content you have viewed in the Platform), and Cookies." Users may also allow the app to access their phone contacts, and GPS data connected to their device.
By Christina Stella

AP: Ricketts bans Chinese app on state phones, citing security

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts has banned the Chinese app TikTok on state government phones, citing security concerns.
Ricketts announced the ban Wednesday, days after President Donald Trump ordered a sweeping ban on dealings with the app’s Chinese owners.
Ricketts said Nebraska’s ban is intended to protect the state against cyberattacks.
“The Chinese government has long engaged in systematic, covert efforts to access sensitive data from U.S. governments, companies, and individuals,” he said in a statement. “As an app owned by a company based in China, TikTok is legally obligated to provide data from its users to the country’s communist regime upon request.”

Fox Business: TikTok banned on all state electronic devices in Nebraska, Gov. Ricketts says

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts announced Wednesday that the state would block TikTok from all of its electronic devices due to security concerns.
“The Chinese government has long engaged in systematic, covert efforts to access sensitive data from U.S. governments, companies, and individuals,” the governor said in a statement. “As an app owned by a company based in China, TikTok is legally obligated to provide data from its users to the country’s communist regime upon request.”
TikTok has come increasingly under fire by U.S. authorities for its tracking of user data – in part by skirting a Google Android privacy feature that farmed data from millions of mobile devices, the Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday.
“To maintain the security of data owned by the State of Nebraska, and to safeguard against the intrusive cyber activities of China’s communist government, we’ve made the decision to ban TikTok on State devices,” Ricketts said.
The announcement comes less than a week after President Trump signed an executive order that would ban TikTok from operating in the U.S. within 45 days.
“TikTok automatically gathers vast swaths of information from its users, including internet and other network activity information such as location data and browsing and search history,” the executive order said. “This data threatens to allow the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) access to Americans’ personal and propietrary information – potentially allowing China to track the locations of Federal employees and contractors, build dossiers of personal information and blackmail, and conduct corporate espionage.”
Ricketts echoed the president’s concerns, noting that other China-based companies might also be a risk.

“President Trump has mentioned impending action on TikTok, and for good reason,” he said. “With parent companies based in China, apps like TikTok, WeChat, and others are significant threats to the personal data of American citizens, not to mention tools for CCP content censorship.”
Earlier this month, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned that TikTok users' personal information could be going “directly to the Chinese Communist Party” and accused the Chinese government of “running espionage operations inside the United States” targeting American lawmakers and business leaders.
He also has taken to Twitter to condemn Beijing for a crackdown on free speech under what he described as a new “draconian” security law in Hong Kong and for alleged human rights abuses in China’s Xinjiang Province targeting an estimated 1 million Uighur Muslims.
By Michael Ruiz

Columbus Telegram: Gov. Pete Ricketts proclaims NPPD Day during Columbus visit Wednesday

Gov. Pete Ricketts stopped by NPPD headquarters to proclaim Wednesday as Nebraska Public Power District Day.
He congratulated the Columbus-based public power utility on 50 years in business and said NPPD will be important as Nebraska gets growing again.
“Your customer-focused attention has been particularly important during the emergencies we’ve been experiencing. Last year, I know you all felt it here as well. We had the worst, most widespread natural disaster in our state’s history,” Ricketts said. “Your linesmen worked tirelessly to either maintain that power or to get it back and replaced as quickly as possible.”
This year, there’s been the COVID-19 pandemic.
“Again, NPPD stepped up to serve their customers. On March 20, (NPPD) said there will be no more disconnections because of people’s inability to pay their utility bills,” Ricketts said. “On April 13, you said we’re going to waive all the late fees for people who were paying their bills late, recognizing that many of your customers have been impacted economically.”
The company resumed normal bill collection Aug. 1, along with disconnections and late charges, according to an NPPD press release. Ricketts said the state needs to start getting back to work.
“The emergency really started back in March and since then the state has been working to recover. So Nebraska has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country," Ricketts said.
Nebraska was the state least impacted by the pandemic, Ricketts said, and now that the state is recovering, it’s time to get back to a more normal life.
As the economy recovers, NPPD President and CEO Tom Kent said they want to make sure they’re able to work with customers that weren’t able to pay their bills for a few months.
“They’ve still got those bills there,” Kent said. “It’s important for us to be able to work with them and help them and provide them tools and resources if we can to be able to get their electric bills or energy bills back in order and it’s going to take some time.”
Part of that is starting up the process again, he noted. NPPD works with social agencies in the state and have a program called Pennies for Power, where donations are provided as a pool for customers to use who can’t pay their bills, he said.
“We want to make sure that those tools are available to help those out that really need help,” Kent said. “With the pandemic, a lot of people need help.”
Kent has been with the company for 30 years and it has “flown by.” But, he started his job as CEO in the middle of a pandemic.
“Columbus is the City of Power and Progress,” Kent said. “If you go back and look at the history of

Columbus with public power, it's long and deep. Loup Power District is one of the original public power (utilities)... and our predecessor Consumers Public Power District was based here in Columbus."
Being part of the legacy and part of the community here is terrific, Kent noted.
Nebraska is one of 49 states with public power but Nebraska is almost entirely served by it, Ricketts said.
"NPPD serves 86 of our 93 counties, a third of our population, and we have the 15th lowest rates in the nation and well below the average rate in the nation," Ricketts said. "It's because of (NPPD's) focus on the customer to deliver that, is the reason you all have been successful."
NPPD is a great organization for the entire state, Ricketts added.
"The fact that it's headquartered here in Columbus means that you have a great resource right within your own community that is also creating a lot of great-paying jobs," he said.
By Carolyn Komatsoulis

GII: Governor announces affordable trust awards, county among them

YORK – Today, while in York, Gov. Ricketts announced the recipients of $10,251,498 in awards from the Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund (NAHTF) for 2020 – which includes York County.
"To grow Nebraska, we need a strong supply of quality, affordable homes to welcome working families to our communities," said Gov. Ricketts. "Programs like the Rural Workforce Housing Fund and the Affordable Housing Trust Fund provide Nebraska's rural communities with more of the tools they need to grow."
The governor said there will be 26 recipients of these funds, which were selected by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED).
Established in 1996, the NAHTF is Nebraska's largest resource for quality, affordable housing development. The fund has helped to build or rehabilitate more than 6,500 units since its inception. NAHTF grants can finance activities like new home construction, homebuyer down payment assistance, or owner-occupied rehabilitation for families 120 percent or below the area median income. York County — one of this year's NAHTF recipients — will use its award to rehabilitate at least 18 homes, with repairs ranging from new furnaces and siding to energy efficient, cost-saving doors and windows.
"The NAHTF offers not just the financing, but the program flexibility to help local leaders address housing needs in their community," said DED Director Anthony L. Goins. "It's an opportunity that can change the lives of a single low- to moderate-income family, or transform the appearance of an entire neighborhood. It's a fund we're proud to administer as an agency, and one that has done a tremendous amount of good in Nebraska throughout its lifespan."
In all, this year's NAHTF awards will help build approximately 80 new homes and rehabilitate 125 more across the state, while helping around 76 households afford to purchase a home. The funds will also help support seven nonprofit organizations that specialize in community housing solutions.
"This grant from the Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund will be of huge benefit to York County homeowners," said York County Commissioners Chairman Randy Obermeier. "Our communities, like many others across the state, contain homes that are in need of repairs, oftentimes more than the owners can bear. The funds from this grant will help us spruce up neighborhoods throughout the county. We would like to thank Governor Ricketts, DED, and our partners at York County Development Center and Southeast Nebraska Development District for their assistance bringing these funds to our area."
York's award is $500,000 for the local housing rehabilitation program.
Other recipients include the City of Bassett, City of Columbus, Community Action Partnership of Mid-Nebraska, Habitat for Humanity of Omaha, High Plains Community Development Corporation, Holy

Name Housing Corporation, Housing Foundation for Sarpy County, Keith County Housing Development Corporation, Lincoln County Community Development Corporation, Midwest Housing Development Fund, NeighborWorks Lincoln, NeighborWorks Northeast Nebraska, New Community Development Corporation dba NeighborWorks Home Solutions, Village of North Loup, Northern Ponca Housing Authority, City of Norfolk, Northeast Economic Development Inc., City of Plainview, City of Sargent, South Central Economic Development District, South of Downtown Community Development Organization, Southeast Nebraska Affordable Housing Council, Southwest Nebraska Community Betterment Corporation, Twin Cities Development Association and Wakefield Development Corporation.

GII: Community celebrates new housing opportunities

YORK – Governor Pete Ricketts joined many local residents and leaders Wednesday morning in celebrating new housing opportunities here and across the state, with a ribbon cutting event for the new York Creekside Apartments.

He also announced that the county has received a $500,000 grant for a housing rehabilitation program that will be available to homeowners in the smaller communities in York County.

Just a year ago, Governor Ricketts and numerous project participants turned shovels in the field east of 220 East Nobes Road for the new multi-family housing project.

Today, the project is finished and new housing options are now available as there are 48 units of varying sizes and plenty of amenities.

This project has been in the works for some time. As explained earlier by York County Development Corporation Executive Director Lisa Hurley, "in January, 2018, YCDC showed Cliff Mesner (Mesner Development) and Kelby Herman (Progress Builders) several sites, along with a community tour. This was a follow up to a conversation YCDC staff had with Cliff and Kathy in October 2017 during a conference. When they called with an idea for a York County application to the Rural Workforce Housing Fund for an apartment complex, we reacted and started asking for donations. The York Community Foundation was gracious enough to let us use them as a pass-through for the donations. Our local donors allowed us to apply to NIFA for the RWHF Matching Funds and Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) in March 2018. YCDC received the NIFA award ($250,000) and $323,000 from DED for the creation of a RWHF Revolving loan that would first fund the York Creekside Apartment Complex. After the award, the developers analyzed several sites before deciding on the site.

"We would not be here today," Hurley said during that earlier groundbreaking ceremony, "if not for the following donors who allowed us to apply for the state funding: C. Naber & Associates, Central Valley Ag, Champion Home Builders, Chance R' Restaurant and Lounge, Community Title, Cornerstone Bank, C-TEC AG, Nancy Dob and Dan Pedersen, EyeCare Associates, Chuck and Karen Harris, Henderson State Bank, Heritage Realty, Jack and Jean Vincent, Kelly and Amy Kadavy, Kopcho's Sanitation, Mead Lumber, Midwest Bank, , Pieper's Inc., Don and Therese Swanson, Svehla Law Offices, Jim and Jamie Ulrich, Union Bank, York County Development Corporation, York General and York State Bank. I would also like to thank the City of York for their assistance in identifying infrastructure locations/needs, and their approval the project."

Governor Ricketts was and has been a major proponent for LB518 – passed by the Nebraska Legislature and signed by the governor in 2017 – which established the Rural Workforce Housing Investment Act with a $7 million fund. Numerous projects, like the one in York, have been the result of that act and the workforce development efforts across the state.

"This is a great day for York," Governor Rickett said prior to the ribbon cutting at the apartment complex. "We continue to fight COVID-19 and in the state of Nebraska we protected our hospital

capacity. In York County, you've had less than two cases a day for the past two weeks. We have to learn to manage this situation for the long-term. We received $9 billion from the federal government for our recovery," which is being appropriated to businesses, farmers, municipalities, counties, etc., "and we continue to be able to provide grants.

"Before the pandemic, the number one issue we were dealing with in the state of Nebraska was workforce and how to make sure we have enough housing to accommodate those people who work here," the governor continued. "That was our biggest challenge and then we passed LB518. York received this money, and you came together to make it work. Those dollars went to help fund this $5.2-plus million complex. When that money is repaid, it can be cycled back in for more projects like this in your community."

Governor Ricketts said Nebraska has been noticed as being one of the least economically impacted states in the nation, considering results of the pandemic, and "that means we are very resilient and we will continue to grow. That's why it's so important to have projects such as this. The legislature added another $10 million into this fund a week ago – that will be reinvested as well, on top of the original $7 million, for more projects.

"I'm excited to be here this morning, for this ribbon cutting – it shows how you are investing in the future growth of your city," the governor added.

After the ribbon cutting ceremony was held, the governor noted that he wanted to make an announcement.

"This time, it is to praise the York County Commissioners," Governor Ricketts said.

He explained the existence of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which exists to help with housing programs that involve building new houses, doing housing rehabilitation, helping future homeowners with financing, etc. The governor said $10.25 million is available for these types of programs – which are also financed through matching funds from communities and counties.

"The York County Commissioners made a grant application for a housing rehabilitation program and we awarded York County with $500,000 for their program," the governor said. "Now, 18 homeowners will use that program for rehab and upgrades to their homes and York County will put in a $50,000 match."

York County Commissioner Chairman Randy Obermier thanked the governor and noted that back in May, the York County Development Corporation had encouraged the county to apply for these funds.

"This type of program is familiar to York, as this has been done before in the city of York, but this time around this program will be for eligible homeowners in the other communities in the county. They will be able to benefit from this," Obermier said.

By Melanie Wilkinson

OWH: There's a new tax break coming for military retirees in Nebraska, but not until 2022

LINCOLN — State senators overwhelmingly passed a new tax break for military retirees, but it won't go into effect until 2022.

Legislative Bill 153 was introduced at the request of Gov. Pete Ricketts. It will allow military retirees to reduce their taxable income by an amount equal to 50% of their service-related pension.

Ricketts said that the state's current tax break for such retirees was "clunky" and inadequate and that LB 153 would encourage more military retirees — including those serving at Offutt Air Force Base — to remain in Nebraska and help address the state's labor shortage.

The bill also was portrayed as making Nebraska more competitive, tax wise, in retaining such retirees since border states provided more generous tax breaks.

The recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the hit on state tax revenue, prompted LB 153 to be amended so it wouldn't go into effect until 2022, rather than 2021. The bill is projected to provide

about $14 million in tax breaks a year.
Some think tanks, including the Omaha-based Platte Institute and Lincoln-based Open Sky Policy Institute, expressed concern, saying that a tax cut for all taxpayers, and not just military retirees, would be more effective in retaining retirees and helping the state's workforce problems.
By Paul Hammel

AP: Nebraska lawmakers pass tax cut for military retirees

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Military retirees who live in Nebraska will get a tax cut starting in 2022 under a bill slated to become state law.
Lawmakers gave the measure final approval Wednesday and sent it to Gov. Pete Ricketts, who proposed it at the start of this year's session. The bill would exempt half of a military retiree's benefits from Nebraska state taxes.
Sen. Tom Brewer, who sponsored the bill, has said the measure would help Nebraska attract and retain military service members after they retire. Several neighboring states, including Iowa and Missouri, don't impose any tax on military retirement benefits and both states have managed to entice retirees from Nebraska's Offutt Air Force Base.
Brewer, a U.S. Army veteran from Gordon, introduced the bill last year but lawmakers ran out of time before they were able to debate it in 2019.
Lawmakers pushed back the effective date of the tax cut so that it won't cost anything until the fiscal year that begins in July 2021. By 2024, it will cost about $14 million a year in lost revenue.
The legislation would affect more than 13,000 military retirees in Nebraska.
Ricketts identified the bill as one of his top legislative priorities this year, arguing that military retirees often move on to second careers that help stimulate their local economy and generate tax revenue.

OWH: State teachers union tries to derail 'grand compromise,' saying it would cost schools

The state teacher's union, the Nebraska State Education Association, put out a last-minute plea for senators to defeat LB 1107, the package deal that includes some property tax relief, a new incentive program for business and a pledge to provide matching funds for the proposed, $2.6 billion center to respond to pandemics and disasters at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.
The NSEA, which has made noise about seeking a voter referendum about the bill, said LB 1107 would create a $3.4 billion "black hole" in the state budget over the next 11 years that will require cuts in services, like K-12 education. It should be called "the Deceitful Deficit Plan," an NSEA press release stated.
Hadley Richters of the Holland Children's Movement also lodged her objections, saying their polling showed that things like affordable health care and fully funding K-12 schools rank as bigger concerns than property taxes. Helping stressed families, she said, is more important than corporate giveaways.
"LB 1107 is not only fiscally irresponsible but morally indefensible," Richters said.
The package, dubbed a "grand compromise," also was criticized for not being the subject of a public hearing, which is a requirement for every bill introduced in the Nebraska Legislature. Supporters of the bill have said that all the elements of the deal were subjects of public hearings.
LB 1107 seems almost certain to pass on Thursday. Forty-one out of 49 senators voted for it during second-round debate on Tuesday and Gov. Pete Ricketts has signaled that he will sign it into law.
Departing senators
Six state senators will be serving their last day on the legislative floor on Thursday, all six because of term limits.

On Wednesday, their colleagues provided some tributes, and gentle jabs, for State Sens. Kate Bolz of Lincoln; Sue Crawford of Bellevue; Ernie Chambers, Sara Howard and Rick Kolowski, all of Omaha; and Jim Scheer — the speaker of the Legislature — of Norfolk.

Bolz, a Democrat now running for Congress in Nebraska's 1st District, was feted as a tireless advocate for "people in need," while Crawford was remembered for her comprehensive research of issues.

Chambers — who set records for his 46 years in the Legislature and for being term-limited out of office twice — was remembered as a fiery agitator and the unquestioned master of the rules, as well as for his trademark outfit of short-sleeved sweatshirts and jeans.

"He was originally going to be a doctor, which I'm sure some of you wish he had," said Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks.

Howard educated the Legislature about the horrors of addiction, and worked to improve the state's response to the issue in honor of her older sister, Carrie, who died of an overdose.

Kolowski, a former Millard West High School principal, was feted for his dedication to public service and for encouraging younger senators to "hang in there, man."

Scheer put family at the center of his life, but used his political service to honor the widowed mother who raised him. He was "firm and fair" as speaker, said Lincoln Sen. Mike Hilgers.

Departing senators, as is the custom, are afforded a chance to rebut the jabs and provide final words at the end of the session's last day. Chambers, who avoids such legislative traditions, will most likely not be among them.

Sweatshirt tribute

Elmwood Sen. Robert Clements, a conservative Republican, and Chambers, who is registered independent but often votes liberal, are at the opposite ends of the political spectrum.

But on Wednesday, the typically suit-and-tie clad Clements donned a short-sleeved sweatshirt to honor his colleague, who sits only a few feet away in the legislative chamber.

COVID-19 cases in Cabinet

Gov. Ricketts earlier this week said that three of his Cabinet members had tested positive for COVID-19. He declined to name them.

Ricketts also recently acknowledged that he'd been tested for COVID-19 three times, all by TestNebraska, which he launched after signing a $27 million, no-bid contract with a group of Utah companies.

His results were all negative, the governor said. One test was as a precaution before a visit with other family members, he said.

By Paul Hammel

OWH: Got questions about Omaha's new mask mandate? We've got answers

Wednesday was Omaha's first full day requiring masks in indoor settings, and people had questions. Do I have to wear a mask in church? How about outdoors? Can I chow down on a burger or savor a beer without yanking a mask on and off?

For the next month, Omaha residents will be asked to do their part to drive down transmission of the coronavirus by wearing masks indoors in many public places.

But the rules depend on the setting and whether or not people can keep their distance.

The Omaha City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to approve an emergency ordinance requiring more mask-wearing, after hours of testimony split among those who pleaded for a mask mandate to curb COVID-19 and those who downplayed the threat of the virus or said wearing a mask should be a matter of personal preference.

The ordinance went into effect immediately, and the council posted a sign on its website that

businesses and other establishments should post to let people know that masks are required for entry. One notable exception: Masks are not required in any setting where people can maintain 6 feet of distance from anyone who does not reside in their household.

While you may be fined $25 for violating the mask ordinance, city officials said they want to focus on educating individuals and businesses on the new rules and to whom they apply.

Learn more about where you have to wear a mask, who is exempt and how the mask mandate will be enforced.

How long will the mask mandate last?

The emergency ordinance is set to expire in one month, on Sept. 15. The council at that time could reassess and decide to extend the requirement depending on the level of community spread of the coronavirus. Another mask ordinance — without the amendments that passed Tuesday — had its first reading this week and is making its way through the normal five-week approval process. It could go into effect in mid-September and will require only four votes to pass.

While the emergency ordinance is in effect, the council has asked Douglas County Health Director Adi Pour to give it and Mayor Jean Stothert a weekly report on coronavirus case numbers, trends and hospitalization rates.

Do I have to wear a mask when I'm outside?

No, the ordinance applies only to indoor settings open to the general public. You don't have to wear a mask when you run around Zorinsky Lake, walk your dog or go inside private residences.

What if people can spread out? Do I still have to wear a mask in church, school or at the grocery store?

If people can stay at least 6 feet apart from someone who's not from their family or household, they don't have to wear a mask indoors under the ordinance. Council member Aimee Melton said it was important to her to include that in the ordinance so students at school can occasionally take a break from wearing a mask, provided it's safe.

Use your common sense, city officials said. If you can't stay 6 feet from other customers at the hardware store the whole time, wear the mask. And some stores and establishments may require masks to stay on the whole time.

Does my child have to wear a mask?

The ordinance applies to adults and kids who are 5 and older — no babies or toddlers.

The ordinance notes that kids who are 3 or 4 can wear a mask, if they can take it off themselves, but the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says children 2 and under should not wear face masks because of the risk of suffocation.

What if I refuse to wear a mask?

Individuals or businesses that don't comply with the ordinance can face a $25 ticket — it's not a felony or misdemeanor charge and won't trigger an arrest.

Officials with the Omaha Police Department didn't respond to questions about how officers will enforce the mask requirement, but one city attorney said people shouldn't tie up 911 with mask complaints.

Who is exempt?

People exempt from mask-wearing include those:

- Seeking government services.
- Seated at a bar or restaurant to eat or drink.
- Who have a job that prevents mask-wearing.
- Who can't wear a mask because of a medical or mental condition or disability.
- Who are exercising in a gym.
- Who are speaking before an audience but are at least 6 feet away.

Will businesses and other places open to the public be responsible for enforcing mask-wearing of customers or patrons?

Yes, with some exceptions, including the ones stated above. The ordinance requires at least one sign to be posted telling people they have to wear masks inside. Businesses and individuals can be cited for violations, though city officials said repeat offenders will likely be the biggest priority.

What's considered a public place?

The ordinance covers indoor places that are generally open to the public, including: public, private or nonprofit workplaces; schools; child care centers; places of worship; private clubs; commercial or business establishments; and public transportation, including buses, taxis and ride-share vehicles under apps like Uber or Lyft.

What public places or other situations are exempt from mask-wearing?

Courts; group living arrangements; medical offices or pharmacies; drug or mental health treatment centers; local, state and federal government offices; airport travel; polling places; people who may be communicating with people who are deaf or hard of hearing, as long as social distancing can be followed; people who are swimming or showering and may get a mask wet; first responders if it would interfere with their jobs; and people who are alone in a room or office with walls or barriers that are higher than face level, among others.

During the workday, people with plastic barriers around their cubicles wouldn't have to wear masks at their desks.

What kind of face covering is required?

Any paper, disposable or cloth face mask, bandanna, scarf or neck covering. Masks with vents that allow exhalations, mesh or other holes are not good enough.

What does Stothert think?

The City Charter doesn't allow the mayor to veto an emergency ordinance approved by at least six of the seven council members.

Last Friday, Stothert said she would back the mask mandate if the council voted for it.

"I have consistently expressed my strong opinion that wearing a mask will help reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure and infection," she said in a statement. "If the City Council approves the new city ordinance to temporarily require masks, I will support it."

What about Gov. Pete Ricketts? He hasn't been in favor of government mandates for masks.

Ricketts has said he encourages people to wear masks as one way to protect themselves and others from the coronavirus. But he's previously called mask requirements, like the one instituted in Lincoln last month, a heavy-handed example of government overreach.

He and Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson didn't believe Douglas County Health Director Adi Pour had the legal authority to implement one herself.

Omaha seems to have won this round: A spokesman for Ricketts said Wednesday: "We have no plans to challenge the City Council's ordinance."

Suzanne Gage, a spokeswoman for the attorney general, said previous conversations revolved around whether Omaha and Douglas County had the ability to establish a public health mandate without state approval.

"The emergency mask ordinance recently passed by Omaha does not fall under these state public health laws, and thus, the Attorney General offered no input," Gage wrote in an email.

One speaker at Tuesday's public hearing threatened that residents might file suit against the city.

"We feel strongly in the legality of this ordinance and our ability to defend and enforce it," said Ryan Wiesen, an assistant city attorney.

I'm uncomfortable wearing a mask. Can I cite the Americans With Disabilities Act and not wear one?

Experts on the ADA law, passed by Congress in 1990, say no.

Fraudulent cards and documents bearing the seal of the U.S. Department of Justice began circulating earlier this summer, claiming an exemption from wearing face masks under the federal disability law.

The department has said that information was inaccurate.
“The ADA does not provide a blanket exemption to people with disabilities from complying with legitimate safety requirements necessary for safe operations,” the Justice Department said in June.
Last week, Councilwoman Melton said in an interview on KFAB that anyone who feels anxiety about wearing a mask — including anxiety about being required to do so — could cite the ADA and refuse to wear one.
“No one can require you to prove you have anxiety,” Melton said during the interview. “You don’t have to have a doctor’s diagnosis; you don’t have to have any of that. So by the way, all of you anti-mask-wearers: If you can’t wear a mask because maybe it makes you not be able to breathe, maybe you feel that if your rights are being violated it gives you some form of anxiety, well, under the ADA, no one can force you to wear the mask.”
But Melton on Tuesday walked back those statements in an interview with The World-Herald, saying her comments were made in jest.
“It was a Friday afternoon, and I thought it was a little cute,” Melton said.
“I stand by that if you have a physical or mental condition that keeps you from wearing a mask, that is exempted under the current ordinance,” she said. But Melton, a family law attorney, said she doesn’t recommend that anyone use her comments as a legal argument against mask-wearing.
Steve Doig, a professor of journalism at Arizona State University whose areas of expertise include the ADA, told The World-Herald that the ADA “doesn’t give a blanket exemption to people to wear and do whatever they want.”
Marilyn Golden, a senior policy analyst at the Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, said in an interview that the ADA allows businesses to impose policies that protect people from legitimate safety concerns, such as requiring masks during a viral pandemic in which people may be unknowingly spreading or contracting disease.
Businesses can refuse service to anyone not wearing a mask as long as they provide reasonable modifications, such as curbside pickup.
“If you can wear a mask, you have to,” Golden said. “Your disability situation needs to be such that you literally can’t wear a mask — not just that you don’t like it.”
By Erin Duffy and Reece Ristau

LJS: Several Nebraska counties see big uptick in COVID-19 cases recently

Several counties that initially seemed to have success battling COVID-19 are now seeing large case surges. And it appears that much of the increase can be attributed to gatherings.
Sarpy County, which only has about 60% of the population of Lancaster County, now has more cases over the past 14 days.
The county just south of Douglas County has seen about half of its total cases since the start of July, including about 600 in just the past 2½ weeks, many of them tied to large groups of people getting together.
"These last two to three weeks, we have seen a number of cases that are tied to large family gatherings (i.e., vacations, parties) as well as gatherings that are associated with youth athletics — teams getting together for practices, tournaments and camps," said Sarah Schram, director of the Sarpy/Cass Health Department.
Gatherings also have been implicated in a surge in cases in Seward County.
The county next to Lancaster County, which is officially part of Lincoln's metropolitan area, has seen 59 cases in the past two weeks, including a COVID-19-related death — its second — announced Wednesday. In the four months previous to that, it had 70 total.

Laura McDougall, director of the Four Corners Health Department, said many of the recent cases can be linked to a couple of "clusters."
"Both situations involved celebratory parties which involved family and friends," McDougall said. "In each situation, there have been multiple people testing positive, and their close contacts have been in quarantine."
She said there have been a few other "sporadic" cases not linked to those gatherings.
Buffalo County, which in the early months of the pandemic had one of the lowest case counts among the state's largest counties, now has one of the highest. The central Nebraska county, which is home to Kearney, has 150 cases over the past two weeks, an average of more than 10 a day. More than one-third of the county's total cases have now occurred in the past 14 days.
Among recent outbreaks Kearney has seen are one among players and staff on the University of Nebraska at Kearney's sports teams and another among employees at the city's Target store.
Jeremy Eschliman, health director of the Two Rivers Public Health Department, said the uptick in cases was likely because of family gatherings and other social events, including those that took place around the Fourth of July.
Because of an uptick in hospitalized patients with COVID-19, Kearney Regional Medical Center, one of the city's two hospitals, reinstituted restrictions on most visitors starting Tuesday.
The department, which covers Buffalo and six other central Nebraska counties, said that as of Monday, the number of people hospitalized for COVID-19 had doubled from a week earlier.
Lincoln County, home to North Platte, also did well in the early months of the pandemic, with fewer than 100 cases from March through the final week of July. But it now has recorded close to 80 in the past two weeks, according to the West Central District Health Department, two dozen of those linked to an outbreak among cast members in a musical being performed by the North Platte Community Playhouse.
"The most important message that we have for our community right now is to practice social distancing and wear face coverings," the department said in a Facebook post over the weekend.
Some smaller counties have seen outbreaks that include small numbers of cases but huge percentage increases.
Nemaha County, for example, has recorded 20 cases in the past 14 days. In the previous 4½ months, it had 19 cases. Burt County has logged 24 cases in the past two weeks, after having only 17 total before that. Kearney County has seen 39 of its 62 total cases in the past 14 days.
At the other end of the spectrum, some smaller counties that saw huge early outbreaks linked to meatpacking plants have seen their case numbers drop sharply. Colfax County has had only 14 cases over the past 14 days and Saline County 23. Dakota County, which has had more than 1,900 cases overall, many linked to the Tyson meatpacking plant in Dakota City, has recorded only 39 cases over the past two weeks.
The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services reported 29,244 cases and 356 deaths statewide as of Wednesday night.
Even in areas that aren't seeing COVID-19 spikes, large gatherings are still responsible for the bulk of cases that are still occurring.
The East-Central District Health Department, which includes Boone, Colfax, Nance and Platte counties, said in a news release Monday that many of the district's cases were coming from "birthday parties, weddings and funerals where people did not wear masks or practice social distancing."
Though cases statewide fell slightly last week, they were still up about 70% from a month ago, according to data from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.
Cliff Robertson, CEO of CHI Health, said in a weekly update Wednesday that Nebraska's RT number, which measures the state's infection rate, is at 1.02 this week. Any value above 1 means infection rates

are growing, he said.
Robertson said CHI Health, which has hospitals throughout the state, including in Lincoln, has seen its number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients grow to 76 this week, up 20 from last week, while the number of patients in intensive care is up 11 to 33 this week.
By Matt Olberding

Sandhills Express: Increase in COVID Cases for LBPHD; Director Cone Says it Has Been Manageable

BURWELL—Between Friday, August 7 and Tuesday, August 11 the Loup Basin Public Health Department (LBPHD) reported seven new COVID-19 cases in the district. The new cases are in Custer (4), Sherman (1) and Garfield (2) counties.
The LBPHD said two of the Custer County cases are determined to be from direct contact with a positive case, two were deemed community spread, according to the LBPHD Facebook page. The Sherman and Garfield county cases were also determined to be from direct contact with a positive case. All close contacts have been identified and asked to quarantine.
Director of the Loup Basin Public Health Department Charles "Chuck" Cone spoke with KCNI/KBBN and confirmed the Garfield County cases were in Burwell. He said the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Burwell has been outspoken regarding the exposure to the coronavirus and therefore Cone could confirm the information. (Cone said ordinarily those specific details are often restricted due to HIPAA laws.)
According to a Facebook post and confirmed by Father Scott Harter, Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Burwell has suspended all services until at least August 26 after a child and parent, who were in attendance at the First Communion Mass at 8:30 a.m. on August 9 tested positive for COVID-19. LBPHD is recommending that anyone who was in attendance during the First Communion Mass begin a 14-day self-quarantine immediately.
Father Harter also serves Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Ord which will not have weekday mass, but will have weekend mass which will be covered by a visiting priest. LBPHD Director Cone told KCNI/KBBN due to the three-to-five-day incubation period for COVID-19, Father Harter would not have been contagious on August 9 and parishioners in Ord do not have to worry about being exposed in this particular instance.
"Those people are not in any danger but after 3-14 days then he (Father Harter) could be contagious but not at that time so there's nothing for those people (in Ord) to worry about at this time due to that," Cone told KCNI/KBBN.
Regarding state Directed Health Measures (DHMs) for COVID-19, Chuck Cone said the Loup Basin district has been the first within the state to move forward to each new phase. He said the purpose of the DHMs was to not overwhelm the health care systems and Cone said he has felt comfortable moving forward into each subsequent stage.
"We were the first health department district in Nebraska that did move to Phase 4 and one of the reasons is because we don't have that many cases here. We have a few but really, relatively speaking, we don't have that many. If we're going to wait for the number of COVID cases to get down to zero that could be a very long time. You have to take a calculated risk at some time. We felt that it was worth it. We didn't have that many cases, it's manageable–that's the main thing," Cone told KCNI/KBBN.
LBPHD Director Chuck Cone continued, "But the number one reason we went into the Directed Health Measures to begin with was so we didn't overwhelm the health care systems and the intubators and all that is in fine shape. In fact, it's as good as shape now in the state of Nebraska as it was when the whole thing started. And so we've kind of shifted our eye a little bit away from the original reason and we've

been staying in these phases just to try to help keep the numbers of COVID-19 down but as long as COVID-19 cases aren't causing a problem with the hospitals, I see no reason not to move forward into the next stage and lighten up the directed health measures."
Cone also said he will be traveling to Lincoln on Friday at the request of Governor Pete Ricketts to represent Nebraska's local health departments during a Midwest tour with White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Deborah L. Birx, M.D.

LJS: Lancaster County reports 23 new COVID-19 cases, no new deaths

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department confirmed 23 new cases of the coronavirus Wednesday but reported no new COVID-19 deaths.
With the new cases, the total number of residents who have contracted the coronavirus during the pandemic increased to 3,384, the Health Department reported.
The local death toll remained at 19, including a man in his 70s and a woman in her 80s whose deaths were reported Tuesday.
Lincoln hospitals Wednesday cared for 17 people with COVID-19, including seven Lancaster County residents. Three patients needed ventilators, according to the Health Department.
The Health Department reported 24 new cases Tuesday, and with 83 cases confirmed this week, the county remained on pace to have its third straight week of declining new cases.
Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird and interim Health Director Pat Lopez have attributed declining new cases since late July to the county's mask mandate.
By Riley Johnson

OWH: Positive cases of COVID-19 reported in Ralston, Millard elementary schools

Days after opening, the Millard and Ralston school districts have reported positive cases of COVID-19.
Two positive coronavirus cases were reported at Reagan Elementary School in the Millard school district. Those with direct contact with the two individuals were directed to quarantine in accordance with Douglas County Health Department guidelines. The school was to be cleaned and sanitized Wednesday evening, the district said in a statement.
Millard began its school year on Monday, with a quarter of its students attending each day. The district is aiming to bring back all students who have chosen in-person learning by Monday, though Superintendent Jim Sutfin said he could decide later this week to divide high school students into two groups that would attend classes in person every other day.
The Ralston Public Schools also alerted families to a confirmed case of COVID-19 in one of the district's elementary schools.
Blumfield Elementary School Principal Casey Knight wrote in a letter to parents Wednesday that an individual involved with the prekindergarten classroom has been diagnosed with COVID-19. The person was not a student.
The Ralston Public Schools reopened to students Tuesday with slightly less than half of students in attendance. The district is in the yellow level of its reopening plan, which means students will attend school part of the time and have independent learning from home part of the time.
Ralston students are divided into two groups attending school on alternate days.
Knight said that person was only in attendance for one of the days, and the district has been in communication with families considered to have close contact with the person.
"The Douglas County Health Department defines close contact as someone within six feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes or longer," Knight wrote. "These individuals who had close contact are at

a high-risk for exposure and are being asked to self-quarantine."
Because of privacy laws, Knight said more details could not be shared. The classroom is being deep-cleaned.
By Emily Nitcher

Seward Co Independent: COVID outbreak hits Seward County

Two major outbreaks stemming from parties and celebrations have been responsible for Seward County's recent surge in confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.
At an Aug. 6 briefing, Four Corners Health District personnel and various institutions throughout Seward County recapped the last two weeks in public health. During that two weeks, 66 new confirmed cases of coronavirus emerged in Seward County, a number that surpassed the county's total since the pandemic began over three months ago.
In the last full week of data (July 27-Aug. 1), Seward County saw a 8.41% positivity rate, nearly doubling the 4.83% rate from the week before and well over the average of 3.98%.
Four Corners Health Department Executive Director Laura McDougall also explained that, as of data available on Aug. 6, 46 people were still sick with coronavirus in Seward County. That surpassed the other counties in the health district (York 18, Butler 7, Polk 6). As of the briefing, six people in the district were hospitalized with complications due to COVID-19. McDougall said Seward County had two of those hospitalizations, one person in their 40s and another she described as only in their 30s.
McDougall then confirmed the two recent outbreaks in Seward County, including one that had resulted in 14 cases in one day (and eight the following day for a two-day total of 22), came from a celebration that involved someone in their 20s and their family members. McDougall also said one of the recent confirmed cases out of York County included "school-aged kids," so the health department has informed area schools that could be impacted by current confirmed cases.
"We expect that number will go up once school reopens," McDougall said.
Because of those recent outbreaks and the rising number of cases inside Seward County, Four Corners Health District officials moved its risk gauge up to 1.75, which is the highest it has been but still shy of the threshold into orange (2.00). McDougall stated in the briefing that, considering the latest data she received that morning, she expected the dial to drift near orange.
Four Corners Health District received a new shipment of personal protective equipment for hospitals, primary care facilities and elder care facilities among others, but not for schools. The State of Nebraska restricted PPE to schools, as well as non-profits, at least for the time being.
Memorial Health Care Systems Chairman Roger Reamers announced that the hospital would emphasize in-house rapid testing, offering quicker test results than alternative outlets. He stressed the importance of quick results.
"We want to make sure we're ready to help in the next few weeks," Reamers said.
Tests can also be conducted in the two-hour window Test Nebraska makes available every Friday.
Graduation ceremonies held in Seward Aug. 1 passed with no noticeable disruptions. Dr. Josh Fields, Seward Public Schools superintendent, said the latest plans for Seward Public Schools were shared with parents on Aug. 5. Concordia University interim President Dr. Russell Sommerfeld said Concordia's plan to reopen now requires face coverings indoors and outdoors where maintaining a six-foot distance is impossible.
Seward City Administrator Greg Butcher and Utica Board of Trustees member Sharon Powell joined the conference to compliment their respective pool staffs, which both drew their seasons to a close without outbreak or incidents. Senior care facilities at both towns remain closed.
In the business sector, Seward County Chamber and Development Partnership President Jonathan Jank

brought up the recent status in unemployment. As of mid-July, federal law required those who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 to seek employment in order to obtain unemployment insurance. Jank invited Bryan Seck of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce to speak about Seward County's rise in unemployment, which stands at 6.5% – double its total this time last year.

Seck listed one person he works with in Lincoln as a single mother of three. During full employment pre-coronavirus she made $1,664 per month, which left $4 for savings after expenditures, according to Seck's presentation. While receiving unemployment insurance during the coronavirus, she received $3,232 per month and saw more of her children. Since those benefits no longer applied to her she's received $832 per month, which has pushed her and her children to the point of eviction, Seck said.

Jank said he wanted to share stories of real people in order to best convey the importance of being progressive and urgent when dealing with unemployment.

By Brady Oltmans

Scottsbluff SH: The word is spreading: Prevent the spread of COVID-19

Local schools and events have been spreading the word: Wear a mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus.

During Wednesday's Panhandle Public Health District's daily briefing, Panhandle Public Health Director Kim Engel gave a shout out to the Scottsbluff Public Schools for a video of the Scottsbluff mascot — or "Mask-ot" according to a video posted on the Scottsbluff Public School's website — promoting tips to help children wear a mask.

The fun video shared some tips for helping children get ready for wearing a mask as many schools will require masks, at least in situations where social distancing is not possible, when school starts this week and next. PPHD officials also shared tips available on the PPHD website including answering questions and sharing facts with children from credible sources about COVID-19 in a way that children can understand and reassuring children that they are safe.

PPHD also shared a video, which has been circulating on social media on simple steps to protect you and your friends from the spread of the coronavirus. The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation worked with various partners to put together the PSA, which is targeted at encouraging teens and young adults to wear masks. The video is available at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Facebook page and on YouTube.

Engel also shared a fun photo from the Monument Marathon committee, which is available on its Facebook page, encouraging runners and volunteers to wear masks at the event coming up in September. Race Director Jennifer Reisig has told the Star-Herald that all runners will be provided a gaiter-style mask.

"They will be wearing masks and we have lots of visitors coming into the area," Engel said, also noting that this week is the Old West Balloon Fest and encouraging people to wear masks and social distance.

Engel and Scotts Bluff County Public Health Director Paulette Schnell said that gatherings are the most common ways that the spread of the coronavirus is occurring. Schnell said that community spread cases continue to increase, which means that officials are unable to determine exactly where a person may have contracted the virus as they are unable to identify a specific person who they may have had contact with. To date, 136 of 479 cases reported since March 2 are community spread cases in the Panhandle.

"It's a good reason to take all those precautions when you are out and about," Schnell said of the increase in community spread cases.

Testing in the area that is done through TestNebraska is continuing to average about four days before results are received, Schnell said. TestNebraska testing is available at Regional West Medical Center in

Scottsbluff, Chadron Community Hospital, Gordon Memorial Hospital, Box Butte General Hospital and Sidney Regional West Medical Center. Sign up is available at testnebraska.com.
Earlier this week, Engel said that hospitals that are providing TestNebraska testing do receive supplies and materials for testing from the private company, which has contracted with the State of Nebraska to increase testing.
Testing is also available at Community Action Partnership in Gering and Morrill County Community Hospital. People can also get testing through their local hospital or clinic, but testing may be limited.
During Wednesday's call, 10 new cases were reported in the Panhandle. Nine of the cases involved adults. Community spread cases reported were: 3, Dawes County; 2, Scotts Bluff County; 1, Sheridan County. Close contact cases were: 2, Scotts Bluff County; 1, Morrill County. In Scotts Bluff County, one child under the age of 19 was reported to have contracted the virus from a close contact.
There are currently 56 active cases with one person hospitalized. To date, 417 people have recovered.
By Maunette Loeks

Holt Co Independent: Health Department Gives Carnival The Go Ahead

A carnival in a pandemic? Yes you heard that right. Mac's Carnival will be in O'Neill Thursday through Saturday, Aug. 13 -15 at Carney Park in O'Neill. Mac's Carnival and Attractions is based out of Woon Socket, SD. Rides, games and food for all ages.
Most people have already lost their mind after a summer that has been nothing but shutdowns from fairs to local celebrations and the rodeo's and attractions that go with these events. Social media went wild when it was announced that Mac's carnival was coming to town.
The City of O'Neill was approached by the carnival owners to see if they could set up at Carney Park. The city granted the carnival a permit to set up as the Health District is in Phase IV. Mac's Carnival then applied for permission from the health department submitting a plan for compliance adhereing to Phase IV and it was granted on Tuesday morning by the NCDHD Director. The carnival said they will take extra measures to comply with health measures to be able to operate. All rides will be sanitized daily before opening and also sanitized throughout the hours of operation. All operators are required to wear masks. They also have put sanitation stations at every ride and throughout the carnival. The rides that are in close contact have closed every other seat to maintain social distancing standards. The city bathrooms at the park remain closed.
People need to remember that Summerfest and the Holt County Fair did not fall in the confines of Phase IV health department measures. Although the fair which ran last week was in Phase IV there was no way to book a carnival when setting up the fair to know if we would transition into Phase IV.
Phase IV states all locations/venues that have a capacity of 500 or more individuals will be required to submit a reopening plan for approval to their local health department. Per the directed health measures put into place by the state of Nebraska, effective Aug. 1st, large events and gatherings can take place under the following conditions: indoor gatherings will be limited to 75 percent of rated occupancy. Outdoor gatherings 100 percent of rated occupancy. Gatherings include but are not limited to indoor or outdoor arenas, indoor or outdoor auctions, stadiums, tracks, fairgrounds, festivals, zoos, auditoriums, large event conference rooms, meeting halls, indoor theaters, libraries, swimming pools or any other confined indoor or outdoor space. Six feet separation between groups remains in guidance.
Plans for reopening or expanding to new capacity limits must be submitted to the local health departments and approved for all indoor and outdoor locations/venues that hold 500 or more individuals (1,000 or more in counties over 500,000 population) before reopening is permitted. The reopening plan must contain planned number of guests, how the location will meet social distancing guidelines and sanitation guidelines.

These measures are effective through 11:59 p.m., Aug. 31, 2020; unless renewed, extended or terminated by subsequent order, all persons in Cherry, Keya Paha, Brown, Rock, Boyd, Holt, Knox, Antelope and Pierce counties are ordered to comply.

Top of Form

Kearney Hub: Add masks to your back-to-school supply list

KEARNEY — Along with paper, pencils and notebooks, make sure your child has a mask to wear back to school.

"It's a proven fact — masks help reduce transmission of COVID-19," said Von Lutz, health educator and special events coordinator at Two Rivers Public Health Department.

"Masks are for the other person's safety. It can't stop the virus, but it can help with transmission. If someone coughs or spits, how far are droplets going to go? Wearing a mask is a great way to block it," he said. "My wearing a mask protects you, and you wearing a mask protects me."

Lutz said reaction to the wearing of masks is mixed.

"Some people don't believe masks help, but it's a proven fact: They help to reduce transmission," he said.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services agrees.

"Limiting the potential for COVID-19 spread is essential as students head back to school. Local health departments and others ask Nebraskans to wear masks, along with taking other preventative actions," according to DHHS.

The kind of mask is important, too. A new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends avoiding masks with an exhalation valve or vent, which allow respiratory droplets to be expelled.

Cases of COVID-19 are rising in Buffalo and Kearney counties. On Monday, 31 new cases were reported on the seven-county Two Rivers area, which includes Buffalo, Kearney, Dawson, Franklin, Gosper, Harlan and Phelps counties.

Students also should practice other safety measures when they return to school, such as frequent handwashing, keeping social distance where possible and staying home if they have been sick or exposed to COVID-19.

Anyone who has been exposed or has symptoms can sign up, in both English and Spanish, for free tests at TestNebraska.com or TestNebraska.com/es for Spanish.

People who have participated in any group activity where masks were not worn and social distancing did not occur are encouraged to get a COVID-19 test.

Lutz said the new weekly TestNebaska sites in this region have been well-received. He said 71 people had signed up to be tested today in Minden. Tests were held Monday in Kearney and were to take place this morning and again Friday. Tests begin Thursday in Holdrege and Alma.

"We've had a great response and an excellent turnout rate," he said.

TestNebraska did more than 55,000 tests in July, nearly double the number it did in June. It continues to expand its daily COVID-19 lab capacity.

To be tested, people first must register online at TestNebraska.com. They will be given a code and a test date and time. People will not be tested without a reservation.

Weekly sites and times include:

n Kearney: 8-11 a.m. Wednesdays at the Buffalo County Fairgrounds at 3807 N Ave., and 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Mondays and Fridays at 3320 A Ave., behind CHI Health Good Samaritan.

-n Alma: 9:30-10:30 a.m. Thursdays at 717 N. Brown St.

- Franklin: 9 a.m.-noon Wednesdays at 1406 Q St.

- Gothenburg: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Fridays at YMCA/Gothenburg Health at 910 20th St.

- Holdrege: 8-10 a.m. Thursdays at Phelps County fairgrounds
- Lexington: 7-11 a.m. Wednesdays at 1600 W. 13th St.
- Minden: 9-11 a.m. Tuesdays at Kearney County Fairgrounds.

By Mary Jane Skala

LJS: Senators approve LGBTQ resolution and celebrate the summer's Supreme Court decision

First, state senators voted on a resolution that affirmed a June U.S. Supreme Court ruling that an employer who fires a person for being gay or transgender violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
Thirteen senators then attended a rally on the Capitol steps where about 50 people gathered to celebrate the progress in making Nebraska a more welcoming state for the LGBTQ+ community.
Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, who sponsored a bill (LB627) last year to end discrimination against gay and transgender workers, saw a majority of senators — 28 — approve her resolution (LR466) Wednesday morning. If she had tried to pass the bill, it probably would have been filibustered and would have needed 33 yes votes to break that filibuster and get it to a vote.
But the landmark Supreme Court decision fully covered her bill, and more, she said. It would be good to harmonize Nebraska law with that decision, but she brought the resolution, instead, because of time constraints in the 2020 session.
"Current and prospective employers are paying attention to what we are doing," she told her fellow senators. "Future workers are paying attention and looking for places to bring their talents."
Sen. Robert Clements of Elmwood rose to say he was not in full agreement with the resolution.
Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, writing for the majority in the decision, said, "An employer who fires an individual for being homosexual or transgender fires that person for traits or actions it would not have questioned in members of a different sex. Sex plays a necessary and undisguisable role in the decision, exactly what Title VII forbids."
Clements said that distorted the original meaning of the 1964 law, which was really just dealing with males and females.
He also highlighted Gorsuch's statement that "it is impossible to discriminate against a person for being homosexual or transgender without discriminating against that individual based on sex."
Clements said that is not true, in his opinion, and the Legislature should not affirm the Supreme Court's 6-3 decision.
His concern is that it may conflict with the Nebraska Constitution section on religious freedom: "All persons have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences."
It's the duty of the Legislature to pass suitable laws to protect every religious denomination, and it would be appropriate to include that language in the resolution, Clements said.
Sen. Dave Murman of Glenvil also had "deep reservations" about supporting the resolution. The Supreme Court's Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia, decision had major implications against religious institutions and faith-based organizations, he said.
Employees could use the decision to seek coverage under group health plans for certain procedures that traditionally have been excluded from coverage, such as gender reassignment surgery, Murman said. And that could violate protections under Title VII.
But Pansing Brooks said there are protections already under the 2012 Hosanna-Tabor v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission decision, "so that religious people can continue to discriminate against LGBT if they choose."
"But this case speaks strongly about the fact that these are Americans and citizens and Nebraskans, and

we will support them and be kind to them and welcome them, and it is what we must do as a kind and civil society," she said.
Senators voted 28-8 to approve the resolution.
In addition to senators, representatives of several chambers of commerce attended the rally after the Legislature adjourned for the day, including Bryan Slone, president of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce.
"As the state comes out of the pandemic, and it will," Slone said, "there is a tremendous opportunity to attract people and businesses to this state and talent that's going to make a game-changing difference in our state."
But they will only come if Nebraska continues to be the most welcoming state in the country.
"Equality before the law is not only a slogan, but continues to be who we are," he said.
Kaylie Hogan-Schnittker, from the Lincoln Chamber's Young Professionals Group, said now is the time for the Legislature to send a strong message to employers and workers that Nebraska is committed to being a welcoming and inclusive state for all.
"Let us show our fellow states that we are committed to celebrating diversity and embracing people as their most authentic selves," she said.
By JoAnne Young

OWH: Nebraska lawmakers vote to affirm U.S. Supreme Court's LGBTQ discrimination ruling

LINCOLN — Nebraska lawmakers voted Wednesday to back a U.S. Supreme Court decision banning job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.
The high court ruled on June 15 that firing someone for being gay or transgender violates federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sex. Justice Neil Gorsuch, who was appointed by President Trump, wrote the majority opinion.
Legislative Resolution 466, introduced by State Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln and co-sponsored by 28 colleagues, put the Legislature on record as affirming the court’s decision. The vote approving the resolution was 28-8, with seven senators abstaining.
Pansing Brooks said the resolution was intended to send a message to Nebraska employers, workers and youths that the state is committed to being a welcoming place for all, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other people and their families.
“It is what we must do as a kind and civil society,” she said.
But Sens. Robert Clements of Elmwood and Dave Murman of Glenvil took issue with the court’s decision. They disputed Gorsuch’s conclusions and raised concerns that the ruling would impinge on religious freedom.
Earlier this year, Pansing Brooks had introduced a bill that would have had the same effect as the court ruling. Legislative Bill 627 was blocked by a filibuster, and she said Wednesday that there was not time after the ruling to address the issue again. She said she would try next year to bring Nebraska law in line with the Supreme Court decision.
By Martha Stoddard

LJS: NU to expand requirements for scholarships to out-of-state students

Nonresident students applying for merit-based scholarships at the University of Nebraska may soon be able to use their high school grade-point average.
Under current NU policy, nonresident students applying for aid at UNL, UNO, UNK or UNMC only qualify if they rank in the top 25% of their high school class or score at least a 23 on the ACT.

The proposed change would allow high school students to submit a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 to that list.
If approved by the NU Board of Regents on Friday, the change would follow an expansion of the factors considered by the university's campuses for admission.
In February, regents approved allowing high school students seeking entrance to UNL, UNK and UNO to show their GPA instead of their class rank or test score.
The rationale behind changing the policy for merit-based scholarships is similar, NU President Ted Carter said.
Many high schools, including Lincoln Public Schools, are no longer calculating class ranks, while the disruption wrought to college-entrance exams such as the ACT and SAT by the coronavirus has changed how students are preparing for college.
"Our highest priority is taking care of students and families," Carter said in a statement. "That includes students outside Nebraska who want to be part of the University of Nebraska family.
"To any student outside Nebraska who's thinking of coming here, we say: There's a great opportunity for you at the University of Nebraska," he added.
Regents are scheduled to meet in-person for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but in a new venue.
Instead of the basement board room at Varner Hall, the board will convene in the more spacious Nebraska Innovation Campus Conference Center.
Two regents — Howard Hawks and Barbara Weitz, both of Omaha — will take part in the meeting virtually from Baxter Arena in Omaha, which is also open to the public.
Friday's meeting is scheduled to begin at 8:30 a.m.
Other agenda items include:
* Regents will be asked to approve the biennial budget request for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years. The request, which will go before the Legislature in January, calls for a 2.5% and 2.3% increase in state appropriations over the next two years. If passed, NU would receive $628.3 million and $642.9 million, respectively, in state funding over the next biennium.
* The board will also ask the Legislature to extend a deferred maintenance agreement that provides $11 million in state appropriations annually to be matched by university funds for building repairs through 2050. Additionally, NU will also seek to increase the fund by $2 million annually through the 2024-25 biennium.
By Chris Dunker

OWH: Big Ten is more than sports — UNL collaborates with academic heavyweights, too

The former leader of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln warns that it would be unwise for the Huskers to parachute out of the Big Ten.
Harvey Perlman, who was chancellor in 2010 when UNL left the Big 12 to join the Big Ten, said his reasoning has only a bit to do with sports and a lot to do with academics.
“The fact is that the Big Ten is much bigger than a sports conference,” Perlman, who is now on the NU College of Law faculty, said Wednesday. “And it would be unfortunate to sacrifice it to play North Dakota State in football. It would be a very significant blow to the academic reputation of the university.”
Basking in the academic glow of the Big Ten is a sweet benefit of playing sports in that conference, academics say.
Although Husker football fans are riled that the Big Ten has decided against holding fall athletics, many academicians inside and outside the state caution the Huskers against taking too much offense with the

decision. UNL must avoid getting so perturbed with the Big Ten that it stomps out in petulance or gets disowned, they say.

The fact is that the Big Ten is one of the strongest groups of universities in the world, and it takes pride in meeting academically and sharing expertise among partners.

The conference oversees the Big Ten Academic Alliance, a batch of administrators and professors who organize leadership conferences, online course sharing, collaboration in library materials, combined purchasing power and other elements to maximize the strength of the conference.

Husker officials and fans have expressed their dejection over the Big Ten's decision this week to not play fall sports because of the coronavirus pandemic. Some, including UNL Chancellor Ronnie Green, have intimated that the Husker program can compete safely and will consider putting together an independent football schedule.

"We are very disappointed in the decision by the Big Ten Conference to postpone fall football," said Green, whose name topped that of three other university leaders who issued the statement Tuesday. "We hope it may be possible for our student athletes to be able to compete."

University of Iowa Faculty Senate President Joseph Yockey said Big Ten schools share rare library collections and offer a joint leadership program. Merely through association, Yockey said, faculty members, graduate students and undergrads are drawn to Big Ten universities because of their prestige and research resources.

Keith Marshall, executive director of the Illinois-based Big Ten Academic Alliance, added that conference collaboration includes brain-injury research, minority graduate student and faculty pipelines, fiber-optic networking, summer research for undergraduates and many other projects.

Yockey called the Big Ten one of the biggest research enterprises on the globe — an enterprise, he said, with "worldwide currency."

Suggesting that the Big Ten is a collection of elite research institutions is like saying Warren Buffett makes decent money. The Big Ten's University of Michigan had the second-highest research expenditures in the country in 2018 (about $1.6 billion), behind Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Research expenditures are made with grants earned from the federal government and private entities, and with an institution's own money. The University of Wisconsin was eighth, federal data says, and the Big Ten (made up of 14 universities) had 12 of the top 50. Only Iowa (51st) and UNL (78th) were outside the top 50 that year.

UNL has the second-smallest enrollment in the Big Ten (about 25,000), ahead of only the private Northwestern University in Illinois.

It's not just UNL that benefits from the partnership. The NU Medical Center's Buffett Cancer Center in Omaha, affiliated with UNL through the NU system, joined the Big Ten Cancer Research Consortium in 2013.

Since jumping out of the Texas-dominated Big 12 and joining the Big Ten, UNL administrators have talked about the need to sharpen their academic game to fit in with the Big Ten. There is evidence that UNL has picked it up, too. UNL was ranked 91st in research in 2010, the federal government says.

Linda Ray Pratt, now retired as a UNL and NU system professor and administrator, said that all of the talk by sports media of UNL taking "rogue action" in the Big Ten "could endanger our membership in the Big Ten, which also has an important academic side for UNL."

Efforts have been made "to bring UNL into the circle of action and research proposals, etc., that flourish in the Big Ten schools," she said.

Lance Perez, dean of engineering at UNL, described "tremendous academic benefits to being in the Big Ten." Perez said Big Ten engineering deans gather annually to discuss challenges and opportunities. "And this happens across the disciplines."

Perez said he reaches out to Big Ten deans for advice on communication and relations, for instance,

with the powerful National Science Foundation. “This group,” he said of the deans, “is amazingly collaborative, amazingly forthcoming.”
Michael Baumgartner, head of the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, said he has no doubt that being in the Big Ten helps UNL recruit faculty members and engage in research projects.
The Big Ten Academic Alliance enables UNL and UNMC to meet academic leaders and participate in exchanges involving faculty, students and library material, he said. When you partner with the Big Ten, Baumgartner said, you connect with “some of the best universities in the country, some of the best universities in the world.”
By Rick Ruggles

LJS: Nebraska traffic back to pre-pandemic levels

Traffic on Nebraska’s highways and byways is returning to normal, after falling more than 40% in some stretches during the early days of the coronavirus clampdown.
The statewide total last week measured up to the 2016-2018 average for the first time since early March, the Department of Transportation announced Tuesday — though some areas remain quieter than normal.
Traffic on the interstate system east of Lincoln and through Omaha, which fell 44% in early April, was down 9% last week, according to the state. And traffic on Omaha’s streets and highways was 6% below average, and down 4% in Lincoln.
But some areas were busier than average last week. Interstate 80 west of Lincoln was up 8%, and rural highways were up 5%.
With the traffic heavier, the department urged motorists to be aware of construction zones.
By Peter Salter

Beatrice DS: Gage County settles dispute with insurance carriers over coverage of Beatrice Six judgment

BEATRICE, Neb. — Gage County has reached a settlement with insurance companies that officials argued should provide coverage for the $28 million judgment in the Beatrice Six case.
On Wednesday, the County Board approved memorandums of understanding with the Nebraska Intergovernmental Risk Management Association, Employers Mutual Casualty and four excess insurance carriers for settlements.
The county expects to collect a total of $5.98 million from the carriers to put toward the judgment.
“We started with an understanding that there may or may not be any coverage,” County Board Chairman Erich Tiemann said. “We reached this point, and I think we all are in agreement that this is the best possible outcome at this time.”
The Beatrice Six — Joseph White, Ada JoAnn Taylor, Thomas Winslow, James Dean, Kathleen Gonzalez, Debra Shelden and Joseph White — were convicted in the 1985 rape and slaying of Helen Wilson in her downtown Beatrice apartment.
They were arrested in March and April 1989 and ultimately spent a combined 75 years in prison until DNA evidence showed that another man had committed the crime. In 2016, a federal jury awarded the six a combined $28 million.
The case gained national notoriety for having the largest number of defendants wrongfully convicted in a single prosecution.
After the judgment, Gage County filed lawsuits against the Nebraska Intergovernmental Risk

Management Association and Employers Mutual Casualty, which both argued that they were not obligated to provide coverage.
Joel Bacon, a Lincoln attorney, said Employers Mutual Casualty is paying $3.9 million and Nebraska Intergovernmental Risk Management Association is paying $1.98 million, with $95,000 being paid by four other insurance companies.
"The total settlement amount of just under $6 million is modest compared to the judgments entered against the county and its former employers, but in our professional opinion this outcome is the best that could be achieved under the circumstances," Bacon said.
The judgment is being paid by property tax revenue and a half-cent additional sales tax that went into effect with the start of the year.
The insurance settlements could mean the judgment will be paid two years sooner, for a total of around five years. The first payment to the Beatrice 6 was made last June.
Tiemann said Gage County has also accumulated a total of $2.1 million in legal fees fighting the judgment and arguing the insurance companies should provide coverage.
By Scott Koperski

OWH Editorial: Land banks can help Nebraska communities. Gov. Ricketts should say yes

Josh Moenning, the mayor of Norfolk, testified before the Nebraska Legislature last year about a major problem weighing on his city. Dozens of tax-delinquent properties, Moenning told lawmakers, threaten to reduce neighboring property values in Norfolk and create blighted conditions. The properties often sit for years due to significant tax liens that deter investors from buying the property. In many cases, the city ultimately must spend big amounts to demolish the structures.
Norfolk would benefit greatly, he said, if the city could return those structures to the marketplace, maintaining property values and avoiding blight.
Norfolk stands out for its dynamic economy and forward-looking civic culture, but the city lacks an important tool available in Omaha to address the problem: a tax-exempt political subdivision known as a land bank, which acquires vacant and tax-delinquent properties in order to get them back on the market.
The Omaha Municipal Land Bank came into existence in 2014 after city officials and business leaders here urged the Legislature to allow its creation, citing land banks' success in other states. At the time, Omaha had more than 3,000 sites as "unfit and unsafe," with more than 700 houses on the demolition list.
Current state law allows land banks in only Douglas and Sarpy Counties. Legislative Bill 424, introduced by State Sen. Dan Quick of Grand Island, would enable other Nebraska municipalities to create a land bank if they so choose. The experience in Omaha demonstrates the positive results a land bank can provide, as testimony on LB 424 explained.
The benefits that Omaha has achieved have spurred leaders in other Nebraska cities, such as Norfolk and Grand Island, to request the ability to have the same land bank option. They are making a reasonable request, aiming to boost their economic development potential and quality of life.
It's appropriate for the state to place sensible restrictions on land banks' powers, and state law plus Omaha's city ordinance do that. The Omaha land bank can't levy taxes, for example. This session, state senators amended LB 424 to require some additional, appropriatate restrictions, such as forbidding a land bank from issuing bonds.
The Legislature has given LB 424 final approval. That's a sound decision, given the clear need in Nebraska communities. Because the virus abruptly caused a long break late in the current legislative session, lawmakers won't have a chance to vote on overriding a veto by Gov. Pete Ricketts should he

take that action.
Economic development is one of Nebraska's central priorities. So is local control. Ricketts can promote both those goals by giving his approval to the land bank legislation.

OWH: Courtney Allen-Gentry: My journey from North Omaha to California to activist nurse

After the Omaha race riots of 1969, a bleak landscape and limited opportunity took my brilliant single mother of five young children to San Diego. This was my mother's imagined land of milk and honey for Black people escaping the cruelties scarring the experience of Black life in the violent wake of those riots.
Post riot, instead of rebuilding the black community, city leaders leveled blocks of burned buildings and cut funding of recreational, educational and business opportunities in North Omaha, punishing Blacks for the nerve to rise up against the injustice of white police brutality. A young activist, school librarian and battered woman, my mother was determined to achieve her dreams while escaping the violent rage of my father and her dreams deferred. She left in the early fall of 1969 with five of us children in tow.
Half a century later, my life has been a series of turnings. My daddy's family in Nebraska in a cloistered, treelined Black community, nearly decimated by fire and violence, stood in stark contrast to my mother's California and a free range life as a latch key kid from the last house in the cul-de-sac on the edge of an urban canyon. My brilliant mother was among the first to homestead a suburban black development full of scorpions and black widow spiders in southeast San Diego.
Our lives were a mixture of activism, independence and the glamour of the black intellectuals and political elite of the '70s.
My mother worked as a social activist and field representative for the longtime president pro tem of the California Senate, James R. Mills. She spent long days doing political organizing while my two older brothers and I went home after school to cook dinner, take care of chores and freely roam the neighborhood, where we caused plenty of trouble.
San Diego also is where my dear, dead, older brother Stacy would discover his love for cannabis and the dazzling tales of Emerald Triangle origin stories, elevating the plant to mystical proportions in the drug culture of the '70s.
Richard Nixon's CIA operations against the Black Panthers also meant frequent visits by the FBI as they monitored my oldest brother's associations and activities.
Years later, after we all left California, Stacy and I were planning to visit San Diego again before he was murdered in 2002 during a home invasion robbery in Omaha. I knew he wanted to have his ashes scattered at the beach in San Diego, yet even after 18 years, I've never had opportunity or desire to release his body from the confines of my bedroom.
My brilliant mother taught me the importance of grassroots organizing and the strength of local political action, walking precincts door to door with her. She spearheaded several statewide California Democratic campaigns. I knew more about Hubert Humphrey, George McGovern and the California electoral process at 8 years old than most adults.
I believe my mother became a political activist for Sen. Mills because of experiencing the '69 Omaha riots. She was determined to be part of the anti-racism movement birthed from previous years of Black upheaval. This meant my young life was filled with the Black social and intellectual elite of the 1970s — leaders including Vernon Jordan, executive director of the National Urban League from 1971–81, from whose swimming pool I was rescued from drowning.
In reflection, growing up the daughter of a Black female social activist deeply impacted by the great racial upheavals of the '60s built the foundation of social activism I am known for today, as a board-

certified advanced holistic public health nurse. I specialize in the ethical integration of plant medicine into a global public health paradigm.
My interest in plant medicine originated from my longing for social justice. It was never my intention to become a cannabis and CBD expert; I just had to use my mind to help people of color whose lives were being ruined for small amounts of cannabis possession. Even now, 51 years after the 1969 Omaha riots, as cannabis is widely legal across states and white businessmen make millions, Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts is drawing from Richard Nixon's playbook, fueling school-to-prison pipelines for Blacks while preventing medical cannabis legalization for vulnerable citizens.
Neither my brilliant mother nor my badass daddy are alive to read this article. Neither will know I have just found out I have a life-threatening disease and no health insurance since I reside in a state where, in my view, business is valued more than lives. Fifty-one years after the Omaha race riots, it's perfectly clear we are all in need of a revolution because we have lost our humanity. Again.
Now I've just got to stay alive long enough to make it happen, so years away I can remind you I was once here.
Courtney Allen-Genty, an RN with a master's in nursing, is a board certified advanced holistic nurse, nurse educator and coach specializing in the integration of science, spirit and plant medicine into public health.

LJS Editorial, 8/13: Presenting a Lancaster County budget was no small feat by board

Amid fiscal uncertainty, the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners has presented a $200 million budget for the upcoming year that mimics the troubled times we're navigating.
There are no frills. No outlandish purchases. And some belt-tightening measures, as you'd expect. It's the epitome of austerity, and we have no problem with that.
This budget funds new body cameras for deputy sheriffs and helps pay for a new centralized county-city payroll system while protecting the county's workforce from layoffs or wage freezes
In short, the board "stuck to our priorities," said Commissioner Deb Schorr.
Funding body cameras for the sheriff's department was considered to be a key first step toward building trust in law enforcement through transparency. It became a hot-button topic in early June in the aftermath of the Memorial Day killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer.
In light of nationwide outrage, body cams are the bridge to officer accountability.
The new payroll system is also a necessary expense to improve workforce technology, while adding money to the budget to prevent layoffs provides peace of mind for those people -- friends, neighbors and community members alike -- who work on our behalf in so many ways.
Conspicuously missing from the budget is a plan to bail out the Lancaster Event Center from its $2.25 million hole.
In the last week, there was a push by the Lancaster County Ag Society for the board to raise the mill levy by three-quarters of a cent to generate the funds needed to cover improvements for the National High School Finals Rodeo and revenue lost when coronavirus concerns canceled it.
We endorse the the Event Center and the role it plays in Lancaster County, but we believe raising taxes of struggling community members at this time is too great an ask.
If there's another way -- and it appears its supporters aren't giving up the fight -- that doesn't mortgage our future or safety, then by all means, we'd support it.
Presenting this budget didn't come without its share of trims or tough decisions. The plan doesn't fund a dozen new employees in a host of county agencies, including the sheriff's office and the jail, and each agency had its spending authority cut by around 1%.
That said, it wasn't easy. But these are tough times, and this was the job each commissioner signed on

for on Election Day. Still, when they do things right and demonstrate proper stewardship and responsibility toward public funds, it shouldn't go unnoticed.

LJS Local View: Tax compromise less than bargained for

There is no doubt many Nebraskans are struggling amid rising COVID-19 case counts and unprecedented economic uncertainty. Nebraska legislators have an opportunity this legislative session to make the right decisions to protect Nebraska children and families.

When the pandemic forced the session into emergency adjournment, state lawmakers had time to press the reset button and reprioritize the legislative agenda to address the immediate needs of Nebraska families suffering in a time of health and economic crisis.

Unfortunately, senators returned committed to reducing state revenues by pursuing generous tax incentives for big corporations and a property tax plan with no guarantee to fully fund schools, one that binds future legislative bodies while great uncertainties exist for what lies ahead.

According to OpenSky Policy Institute, had the new property tax reform been passed in 2000, the state would have seen a 16% smaller General Fund budget in 2021, $788 million fewer than was actualized. Passing LB 1107 into law would add further shortfalls to the state budget in the following biennium by $400 million dollars.

These staggering numbers force lawmakers to govern with fewer resources and the inability to be nimble in responding to Nebraskans' policy priorities. When surveyed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, an overwhelming majority of Nebraskans (74%) "oppose tax breaks to stimulate the economy if it will impact the budget for education, roads, and other services."

If Nebraska's legislators concede support to LB 1107 without commitment to addressing policy that protects children and families, the state will plunge into an economic emergency, overwhelming our state programs and services. While property tax relief is important to Nebraskans (57% approve), such cuts rank behind their support for affordable and accessible healthcare (69%); creating high-quality jobs (61%); fully funding K-12 public education (59%); and ensuring a living wage (58%).

At a time where Nebraskans with the fewest resources are most in danger, providing corporate tax breaks is a check we can't cash. Lawmakers should pause to reconsider these priorities and support the reinstatement of eviction moratoriums for renters and owners impacted by COVID-19, emergency child care subsidies advocated by Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh, expansion of eligibility for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and immediate reprioritization of LB 311, an act to implement paid family and paid medical leave for working Nebraskans.

This is the bare minimum to better protect Nebraskans.

The real question still waiting to be answered: Why would our state senators give more than $700 million in state revenue to benefit large businesses and corporations, instead of ensuring every Nebraska child and family impacted by the current health and economic crisis has food on the table and a roof over their heads?

Hadley Richters is CEO of the Holland Children's Movement, which is based in Omaha.

GII: Vets home residents asking for care home visitor guidelines to be amended

Letter to the Editor
E. Lynn and Ann DeLaet
Kearney

To our concerned public and families, we are residents of the Central Nebraska Veterans Home in Kearney. In March we were literally shut down.

This included suspension of all our activities, suspension of all social visits from our family and friends, not attending any religious events and we could not keep any outside appointments. We were restricted to our rooms for our meals, which were served cold and never what we ordered. We cannot do our washing, it has to be sent out, and we have no interaction with any of our neighbors in our pod. Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months — five months ago to be exact — and finally we can start visiting our loved ones through a glass window on a phone or radio for a limit of 30 minutes. We are becoming more depressed, hopeless, disheartened and discouraged because of our situation. While everyone wants to put the blame on the VA home, that is not the case. They are doing a tremendous job of maintaining optimistic attitudes with the residents, but they are restricted by government guidelines that are in place for these homes. They have no way of compensating hours that we spend alone in our room and months with on social interaction with our friends and families. This is our home and we are starting to feel more like prisoners. People making these guidelines are getting to leave their homes and see their families, but not us.

Not only are we suffering emotionally, but also physically. No outside activity, also came with canceling physical therapy appointments. For someone who is losing circulation in their legs and spends most of their time in a bed or a chair, physical therapy is a must. At this time, they are overwhelmed with appointments because of the guidelines.

We feel that at our age life is all about quality, not quantity, and we want to spend the rest of what we have left with our family and friends. We are suffering from anxiety and depression and feel like there is no relief in sight.

Please be a concerned citizen or family member and contact your governor and help us be able to have relief from all this and see our family and friends in a safe environment.

LJS: Fortenberry's second TV campaign ad will be negative

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry's campaign plans to follow up on its initial positive television ad of the 2020 congressional campaign with a negative TV ad tying Democratic nominee Kate Bolz to remarks she made upon returning from a trip to China in 2018.

The new TV ad, which is expected to begin to air later this week, presumably will be similar to radio and digital attack ads aired by the Fortenberry campaign hours after Bolz won the 1st District Democratic nomination last May.

The congressman's earlier digital ad stated that Bolz had said "we have much to learn from China" after returning from her trip there.

That swift targeting of Bolz three months ago was a clear indication that the congressman views the two-term Lincoln state senator as a more challenging opponent than he's faced in recent years.

The radio and digital ads described views expressed by Bolz after her return from China as "naive and dangerous and wrong."

Fortenberry's initial TV ad features Mark Nemec, owner of the Kolac Korner Cafe in Prague, who credits the congressman for helping his business survive and continue to support jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic through assistance from the federal Paycheck Protection Program.

By Don Walton

AP: Fed official says states reopened too quickly

WASHINGTON (AP) — A top official at the Federal Reserve criticized the decision by many states to reopen businesses this spring before getting the virus fully under control, and said those choices have hindered an economic recovery in the U.S.

Eric Rosengren, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, said states in the South and West that allowed businesses to reopen after shutting down for a brief period did register an initial burst of economic activity. But spikes in infection rates soon followed and economies in those states are now lagging those in the Northeast as consumers have become more cautious and bars and restaurants have been shut down again in some states.

Rosengren's comments, delivered online Wednesday, are some of the most specific yet by a Fed official tying the health of the economy to the nation's ability to control the virus. Fed Chair Jerome Powell has emphasized generally that recovery from the recession depends on conquering the pandemic, but Rosengren's remarks delved into the sharp difference in infection rates, both within regions of the United States, and the U.S. compared with Europe.

"Limited or inconsistent efforts by states to control the virus based on public health guidance are not only placing citizens at unnecessary risk of severe illness and possible death – but are also likely to prolong the economic downturn," Rosengren said.

"Despite the sizable interventions by monetary and fiscal policymakers ... the recovery may be losing steam, as activities in many states are once again restricted (officially or voluntarily) to slow the virus's spread," Rosengren said.

In Europe, nations "shut down more forcefully, maintained restrictions longer, and did not reopen until the virus had reached low levels," Rosengren said. "In contrast, in the United States, infection rates remain elevated, as states lifted protective measures too soon," Rosengren said.

As a result, real-time data shows that in Europe, visits to retail stores and recreation outlets, such asmovie theaters, have recovered more robustly than in the United States, Rosengren said.

Rosengren also pointed to the high current savings rate in the United States as evidence that Americans have been reluctant to spend, despite stimulus checks of $1,200 that were mailed to most Americans in the spring, and supplemental federal unemployment aid of $600 a week.

Other Fed officials have warned that the viral resurgence in July could slow the U.S. recovery. And Dallas Federal Reserve President Robert Kaplan said last month that more widespread use of masks would slow infections and help the U.S. economy.

INVESTORS HOPEFUL

The S&P 500 briefly traded above its record closing high Wednesday, nearly erasing the last of the historic losses it took due to the pandemic. The index ended up with a gain of 1.4%, just shy of its all-time high.

At its depths, the S&P 500 had been down nearly 34% when worries about the recession were at their height. But massive aid from the Federal Reserve and Congress helped prop up the market. That's allowed investors to look ahead a to a future when a vaccine will hopefully help the economy get back to normal.

RECORD DEFICIT

The U.S. budget deficit climbed to $2.81 trillion in the first 10 months of the budget year, exceeding any on record, the Treasury Department said Wednesday. Outlays so far this budget year total $5.63 trillion, a 50% increase over the $3.73 trillion at this point in 2019, with the vast majority of the extra spending related to fortifying the country's economy in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Congress has already passed rescue packages totaling nearly $3 trillion this year, but Democrats and Republicans remain far apart on another relief bill.

AP: US jobless claims fall below 1 million but remain high

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of laid-off workers applying for unemployment aid fell below 1 million last week for the first time since the pandemic intensified five months ago yet still remains at a

high level. The viral pandemic keeps forcing layoffs just as the expiration of a $600-a-week federal jobless benefit has deepened the hardships for many.
The Labor Department said applications fell to 963,000, the second straight drop, from 1.2 million the previous week. The decline suggests that layoffs are slowing, though last week's figure still exceeds the pre-pandemic record of just under 700,000.
The pandemic, the shutdowns that are meant to fight it and the reluctance or inability of many people to shop, travel or eat out are continuing to weaken the economy and force companies to cut staff. Twenty-three states have paused or reversed their business re-openings. In a hopeful sign, the rate of new confirmed viral cases has declined in the past couple of weeks, though it remains far above the rates that prevailed in May and June.
All told, fewer people are also continuing to receive state jobless aid. That figure dropped to 15.5 million, from 16.1 million the previous week.
For months, the unemployed had also been receiving the $600 a week in federal jobless aid on top of their state benefit. But the federal payment has expired, and negotiations in Congress to extend that benefit, likely at a lower level of payment, have collapsed in rancor.
The supplemental federal aid had enabled many jobless Americans to afford rent, food and utilities, and its expiration threatens to weaken consumer spending and further slow the economy. Unemployment benefits have accounted for roughly 5% of national income since April, a larger share than even Social Security. The loss of the $600 has shrunk benefits for the average recipient by one-half to three-quarters.
Michelle Meyer, an economist at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, says that the loss of the additional aid will reduce Americans' incomes by $18 billion a week.
"That's a big hit to purchasing power," she said.
Last week, President Donald Trump issued an executive order that would provide $300 a week in federal aid to the jobless to replace the expired $600-a-week benefit. But experts say it would take weeks for the states to implement that payment.
In addition to people who applied last week for state benefits, nearly 489,000 others sought jobless aid under a new program that has made self-employed and gig workers eligible for the first time. That figure isn't adjusted for seasonal trends, so it's reported separately.
But including that group, the Labor Department says 28.2 million people are receiving some form of unemployment benefits, though that figure may be inflated by double-counting by some states.
For states to set up systems to distribute a new $300 federal jobless benefit, their labor departments would need more guidance from the federal government, noted Michele Evermore, a senior researcher at the National Employment Law Project. The money, which is supposed to come from a federal disaster relief fund, would likely require states to hire more people and possibly contract with software vendors to establish a system to process the payments, Evermore said.
"I can't imagine that this goes up in less than a month anywhere," she said.
After the pandemic hit, Congress approved a $2 trillion aid package. Among other things, it provided the $600-a-week benefit and made self-employed and gig workers newly eligible for unemployment aid. Both programs required the states to create new processing systems while handling a crush of benefit applications. That influx resulted in huge backlogs and left millions of the unemployed frustrated by their inability to access benefits. Washington state, for one, eventually called in National Guard troops to help process applications.
In the meantime, with confirmed virus cases still high, it's not clear when business owners will be able to reopen or will have enough customers to rehire.
Grace Della is one of them. She opened her food tour business in Miami a decade ago with $300 from her mother. On weekends, she led the tours herself and eventually built up a business with 13 tour

guides, averaging 10 tours a day through culinary hot spots in South Beach and Little Havana.
Yet with the risk of infection still high and with scant customer demand, it's been more than four months since Miami Culinary Tours has taken out guests, and Della, 46, says she doesn't expect to recall her employees anytime soon.
She hopes to reopen later this month but isn't sure she can, given the state's high level of confirmed infections. Della said she tries to stay positive but confesses to moments of crippling fear. At one point, hyperventilating with anxiety, she contacted firefighters.
"There's no money coming in," Della said. "We're all scared."
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