From: Aspen, Blake
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Cc: Pinkerman, Justin
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Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jun 2022	7.68	4.00	08:05
Corn	Oct 2022	6.77	-40.00	08:01
Milo	Jun 2022	6.94	-70.00	08:05
Milo	Oct 2022	6.47	-70.00	08:01
Soybeans	Jun 2022	15.62	-55.00	08:00
Soybeans	Oct 2022	14.63	-65.00	08:02
Wheat	Jun 2022	10.59	-80.00	08:07
Wheat	Jul 2022	10.59	-80.00	08:07

TV and Radio
KETV: NDOT opens new state operations center
KMTV: Gov. Ricketts attends opening of new transportation hub, answers questions on firearms legislation
KLKN: NDOT opens new command center for Nebraska highways (no video)
WOWT: Gov. Ricketts announces formation of new State Operations Center (no video)
KFOR: White House Considering Gas Tax Holiday — Ricketts Calls It A Band-Aid (no audio)
10/111: First hearing in Slama-Herbster legal fight (no video)
NPM: Federal Judge Sides With Medical Marijuana Supporters on Ballot Petition Lawsuit

Governor
OWH: Officials celebrate opening of NDOT's operations center in Omaha
Nebraska Examiner: Nebraska motorists expected to benefit from newly merged command hub
Chadron Record: Ricketts visits with local residents
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CT Post: Without Ricketts, rally opposing his beliefs goes on in Canton
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OWH: Officials celebrate opening of NDOT's operations center in Omaha

A new Nebraska Department of Transportation operations center in Omaha should provide drivers with more immediate information on hazards along Nebraska's highways and interstates.
State officials gathered Tuesday to celebrate the opening of the center, which is essentially a merger of the department's previous two operation centers — with one located in Omaha and Lincoln each. The new combined center in Omaha is located at a Nebraska State Patrol office along South 108th Street.
According to Jessica Sherwood, manager of the center, staff members have access to more than 380

live traffic cameras across the state. With access to those feeds and other information now under one roof, staff members will be able to more quickly and effectively communicate with each other, first responders and ultimately the public about obstacles and hazards on Nebraska's roads.
That includes distributing real-time information via various methods including the smartphone navigation app Waze, which provides crowdsourced traffic information, and more than 330 message boards across the state.
"There's nothing worse than to come up on an incident unaware where you wish you could have took that exit just prior to the incident," NDOT Director John Selmer said. "We hope that this center will help meet the desires and expectation of our public."
Sherwood said the center will operate at all hours. That's a change from when there were two district operation centers, which didn't operate at a full-time capacity and relied on people working on call.
"The state operation center's No. 1 goal and priority is to provide the most accurate and timely information to our traveling public throughout the state," she said.
The creation of the state operation center marks the latest in what Gov. Pete Ricketts said is his administration's effort to create efficiencies in state government under a "philosophy of continuous improvement." Ricketts pointed to how NDOT was formed out of the merger of the state's Department of Roads and Department of Aeronautics in 2017.
"Our mission is to create opportunities for Nebraskans (and a) more effective, more efficient and customer-focused state government," he said.
By Dan Crisler

Nebraska Examiner: Nebraska motorists expected to benefit from newly merged command hub

OMAHA — Long gone are the "wild, wild West" days when families loaded up their station wagons and could only pray their vacation route would not be disrupted by car accidents or storms, John Selmer, Nebraska's director of transportation, said Tuesday.
He said technological breakthroughs have increased information available to Nebraska travelers today. A state transportation team, for instance, now monitors nearly 380 cameras and updates 330 message boards along state roadways to help get motorists to their destinations safely and efficiently.
Gov. Pete Ricketts and Selmer announced a change Tuesday that is expected to make the journey through Nebraska even smoother.
Around-the-clock watch
A new State Operations Center, at 4411 S. 108th St., has been formed to create one centralized command center that monitors the state highway network. Previously, those functions were split between offices in Lincoln and Omaha.
Hours will be expanded to create an around-the-clock system in which a team of about 10 workers watch roadways as they are reflected through the network of cameras and onto a wall of video screens. Those same workers receive and dispatch relevant information from and to partner agencies to help smooth traffic flow and avert or control catastrophes.
Ricketts and Selmer said the enhancements for travelers and motorists will come mostly through streamlining, and without any added cost to taxpayers.
As traffic overall continues to increase, Ricketts said, so has the need for consistent management of

the roadway network that Nebraskans use daily for commerce, commuting, school and recreation.

Smart decisions behind the wheel

"Providing timely information helps drivers make smart decisions behind the wheel so they can stay safe and avoid traffic," he said.

Selmer said "communication is vital." He noted that the state operations center team, now working at one site, shares relevant information with law enforcement and other agencies that help keep traffic moving and clear roads of hazards that can range from fatal pileup crashes to a runaway tire.

The team also feeds information to various travel social media and outreach tools including Nebraska 511, a website that shows road closures and conditions, construction and detour information.

"This center will be a hub in making sure that not only our local partners have the information they need to coordinate with us but to educate or provide information to the traveling public," said Selmer.

He said the operations center is on alert and prepared to respond to traffic needs and emergencies during big events such as the upcoming College World Series, which starts Friday.

"There is nothing worse than to come up on an incident unawares and where you wish you could have taken that exit just prior to the incident," Selmer said.

Located in an existing state office building, the central hub has been 20 years in the making, said manager Jessica Sherwood.

'Next phase of evolution'

Two decades ago, she said, one person took calls and updated the 511 system while relying on people in eight districts working on call on evenings and weekends. Initially the district centers did not operate on a full-time basis and activated for major crashes or weather events in their areas.

"Today we are here for that next phase of evolution," Sherwood said.

Selmer said his goal for the Nebraska Department of Transportation and the operations center is to provide even more predictive information.

He'd like systems to read road conditions and not only inform Nebraskans of conditions in their path, but also to suggest alternative days or hours to travel.

"It's an interesting time to be in transportation," he said. "There are a lot of things around the corner."

By Cindy Gonzalez

Chadron Record: Ricketts visits with local residents

Last Wednesday, June 8, Chadron received a visit from Governor Pete Ricketts, who has been conducting "town hall" style events across the state to talk about the accomplishments of the 2022 Legislative session and address questions from residents.

Ricketts began the program speaking to how well the state handled the COVID-19 pandemic, attributing the response as one of the major reasons the state has been able to achieve the lowest unemployment rate in the country's history at 1.9%. Lots of companies are also investing in Nebraska, he noted, which brings job opportunities.

State revenues have also set records this year, Ricketts said, as in April Nebraska collected more than $1 billion in gross state revenue.

Another point Ricketts raised is that government growth rate was kept low over the past eight years, allowing for delivery of sustainable tax relief.

One of the questions at the event was in regard to whether anything's being done to help draw people to western Nebraska from the east side of the state. Ricketts said if one looks at how the Department of Economic Development is distributing grants, it's fairly widespread across the state.
As to the low unemployment rate and the initial investment made into The Good Life is Calling program, it was questioned whether the program will continue to allow communities to continue recruiting the types of employees needed. Ricketts said a low unemployment rate means it's hard for employers to hire people. He added there needs to be a focus on making sure the young people are educated to take the high demand jobs that are here in the state.
Businesses are going to have to start getting involved earlier to get the folks they need, Ricketts said, and there needs to be an educational pipeline so young people are educated for the jobs available.
Another concern raised was predator damage to livestock, It was noted that the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has been doing a good job in providing trappers to keep predators down, and Nebraska Game and Parks does its part in providing permits for people to hunt them.
An issue arises with the low unemployment rate as it can be difficult to attract government trappers. Options are available, such as petitioning for a levy to pay for predator damage.
Ricketts noted predators taking down animals also has an impact on the availability of hunting game and that draw to folks. He suggested working with the local NGPC office and staff to determine what kind of financial support is available to help with predation control.
Looking at the 2022 Legislative session, Ricketts said it was historic in a number of ways. There were four key things, he noted, any of which would be considered historical by themselves.
"I think this Legislative session will go down in history as one of the unicameral's finest," Ricketts said.
The first point the governor spoke to was the passing of LB873, which rolled together several tax relief programs, among them the property tax relief program begun by LB1107 in 2020. Ricketts explained when people filed for Nebraska state income taxes, they were able to claim a 25% rebate on what they paid to the school district in property taxes.
Another property tax relief program was added based on what folks pay into local community health. Starting in 2022, $50 million will be put into a rebate program similar to the one with the school district.
"Citizens will continue to see property tax relief in Nebraska," Ricketts said. There was also an acceleration of tax relief for seniors. Nebraska is one of the few states that taxes Social Security benefits. Last year, a bill was passed to take about half of those taxes off. As part of LB873, the other half was taken off, and accelerated how fast it would come in. By 2026, Social Security benefits will not be taxed at all.
The final piece of LB873, Rickets noted, will take income tax rates from 6.84% to 5.84%, and business rates from 7.5% to 5.84%, both of which will be phased in by 2027. By that same year, the state will have delivered $12.6 billion in tax relief all total.
Another item the Legislature took up was investing in public safety and law enforcement. Ricketts noted $47.7 million was invested in the Grand Island law enforcement training center. Another $16.9 million was invested in expansion od the Nebraska State Patrol crime lab. Another bill, LB1241, was passed and will trade reciprocity with out-of-state officers to come and work in Nebraska.
"If you're certified in another state," Ricketts said, "you can come and work for Nebraska."
Also in LB1241, there is 100% tuition reimbursement for officers who attend state-run institutions, state income tax relief for officers over age 60 who are paying for their own health insurance, and

retention bonuses for officers. Money has also been set aside to replace the state penitentiary.
The third key point is investment in water resources. The passage of LB1015, Ricketts said, gives authority to move forward on the Perkins County canal project. He explained the project is about building a canal from the South Platte River in Colorado to a reservoir system in Nebraska. This is based on a compact signed nearly 100 years ago, he said, but is now being pursued due to the growth on the Front Range in Colorado and the resulting drain it would have on the river.
The compact with Colorado, Ricketts noted, requires delivery of about 120 cubic feet per second from Colorado to Nebraska during non-irrigation seasons, but only if the canal and reservoir system is built.
"They don't plan to give us anything, so we need to protect our water rights," Ricketts said, pointing out this is not about getting more water but holding on to what Nebraska is already getting.
Other water projects being invested in are: developing a marina at Lake McConaughy, expanding the marina at Lewis and Clark Lake State Recreation Area, building a convention center at Niobrara State Park, and rebuilding the canal system between Fort Laramie and Gering that collapsed a few years ago.
The fourth key item is the $1.04 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The Legislature has allocated estimates of: $60 million to community colleges, $8 million for state colleges, $60 million for a medical center at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, $40 million in behavioral health facilities, $5 million in loan forgiveness for nurses and behavioral health staff, $100 million for shovel-ready projects, $20 million toward a site building development fund, $489 million for disproportionate communities and $128 million for housing.
Ricketts noted the High Plains Community Development Corporation's recent housing survey as key in distributing ARPA money for more housing.
The governor also pointed out the Nebraska Rural Advantage Act has been "re-upped," now a new limit of $10 million compared to the former $1 million. There is also $42 billion coming from the Commerce Department for rural broadband, he said, but one of the biggest problems is getting the people who know how to install it.
By Mark Dykes

Nebraska Examiner: Slama-Herbster attorneys argue about path forward in discovery

BEATRICE, Nebraska — Dueling lawsuits about one of eight groping allegations that jostled the end of Nebraska's GOP gubernatorial primary race reached a courtroom for the first time Tuesday.
Johnson County District Judge Rick Schreiner heard lawyers argue parts of five motions concerning the discovery process that lawyers use to gather information for civil cases. Four of the filings came from lawyers for unsuccessful governor candidate Charles Herbster, who did not attend the hearing. One came from lawyers for State Sen. Julie Slama, who attended.

How they got here

The filings involve dueling lawsuits initiated by Herbster and Slama. Herbster sued Slama for defamation after she was named as one of eight women alleging in an April 14 Nebraska Examiner article that Herbster had groped them. He has denied wrongdoing.
Slama counter-sued Herbster, alleging sexual battery and defamation. She says Herbster reached up her skirt and touched her inappropriately during a 2019 fundraising dinner in Omaha.

What happened Tuesday

The judge took parts of two Herbster motions under advisement. One argued the propriety of

adding evidence to the legal filings alleging defamatory statements. The other sought protective orders against being sanctioned for missing a deposition date that Slama's attorneys scheduled during the stretch run of the primary campaign, as well as a protective order seeking to limit what Slama's attorney can say about the case publicly.

The day's most meaningful progress came during an hour-plus discussion that Schreiner pressed the lawyers to participate in privately at the courthouse. Schreiner paused the proceedings after Slama's lawyers told him they had gotten no response from Herbster's team about negotiating on the timing and possible limits to subpoenas.

The judge pressed the lawyers to resolve their differences about a number of issues involving the depositions and subpoenas, including when Herbster will sit for a deposition in Slama's lawsuit.

What's next

Slama's attorneys have already notified Herbster's attorneys that they intend to depose Herbster on July 20, the Nebraska Examiner has learned. Herbster's attorneys offered no immediate comment.

Herbster's legal team had filed motions seeking to limit the scope of several subpoenas that Slama's legal team is pursuing involving Herbster and his political staff.

Herbster's team argued Tuesday that the businessman's deposition should wait until filings in the case are narrowed. They also argued that Herbster shouldn't have to answer questions that could consume up to two days.

Slama's attorneys argued that Herbster shouldn't have missed the first deposition date in early May. They argued that their questions should take as long as needed for answers.

The judge said he saw nothing in Nebraska law that required waiting for filings to be amended before proceeding with depositions. He also expressed skepticism that a protective order was needed.

He ordered the lawyers to brief him on the protective order and keep negotiating over narrowing subpoenas. The first round of new filings is set for July 1, and responses are due July 15.

Other issues

Schreiner spent much of Tuesday's hearing refereeing disputes between the lawyers about which side, if any, had improperly "tried" the civil case in the news media instead of arguing in court.

Herbster attorney Theodore Boecker alleged that Slama attorney Dave Lopez was running afoul of court rules limiting what can be said about a case in public.

Lopez's legal teammate, Marnie Jensen, objected, offering seven exhibits of Herbster and his campaign team making statements in the press about the allegations at the heart of the case.

The judge did not immediately set a next court date. He encouraged the lawyers to work things out. The lawyers said they would try to make progress on disagreements about discovery.

Politics vs. the law

Schreiner said that he has no interest in having political arguments in his courtroom and that he wants to center this case on the law.

Herbster has argued that the allegations against him were political, alleging a conspiracy by Gov. Pete Ricketts and University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen to help Pillen win the GOP nomination for governor. Ricketts and Pillen have denied being part of any political conspiracy.

Political observers have said the updated legal complaint Slama filed after the May election may have been meant to communicate to Herbster that Slama remained serious about suing him.

"None of this has ever had anything to do with politics," Slama said Tuesday in Beatrice. "From day one, this has been about trying to protect young girls from going through what I went through."

By Aaron Sanderford

CT Post: Without Ricketts, rally opposing his beliefs goes on in Canton

Gov. Pete Ricketts, of Nebraska, was not in Canton Tuesday night, but his ears might have been ringing. Just a few miles from where he was supposed to speak, a crowd of residents and state leaders gathered to protest his invitation in the first place.

Outside Cherry Brook Primary School a group of overwhelmingly Democratic voters wore purple and orange and carried handmade signs. Purple represents a woman's right to choose, and orange represents gun safety.

Ricketts canceled his appearance at a fundraiser for Republican candidate for governor Bob Stefanowski at the last minute.

"I don't think [Ricketts] knows or understands Connecticut, and I don't think he has any right to speak on or influence what our politicians and leaders do," said Carly Henderson, of Avon.

Henderson attended the rally with Angela Scott, also of Avon. The two wore shirts from the March for our Lives protest in Washington, D.C., in 2018. They lamented that they still had occasion to wear the shirts.

"The fact that we have gone through Sandy Hook, we went through Parkland, this is just too much," Scott said. "The fact that we can have all of these other things passed in a heartbeat but we can't have any regulations passed on gun control? Give me a break."

Ricketts is a strong supporter of gun rights and limits on abortion, two stances opposite those of Gov. Ned Lamont.

"The issue isn't whether Pete Ricketts was in Canton tonight," said Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin. "The issue is Bob Stefanowksi wanted Pete Ricketts standing next to him in Canton tonight."

The rally against Ricketts' presence became a "celebration" of Democrats' ability to mobilize ahead of November's elections, Rep. Jillian Gilchrest, D-West Hartford, said. Ricketts announced that he canceled due to a scheduling conflict, but Democrats at the event took credit for his absence.

"While we successfully stopped an extremist, Republican, anti-choice, pro-gun governor of Nebraska from coming to the state of Connecticut, Bob Stefanowski invited him here," Gilchrest said. "Bob Stefanowski wanted him here in Connecticut to fundraise for him. That tells us exactly who Bob Stefanowski is."

A few Canton residents at the rally seemed confused about why Stefanowski extended the invitation to a figure they deemed as more "extreme" than Connecticut.

"I remain outraged that Stefanowski thought it was appropriate for Ricketts to come here," Crane said. "He's extremely to the right, and most of the people in Canton that I know are not that far to the right."

The event might have been a celebration, but the lingering toll of mass shootings and fear about the future of Roe v. Wade was palpable in the crowd and among the speakers.

Many attendees were children, who also carried signs, some of which reflected a nuanced understanding of the political issues at stake.

Michael Vogel, of Canton, brought his three children to the rally. Before it started, they spread out on the sidewalk and made signs. One said "Abortion is healthcare."

"This is the world they are going to be living in, and I don't think they should be passive recipients just accepting what the world is," Vogel said. "We want them to recognize that the world can be made better."

By Emily DiSalvo

Hartford Courant: Connecticut Republicans, Democrats clash over guns, abortion without Nebraska governor

CANTON — The high-profile guest of honor was not there, but the absence of Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts did not stop a clash Tuesday between Republicans and Democrats over guns and abortion.
Republican gubernatorial candidate Bob Stefanowski went ahead with a big-money fundraiser in Canton, even though Ricketts, the chairman of the national Republican Governors Association, canceled due to what the campaign described as a scheduling conflict.
At the same time, a group of Democrats gathered in protest outside a public school that was one mile away — strategically placed on the same street so that those driving north to the fundraiser would need to pass the protesters.
The fundraiser had caused controversy among Democrats because Ricketts favors banning abortion, even in cases of rape and incest, if the landmark Roe v. Wade decision is overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in the coming weeks.
“Nebraska is a pro-life state. I believe life begins at conception, and those are babies, too,” Ricketts told CNN last month. “If Roe v. Wade, which is a horrible constitutional decision, gets overturned by the Supreme Court, which we’re hopeful of, here in Nebraska, we’re going to take further steps to protect those pre-born babies.’’
When asked if he favored raising the age to 21 to buy an assault weapon, Ricketts said, “I haven’t looked at the details of that bill.’’
The cancellation by Ricketts was announced on the same day that the Connecticut Democratic Party said that public officials would be attending the protest, including Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin, state legislators Eleni Kavros-DeGraw of Avon and Jillian Gilchrest of West Hartford, and Chris Mattei, a former federal prosecutor who explored a run for governor in 2018 and ran for state attorney general.
“When you are saying that women should not have the right to have an abortion on demand, you are not pro-family,'' Kavros-DeGraw told more than 60 Democrats gathered outside the school. “The folks that donate tonight are not the people who share the values of the majority of the people who live in Connecticut. Those are the folks who are saying, no, my gun is more important than your child.''
Bronin said, “Governor Pete Ricketts is one of the most extreme right-wing Republicans in the country. ... He opposes common-sense gun laws. He was one of President Trump’s biggest supporters. ... If Bob [Stefanowski] had his way, Donald Trump would still be president today.''
But Liz Kurantowicz, a senior adviser to Stefanowski, said that Stefanowski supports the state’s laws on abortion and guns.
“The only extreme views on abortion in Connecticut are Governor Lamont’s,'' Kurantowicz said. “Bob supports a woman’s right to choose, as is already codified in Connecticut state law, and believes in parental notification for girls under 16. The governor seems to be embracing extremists who believe there should be no restrictions on abortion whatsoever.''
She added, “Connecticut has the strongest-in-the-nation gun laws, and Bob will do what’s in his power to enforce them when he’s governor.''
Kurantowicz declined to reveal the number of supporters who attended the fundraiser or how much money was raised, saying that the total would be revealed publicly in the quarterly campaign report.
Despite pledging to spend $10 million of his own money on the race, Stefanowski has continued to

raise money. The top ticket price for the Canton fundraiser was $3,500 per person, along with $2,500 for a platinum supporter, $1,000 for gold supporter and $250 for a "Save CT Supporter,'' according to an invitation obtained by the Courant.
The campaign has also sent out invitations for a major fundraiser next week with New Hampshire Republican Gov. Chris Sununu that has a maximum ticket price of $3,500.
Stefanowski is locked in a high-stakes, big-money battle against Lamont, a fellow millionaire former business executive. Lamont has already spent more than $40 million of his own money in three statewide races in 2006, 2010, and 2018. He is expected to spend millions more this year to keep his current position.
Stefanowski is trying to break a 15-year losing streak by Republicans in major races in Connecticut. In 2006, then-Gov. M. Jodi Rell and then-U.S. Rep. Chris Shays of Bridgeport both won reelection. But Shays lost in the Democratic wave that swept in Barack Obama as president in 2008, and no Connecticut Republican has won a seat for Congress, governor or other statewide office since then.
Mattei, a former federal prosecutor who handled gun trafficking and other cases, said that his 6-year-old son had somehow found out about the Texas school shooting.
"I didn't know what to say to him, and he's the kind of kid who doesn't like people to see him cry,'' Mattei told the crowd. "And he started crying, and I thought it was because he was scared that something like that could happen in his school. But somehow he had heard that the shooter at Uvalde had been killed. When I asked him whether he was crying because he was afraid that this might happen at his school, he said no — because it didn't occur to him that there might be more than one person who could do something like this to other children. The reason he was crying is because he was so sad for the children — about his age — who he knew had died.''
By Christopher Keating

Breitbart: 'Working People Vote Republican': GOP Populist LePage Aims at Maine Comeback Against Democrat Gov. Mills

Former Gov. Paul LePage cruised through the Republican gubernatorial primary in Maine unopposed on Tuesday, officially setting up a face-off against incumbent Democrat Gov. Janet Mills for November.
LePage, who is celebrating election night at a small event near his hometown of Lewiston, wrote in a statement as polls were closing, "The entire country is waking up to what I've known from the beginning: We can defeat Janet Mills in November."
LePage previously served as governor of Maine for two terms until 2019, and while he could not run for a third term because of the state limit of two consecutive terms, he began hinting just a year after he left office that he would run again in 2022 to succeed Mills.
LePage formally launched his campaign in July 2021, saying at the time, "We must work toward building a better future based on individual liberty, fiscal responsibility, and an economy which empowers everyone including our rural communities."
Mills announced in March she would pursue reelection, setting up the fight with LePage and contending she had "much left" to do as governor.
Formerly a city councilor and mayor, LePage won his race for governor in 2010 by a narrow vote of less than two percent, and in doing so, rocked the moderate Republican presence in Maine with his strong personality and unrelenting conservative views.
The magazine American Conservative noted during his first term in office that LePage, for

instance, “compared the IRS to the Gestapo, said that Obama could go to hell, and pointed to the press box during his inaugural address warning, ‘You’re on notice.’”
Roughly around the same time LePage was running for his first term in office, the Maine Republican Party adopted the tagline “working people vote Republican” as a means of sequestering the Democrat Party — historically a party focused on the working class and unions — as an out-of-touch party of elites. LePage, who grew up in poverty before entering the workforce to take on various blue-collar jobs, served as an exemplary figure for that message as the state party was spreading it around in ads and selling it as a popular bumper sticker.
As part of his comeback bid, LePage is advocating for cutting the state income tax and promoting that he left the Maine economy “surging” in 2019.
He recently stated that when he left office, “private sector jobs were rapidly expanding, unemployment was at a record low, investment capital was flowing, and government red tape and spending was under control for the first time in 50 years.”
LePage’s heavy focus on economic issues aligns with national polling data showing Americans are overwhelmingly concerned with inflation and costs of necessities like groceries and gas. Gas in particular had been hovering at high rates for months but reached a new record-breaking high price Tuesday for the 17th day in a row.
LePage zeroed in on gas prices back in March, pressuring Mills to cut the state’s fuel tax, in line with temporary suspensions or cuts that some other governors had begun implementing.
Mills insisted in response that one-time $750 relief checks, which she proudly announced during her State of the State address this year, were the answer to Mainers’ strained budgets rather than a structural change like a tax cut.
The Maine Democrat shared a video on Tuesday urging voters to turn out to the polls, as some contested races were taking place further down the ballot. Mills wrote, “Let’s show folks that #Maine is ready to keep moving forward”:
A recent biannual statewide poll provided an illustration of the difference in support between LePage and Mills. It showed Maine’s rural and expansive Second District favored LePage, whereas the state’s more densely populated First District, peppered with wealthy coastal towns, preferred Mills.
The poll’s topline result found the two candidates were in a dead heat, with LePage trailing Mills by a few points, within the poll’s margin of error.
LePage political adviser Brent Littlefield indicated to Breitbart News on Tuesday that issues such as President Joe Biden’s multitrillion spending packages — which states have reaped the benefit of — and Mills’ “extreme” handling of coronavirus are issues he expects will resonate with the average Maine voter.
“It’s that extreme nature of her approach that is different from Gov. LePage,” Littlefield said.
“He has a background and history of turning things around economically, and she is basically living off Uncle Joe’s money and subsidizing the state with temporary funds, and she’s running around handing it out like Santa Claus,” Littlefield added. “In the meantime the state’s going to be left holding the bag when the money from D.C. runs out.”
Biden defeated former President Donald Trump in Maine by about nine points in 2020, but with the president continuously receiving dismal approval ratings, and with growing expectations that Republicans will see big gains nationally in November, the gubernatorial race in the Pine Tree State is set to be competitive.
The Republican Governors Association (RGA) praised LePage on Tuesday as a “proven leader” and

said the group was “confident” he would defeat Mills.
“Janet Mills’ only concern as governor is appeasing the far-left activists and Joe Biden,” RGA cochairs Govs. Doug Ducey and Pete Ricketts said in a statement, adding Mills “signed into law a grocery tax, proposed a gas tax hike, and allowed an extreme environmental agenda to decimate local fishing communities.”
“The RGA congratulates Paul for officially becoming the GOP nominee,” the governors added, “and we remain confident Mainers will return him to the Blaine House.”
By Ashley Oliver

LJS: Judge rejects AG's request to stay injunction as appeal on petition lawsuit is heard

A day after the requirement for ballot initiatives to gather signatures from 5% of voters in 38 of Nebraska's 93 counties was deemed unconstitutional, a federal judge denied a motion to keep the requirement in place until an appeals court can take up the matter.
U.S. District Court John Gerrard denied the Nebraska Attorney General's request for a stay on a preliminary injunction against Secretary of State Bob Evnen on Tuesday, saying the state failed to meet the standard to grant one.
The ruling follows a 46-page decision on Monday, also from Gerrard, siding with Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana, who asked for the court to stop Evnen from enforcing the multicounty requirement ahead of the July 7 deadline for submitting signatures.
Crista Eggers, a campaign coordinator for the ballot initiatives seeking to allow doctors to recommend cannabis to their patients, and providing patients access to cannabis, said the multicounty requirement diluted the voting power of individuals in the state's most populous counties.
That, Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana and the ACLU of Nebraska argued, violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.
On Tuesday morning, the attorney general's office, which is representing Evnen as the state's chief election officer, asked Gerrard for a stay while an appeal of the decision can be decided by the Eighth Circuit Court. Later in the day, Gerrard denied it.
Solicitor General James Campbell, writing to the court in support of the motion to stay the preliminary injunction, said the attorney general's office believes it will succeed on the merits of the constitutional claims during the appeal.
"Just last year, a judge on this court granted a stay pending appeal even though it did not think that the appellants were likely to prevail," Campbell wrote.
Without an appeal, the state would be “irreparably harmed” by being prevented from performing its duty under the current law, the attorney general’s office added, and Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana would not be harmed.
In the brief, the state says it is “quite possible” Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana will qualify for the 2022 ballot under the current multicounty requirement.
Eggers, in a phone interview Tuesday, said Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana is pleased with the injunction even as the campaign continues to gather signatures as if it would need to qualify 38 counties.
To date, the pair of petitions being circulated by Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana have been signed by more than 100,000 registered voters in the state, Eggers said, and the campaign has qualified 22 counties with 23 days remaining before the deadline.

“Yesterday was a big day for us, but we still have a long road ahead of us,” Eggers said. “We will continue to do what we have been doing.”
Lincoln Sen. Anna Wishart, who is co-sponsoring the pair of petitions to legalize medical marijuana, said the campaign has built “a large infrastructure” of grassroots supporters across the state, and will continue to rely upon the efforts of its volunteers.
“We do recognize the goal is we need to collect enough statewide to get across the finish line, and we’re focused on doing that,” Wishart said.

Leaders of Voter ID petition say strategy unchanged

Another campaign will also continue its effort to pass the multicounty requirement that was amended into the state constitution in 1912.
Citizens for Voter ID, which is seeking to enact a constitutional amendment requiring voters to show a photographic identification before they cast their ballot, will continue on as planned, said co-sponsor state Sen. Julie Slama of Dunbar.
“Yesterday’s ruling does not change our strategy, as we’re on track to exceed the threshold number of counties already,” Slama said in a text message. “Voter ID has the support of both rural and urban Nebraska, so we’ve had no trouble in achieving the county threshold.”
Slama said Citizens for Voter ID, which needs roughly 124,000 signatures, would not disclose how many it has collected before the July 7 deadline for submitting them to Evnen’s office, however.
In recent weeks, circulators of the voter ID petition have been accused of misleading potential signers about its intent or telling voters they are employed by the state; Slama has dismissed the complaints as coming from Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue, the Democratic nominee for governor, and other “liberal operatives” who oppose the initiative.
Campbell, in his brief supporting a motion to stay the injunction ordered by Gerrard, said without the multicounty rules, as many as 16 total initiatives or referendum measures could be put before voters in November.
If those petitions qualify for the November ballot and the preliminary injunction is later overturned, those measures could be invalidated, Campbell wrote.
“This harms not only initiative petitions but also the voters presented with initiatives that might be erased," he wrote. “Asking Nebraskans to vote on a full slate of initiatives with a cloud of uncertainty surrounding them is not in the public interest. That undermines voter trust in the process.”
Of the 13 remaining petitions (excluding the pair of medical marijuana petitions as well as the voter ID petition), at least two are defunct, including a previous medical marijuana petition sponsored by Wishart and Sen. Adam Morfeld, also of Lincoln.

Other petitions see mixed success

Bill Hawkins of the Nebraska Hemp Company said he had “taken a step back” from pushing a proposed constitutional amendment granting all persons “the right to use all plants in the genus cannabis.”
The proponent of full legalization said he agreed with the rule that petitions be signed by 5% of voters in two-fifths of Nebraska’s counties, however, even if it makes it more difficult for grassroots campaigns to find support for their issue.
“I believe central and western Nebraska count as much or more than urban Lincoln and Omaha,” Hawkins said. “We are a rural state. It needs some geographic distribution.”
“The people reserve the right to the petition, not just the people of Douglas, Sarpy and Lancaster,” he added.
Other initiative and constitutional amendment petitions are also in circulation at events across the

state, but it’s unlikely they will reach the signature threshold ahead of the deadline.
Robert Rhodes, of Elkhorn, the sponsor of an initiative to repeal Nebraska’s motorcycle helmet laws, said the campaign “wasn’t doing very well,” but is still alive, having been handed off to several motorcycle clubs to gather signatures.
A slew of proposed constitutional amendments from Michael Connely of York, including creating rights to so-called “constitutional carry” of firearms and eliminating the Nebraska Department of Education, have also been registered with the secretary of state’s office.
Connely did not return an email seeking comment.
On Tuesday afternoon, however, Gerrard denied the state’s motion to stay the injunction, writing in a three-page order Evnen's attorneys did not provide any additional arguments to change his mind.
"(T)he court finds nothing here to change its mind about its findings, yesterday, that the plaintiffs are likely to succeed and that any harm to the defendant and the public interest is outweighed by the harm to the plaintiffs," he wrote.
By Chris Dunker

LJS: Sen. Suzanne Geist urged to run for Lincoln mayor, not sure she will

Sen. Suzanne Geist is being urged to consider entering the 2023 race for Lincoln mayor, but she says she's not sure that's the path she wants to follow with two years remaining in her second legislative term and her growing seniority and influence in helping shape issues like prison reform.
Geist is a Republican; Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird is a Democrat and widely expected to seek reelection; the mayor's office is nonpartisan.
"It's a difficult decision," Geist said during an interview at a Lincoln coffee shop.
There are other priorities in her life to consider, including nine grandchildren, all of whom live in Lincoln.
"And I take my current role (in the Legislature) seriously," Geist said.
"I'm not a big headliner; I'm busy working in the back" outside the spotlight.
After prevailing in a high-profile legislative battle earlier this year over elements of a criminal justice reform package championed by Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha, Geist said she wants the Legislature to focus its efforts on programming.
"We need to try to salvage lives," she said.
"It's not a matter of hard on crime or soft on crime," Geist said. "We need a balance."
The answer is not reducing sentences, she believes, but directing more prison resources toward rehabilitation and drug treatment and changing lives.
"A robust treatment program within prison and transitioning out into community-based and government-based support and programming," she said.
With two years remaining before she would be term-limited out of the Legislature, Geist said she does not plan to seek the chairmanship of the Legislature's Judiciary Committee when the 2023 Legislature convenes in January and makes its organizational and leadership decisions.
"I want to be a contributing member" of that committee, she said, "but I'm more fitted to be a Transportation and Telecommunications Committee chairperson because of my telecommunications experience."
Geist said she values her independence in Nebraska's uniquely nonpartisan Legislature.
"I'm a conservative and a Republican, but my own party has not been very happy with me on a couple of votes I've taken," Geist said.

"The deeper you get into issues, the more you understand how complicated they are."
Rather than "giving my word and refusing to budge," Geist said, when she finds reason to change her vote, she informs sponsors of the bill and lobbyists who may have talked with her that she has changed her mind so no one is blind-sided in a legislative arena that links power and influence with trust.
That's happened two times in six years, she said.
Geist and Sen. Anna Wishart are Lincoln's two senior senators now, both completing their second and final terms in the Legislature as they bump into the voter-imposed limit of two consecutive terms.
Wishart is a Democrat.
"We're now six years down the road," Geist said. "There's not much time left.
"It's very important to learn about a system before you would try to change it, and it takes so long to learn. I would never vote for term limits.
"The things that I have become passionate about weren't even on my plate when I began."
More assertive in her sixth year, Geist said she views prison and sentencing reform in a nonpartisan sense although it has been a major issue for Democrats.
"I made my own philosophy," she said. "What's effective? What are the areas that need improvement?
"I don't want to lock them up and throw away the key. But I don't think we're where we need to be.
"I want them to be successful. I want them to find the ability to control their lives and build a future.
"With two years to go, I will be looking for legislative partners."
Geist said she has talked with Republican gubernatorial nominee Jim Pillen and "I think he is open" to considering her perspective if he is elected in November.
By Don Walton

Fremont Tribune: Weeping Water to begin four-day school week this fall

WEEPING WATER – Students at Weeping Water Public Schools will attend classes four days each week next year in all grade levels.
Weeping Water Board of Education members approved the change at their May meeting. They directed Weeping Water Superintendent Kevin Reiman to make the necessary adjustments to implement a four-day week for students and staff in the 2022-23 school year.
Reiman said Tuesday morning that school board members and administration officials opted to go with a four-day week for several reasons. He said staff retention and recruitment was at the top of the list of those thoughts.
“The state is experiencing a significant shortage of teachers,” Reiman said. “The number of applicants we have for open positions has decreased at an alarming rate. It is our hope that by going to a four-day week, we can keep the teachers we already have on staff. If we do have an opening, we believe a four-day week will be an incentive for teachers to work at Weeping Water.”
Reiman said attendance and mental health were also factors in the decision.
“Our research showed that attendance rates increase in schools with a four-day week,” Reiman said. “For example, parents and students schedule appointments on the off day of the week. Our research also showed us that a four-day week improves the mental health of both students and staff.”
Reiman said Weeping Water is currently in a solid financial position, but the district is experiencing increased costs in areas such as transportation and food. He said moving to a four-day week would

help the district combat those types of rising expenses.
School board members passed a revised calendar to reflect the change to a four-day week. School will be closed on most Mondays during the academic year. There will be several instances where school is open on a Monday and closed on another day. Board members left March 20, April 17 and May 8 as potential make-up dates where school could be held on Mondays if there are snow days.
Each school day will be 19 minutes longer in the upcoming year. Weeping Water had been dismissing classes at 3:41 p.m. each day of the district's five-day week. There will a 4 p.m. dismissal time under the new four-day-a-week structure.
Reiman said staff members will work every other Monday on professional development and school improvement topics. He said these dates would give staff members additional planning time in their classrooms and learning opportunities throughout the year.
Weeping Water will be the second Cass County school to implement a four-day week. Conestoga has used a four-day system since 2006.
Reiman said Weeping Water Elementary Principal Bristol Wenzl was on an external visitation team that traveled to Conestoga. She met with Conestoga staff and community members and gained valuable insight about what a four-day week would entail.
"One of the key things she heard from Conestoga's stakeholders was how much they liked the four-day school week," Reiman said. "This was the spark to take what we had researched and present the idea to our school board.
"We did take what Bristol learned at Conestoga as well as talking to other four-day school districts in the state. The administration team then combined all of this data and tweaked it to fit the goals for our school district."
Other school districts in Nebraska that have four-day weeks include Banner County, Hay Springs, Minatare and Wynot. Grand Island Public Schools implemented a temporary four-day school week in January 2022 due to infections from the coronavirus pandemic.
Reiman said Weeping Water residents have been receptive to the idea of a four-day week. He said people have been willing to adapt to the new schedule and have presented their questions in respectful and cooperative ways.
"The feedback has been extremely positive," Reiman said. "We did have parents who had logistical questions that we were able to address. Beyond those logistical questions, the feedback from the community, Board of Education, staff and students has been positive. As a superintendent, I appreciate the way the community has supported this decision and been open to finding solutions to potential conflicts."
Weeping Water board members also learned that this year's junior class had an average score of 20.1 on the ACT college entrance exam. The class finished above the state average of 19.0. Two students had ACT scores of 33 and 30, two posted marks of 26 and one was at 25.
Weeping Water Secondary Principal Dr. Tiffanie Welte told board members the juniors were the third Weeping Water class in a row to score above the state ACT average.
By Brent Hardin

Nebraska Examiner: Stockholders sue Costco officials over alleged mistreatment of chickens grown too big

LINCOLN — A lawsuit claims that Costco is in violation of Nebraska and Iowa livestock welfare laws by breeding chickens that "unnaturally" grow too fast, become so fat they can't stand up to reach

food or water and end up dying.
Two Costco shareholders filed the lawsuit Monday in Washington State, where Costco is based, against the company's top executives and members of its board of directors, which includes Nebraska native Jeff Raikes.
Some birds are so heavy they cannot stand up after falling on their backs, says the lawsuit, citing a 2021 hidden camera investigation by an animal rights group, Mercy for Animals. The Los Angeles-based group opposes large-scale, "factory farms."

Inadequate care

The lawsuit accuses Costco's executives of violating their fiduciary duty by providing inadequate "individualized" veterinary care for chickens raised in Nebraska and Iowa through a subsidiary, Lincoln Premium Poultry. It was formed in 2015 to produce chickens for Costco's trademark $4.99 rotisserie chicken.
"Once lauded as an innovative warehouse club, Costco today represents a grim existence for animals in Nebraska who are warehoused in inescapable misery," said Alene Anello, president of Legal Impact for Chickens. It is a San Fransisco-based animal welfare group that represents the two shareholders who filed suit, Krystil Smith and Tyler Lobdell.
A Lincoln Premium Poultry official referred the Examiner to Costco officials, who did not respond immediately Tuesday to messages seeking comment.
But in response to criticism in 2021 by Mercy for Animals, Costco issued a statement, saying the company and Lincoln Premium Poultry are both "committed to maintaining the highest standards of animal welfare, humane processes and ethical conduct throughout the supply chain."

Audits ensure high standards

Independent audits, the statement said, are regularly conducted to ensure that growers, truckers and others involved are complying.
Officials with the Nebraska and Iowa Departments of Agriculture also did not immediately respond to questions about whether Costco had ever been cited for violating livestock welfare laws in those states.
Costco opened a $450-million chicken processing facility in Fremont in 2019, and 120 contract growers were hired to raise chickens that are bred, hatched and distributed by Lincoln Premium Poultry.
The Fremont facility processes about 2 million chickens a week. The company has said it supplies nearly half of the chain's total rotisserie chickens.

'White striping'

The lawsuit claims that Costco growers often didn't have any prior experience in growing chickens, that the chickens are grown in "crowded" and "filthy" barns holding up to 45,000 birds, and that almost all have a condition known as "white striping," in which fibrous fat replaces muscle.
Lincoln Premium Poultry officials have said that 4% to 5% of its chickens die during the growing process but said some mortality is to be expected in all livestock operations.
By Paul Hammel

LJS: Research team to provide update on AltEn study

The research team investigating the human health and environmental impacts of the AltEn ethanol plant near Mead will share an update of their ongoing study on Thursday evening.
The presentation featuring researchers from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of

Nebraska Medical Center, will be at the Mead Fire Hall at 7 p.m.
The meeting is open to the public and will include a question-and-answer session and general discussion of the 2021 sampling.
AltEn, which used pesticide-treated seeds to produce ethanol, creating toxic solid and liquid waste products along the way, was ordered to shut down in February 2021 for violating numerous state environmental regulations.
Faculty from UNL, UNMC and Creighton University then launched a wide-ranging research project to study the movement of pesticides through the environment, as well as the chemicals' effects on humans, animals and pollinators.
Environmental sampling started in the spring of 2021, while a survey of perceived health effects from 1,000 individuals living near the defunct plant was closed in May.
Dr. Eleanor Rogan, interim chair of the Department of Health Promotion in UNMC's College of Public Health, said the research team is still analyzing the results of the survey.
UNMC will also look for the presence of pesticides and toxic compounds in the blood or urine of individuals who wish to provide samples.
The study got a boost from the Legislature in April when it approved an amendment from Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue appropriating $1 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to continue the study through 2022.
Members of the research team who will present their findings and lead a discussion about their results include Rogan; Ali Khan, dean of UNMC's College of Public Health; Jesse Bell, director of the Water, Climate and Health Program; Shannon Bartelt-Hunt, department chair of civil and environmental engineering at UNL; Liz Van Wormer, coordinator of the One Health program at UNL; and Judy Wu-Smart, extension and research entomologist at UNL.
By Chris Dunker

OWH: Herbster's lawyers resist deposition in Slama lawsuit at court hearing

BEATRICE — Charles W. Herbster's legal team continued to resist a requested deposition Tuesday in the first court hearing of a dueling legal battle between Herbster and State Sen. Julie Slama.
The hearing, held at the Gage County courthouse in Beatrice, saw Johnson County District Judge Rick Schreiner consider five motions in the case. Schreiner made decisions on two motions, while three are still up in the air. Slama was present at the hearing, while Herbster did not attend.
Herbster filed a defamation lawsuit against the Dunbar senator in April after the Nebraska Examiner reported allegations from eight women who said Herbster — a Republican mega-donor and then-candidate for governor — had groped them in recent years. Slama was the only named accuser at the time.
Slama, a Republican state lawmaker, confirmed the account detailed in the April 14 Examiner story, which reported that Herbster reached up Slama's dress without her consent and touched her inappropriately at the Douglas County Republican Party's 2019 Elephant Remembers dinner.
Slama answered Herbster's lawsuit quickly and filed a counterclaim alleging sexual battery. Slama had given notice to depose Herbster on May 6, but Herbster opted not to attend.
His legal team filed a motion to quash the deposition notice and seek a protective order that would limit his deposition to "scheduling at a mutually convenient time." It alleged the other side was playing politics by scheduling the deposition just ahead of the May 10 primary, which Herbster subsequently lost to Jim Pillen.

At the hearing, Schreiner asked Herbster's attorney Theodore Boecker if Herbster would be able to attend a deposition now that the primary is over. Boecker did not answer the question directly, and instead criticized Slama's legal team's estimate that a deposition would take two days.

Though Herbster's team denied that the alleged groping incident even occurred, Boecker pointed out that if it did, the incident would have only lasted seconds, which he argued was not worthy of a two-day deposition.

Marnie Jensen, one of Slama's attorneys, argued that the motion to quash the deposition was moot because Herbster didn't attend. Jensen encouraged Schreiner to either deny the motion or set it aside.

Schreiner overruled the motion from Herbster's legal team, but a new deposition was not scheduled at the hearing.

Jensen said Slama's team may seek sanctions against Herbster because of his absence at the May 6 deposition.

Schreiner heard arguments but ultimately held off on a decision regarding a separate motion seeking a protective order against Slama and her legal team for, in the words of Herbster's attorneys, attempting to try the case in the press.

Boecker said Herbster's legal team does not make statements to the press. He said involving the press in legal cases can be problematic, because it puts lawyers in the position of witnesses.

Jensen, however, argued that people on both sides of the case, including Herbster and Slama, have made public statements about the case. She said Slama is a public figure as a Nebraska lawmaker, which makes working with the press a necessity.

The hearing also addressed new evidence Herbster's team submitted, which Schreiner is still considering. The evidence included copies of online documents, including a tweet from Slama that showed the dress she wore when she was allegedly groped by Herbster, and emails and press releases from Dave Lopez, another one of Slama's lawyers, about the incident.

Boecker said the evidence shows Slama and Lopez describing the incident as a sexual assault, which he claimed is defamatory language that is more extreme than the groping allegations.

"It's gone beyond groping," Boecker said.

Lopez argued that they have no way to authenticate the accuracy of the documents, and alleged some of them were altered. He said the new evidence is a "grossly inappropriate" effort by Herbster to get in the way of Slama's choice of legal counsel.

Boecker responded by saying Lopez could have avoided having his words submitted as evidence by not issuing press releases.

The two legal teams also discussed multiple subpoena requests made by both sides during a private meeting supervised by Schreiner. Both sides have also issued objections to the other's subpoenas.

Though Lopez said "substantial progress" was made in this meeting, the issue has not been resolved.

Lopez said both legal teams will continue to discuss possible subpoenas over the next few days.

Slama's team has moved to subpoena documents from several people affiliated with Herbster: Kellyanne Conway, Corey Lewandowski, David Bossie, Emily Novotny, Ellen Keast and Michelle Keithley. Herbster's lawyers filed documents in May showing their intent to subpoena a long list of documents and communications.

By Erin Bamer

OWH: CHI Health says cybersecurity breach may have exposed some patients' data

CHI Health is notifying patients that one of its vendors had a “cybersecurity event” that may have exposed some patients’ protected health information.
The data involved includes names, Social Security numbers, medical codes, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses dates of birth and gender.
The vendor, MCG Health LLC, determined on March 25 that an unauthorized party had previously obtained personal information that matched data stored on MCG’s systems, CHI Health officials said in a press release.
MCG, a Seattle-based technology company, provides patient care guidelines to health care providers and health plans across the United States, including CHI Health.
CHI Health hospitals in Omaha include Creighton University Medical Center-Bergan Mercy, Immanuel Medical Center and Lakeside Hospital.
The company notified CHI Health officials on April 22 that some of its patients’ data may have been involved. CHI Health officials said in their statement that they were hopeful at first that their patients’ information had not been accessed or disclosed. However, the health system determined May 11 that “there is a likelihood that the protected health information of some of our patients may have been compromised.”
No information was available indicating how many CHI patients may have been affected. A CHI Health official referred questions to MCG, which could not be reached immediately Tuesday for comment.
MCG did not specify in a June 10 notice of the event on its website how many of its customers may have been impacted. The Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported Monday that the information of about 700 patients of Avera McKennan Hospital and University Health Center had been accessed by an unauthorized party.
CHI Health officials said that MCG will notify affected patients by letter on the health system’s behalf.
MCG, according to the release, has retained a forensic investigation firm to assist and also is coordinating with the FBI.
While the exact nature of the event was not specified, data breaches and cyberattacks targeting health systems have increased in the past several years. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services tallied 618 breaches and attacks affecting at least 500 people in 2021.
In 2020, an investigation found that an unauthorized party gained access to Nebraska Medicine’s and UNMC’s shared network. The party deployed malicious software, or malware, and acquired copies of some patient and employee information held on the systems. While the data of thousands of people may have been involved, an investigation found no evidence that individuals’ personal information had been used to commit fraud or identity theft as a result of the incident.
MCG is offering affected CHI Health patients identity protection and credit monitoring services for two years at no cost. The company also has set up a call center to answer questions related to the event. The call center is available at 866-475-7221 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Additional information is available on MCG’s website, mcg.com. Look for “Notice About Patient and Member Data.”
CHI Health officials encouraged patients to review account statements and monitor free credit reports. Americans are entitled under federal law to one free credit report a year from each of the three nationwide consumer reporting agencies. To order a report, visit www.annualcreditreport.com or call toll-free 877-322-8228.
By Julie Anderson

OWH: Weather researchers crisscross Nebraska, Great Plains, studying storms

Somewhere in the 100- to 200-square-mile swirling mass of atmosphere that forms a supercell storm are cantankerous streams of air that scientists believe could be the reason a storm spins out a tornado.

Scientists believe what they are seeking could be as “small” as a milelong stream of air in the lowest half-mile of the storm’s 10- to 15-mile height — the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Those regions of the storm may be sharply colder or barely colder than the air around it, or may be where the wind shifts abruptly. (Keep in mind that storm systems are chaotic, with winds spinning vertically and horizontally, and temperature and moisture content varying widely.)

Scientists aren’t certain why one storm generates a tornado and another doesn’t. The only way to find out is to blanket a given storm with as much weather-sensing equipment as possible — a costly, time-consuming effort that involves no small degree of luck.

That has been the catalyst for a $3.2 million federally funded field study led by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dubbed TORUS, for Targeted Observation by Radars and UAS (drones) of Supercells, the study includes about 50 researchers from the federal government and academia.

Their nomadic work takes them wherever the storms are breaking across 367,000 square miles of the Great Plains, from North Dakota to Texas and from Iowa to Wyoming and Colorado.

Recently, weather researchers chased super cell storms across Nebraska.

“The main objective of TORUS is to better understand super cell thunderstorms, the ones that produce the biggest hail, the strongest tornadoes,” said Adam Houston, the lead investigator and a professor of atmospheric sciences at UNL. “To better predict tornadoes, we need to understand them. Hopefully, this will lead to forecasts with enough lead time and accuracy that we can protect lives and to some extent property.”

The effort utilizes an array of equipment, including eight trucks equipped with weather-sensing equipment, with some deploying radar and others, LIDAR (pulses of light), drones, a NOAA hurricane airplane and weather balloons.

In spring 2019, the field study deployed drones and it was the most ambitious drone-based study of storms undertaken to date, according to UNL. Teams traveled 9,000 miles across five states this summer during that field study, according to UNL.

This year, in place of drones, it is using party-sized helium balloons that send aloft Styrofoam cups containing small weather sensors.

Funding comes from the National Science Foundation and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Mike Coniglio, research meteorologist with the NOAA’s National Severe Storms Laboratory, said these types of sophisticated field studies are essential to dissecting storms because traditional weather sensors, such as stationary National Weather Service radars, are limited in how often they can take measurements and what they can see.

“The features we are looking for are difficult to observe,” he said.

Once scientists learn what triggers a tornado, they will hunt for proxies in the larger environment of the storm that will enable them to make forecasts. Proxies are needed, he said, because meteorologists can’t chase and monitor every single storm in such fine detail.

The Great Plains are an ideal place to study tornadoes because the open horizon allows scientists to see at greater distances, which means they are safer while storm chasing. Data gathered from these

studies is run through supercomputers for analysis.
Findings from the 2019 field surveys are expected soon, while results from this year's research will be released in a couple of years.
Coniglio said the overall science of understanding storms has moved beyond its infancy, "but we certainly have a lot more detail to learn about what is happening inside these storms."
By Nancy Gaarder

OWH: Focus on the person

Governor Pete Ricketts was recently asked about whether an 18-year-old should be allowed to buy an AR-15 rifle. His response was, "Absolutely, yes ... We ought not to focus on the gun, but on the person pulling the trigger." Absolutely, Governor, let's focus on the person. At Uvalde, the person pulling the trigger was an 18-year-old kid. He's not old enough to buy cigarettes, alcohol or lottery tickets, but you're OK with him buying an assault rifle? How does that make sense?
Charles Pille, Lincoln

LJS Editorial, 6/15: A chance for compromise and real leadership

At this sad point in our political discourse, there is almost certainly no more courageous stand than trying to strike a compromise with lawmakers from the opposing party.
And there is nothing more necessary to restore our nation to greatness.
In that vein, it's time for lawmakers of all ideologies to come to come together to do something about gun safety or gun control or whatever partisan label one wishes to apply.
It's certainly the last thing Rep. Don Bacon meant, but maybe the Omaha congressman, unwittingly, offered one reasonable idea.
"I oppose raising the age of purchase because this country trusts young adults at the age of 18 to vote and to serve in the military protecting our country," Bacon said in a press release, employing a common argument to explain his vote against raising the age limit for purchasing a semi-automatic rifle. "So why aren't they considered mature enough to purchase a gun?."
Well, if an 18-year-old wants to get his or her hands on a semi-automatic weapon, let them enlist in the military. Not every 18-year-old would be judged fit to serve. Perhaps someone judged unfit for military service ought not have a semi-automatic weapon until they are 21.
An 18-year-old qualified to serve in the military will be trained in the proper use of such a weapon, and, indeed, as Bacon said, could be trusted.
A trained 18-year-old can drive a tank, but that same 18-year-old can't rent a 2021 Ford Escape at the airport. An 18-year-old can be stationed overseas, sleeping in hostile territory. That same 18-year-old can't rent a motel room in most states. If we trust 18-year-olds with weapons, why don't we trust them with beer and cigarettes? Maybe it's because they still have some growing up to do.
There are still plenty of guns an 18-year-old could buy. But tying ownership of a semi-automatic weapon to military service for people ages 18 to 21 seems like a very reasonable compromise.
A bipartisan group of U.S. senators (neither Ben Sasse nor Deb Fischer listed among them) announced an agreement Sunday that would encourage states to adopt "red flag" laws that allow interested parties to petition a court to removed guns from a person deemed to present a danger to themselves or others. It would also enhance background checks for gun buyers under 21.
More ambitious firearms legislation passed in the Democratically-controlled House faced certain

defeat, so a Senate compromise means that if lawmakers are serious, at least something will happen.
But there is no crisis in this nation that can't be spun to help one party and hurt the other. Until we get to a place where lawmakers are working for the good of all, not just their donors and the support of their partisan kingmakers, there will be no compromise. And people will keep dying.
To be clear, both parties seem keen to avoid what they perceive as weakness in giving up something to get something.
Right now, someone needs to lead without regard for party or even popularity. Passing something -- anything -- would make our communities safer. And it would be an even bigger win for a nation in need of finding some common ground.

LJS Local View: University system building workforce, brighter future

This spring we celebrated 7,200 new graduates of the University of Nebraska – new Husker, Maverick, Loper and UNMC alumni who are future leaders of our state.
It's one of my favorite times of year. Commencement brings to life the fundamental reason why public higher education exists: To create opportunities for students to build a better future for themselves and the world around them.
Each graduating class of the University of Nebraska transforms our state in ways that are impossible to quantify. These students go on to become the next generation of teachers, health care professionals, agricultural leaders, entrepreneurs and engineers. They not only fill today's job openings, they create jobs that don't even exist yet – high-skill, high-wage positions that propel Nebraska forward.
They grow our tax base, injecting millions into the economy every year. College graduates contribute to strong communities through high rates of volunteering and public service.
And University of Nebraska graduates, having learned from the best in their fields in classrooms and labs across our campuses, are uniquely positioned to solve some of the biggest challenges of our time: treating cancer and other devastating diseases, producing enough food to feed the world, protecting our national security.
No other entity, in fact, impacts Nebraska's economy and workforce quite like the University of Nebraska. With more than 50,000 students, world-class faculty and a vibrant research enterprise that affects everything from the food you eat to the health care you receive, the scope and scale of the university's work is significant and far-reaching.
While the chancellors and I are immensely proud of the university's impact on Nebraska's economic development, we also know we can't simply keep doing "business as usual."
It's time to do more – create more opportunities for students, form more partnerships with local businesses, offer more internships that will lead to great-paying jobs right here in the state.
Nebraska's workforce needs are too urgent for its public university not to be leaning in aggressively on economic development. In survey after survey, the clarion call from business leaders is that workforce is their No. 1 challenge. We can all be proud that Nebraska's economy has been more resilient than most through COVID-19, but to truly grow and compete, we need more workforce.
That includes college graduates who can fill crucial shortages in fields like healthcare, IT and teaching. And it will require us to retain talented Nebraskans as well as make our state the destination of choice for people looking for a great place to live, work and raise their families.
Our challenge is clear, but Nebraskans know what it means to have a bias for action. As a university,

we understand the time to act is now.
That's why, as we began updating the University of Nebraska System's strategic plan, one the first items on our list was a goal for every University of Nebraska student to have an internship or other experiential learning opportunity.
It's why we've launched new programs like UNO's Career Connect, a collaboration with local businesses to provide unprecedented access to paid internships for UNO students. It's why UNL's Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources just sent 26 students across the state for 10-week internships focused on rural community growth. It's why UNK has formed a new partnership with Central Community College ensuring a seamless transition from an associate's degree to a bachelor's degree for students in a variety of business fields.
It's why we're exploring new strategies to make it easier for working professionals to earn credentials that can advance their careers, and to help the 300,000-plus Nebraskans who have earned some college credits complete their degree. And it's why we are joining with elected leaders and education colleagues in pursuit of a bold new goal for 70% of 25- to 34-year-old Nebraskans to hold post-secondary credentials.
None of us can do this alone, after all. Workforce development is a statewide challenge – and a national competition. With our shared bold vision for economic growth, I believe Nebraskans will compete to win.
Ted Carter is president of the University of Nebraska system.

AP: Biden tells oil refiners: Produce more gas, fewer profits

President Joe Biden on Wednesday called on U.S. oil refiners to produce more gasoline and diesel, saying their profits have tripled during a time of war between Russia and Ukraine as Americans struggle with record high prices at the pump.
"The crunch that families are facing deserves immediate action," Biden wrote in the draft of a letter to oil refiners obtained by The Associated Press. "Your companies need to work with my Administration to bring forward concrete, near-term solutions that address the crisis."
Gas prices nationwide are averaging roughly $5 a gallon, an economic burden for many Americans and a political threat for the president's fellow Democrats going into the midterm elections. Broader inflation began to rise last year as the U.S. economy recovered from the coronavirus pandemic, but it accelerated in recent months as energy and food prices climbed after Russia invaded Ukraine in February and disrupted global commodity markets.
The government reported on Friday that consumer prices had jumped 8.6% from a year ago, the worst increase in more than 40 years.
The draft letter notes that gas prices were averaging $4.25 a gallon when oil was last near the current price of $120 a barrel in March. That 75-cent difference in average gas prices in a matter of just a few months reflects both a shortage of refinery capacity and profits that "are currently at their highest levels ever recorded," the letter states.
As Biden sees it, refineries are capitalizing on the uncertainties caused by "a time of war." His message that corporate greed is contributing to higher prices has been controversial among many economists, yet the claim may have some resonance with voters.
Some liberal lawmakers have proposed cracking down on corporate profits amid the higher inflation. Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent, in March proposed a 95% tax on profits in excess of companies' pre-pandemic averages.

The president has harshly criticized what he views as profiteering amid a global crisis that could potentially push Europe and other parts of the world into a recession, saying after a speech Friday that ExxonMobil "made more money than God this year." ExxonMobil responded by saying it has already informed the administration of its planned investments to increase oil production and refining capacity.

"There is no question that (Russian President) Vladimir Putin is principally responsible for the intense financial pain the American people and their families are bearing," Biden's draft letter says. "But amid a war that has raised gasoline prices more than $1.70 per gallon, historically high refinery profit margins are worsening that pain."

The letter says the administration is ready to "use all reasonable and appropriate Federal Government tools and emergency authorities to increase refinery capacity and output in the near term, and to ensure that every region of this country is appropriately supplied." It notes that Biden has already released oil from the U.S. strategic reserve and increased ethanol blending standards, though neither action put a lasting downward pressure on prices.

The president is sending the letter to Marathon Petroleum, Valero Energy, ExxonMobil, Phillips 66, Chevron, BP and Shell.

He also has directed Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm to convene an emergency meeting and consult with the National Petroleum Council, a federal advisory group that is drawn from the energy sector.

Biden is asking each company to explain to Granholm any drop in refining capacity since 2020, when the pandemic began. He also wants the companies to provide "any concrete ideas that would address the immediate inventory, price, and refining capacity issues in the coming months -- including transportation measures to get refined product to market."

There may be limits on how much more capacity can be added. The U.S. Energy Information Administration on Friday released estimates that "refinery utilization will reach a monthly average level of 96% twice this summer, near the upper limits of what refiners can consistently maintain."

The draft letter notes that roughly 3 million barrels a day of refining capacity around the world have gone offline since the pandemic began. In the U.S., refining capacity fell by more than 800,000 barrels a day in 2020.

AP: Biden focuses on workers as high inflation remains a risk

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — President Joe Biden told the largest federation of labor unions on Tuesday that he's working to rebuild the U.S. economy around workers, an attempt to draw a contrast with Republicans who have increasingly attracted blue-collar votes.

"We should encourage unions," Biden said. "I'm not just saying that to be pro-union. I'm saying it because I'm pro-American."

The speech before the AFL-CIO convention in Philadelphia was the president's attempt to reset the terms of the debate on the economy as the president's own approval ratings have slid while consumer prices and the cost of gasoline have surged.

Inflation at a more than 40-year high has caused voters to sour on the economy, despite a recovery after the pandemic-induced downturn that has led to robust hiring and a healthy 3.6% unemployment rate. The president on Tuesday tried to remind his audience of the food lines and layoffs during the coronavirus pandemic that preceded his presidency, contrasting that with the improvements in household balance sheets under his watch.

But even as the economy has quickly amassed jobs, inflation has left many workers feeling worse off as wages have not kept up with the costs of living. The Labor Department said Friday that average hourly earnings, after adjusting for inflation, have fallen 3% over the past year.

Inflation has left Biden and Democrats' control of the House and Senate vulnerable in the upcoming midterm elections. Republican lawmakers have blamed the president's $1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package for causing inflation to start rising last year. GOP lawmakers also say the Biden administration has been too restrictive on domestic oil production.

“Working families’ budgets took a back seat to the far-left’s wish list," Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said in a Monday speech.

Biden says the GOP is focused on cutting taxes for companies and the wealthy. Republicans argue that their 2017 tax overhaul created a firmer base for growth by reducing corporate tax rates, making U.S. companies more competitive. They say enabling companies and individuals to hold on to more of what they earn will boost growth, while Biden counters that laws enabling unionization and boosting child care benefits for families will lead to growth through a stronger middle class.

Biden has tried to take specific aim at a proposal by Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., that suggests all Americans should owe federal income taxes. Many Republican lawmakers have either disowned the proposal or offered caveats, since tax credits are a means of financial support for poorer and middle class U.S. families.

“Republicans have it all backwards: Their plan literally calls for increasing taxes on middle class and working people and cutting taxes on corporations and wealthy Americans,” Biden said. “I believe in bipartisanship, but I have no illusions about this Republican Party, the MAGA party.”

The president faces an uphill battle in restoring union membership, which has declined for decades as it became harder to organize workers and many factory jobs moved away from communities with a history of unionization. Only 10.3% of U.S. workers belonged to a union last year, down from 20.1% in 1983, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The nature of who belongs to unions has also changed over time as nearly half of union members work for the government. Just 7.7% of manufacturing workers and 12.6% of construction workers hold a union card, as the movement's blue-collar roots have diversified into white-collar professions.

Despite the decline in unionization, the movement still generates value. Government figures show that the median unionized worker earns about $10,000 more annually than a worker without a union.

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