From: Shelburn, Andrew
To: Shelburn, Andrew
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 6-27-22
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AG VALLEY CO-OP

Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jun 2022	7.46	14.00	08:52
Corn	Oct 2022	6.06	-40.00	08:52
Milo	Jun 2022	6.62	-70.00	08:52
Milo	Oct 2022	5.76	-70.00	08:52
Soybeans	Jun 2022	14.54	-55.00	08:52
Soybeans	Oct 2022	13.49	-65.00	08:52
Wheat	Jun 2022	9.10	-80.00	08:52
Wheat	Jul 2022	9.10	-80.00	08:52

TV and Radio

KETV: What does the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade mean for Nebraska?
KLKN: Planned Parenthood calls Roe v. Wade decision 'devastating'

NTV: What does abortion ruling mean for rural America? (no video
WOWT: Special legislative session on abortion possible in Nebraska
KTIV: Planned Parenthood North Central States reacts to Roe V. Wade decision
NCN: Ricketts in wait-and-see mode on potential special session
NPM: State Leaders React to Roe Decision; Special Session Uncertain
NPM: Nebraska Reacts to Supreme Court Decision Overturning Roe v. Wade
10/11: Whats next in Nebraska following Roe V. Wade ruling
KETV: Roe v. Wade overturned: Nebraskans making their voices heard
KMEG: Overturning Roe: tri-state leaders react to Supreme Court ruling
NTV: Supreme Court's decision on Roe v. Wade highlights national abortion divide
NTV: SCOTUS abortion decision fuels Nebraska Democratic Party voting push
KSNB: What Roe vs. Wade's overturning means for Nebraska
KETV: 'Abortion is health care,' Activists rally for abortion rights at Memorial Park
KMTV: Abortion is still legal in Nebraska as state does not have trigger law
10/11: Pro life rally held at the capitol building
NTV: SCOTUS abortion decision fuels Nebraska Democratic Party voting push
KETV: Maternity house, abortion clinic bear influx of patients after Roe v. Wade ruling
ABC News: Overturning Roe v. Wade raises stakes for patients who need IVF, experts say
KLKN: Nebraska AG joins effort to stop addition of LGBTQ protections in Title IX (no video)
NPM: Roe vs Wade Decision Could Impact Elections

Governor

OWH: Ricketts, Nebraska officials celebrate new state building in Lincoln
Midwest Messenger: Ribbon cutting completes relocation of Nebraska agriculture agencies
NP Telegraph: Nebraska governor proclaims pollinator week
Daily NonPareil: Bellevue gas station's $2.38 special calls attention to high gas prices
LJS: Watch now: Ricketts said he'll work with speaker to call special session of Legislature to ban abortion
Columbus Telegram: Special session likely after Supreme Court decision
Nebraska Examiner: Nebraska lawmakers, governor weigh special session on abortion
Fremont Tribune: Pro-Life proponents; Pro-Choice advocates sound off on Supreme Court ruling
OWH: Nebraska lawmakers expect special session on abortion after Roe v. Wade decision
OWH: Nebraska law still allows abortion up to 20 weeks, but eyes will be on Legislature
LJS: 'The victory has been realized': Longtime anti-abortion activists in Lincoln celebrate end of Roe
Nebraska Examiner: Anti-abortion Nebraskans rally in Lincoln for Roe v. Wade decision, next steps
OWH: Hundreds return to Omaha's Memorial Park to rally for abortion rights
AP: Uncertainty looms over possible Nebraska abortion session
Politico: 'It's now up to the states': Republicans move to ban abortion after Roe falls
Center Square: Colorado among states still allowing abortions after SCOTUS overturns Roe
OWH: Pair of Nebraska state senators set to square off in special election for Congress
Kearney Hub: 50 years at Fort Kearny, Gene Hunt is 'having too much fun' to retire
Fremont Tribune: Citizens for Voter ID plan town hall event in Fremont
AP: Iowa doors swing open for Republicans eyeing White House run

State Capitol

NP Telegraph: Gothenburg earns recertification in economic program

Agency

OWH: Game and Parks' solution for elk problems stirs up Nebraska hunters
OWH: Omaha-area nonprofits to receive millions in grant funding
LJS: Lincoln area groups getting grants for capital projects
Nebraska Examiner: State doles out $115 million in “shovel ready” grants to 76 Nebraska nonprofits
AP: Nebraska Supreme Court denies appeal of death row inmate
LJS: Man sentenced for sexually assaulting a child dies in prison

Legislature

LJS: Don Walton: Brewer in Ukraine; Supreme Court decision on abortion stirs storm

State, Local and Regional

OWH: Scientists weigh in on Nebraska's unusual hail storms and whether they are the new norm
OWH: Can 'next-Gen' DNA testing help ID the remains of US service members killed in war?
OWH: Over 1,000 Omahans protest Supreme Court abortion ruling

Opinion

OWH Editorial: After Roe, Nebraska should take measured approach to future abortion laws

OWH Midlands Voices: Omaha's streetcar is a vehicle for more than transportation

OWH Public Pulse

1. Tone deaf bill
2. Handbags, not handguns
3. Second Amendment
4. TIF totals
5. Good work
6. Short-term memory

LJS Editorial, 6/26: NU's modest budget increase the right thing

National/Federal

OWH: Nebraska Reps. Bacon, Smith join Sens. Fischer, Sasse in opposing gun violence bill

LJS: Inflation is immediate priority, candidates Flood, Pansing Brooks say

LJS: Pansing Brooks calls on voters to 'fight back'; Flood touts 'pro-life' record

AP: Army Guard troops risk dismissal as vaccine deadline looms

OWH: Ricketts, Nebraska officials celebrate new state building in Lincoln

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts and several other Nebraska officials celebrated the opening of a new office building designed to be the "one-stop shop" for multiple state agencies.

At a press conference Friday afternoon, Ricketts cut the ribbon to officially open the new Fallbrook State Office Building in Lincoln. The building, at 425 Fallbrook Blvd., is home for 525 state employees across eight agencies, including the agriculture, natural resources and economic development departments.

The building will serve as the central location for similar state agencies, boards and commissions. Ricketts said consolidating the offices will improve customer service and better utilize state resources to the benefit of Nebraska taxpayers.

"I hope you enjoy our facility as much as we do," said Department of Economic Development Director Tony Goins.

Many of the agencies housed in the new building were previously in an old state building still occupied by the Department of Health and Human Services. Jason Jackson, director of the Department of Administrative Services, said the relocation frees up space for DHHS to consolidate its offices into a central location as well.

Goins said the former economic development office was built in the 1970s, and the department's relocation has been in the works for a long time. The new building presents a professional image to its clients, both national and international, he said.

Factoring in all the spaces the agencies used to occupy, Jackson said, the new building reduces the combined footprint by about 60,000 square feet. The reduced costs associated with the consolidation will save Nebraska taxpayers about $700,000 per year, he estimated.

By Erin Bamer

Midwest Messenger: Ribbon cutting completes relocation of Nebraska agriculture agencies

With a formal ribbon-cutting, several Nebraska agriculture agencies and commodity boards officially announced to the public Friday afternoon, June 24 that they have relocated out of downtown

Lincoln into one north Lincoln building.
Gov. Pete Ricketts and state leaders were on hand to celebrate the completion of the Fallbrook State Office Building at 245 Fallbrook Boulevard.
“By bringing together different agencies that are housed together, we can be more efficient with agencies, and we can best utilize our office space. People who have business with different commodity boards can come here and have one-stop shopping,” a masked Governor Pete Ricketts told the crowd.
It will also impact the Department of Health and Human Services by freeing up space for their offices in downtown Lincoln, he said.
Ricketts said the citizens of Nebraska can be assured that they will spend less time waiting in line; filling out paperwork and waiting for services, as they can now conduct all similar business in the same general location.
After taking turns this spring to relocate their individual offices, the following ag agencies have now settled into the Fallbrook building: Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Nebraska Department of Economic Development, Natural Resources, and the Corn, Wheat, Sorghum, and Ethanol Boards,” said Eric Maher, Communications Director; Nebraska Department of Administrative Services. The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy was already in the building. There are different suite numbers for each ag agency in the Fallbrook building.
“The Nebraska Wheat Board’s move to the Fallbrook location is a great long-term investment for the office. Being located with other commodity organizations and complimentary state agencies is a catalyst for cooperation and collaboration,” said Royce Schaneman, executive director of the Nebraska Wheat Board.
There was a lot that went into setting up this move.
“Co-locating these agencies in Fallbrook is the culmination of a multi-year project that improves accessibility to government services, improves collaboration, and reduces cost,” said Jason Jackson, director of Nebraska Department of Administrative Services.
In all, the state reduced its square footage by about 60,000 square feet, and Nebraska citizens are saving $700,000 dollars each year in terms of reduced cost from a rent perspective, Jackson said.
“We run state government like a business. To everyone who made this relocation possible, I want to say thank you for your resilience and a positive attitude,” said Tony Goins, director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.
Following speakers’ remarks and the ribbon cutting, the public was invited inside for a tour of the building.
By Amy Hadachek

NP Telegraph: Nebraska governor proclaims pollinator week

Nebraska helps feed the world, and pollinators are responsible for one out of every three bites of food. Gov. Pete Ricketts officially proclaimed June 20 to 26 as pollinator week on Monday in a ceremony at the Capitol.
From honeybees to butterflies, moths, birds and bats, pollinators are responsible for pollinating about 90% of all flowering plants, and these plants wouldn’t exist without them. Pollinator week is a way to learn, celebrate, and protect pollinators, according to a press release.
“Nebraska does a lot for pollinators,” said Debbie Dekleva, founder of the North Platte-based nonprofit, Sustainable Monarch. “In 2015, the Nebraska Department of Roads kept the roadsides

very tidy by mowing a lot. When they learned that monarch butterfly population decreased by 90% they implemented ways in which they could help the pollinator rebound. They started planting milkweed, the only plant monarch caterpillars will eat, and nectar plants for the adult butterflies.
“Monarchs are a great poster child for pollinators because they are easily recognizable and their iconic migration from Mexico to Canada is awe inspiring,” Dekleva said. “It takes five to six generations to complete the migration and they need suitable habitat throughout the migration path, including through Nebraska.”
In addition to Nebraska Department of Transportation, the Sandhills and ranching community do a lot for pollinators as well. Grazing natural landscapes like the Sandhills is critical to keep plants regenerating from the roots, increase the duration of blooms and disperses seeds and fertilizer for new plants to grow. When plants are in bloom, pollinators are working behind the scenes to create more seeds, help continue the growth cycle and increase biodiversity. Based on recent genetic tracing for the monarch migration, Nebraska rangelands are a significant producer of monarchs that reach Mexico to overwinter, a journey that can be 2,500 miles. With the continuous cycle of pollination and reproduction, the Sandhills feed people all over the world with Nebraska beef being served as a delicacy.
People can help pollinators thrive by planting Native plants and reducing chemical inputs whether at home or at work. One way to track pollinators is through iNaturalist, an ap that allows you to upload pictures and then helps identify plants, insects and other wildlife. For more information, contact Dekleva at 308-289-0499.

Daily NonPareil: Bellevue gas station's $2.38 special calls attention to high gas prices

A Bellevue gas station rolled back its prices to $2.38 per gallon for a couple hours Wednesday morning.
The price cut at Speedy Gas N Shop at 12701 S. 28th Ave. was a promotion organized by Americans for Prosperity to call attention to high gas prices and inflation.
Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts made an appearance alongside State Sens. John Arch of La Vista, Lou Ann Linehan of Omaha and Mike Flood of Norfolk. Flood is squaring off against State Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln in a special election Tuesday for a seat in Congress.
"Drivers here in Bellevue are getting the opportunity to get gas for what it was a year and a half ago," Ricketts said, noting that $2.38 was the price at the pump when President Joe Biden took office.
AFP-Nebraska reimbursed the gas station for the difference in the price for sales made during the two-hour promotion, which Nebraska Examiner reported totaled nearly $4,000.
Nebraska's average price -- about $4.75 per gallon for regular on Wednesday, according to AAA -- remains below the national average. AAA said Nebraska's highest recorded average price was $4.79 on June 17, while national prices broke threshold of a $5 average price.
“The recent high prices may have led to a small drop in domestic gasoline demand as fewer drivers fueled up last week,” said Andrew Gross, AAA spokesperson. “This dip, coupled with less costly oil, has taken some steam out of surging pump prices. And this is happening right before drivers gas up for what AAA forecasts will be a busy July 4th travel weekend.”
Adjusted for inflation, though, the current pain at the pump is still less than July 2008, when the the average cost of regular gas in Nebraska was $4, according to the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy. That 2008 price would be the equivalent $5.43 in 2022 dollars.

Jessica Shelburn, state director of Americans for Prosperity-Nebraska, said she believes companies aren't refining as much gas as they could -- despite the present demand.
"You do see when gas prices are lower, they're saying that they don't want to supply more," Shelburn said. "But right now, we have the opportunity, and they're saying that they can supply more. We're just not allowing them to."
The U.S. Energy Information Administration expects that U.S. refineries will be working "near the upper limits of what refiners can consistently maintain" but will produce less than before the pandemic. The administration said that's due to refinery closures triggered by the sudden decline in demand from the pandemic, "which put downward pressure on refinery margins and made market conditions more challenging for refinery operators."
Shelburn called tapping the strategic oil reserves and a proposal by Biden to temporarily stop the collection of the 18-cent federal gas tax a "gimmick" and "Band-Aids" that don't solve the problem.
At the event, Ricketts said that Biden was making "war on our energy resources" by cancelling the Keystone XL pipeline and stalling the leasing of federal lands for energy extraction. He said that "the Biden administration has been kidnapped by the radical environmentalists."
"If you started making an impact on allowing us to explore our energy resources, you would see those prices start coming down as soon as those policies started going into place," Ricketts said.
The Nebraska Democratic Party said in a news release that Ricketts fails to blame oil companies for taking record profits and that he could take action to help Nebraskans, but instead chose to "stunt" for publicity.
“Gov. Ricketts could ease some pain of the global gas prices by calling a tax holiday at the pump,” Nebraska Democratic Party Chair Jane Kleeb said, “Ricketts could also demand all gas stations require a 15% ethanol blend."
Shelburn with AFP-Nebraska said a permanent solution would require elected officials coming together to do what's best for the American people.
"It takes everyone coming to the table and having those discussions and being willing to make some compromises," Shelburn said. "The Biden administration isn't gonna get everything they want. The oil companies aren't gonna get everything they want. The focus needs to be on the American people. And that's what we've really lost track of, I think, in society is that we're not focusing on making sure people have the ability to live their American dream."
By Scott Stewart

LJS: Watch now: Ricketts said he'll work with speaker to call special session of Legislature to ban abortion

Gov. Pete Ricketts and Speaker Mike Hilgers of Lincoln said they would work together to determine when to call the Legislature back into special session to consider enacting a ban on abortion in the state.
"I am keen to protect pre-born babies, but I'll have to work with the speaker with regard to what he thinks we will be able to accomplish," Ricketts said Friday during an event celebrating the completion of new state offices in the Fallbrook development in Lincoln.
Abortion remains legal in Nebraska up until 20 weeks after fertilization, according to current state law.
Friday's Supreme Court ruling leaves the decision on how to restrict abortion up to individual states. Thirteen states had trigger laws in place that will automatically ban abortion within one month of the

ruling.
The governor would not predict when the session would be scheduled but indicated he'd rather call state senators back than wait until the next session begins in January.
He pointed out that Tuesday's special election to replace Rep. Jeff Fortenberry would change the makeup of the Legislature. State Sens. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln and Mike Flood of Norfolk are seeking to fill the remainder of the 1st District congressman's term.
In the closing days of this year's legislative session, a bill to ban abortion in Nebraska if states were given full regulatory authority by the court was trapped by a filibuster. A cloture motion to free the bill for consideration fell two votes short on a 31-15 count, with Flood voting yes and Pansing Brooks voting no.
Ricketts also mentioned that Sen. Tom Brewer had just left for a trip to Ukraine. Brewer, a Republican who supported the bill to ban abortions, had said he would return for a special session.
Sen. Adam Morfeld of Lincoln said a special session is "all-but-guaranteed," and will likely take place later this summer.
Had the trigger bill senators considered this past session passed, it would have made it a felony for anyone to provide any medication or undertake any procedure with the intent of ending the life of an unborn child, starting at fertilization. The woman undergoing an abortion, however, could not be charged.
Lawmakers who opposed the bill have vowed to continue their opposition in the event of a special session. Several of them repeated those promises Friday in the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling.
"We have stopped an abortion ban before, and we will do it again together," Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha, who led an eight-hour filibuster on the failed trigger bill earlier this year, wrote on Twitter on Friday.
Sen. Joni Albrecht of Thurston, who introduced the trigger bill, said she has been negotiating with some lawmakers on alterations that would address sticking points of opposition in the previous legislation — mainly that the bill would have inadvertently banned in vitro fertilization, or IVF, and hindered doctors attempting to perform life-saving operations.
"We have to be certain that we cover all our bases," Albrecht said.
Albrecht said she isn't sure what the new bill would look like, because it will largely depend on a full analysis of the Supreme Court's ruling.
Two other abortion-restricting bills were proposed during this year's session, but neither made it out of committee. One, introduced by Sen. Suzanne Geist of Lincoln, would have banned chemical abortions after seven weeks. It would not have regulated surgical abortions. The other, introduced by Sen. Julie Slama of Dunbar, would have banned abortions after a fetal heartbeat could be detected. That usually occurs about six weeks after fertilization.
Slama said Friday she would support any abortion-restricting bill in a special session, as long as it is capable of reaching 33 votes to end a filibuster. Albrecht said she does not expect Ricketts to call for a special session if he isn't confident a proposed bill will pass.
"We should not walk away empty-handed," Slama said.
The fate of any bill will ultimately depend on the makeup of the Legislature, which has already changed from the end of last session because of the death of Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha. Pahls was not present for the vote on the trigger bill because of illness, though Morfeld said Pahls likely would have voted for the bill.
Ricketts appointed Omaha businesswoman Kathleen Kauth as Pahls' replacement earlier this month. At her appointment ceremony, Kauth said she would have voted for the trigger bill had she been

serving at the time.
Nebraska Family Alliance policy director Nate Grasz called for legislative action.
"Pre-born babies who can smile, yawn, suck their thumbs and have their own heartbeat can be legally aborted up to 20 weeks in our state," he said.
"We will immediately begin working with our state lawmakers to pursue the strongest protections possible for every unborn child in Nebraska, because every life should be cherished and protected," Grasz said.
Morfeld, a candidate for Lancaster County Attorney, also issued a statement Friday declaring that "I will not criminalize doctors or women for reproductive decisions" if he is elected to that office.
"I will not turn every miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, IVF procedure and split-second, life-saving decision by a doctor into a criminal investigation.
"These are private decisions that should be left to a woman and her doctor, not politicians and lawyers."
By Don Walton and Chris Dunker

Columbus Telegram: Special session likely after Supreme Court decision

The Supreme Court on Friday overturned its historic Roe v. Wade ruling, leaving the legality of abortions up to the states. Officials indicated on Friday that a special session of the Nebraska Legislature is very possible.
Before Friday's announcement, 13 states had "trigger" laws in place that would automatically ban abortions within one month of Roe v. Wade being overturned.
Currently, Nebraska allows abortions up to 20 weeks after fertilization. During the last legislative session, a "trigger" bill failed to pass by two votes. The bill would have made it a crime for health care professionals to perform an abortion but would have allowed it if the mother's life was in danger.
Going forward, a factor will be the winner of the June 28 special election. Republication Mike Flood is running against Democrat Patty Pansing Brooks for the U.S. House of Representatives District 1 seat left vacant by the resignation of Jeff Fortenberry. The Omaha World-Herald reported on Friday that Flood voted in favor of the trigger bill while Pansing Brooks voted against it.
"The variables are who wins the election next week … and I would think we'd want everybody there to make a decision that's important," State Sen. Mike Moser of Columbus said. "And then to look at the bills we've had in the past and see which one of those has the support to get it through. Once those things are determined then we can see more where we go from here. Otherwise there would be just our previous legislation in place, and it's likely that we would want to bill that would be more encompassing than that."
Pansing Brooks said in a statement that the majority of Americans and Nebraskans do not agree that abortion should be illegal.
"Tuesday's special election will be our first opportunity to stand up and fight back at the ballot box against this extreme effort to push us back into the Dark Ages. My opponent doesn't even support exceptions for rape or incest," Pansing Brooks said.
"The contrast -- and the stakes -- are clear."
Flood also released a comment, noting that he's proudly pro-life.
"(I) am proud to have sponsored and passed the nation's first Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which banned abortion at 20 weeks, when babies can feel pain," Flood said. "We helped pave

the way for this landmark decision."
Gov. Pete Ricketts released a statement Friday, in which he noted that the initial Roe v. Wade ruling took away states' rights to regulate abortion.
"Today's Supreme Court decision restores the rights of the people, and as a result our future generations will have a chance at life," Ricketts said in a press release.
"The Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe is an answer to millions of prayers on behalf of the unborn and a victory for human life. I will be working with our legislative leaders to determine what more we can do to protect our preborn babies."
Moser added that the new Supreme Court ruling will now be as historic as that initial ruling.
"The original ruling was surprising in its day, and this is a historic ruling that moving forward will be looked at with the same importance as the original Roe v. Wade," Moser said. "We'll see how those things play out and what the timing would be and go from there."
According to the World-Herald, some lawmakers who opposed the last trigger bill have voiced they will continue their opposition in the event of a special session.
"We have stopped an abortion ban before, and we will do it again together," Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha, who led an eight-hour filibuster on the failed trigger bill earlier this year, wrote on Twitter Friday.
Planned Parenthood North Central released a statement saying that its doors remain open in Nebraska, as well as Minnesota and Iowa.
"This decision is an unconscionable rollback of fundamental rights for all people in the United States. Because people's right to access abortion is no longer guaranteed by federal law, it now depends on where you live and how much money you have to travel out of state for abortion care. Forced pregnancy is a grave violation of human rights and dignity," said Sarah Stoesz, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood North Central States.
"We have been preparing for months to be able to best serve patients across our region. Our doors are open and Planned Parenthood is committed to providing abortion care where it remains legal."
By Hannah Schrodt

Nebraska Examiner: Nebraska lawmakers, governor weigh special session on abortion

LINCOLN — Nebraska could be headed toward a special session now that the U.S. Supreme Court has overturned Roe v. Wade, although it's unclear what new abortion restrictions, if any, could survive a promised filibuster.
The Legislature this year fell two votes short of passing a "trigger bill," which would have banned abortion in the state if the U.S. Supreme Court reversed Roe v. Wade — as it did Friday.
A filibuster stopped Legislative Bill 933, and legislative leaders say little has changed since then. The late State Sen. Rich Pahls was ill with cancer during the spring debate. He has since been replaced by Republican Kathleen Kauth of Omaha. But that gubernatorial appointment alone is not enough to flip the legislative math toward passage of a total ban, political observers said.
Gov. Pete Ricketts said he was open to a special session, and several senators said Friday they plan to push for one, as soon as August.
State Sen. Suzanne Geist, who helped lead efforts to pass a ban, said she thinks that the session will happen and that anti-abortion senators will have the votes to increase restrictions.
State Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha, who led opposition to the abortion ban this spring, vowed to keep up the fight. "We have already defeated an abortion ban in Nebraska and we will do it again," she

tweeted Friday. “We will defeat any other attempt to ban abortion in this state because the majority of Nebraskans understand that banning abortion is as extreme as it is unnecessary.”
State Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh anticipates a special session, as well. “It’s a very, very scary time,” she said. “I just want Nebraska to continue to be a great place for my daughters and everyone’s daughters to live and have access to health care and have autonomy over their own health care decisions.”
Geist said the current Legislature has shown it is unlikely to pass a full ban, so senators who want to restrict abortions will have to figure out what can get past a filibuster.
Nebraska currently restricts abortions after 20 weeks, the point at which medical experts have testified that a fetus can feel pain. Mississippi restricts abortions after 15 weeks.
That Mississippi law is the vehicle a conservative Supreme Court majority used to overturn Roe v. Wade and give statehouses the ability to set their own limits on abortion.
“I think that there’s still some question about whether we will actually have a special session,” Geist said. “And if we do, there’s a question about what type of bill will pass.”
Speaker Mike Hilgers, in a statement Friday, said he anticipates a special session this summer “to pass legislation to protect pre-born babies.”
“I will work with Governor Ricketts on the timing of a special session,” Hilgers said. “And, after reviewing the Supreme Court’s opinion in detail, I will work closely with the Governor and my legislative colleagues on the scope of such protections.”
Ricketts said he would work with Hilgers to determine what else can be done in Nebraska “to protect pre-born babies.”
“We had to wait for this decision to be able to do any planning,” Ricketts said. “I will have to coordinate with his [Hilgers’] office with regard to anything we would accomplish in the Legislature.”
A special session doesn’t come cheap. In the past, special sessions have cost about $10,000 a day, according to Dick Brown, assistant clerk of the Legislature.
That includes the cost of per-diem expenses for senators, as well as printing and paying pages and sergeants-at-arms.
It takes a minimum of seven days to pass a bill, Brown said, but there is no limit on how long a special session can last.
By Aaron Sanderford

Fremont Tribune: Pro-Life proponents; Pro-Choice advocates sound off on Supreme Court ruling

Jan S. Ortmeier was happy when she heard Friday that the U.S. Supreme Court had overturned Roe v. Wade.
The ruling removed the federal constitutional right to an abortion. Individual states will have the authority to determine if or when an abortion is legal or can ban the procedure altogether.
Pro-Life advocates and Pro-Choice proponents across the nation have expressed their views.
Protests have broken out across the country in reaction to the ruling.
“We are aware of the ruling and we don’t anticipate any major problems, but we continue to monitor the situation,” Capt. Kurt Bottorff of the Fremont Police Department said late Friday afternoon.
News of the ruling was met favorably by Pro-Life proponents.
“Finally, they’re coming to realize that it is a real life, a real human being from conception until

death," said Ortmeier, who with her husband, Don, are part of Fremont Area Right to Life.
Ortmeier said she remembers when talk about Roe v. Wade surfaced before the ruling in 1973.
"We talked among our friends about how awful that was going to be," she said.
The Ortmeiers helped start the local Right to Life chapter in the 1970s.
"We felt we had to do something and educate people and stand up for the babies and the mothers and help them as much as we could," she said.
Not everyone was pleased about the recent ruling.
Sarah Stoesz, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood North Central States, which includes Nebraska, called the ruling a devastating blow to reproductive freedom.
"The U.S. Supreme Court decision is wrong and will harm millions of people," Stoesz said. "This decision is an unconscionable rollback of fundamental rights for all people in the United States. Because people's right to access abortion is no longer guaranteed by federal law, it now depends on where you live and how much money you have to travel out of state for abortion care. Forced pregnancy is a grave violation of human rights and dignity."
United Women in Faith, formerly United Methodist Women, issued a statement Friday expressing concern about the recent Supreme Court decision's impact.
The statement said banning of abortions won't end them and that poor and working-class women will resort to unsafe procedures that could cost them their lives, which happened too often prior to the Roe decision.
"We call on federal and state legislators to act to protect the lives of women and girls by codifying their right to privacy, to legal and safe contraceptives, and, in tragic conflicts of life with life, to abortions," the statement said.
Politicians have expressed their views against and for the ruling.
State Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks is the Democratic candidate in Tuesday's special election to fill former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry's vacated 1st District House seat.
In a Facebook statement, Pansing Brooks denounced the decision.
"Today, the U.S. Supreme Court made an unconscionable decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, giving the government the seat at our daughters' exam tables for which many have long coveted," Pansing Brooks said. "A majority of Americans and Nebraskans do not agree that abortion should be illegal."
Pansing Brooks said the special election would be a first opportunity for voters to fight back at the ballot box "against this extreme effort to push us back into the Dark Ages."
She decried the stance of pro-life Republican candidate Mike Flood, whom she said doesn't even support exceptions for rape or incest.
In May, the Fremont Tribune reported that Flood said he'd work to ban abortions and expand prohibitions on taxpayer subsidies for abortion.
Flood said in a Facebook statement on Friday that the High Court has returned abortion-related policy decisions back to the states and people where they belong.
"I am proudly pro-life, and am proud to have sponsored and passed the nation's first Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which banned abortions at 20 weeks, when babies can feel pain," Flood said. "We helped pave the way for this landmark decision."
U.S. Sen. Ben Sasse said the Supreme Court righted a Constitutional wrong and that the pro-life movement's work has just begun.
"The pro-life movement is pro-baby, pro-mom, and pro-science," Sasse said. "…We can't call this legal victory the end, because our movement has never been primarily about lawsuits and laws – it's about love and compassion. … Let's support and love all pregnant women. Let's come alongside

them and give the support they need. Let's support babies regardless of the situations they face and build communities around them that will love and cherish them."
Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts added his thoughts.
"Roe v. Wade took away the states' right to regulate abortion and cost millions of babies their lives," Ricketts said. "Today's Supreme Court decision restores the rights of the people, and as a result our future generations will have a chance at life. … I will be working with our legislative leaders to determine what more we can do to protect our preborn babies."
Ortmeier recalled when she became a volunteer years ago at Problem Pregnancy, a center in Fremont. She said the entity provided free pregnancy tests and then diapers and parenting classes. Counselors talked to women.
"We tried to help them realize it's a real life growing within them and there would never be another person with those characteristics and talents and to get rid of that life would just be devastating," Ortmeier said.
In a Tribune article in May, Ortmeier also said there's now a Pro-Life center in every state that will help women facing an unplanned pregnancy.
She cites Life Choices, a nonprofit organization in Fremont.
Suzanne Schneider, executive director of Life Choices, talked about that nonprofit agency's work.
"At Life choices, our work has always been and will continue to be Her — every woman deserves compassion and support in the face of an unexpected pregnancy and Life Choices provides that," she said.
By Tammy Real-McKeighan

OWH: Nebraska lawmakers expect special session on abortion after Roe v. Wade decision

LINCOLN — Nebraska lawmakers are bracing for a special session in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade, though it remains unclear when lawmakers might be called back and how far they'd be willing to go in limiting abortion.
The Supreme Court ruled to overturn Roe v. Wade in a 5-4 decision Friday, ending the nationwide protections on abortions established in the 1973 ruling. The news spurred strong reactions from Nebraska public officials on both sides of the political aisle, with opponents calling the decision "dangerous," and supporters praising the justices for their "courage."
"This is a huge day for the United States," said State Sen. Julie Slama of Dunbar.
The ruling leaves abortion regulations up to individual states. Before Friday's decision, 13 states had trigger laws in place that will automatically ban abortions within one month of the ruling. More bans are expected to follow.
Abortion remains legal in Nebraska up until 20 weeks after fertilization, according to current state law, but that could change in the event of a special session.
Gov. Pete Ricketts previously said that he would support a special session if the Supreme Court overturned Roe, and that he supported a ban on abortions including in cases of rape and incest. But on Friday the governor sounded more pragmatic, saying that he planned to speak with Speaker of the Legislature Mike Hilgers of Lincoln in the next few weeks to determine what policies could pass in the Legislature.
"I will be working with our legislative leaders to determine what more we can do to protect our preborn babies," Ricketts said in a statement.

Hilgers also refrained from stating definitively Friday that there would be a special session, though he said he anticipates one this summer "to pass legislation to protect pre-born babies." He also repeated his commitment to work with Ricketts on scheduling a special session.

Their remarks appeared to be an acknowledgement of the uncertainty over the lengths legislators are willing to go to restrict abortion in Nebraska.

Earlier this year, lawmakers attempted to pass their own trigger bill to ban all abortions in Nebraska upon the demise of Roe. The bill died when it fell two votes shy of the 33 needed for a filibuster-ending cloture motion.

Had the bill passed, it would have made it a felony for anyone to provide any medication or undertake any procedure with the intent of ending the life of an unborn child, starting at fertilization. The woman undergoing an abortion, however, could not be charged.

It wouldn't have included exemptions, including for rape or incest, but would have allowed licensed physicians charged under the law to use as a defense that the abortion was necessary to prevent the woman's death or serious, permanent impairment of a life-sustaining organ.

Some lawmakers who opposed the bill have since vowed to continue their opposition in the event of a special session. Several of them repeated those promises Friday in the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling.

"We have stopped an abortion ban before, and we will do it again together," Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha, who led an eight-hour filibuster on the failed trigger bill earlier this year, wrote Friday on Twitter.

Sen. Jen Day of Omaha shared a similar message on Twitter, along with a reminder that abortion remains legal in Nebraska.

"We will never stop defending our right to decide if, when, and under what circumstances to have a family," she wrote.

Sen. Joni Albrecht of Thurston, who introduced the trigger bill, said the legislation likely would not be resurrected if a special session is called. Albrecht said she has been negotiating with some lawmakers on alterations that would address sticking points in the previous legislation — mainly that the bill would have inadvertently banned in vitro fertilization, or IVF, and hindered doctors attempting to perform lifesaving operations.

"We have to be certain that we cover all our bases," Albrecht said.

Albrecht said she isn't sure what the new bill would look like, because it will largely depend on a full analysis of the Supreme Court's ruling.

Two other abortion-restricting bills were proposed during this year's session, but neither made it out of committee. One, introduced by Sen. Suzanne Geist of Lincoln, would have banned chemical abortions after seven weeks. It would not have regulated surgical abortions. The other, introduced by Slama, would have banned abortions after a fetal heartbeat could be detected. That usually occurs about six weeks after fertilization.

Slama said Friday that she would support any abortion-restricting bill in a special session, as long as it is capable of reaching 33 votes to end a filibuster. Albrecht said she does not expect Ricketts to call for a special session if he isn't confident a proposed bill will pass.

"We should not walk away empty-handed," Slama said.

The fate of any bill likely will depend on the makeup of the Legislature, which already has changed since the end of last session due to the death of Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha. Pahls was not present for the vote on the trigger bill due to an illness, though he likely would have voted for the bill, according to multiple lawmakers.

Ricketts appointed Omaha businesswoman Kathleen Kauth as Pahls' replacement earlier this month. At her appointment ceremony, Kauth said she would have voted for the trigger bill had she been serving at the time.

Ricketts will appoint at least one new lawmaker this summer after either Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk or Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln is elected to finish out the term of U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, who resigned after he was convicted of three felonies in March. The two are competing in a special election set for Tuesday.

Whoever Ricketts appoints could have an impact on the fate of the special session. Flood, a Republican, voted for the trigger bill, while Pansing Brooks, a Democrat, voted against it.

On Friday, Flood welcomed the Supreme Court's ruling, telling The World-Herald that he believed it righted a longstanding wrong. Pansing Brooks said she was shocked and angered by the ruling, adding that it relegated women to second-class status.

A similar divide was on display Friday among the candidates running to replace Ricketts, who is term limited and cannot seek reelection.

"Nebraska is a pro-life state because our citizens understand that life is the most precious gift of God's grace," Jim Pillen, the Republican nominee for governor, said in a statement. "Today, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed what we have long known to be true: Our constitution contains no right to murder an unborn child. I will do all I can to ensure that no more unborn babies are killed."

Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue, the Democratic nominee for governor, said the reintroduction of the trigger bill in the Legislature would "cause Nebraskans to live in a police state." She called out the lack of exemptions in cases of rape and incest.

"I have grave concerns about the collateral damage we will be creating with these types of decisions that should be between a patient and healthcare provider, a woman and her partner or husband, or a family and their minister or priest," she said in a statement.

Beyond the State Capitol, groups on both sides of the issue vowed to continue their efforts.

"Most Nebraskans support keeping abortion legal in our state because they understand no one should be forced to carry a pregnancy against their will or face the life-altering consequences of being denied abortion care," Scout Richters, an attorney with ACLU of Nebraska, said in a statement. "This race to take away people's rights is dangerous and dystopian — and we will do everything we can to stop it."

Sandy Danek, executive director of Nebraska Right to Life, said in a statement that the Supreme Court's decision marked a victory but not the end of the group's work.

"We must continue to work vigorously to elect pro-life representatives in the State Legislature to pass laws to protect mothers and their pre-born children," Danek said.

By Erin Bamer

OWH: Nebraska law still allows abortion up to 20 weeks, but eyes will be on Legislature

The Supreme Court's ruling overturning of Roe v. Wade leaves the legal status of abortion up to states, which have adopted a patchwork of laws that now will determine the access Americans have to abortion.

Under Nebraska law, abortion remains legal up to 20 weeks after fertilization. Abortion also remains legal in Iowa, Colorado and Minnesota.

A so-called trigger bill that would have banned all abortions in Nebraska if the high court overturned Roe v. Wade died in the Legislature this spring. But now all eyes are on Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts

to see whether he calls a special legislative session to revive that bill — Legislative Bill 933 — or something like it.

Several states in the region already are among 13 nationwide that have adopted trigger bills banning abortion now that the court has struck down the landmark 1973 decision, namely South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming and Missouri.

South Dakota's ban took effect immediately. Planned Parenthood North Central States, which includes Nebraska and Iowa, paused abortion appointments in that state last week and will not resume them, officials said Friday.

Oklahoma has banned abortion outright, in addition to having a trigger ban in place. Abortion remains legal in Kansas, but voters will decide in an August referendum whether to remove the right to abortion from the state constitution. Approval would allow the Kansas Legislature to pass laws that restrict or ban the procedure.

Sarah Stoesz, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood North Central States, said Friday that the ruling means that access to abortion now will depend on the state in which a woman resides. The organization covers Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota and Minnesota.

"It is fair to say an abortion ban is not a ban for all people," she said. "It’s only a ban for certain people who are unable to travel."

Dr. Sarah Traxler, the Minnesota-based organization's chief medical officer, said its leaders have been working to increase access to abortion in states where it remains legal.

"We believe we'll have an influx of patients in Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota," she said.

The organization has been working to bring in and train more physicians in all three states to meet the anticipated increase in demand, she said. The group also has hired more patient navigators to support patients as they travel to get care.

In Minnesota, it has launched a direct-to-consumer mifepristone, or abortion pill, program for Minnesota residents. It also has increased capacity at its telemedicine abortion sites. Telemedicine abortion is not allowed in Nebraska.

The organization also has been training clinicians on miscarriage management, Traxler said, because it already is seeing an increase in the number of patients who come to its clinics seeking such care.

She noted that there are many situations in which abortion is lifesaving care, including in patients with cancer who can't get treatment because they are pregnant, those who have had their water break early and developed dangerous infections and in moms with pre-eclampsia suffering seizures and the threat of stroke.

She said the organization's Sioux Falls, South Dakota, health center remains open for birth control, STD testing, gender-affirming hormone therapy and other sexual and reproductive health care needs.

In Nebraska, the overturning of Roe also has raised concerns among health care providers, patients and families about what laws might follow.

LB 933 would have made it a felony for anyone to provide any medication or undertake any procedure with the intent of ending the life of an unborn child, starting at fertilization. The woman undergoing an abortion could not be charged. The measure would not have provided exemptions, including for rape or incest, but would have allowed licensed physicians charged under the law to use as a defense that the abortion was necessary to prevent the woman’s death or serious, permanent impairment of a life-sustaining organ.

Dr. Maureen Boyle, an obstetrician/gynecologist with Methodist Health System, said doctors are concerned such provisions could tie their hands when it comes to providing the safest and best care

for women as laid out in guidelines from their professional boards.
"This really is not a pro-life or pro-choice issue," she said. "It's really about taking care of women in any and all circumstances they may find themselves in."
Fertility specialists, as well as patients and family members, have raised concerns that the passage of such laws could prevent fertility treatments. A Facebook group called Save IVF Nebraska created to advocate for continued access to fertility treatments in the state had 969 members on Friday.
A group of physicians concerned about the provisions in LB 933 recently formed the Campaign for a Healthy Nebraska group to provide information about such issues. "We feel as physicians that the public needs to get germane and relevant information from the source," said Dr. Stephanie Gustin, medical director of the Heartland Center for Reproductive Medicine in Omaha.
Proponents of LB 933 have said the measure is not intended to apply to in vitro fertilization or to treatments for women who suffer miscarriages or ectopic pregnancies, the potentially life-threatening situation in which a fetus begins to develop outside the uterus.
But an ACLU of Nebraska attorney has noted that the language in a law, not the intent, is what matters.
By Julie Anderson

LJS: 'The victory has been realized': Longtime anti-abortion activists in Lincoln celebrate end of Roe

Shirley Lang has been praying for the past 50 years that she would live long enough to see this day. There was never a doubt in her heart that Roe v. Wade — the landmark Supreme Court case that enshrined a woman's constitutional right to an abortion in 1973 — would eventually be overturned, as happened Friday.
The question was when?
"I didn't think it would take this long," the 88-year-old Lincoln woman said. "There have been people praying all over America to undo this because it is wrong."
Friday felt like a day for commemoration, longtime anti-abortion activists in Lincoln say: For the nearly 50 years of prayer and hard work, but also for those affected by abortion in the years since.
Lang remembers being at the first Walk for Life outside the state Capitol in 1974, the beginning of a lifelong passion to end abortion. She remembers distinctly the words one state senator left the demonstrators with on the Capitol steps.
"He said 'You are on the right side, but you're going to have to work at this for years,'" she said.
Lang took the words to heart and eventually co-founded Lincoln Right to Life.
"I felt like I had to do something about it," she said.
Sandy Danek became involved in the fight in 1989, volunteering with Nebraska Right to Life. As a mother who'd experienced the pain of miscarriage, the battle was a personal one.
"That experience caused me to want to work for the benefit of the child in the womb," she said.
Like Lang, she believed this day would come because Roe "isn't good law," and the fact that prenatal technology — like ultrasounds — has improved in the years since.
Danek eventually served as president of the Nebraska Right to Life board and now serves as executive director, a position she assumed when longtime leader Julie Schmit-Albin died of cancer in 2020.
There's a certain poignancy that Schmit-Albin is not here to see this day, those who knew her say, considering the profound influence she had on the anti-abortion movement across the state.

"It strikes an emotional chord with me," Danek said. "When she died, many said — and I believe it — that the pro-life structure in the state is due to in part what Julie did in the 32 years she was director. She was brilliant, but steady and strong."

Lisa McInerney leads Lincoln's chapter of Sidewalk Advocates for Life, a group of volunteers who gather outside Planned Parenthood near 48th Street and Old Cheney Road.

There are anywhere from two to four people on the sidewalk during Planned Parenthood's operating hours on Tuesdays — the day on which abortions are typically performed, McInerney says.

People often come to pray, but there are also trained volunteers who approach people driving up to the building to offer resources or to point them to one of Lincoln's three pregnancy care centers — including one right across the street — that offer free ultrasounds and supplies.

Volunteers who support abortion rights are also present, escorting women into the building.

Friday's decision doesn't immediately impact the availability of abortion in Nebraska, but Gov. Pete Ricketts is expected to convene the Legislature for a special session to restrict it.

If that happens, McInerney said the focus of the sidewalk advocates will center on informing women who have been referred by Planned Parenthood to other states where it is legal.

Lincoln's Sidewalk Advocates chapter has only been around for a few years, but anti-abortion activists have gathered and prayed outside Planned Parenthood for much longer.

For years, activists met outside its former location at 37th and South streets, and Lincoln Right to Life operated a location in a house just to the south of it.

When Planned Parenthood moved farther south near 48th and Old Cheney, Lincoln Right to Life followed, moving into a location near where the Women's Care Center, which offers ultrasounds and pregnancy counseling, is now.

Friday's decision feels like an answer to the prayers of those people who have stood outside Planned Parenthood for years, McInerney said.

"We've prayed and hoped for it for a long time," she said.

Julia Lostroh went to her first Walk for Life in 1981 and has been active in the anti-abortion fight ever since.

Friday's decision doesn't mean the fight is over, she said, since many states will still have legal abortion — as they did before Roe made it federally legal. While it's a day of joy, for Lostroh and others, there is a sense of remembrance attached to the news.

"It's not a celebration type of a thing because this is so sad that we've lived with it for 50 years," said Lostroh, a former lobbyist and now PAC chairman for Nebraska Right to Life. "I think it will be a commemoration and a new start for us as far as being able to (implement) some meaningful protections for life."

Marion Miner, the director of pro-life and family policy for the Nebraska Catholic Conference, called the Supreme Court's 6-3 decision in a Mississippi abortion case that led to the overturning of Roe "surreal" and "a real victory for human rights and the fulfillment of many hopes and prayers."

He understands, however, that emotions are going to be high on either side of the abortion divide.

"I think it's incumbent on us to recall that in the midst of our rejoicing and our resolve to act ... those people who are likely to be in shock or unsure of the future," he said. "The church is with those who are suffering, with those who are confused, with those who are alone, and people should know that."

Bishop James Conley of the Diocese of Lincoln said on Twitter shortly after Friday's news he thought he would never see Roe overturned during his lifetime, but always believed the day would come.

"Our Lord has given us a great gift from the love of his most sacred heart," Conley wrote. "We now

have to reach out to women and families who find themselves in difficult situations and love them with the heart of Jesus."
In the weeks preceding the decision, which came months after a leaked draft of the court's majority opinion, Catholic churches in Lincoln warned parishioners to be vigilant for possible attacks when the ruling was handed down.
Danek voiced similar concerns, but also said there will be people who will want to "celebrate in the public square."
"They see this as 50 years of very difficult work and finally the victory has been realized," she said.
A victory Lang waited five decades to see.
"When I stand in front of God on Judgment Day, he'll say what did you do in this country, where you were free to stop this?" she said. "And I want to be able to say I tried my best."
By Zach Hammack

Nebraska Examiner: Anti-abortion Nebraskans rally in Lincoln for Roe v. Wade decision, next steps

LINCOLN — Longtime leaders in Nebraska's anti-abortion movement gathered Saturday to celebrate Friday's U.S. Supreme Court decision that several described as the end of the beginning of their efforts to make abortion illegal in Nebraska.
Former Gov. Kay Orr and Lt. Gov. Mike Foley joined a morning rally at the Nebraska Republican Party headquarters that drew about 100 people. Two hours later, 50 people attended a Students for Life rally on the State Capitol steps to support the reversal of Roe v. Wade.
"I've been involved in the pro-life movement for over 40 years, and over all those years, I always knew that we would get to this day," Foley said. "I didn't know that I would live to see the day, but we did. God works in mysterious ways."
Attendees pushed back against local abortion-rights groups who have said that a majority of Nebraskans support keeping abortion legal and safe, based on polling shared publicly by the Nebraska Democratic Party and Democratic-leaning organizations.
As many as 1,500 people protested the Roe decision in Omaha and hundreds more rallied Lincoln on Friday. The court ruling sent the decision on abortion back to lawmakers, including Nebraska's. Gov. Pete Ricketts and legislative leaders are mulling a special session on further restricting abortion. Under current Nebraska law, abortion is legal up to 20 weeks after fertilization.
The state GOP rally also aimed to draw more attention toward Tuesday's special election in the Lincoln-centered 1st Congressional District. Republican State Sen. Mike Flood and Democratic Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks are squaring to fill former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry's seat through the end of the year.
Orr, Foley and State Sens. Julie Slama of Dunbar and Suzanne Geist of Lincoln talked about Flood's anti-abortion record, including passage of a bill that banned abortions in Nebraska after 20 weeks. They spoke of his support for a total ban.
"We have this opportunity now to speak to people about supporting the life of the unborn child," Orr said, encouraging GOP activists preparing to campaign door-to-door for Flood. "But I ask all the Nebraskans who pick up that mantle to do that and do so with grace, love, kindness, gentleness."
Foley contrasted Flood's stand on abortion with that of Pansing Brooks. On policy, Foley said, Pansing Brooks is wrong. She supports abortion rights and helped Democrats filibuster Republican efforts this past session to pass a preemptive ban.

Pansing Brooks has argued the Roe decision threatens women's bodily autonomy.
Flood, who spoke at both rallies Saturday, told the students at the Capitol group they were the first generation who grew up knowing what a child developing in the womb looks like, because of ultrasound technology. He said they understand what they see: "a baby."
"What happened in 1972 is wrong," he said, holding a megaphone microphone. "But your generation is the generation of life."
Lincoln twins Bridget and Cecilia Nickman, 17, said they came to the student rally because they enjoy being around people who believe as they do that abortion is wrong.
"It just means a lot, because I think the mainstream media can make it really easy to feel like you're alone in this," Bridget said. "It seems like everything's saying that they're taking away a woman's fundamental right."
For James Sykes of Lincoln, 21, fighting abortion is personal. He said doctors told his mother she had to have an abortion at the age of 18 because of medical complications.
He said she went through with it, only to find out a few weeks later that she had not needed to abort her pregnancy after all.
"That sort of destroyed her," Sykes said. "That's become a motivator for not only her, but myself as well."
By Aaron Sanderford

OWH: Hundreds return to Omaha's Memorial Park to rally for abortion rights

For the second time since the U.S. Supreme Court's reversal of Roe v. Wade, protesters gathered at Memorial Park Sunday to call for access to safe and legal abortions.
Though Sunday's crowd of a few hundred was smaller than Friday's protest, which drew more than 1,000 people to the park, the energy was much the same. Chants of "my body my choice," "hey hey, ho ho, abortion ban has got to go," and "f--- Pete Ricketts" echoed across Dodge Street as passing cars honked and motorcyclists revved engines seemingly in support.
The rally began at 6 p.m., and the group initially marched on the sidewalk from Memorial Park to 52nd Street before returning to the park. Around 7:45 p.m., they headed toward 72nd and Dodge Streets.
The Supreme Court in an opinion published Friday struck down Roe v. Wade, the landmark ruling that solidified abortion as a constitutional right nearly 50 years ago. Friday's decision leaves regulating abortion up to individuals states. In Nebraska, abortion is still legal up to 20 weeks after fertilization.
A draft opinion leaked and published in early May signaled the court was prepared to undo Roe. But even with the forewarning, protesters said the news still felt shocking.
"We knew it was coming, but still, it's exhausting," said Jen McEvoy, 52, who attended the protest with her daughter Lillian. "There is overwhelming support in this country for abortion rights, and yet it's been taken away by this false court that was picked specifically to overturn this issue."
Others said that their initial reaction was despair.
"I found out at work," said 19-year-old Nicole Sandquist. "We cried together in solidarity, all of the women in my workplace. It was a very solemn day."
Some gathered Sunday stressed the importance of voting and electing lawmakers who support abortion rights in Nebraska and nationally.
Abortion opponents, including Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts and Speaker of the Legislature Mike

Hilgers of Lincoln, heralded the Supreme Court's decision, saying it correctly returned the matter to the states.
“The Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe is an answer to millions of prayers on behalf of the unborn and a victory for human life," Ricketts said in a statement Friday.
Ricketts and Hilgers said they would work together on a possible special session this summer to consider abortion restrictions. Earlier this year, the Legislature narrowly failed to pass a so-called trigger ban, which would have banned abortion in the event Roe v. Wade was overturned.
Abortion-rights protests are scheduled to continue this week, with planned rallies in Omaha and Lincoln on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday.
Alex Bazer, 19, said that she thinks people gathering to show support is important.
"We will not take this lying down," she said. "We will not stand here and let them take this away, especially with how long we've been fighting just to have basic human rights like everyone else."
By Molly Ashford

AP: Uncertainty looms over possible Nebraska abortion session

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska could be headed to a special session to try to ban abortions now that the U.S. Supreme Court has given states that power, but it’s unclear whether one will actually happen or what type of restrictions might win enough support to pass.
Gov. Pete Ricketts was noncommittal Tuesday when asked if he planned to call a special session, saying repeatedly that he would work with Speaker of the Legislature Mike Hilgers to try to find a way to ban abortions.
Ricketts, a conservative Republican who vehemently opposes abortion, praised the ruling as “a victory for the people” and has said he would support a special session to outlaw the procedure in Nebraska.
“We should always be looking to protect innocent life,” he said.
But it’s unclear whether abortion opponents have enough support in the one-house Legislature to pass new restrictions. A proposal that would have automatically banned abortions if the Supreme Court ever allowed it fell two votes short earlier this year of the support it needed to overcome a filibuster.
Hilgers, a Republican abortion opponent, said in a statement Tuesday that he anticipates a special session later this summer.

Politico: 'It's now up to the states': Republicans move to ban abortion after Roe falls

Fifty governors began charting vastly different paths on abortion policy on Friday after the Supreme Court dismantled the federal constitutional right to abortion and returned decision making power to the states.
Red state governors and attorneys general moved swiftly to ban access to the procedure and announced special legislative sessions to restrict abortion in the minutes and hours after the Supreme Court’s decision. Their blue state counterparts quickly issued executive orders and announced new policies to protect abortion and prevent abortion-rights opponents from prosecuting providers and patients for pregnancies terminated legally in their state’s borders.
But those steps are likely just the first as the fight for abortion rights shifts back to the nation’s statehouses for the first time in nearly half a century. It may take months for the status of abortion

rights in many states to become clear as lawmakers pass new bills, proponents and opponents of abortion rights file lawsuits and governors take executive action.

"For 50 years, women have relied on their constitutional right to make their own medical decisions," North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat who stands between his state's Republican-controlled legislature and an abortion ban, said on Friday. "That means it's now up to the states to determine whether women get reproductive health care."

And abortion policy will remain in the hands of the states for the foreseeable future, unless Congress enacts federal abortion protections or restrictions.

As of Friday, abortion is illegal in seven states — Alabama, Arkansas, South Dakota, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri and Oklahoma — except where it is required to save the life of the pregnant person. Abortion is also banned under civil law through a private enforcement mechanism after six weeks of pregnancy in Texas. The legal status of abortion is unclear in Wisconsin and West Virginia, where pre-Roe laws remain on the books. Proponents and opponents of abortion rights disagree about whether those laws are enforceable.

Bans in Idaho and Tennessee will take effect 30 days after the Supreme Court issues its final judgment in its decision, which hasn't happened yet.

Some red states rushed to implement their so-called trigger bans on Friday, with Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt, a Republican, announcing he had certified the Supreme Court's decision overturning Roe within 20 minutes of the ruling coming down.

"With the Dobbs decision just handed down and a stroke of my pen — Missouri became the first state to effectively end abortion and has become the most Pro Life state in America," Schmitt said on Twitter.

Others, like Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch and North Dakota Attorney General Drew Wrigley, both Republicans, are evaluating the court's decision before implementing their trigger bans.

A spokesperson said Fitch's office plans to "give the opinion and the analysis contemplated by the law the thoughtful attention they deserve," but did not provide a timeline for certification. Wrigley's office said he is "evaluating the Dobbs opinion in every detail and will give careful consideration to its impact on North Dakota's abortion laws," a process state law gives him 30 days to complete.

Bans in some red states may take time

Abortion bans in other red states hinge on court and legislative action.

In Indiana, Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb asked the legislature on Friday to take up abortion in a July 6 special session where lawmakers were set to address tax-related issues. Abortion remains legal in Indiana, though it had long been expected lawmakers would move quickly to ban the procedure if the Supreme Court overturned Roe.

"The Supreme Court's decision is clear, and it is now up to the states to address this important issue," Holcomb said. "We'll do that in short order in Indiana."

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, a Republican, also announced a special session later in the year to further address abortion rights in the state — even though abortion is already banned. Three other Republican governors — Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte, West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice and Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts — said they were consulting with legislative leaders on next steps.

Republican elected officials in states where abortion bans have been blocked by federal courts moved rapidly to allow those laws to go into effect. Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost filed an injunction to trigger the state's six-week abortion ban, South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster pledged to file motions to lift a block on a similar law in his state by the end of the day, , and Alabama Gov.

Kay Ivey said the state would "immediately" move to ask the court to lift an injunction on the state's near-total abortion ban, which a judge did Friday evening.
Two blue cities in red states, meanwhile, began to mount an opposition — a strategy they're hoping other jurisdictions will replicate.
St. Louis City Alderwoman Annie Rice, a Democrat, introduced a measure on Friday that will allocate $1.5 million in federal recovery funds to aid abortion access, including $1 million to organizations that offer logistical support — including child care, transportation and lodging — to people seeking abortions, and $500,000 to establish a reproductive equity fund to support providers who offer pregnancy care.
Mallory Schwarz, executive director of Pro-Choice Missouri, said she anticipates the bill will be voted on before the Board of Aldermen goes on recess in July.
"This legislation shows the strength of our grassroots movement and the critical importance of state and local leadership," Schwarz said. "The people closest to the problem are closest to the solution, and we hope you will see this as a model for what a national response could and should look like."
And in Austin, Texas, Council members Chito Vela and Vanessa Fuentes called for a special meeting of the City Council to take up a proposal to effectively decriminalize abortion in the state.
"We're really the last line of defense at this point," Vela said. "The federal government has now stepped to the side, the state government is aggressively attacking abortion rights, and now we — even though we're the lowest level of government and in many ways the weakest level of government — we're going to do everything that we can to make sure that whatever is within our power, we can protect abortion rights and protect women."

An uncertain future in purple states

Friday's decision underscored how the future of abortion policy in a handful of purple states rides on the outcome of the November election.
"This fall, Roe is on the ballot. Personal freedoms are on the ballot. The right to privacy, liberty, equality, they're all on the ballot," President Joe Biden said on Friday.
In Michigan, for example, a state judge temporarily blocked the state's 1931 pre-Roe ban from taking effect. The future of abortion in the state depends on myriad factors, including whether Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer wins reelection and whether Democrats continue to control the state Supreme Court.
"We need to clarify that under Michigan law, access to abortion is not only legal, but constitutionally protected," Whitmer said Friday.
In Kansas, abortion is protected, though voters will have a chance to undo constitutional protections for abortion during the August primary. If that measure passes, the Republican-controlled legislature could take up an abortion ban, which Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly would likely veto. Kelly is up for reelection in November.
In Virginia, Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin told the Washington Post on Friday that he would like to see lawmakers pursue a 15-week ban on abortion when the legislature meets again in January, though Senate Democrats are unlikely to advance such a measure to his desk. For now, abortions are allowed in Virginia until the third trimester.
"We do have, at least in the [state] Senate, enough reproductive rights champions to stop abortion bills from possibly even seeing the Senate floor," said Breanna Diaz, policy and legislative counsel at the ACLU of Virginia. "We will do everything in our power to ensure that Virginia remains a safe haven for abortion."

Blue states move to become havens

West Coast governors on Friday moved to establish their states as sanctuaries for those seeking and providing the procedure. They issued a "multi-state commitment" to protect patients and providers from other states' restrictive laws, block extradition requests from other states and prevent doctors from being punished by insurers and professional licensing boards.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee — all Democrats — also pledged to expand access to medication abortion, remove "barriers to telehealth for reproductive healthcare services" and grow the group of providers qualified to perform abortions.

In blue Massachusetts, where abortion access is codified into state law, Republican Gov. Charlie Baker signed an executive order Friday morning declaring that the Bay State will not cooperate with extradition requests from other states attempting to prosecute abortion patients or providers and prohibiting state agencies from assisting other state's investigations.

Democratic legislative leaders in Massachusetts are building money for abortion clinic security and infrastructure into the state budget, possibly millions of dollars. Ongoing budget negotiations also include a proposal that would extend the protections Baker put in place Friday and expand access to emergency contraception.

Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, a Democrat and the state's leading contender to replace Baker when he leaves office in January, also vowed to block other states' prosecutions.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, a Democrat, announced he would be calling the legislature into special session "in the coming weeks" to take "swift action to further enshrine our commitment to reproductive health care rights and protections." Abortion is legal in the state, and the state Supreme Court has found a right to abortion in the state's constitution.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, in conjunction with the state health department, announced a new public awareness campaign to let people know that abortion is still legal in the Empire State, including a website with information about abortion rights, providers, supports and payment options in New York.

"As long as I am Governor, this State will protect you," Hochul said.

By Megan Messerly and Lisa Kashinsky

Center Square: Colorado among states still allowing abortions after SCOTUS overturns Roe

(The Center Square) – Colorado is among several states that will still allow abortions following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that overturns the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision.

The court released its 6-3 decision on Friday in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, overturning Roe.

"The Constitution does not confer a right to abortion; Roe and Casey are overruled; and the authority to regulate abortion is returned to the people and their elected representatives," a syllabus of the ruling said.

Colorado Democrats passed the Reproductive Health Equity Act during the 2022 legislative session, which codified a right to abortion in the state, in addition to protecting other reproductive rights.

Colorado politicians, groups, and religious leaders on Friday responded to the court's decision.

"Because of my administration and Democratic leadership in the legislature, Coloradans don't have to worry because our rights are still protected today despite the unfortunate reality that the U.S. Supreme just rolled those freedoms back for millions of Americans in other states," Gov. Jared Polis

said in a written statement.
The Colorado Senate Democratic caucus also condemned the decision, saying it "undermines the integrity of the U.S. Supreme Court, and undercuts decades of legal precedent. By overturning Roe v. Wade, millions of pregnant Americans will lose the ability to access a safe abortion."
The Women's Foundation of Colorado, a nonprofit that advocates for economic opportunity for women, said in a post that "access will be denied or severely limited to women in the majority of states."
"We can't begin to estimate the impact to gender, racial, and economic equity in a country where having access to the full range of reproductive information, care, and justice is the exception, not the rule," the group said.
There are 26 states which are "certain or likely" to ban abortions, with 13 states already having "trigger laws" on the books that automatically ban the practice, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive rights research group.
Wyoming and Utah, which border Colorado, both have trigger bans, according to the group. In Nebraska, Gov. Pete Ricketts previously said he would call a special legislative session to pass an abortion ban if the court overturned Roe, CNN reported.
Republicans and some religious leaders praised the court's decision in statements Friday.
House Minority Leader Hugh McKean, R-Loveland, said the ruling "has cleared the way for individual states to determine their own abortion laws," and criticized Colorado's law as "extreme legislation."
Colorado GOP Chairwoman Kristi Burton Brown said that while the decision is "an amazing step towards equal protection for every child," a conversation is needed about supporting families.
"I hope this decision leads to a real conversation – between people on all sides – about how we as a country can best work together to further support our children, mothers, and families," she said.
Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila, head of the Archdiocese of Denver, called Roe v. Wade "a dark cloud over our country and has played a role in tens of millions of pre-born babies dying."
"This is a remarkable moment, and I want to personally thank everyone who has fervently prayed and worked that we might see this day," Aquila said, acknowledging that "the work continues."
"While precious lives will no doubt be saved because of this decision, in states like ours, the abortion industry and many lawmakers are increasing their efforts to promote Colorado as an 'abortion destination,'" he said.
By Derek Draplin

OWH: Pair of Nebraska state senators set to square off in special election for Congress

Voters in Nebraska's 1st District on Tuesday will decide who will represent them in the U.S. House of Representatives for the next six months in what will be one of the earliest electoral contests following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on abortion Friday.
Though the race between State Sens. Mike Flood of Norfolk and Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln will not be the only such contest — at least five states will hold primary elections Tuesday — it could be one of the most immediately consequential.
The winner will be sworn in as the state's newest representative in Congress and leave an opening in the Nebraska Legislature, which could be called into a special session this summer to take up abortion restrictions.
Both Flood and Pansing Brooks told The World-Herald that they are working hard to win Tuesday, but both also acknowledged the challenges of reaching and motivating voters for an admittedly

unusual election.
The whole reason for the race stems from the resignation of former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, a nine-term Republican congressman from Lincoln. Fortenberry stepped down earlier this year after he was convicted of three felonies in a case that originated from illegal campaign contributions. He is scheduled for sentencing Tuesday, the same day his former constituents will pick a replacement to serve out the remainder of his term, which ends in early January.
Flood, a Republican, and Pansing Brooks, a Democrat, are squaring off in the special election because they were selected by the leadership of their respective parties. Separate of those decisions, the two also won their party primary races on May 10, meaning Flood and Pansing Brooks will face each other again in the November general election to decide who will serve in the House for the next two years.
“There’s a lot of people who just don’t know about it,” Flood said.
Said Pansing Brooks, “There’s no question that we find people who say, ‘oh my gosh there’s an election on Tuesday?’”
Nebraska has not had a special election for Congress since 1951, according to election officials. Given the lack of historical examples to go off of, Lancaster County Election Commissioner Dave Shively refrained from making predictions on turnout.
The county had about 35,000 requests for early ballots and, as of Friday morning, about 75% of those had been returned, according to Shively. The county has 200,491 total registered voters, with Republicans holding an edge over Democrats, 80,236 to 69,713 as of June 1, according to the Secretary of State’s Office.
Lancaster County accounts for much of the population in the 1st District, which includes all or parts of 12 counties in eastern Nebraska. It also covers parts of Sarpy County, including Bellevue, Offutt Air Force Base, La Vista and most of Papillion.
Like Shively, Sarpy County Election Commissioner Emily Ethington also held off from a prediction on turnout, noting the unique circumstances of the race.
Within the portion of Sarpy County that falls in the 1st District, there were 3,559 requests for early ballots and, as of Friday, 2,291 of those early ballots had been returned, according to Ethington.
A total of 90,625 registered voters in Sarpy County live within the 1st District. Of those, 37,729 are registered Republicans and 25,441 are registered Democrats.
“Since this election is unique in a number of ways — only Congressional District 1 voters are eligible to vote in this election, this election will fill a vacancy in Congress, and we just had the primary election — it is hard to predict turnout,” she wrote in an email.
Whether and, if so, to what degree abortion could factor into Tuesday’s race remains a difficult question. But Friday’s Supreme Court decision, which effectively sends the issue of regulating abortion back to the states, won’t bring any unregistered potential voters off the sidelines — the voter registration deadline had already passed by Friday.
Flood, an attorney who owns a broadcast media and consulting business called Flood Communications, said he was pleased by the court’s decision, saying it “righted a wrong” that occurred with Roe v. Wade.
As a former speaker of the Legislature, Flood helped lead passage of Nebraska’s current abortion law, which bans abortion after 20 weeks post fertilization. He describes himself as “pro-life.”
In the hours after Friday’s ruling, Flood said Nebraskans need to begin conversations on both how the state should regulate abortion and how it should “build a culture of life.” That includes discussions on how to provide prenatal care for low-income women and resources for those facing

an unwanted pregnancy, both before and after birth.
“A lot of people are looking at today’s decision as a black or white result. And it’s really just the beginning of a new conversation that we have to have everywhere in Nebraska,” he said.
Pansing Brooks, an attorney who co-founded her own law firm with her husband, said she was angered and shocked by the ruling despite the fact it had been largely expected due to a leaked draft opinion.
“I cannot believe that now my daughter does not have the same rights that I had growing up, the same protections to bodily autonomy and to be able to make decisions about her own body,” Pansing Brooks said.
News events in recent months have changed conversations with voters in the district, she said. For most of this year, inflation dominated those discussions, Pansing Brooks said. While it remains a pressing issue, the leaked draft Supreme Court opinion elevated abortion to a top-of-mind issue. A wave of deadly mass shootings did the same thing for action to combat gun violence, she said.
Pansing Brooks has campaigned on her ability and willingness to work across the political aisle. She was once a Republican but said she became a Democrat as the GOP moved further to the right on social issues. She describes herself as a fiscally conservative Democrat.
“I intend to work across the aisle and find people of goodwill and work to heal this country to find consensus,” she said. “No one party has all the answers.”
Flood has staked his campaign on being a check on Democrats in Washington, who he said are responsible for rampant inflation.
“I’ve heard it from everybody and there’s a real sentiment among people in the 1st District that want an end to the Biden-Pelosi agenda, and that’s on the table Tuesday,” Flood said.
Both lawmakers tout their experience in the Legislature. Flood, who was elected to a third term in 2020 after taking a break for a few years, became Nebraska’s longest-serving speaker of the Legislature during his first two terms in the body.
Pansing Brooks is nearing the end of her second four-year term in the Legislature. She is barred by term limits from seeking reelection.
Whoever wins Tuesday will be leaving the Legislature early, which could impact abortion policy in Nebraska. Gov. Pete Ricketts said Friday that he would discuss with the current speaker of the Legislature the possibility of calling a special session this summer to consider abortion restrictions.
Earlier this year, Flood supported a bill that would have banned abortion upon the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Pansing Brooks opposed the bill, which died after an attempt to end a filibuster failed by two votes.
Ricketts, an abortion opponent, will have the ability to appoint a replacement for the winner of Tuesday’s special election.
The polls close at 8 p.m. Tuesday.
By Ryan Hoffman

Kearney Hub: 50 years at Fort Kearny, Gene Hunt is 'having too much fun' to retire

KEARNEY — Gene Hunt, superintendent of Fort Kearny State Park, grinned as he sat at a picnic table at Fort Kearny State Historical Park Tuesday morning. "I'm just a Nebraska farm kid," he said.
Smiles and small talk come easily for Hunt. For the last 50 years, he has overseen Fort Kearny State Historical Park and the Fort Kearny State Recreation Area. He has hired and managed employees, welcomed volunteers and park visitors, managed the campground and cared for trees and

wildflowers. He has seen floods, fires, a solar eclipse and COVID-19, too. He's received local and statewide awards, including one from Gov. Pete Ricketts earlier this year.

As he begins his 51st year with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Hunt said his days aren't much different from those of his childhood on a farm near Arcadia. "This job is taking care of trees, grass and flowers, basically everything I've done my whole life," he said. "I've had a love of the outdoors from day one."

Retirement flits into his mind now and then like a butterfly, but Hunt, 73, lets it go. He's having too much fun.

A LIFETIME OUTDOORS

A graduate of Arcadia High School and Kearney State College (now the University of Nebraska at Kearney), Hunt began his NGPC career at what was then Windmill State Wayside Area, now Windmill State Recreation Area.

He'd been hunting and fishing since he was small, so when his father insisted that he and his brother Darwin go to college, he decided to become a biologist.

"After UNK, I was seriously looking at graduate school. I wasn't sure whether to study big game, small game, fish, whatever. But after I started at Windmill, I realized this job was just glorified farming. I was a farm kid, and I still am," he said.

He scrapped plans for graduate school and stayed at Windmill as a temporary park worker briefly until hired as the assistant superintedent at Fort Kearny in 1972. He's been there ever since.

CAMPING FRIENDS

Superintendent at Fort Kearny since 1982, Hunt said his job hasn't changed much in the last 50 years, but the way people use the outdoors has.

"At one time when people went camping, they had a campfire. They cooked over the campfire. They had a small tent and maybe a small trailer," he said. "Now they have a larger camping unit. The side opens up and the kitchen is there. Today, an RV drives in, parks, plugs in and pulls out a satellite dish so they can watch TV."

Since 1972, crowds have changed at Fort Kearny, too. "It used to be young families bringing their kids out. Then, with newer and bigger RVs, it was Grandma and Grandpa with the grandkids. Now, I see a real trend back to young families. They want to start getting kids outdoors because if they don't, they realize kids will just be on their phones all the time," he said.

As always, campers still enjoy walking, bicycling and bird-watching. "People just enjoy sitting next to the campsite and visiting with other campers. They create their own little community," he said. "One of the silver linings of COVID was getting families to do more together and getting outdoors."

VOLUNTEERS, BOY SCOUTS

He carried 50 years of memories, like when the lake at Fort Kearny was a county pit for sand and gravel and authorities used dynamite to create the beach. "Water came back up over the highway," he said.

He remembered when teenagers from the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center removed railroad ties and built the stockade at Fort Kearny between 1961-62.

Normally, he has a staff of eight, but due to post-COVID-19 labor shortages, he currently has just five employees, so he depends heavily on volunteers. He is grateful for all of them, too.

That includes Caroline Bennett, a retiree and valuable part-time employee who first worked at Fort Kearny as a teenager. "Teenagers along Highway 150 usually worked at the fort instead of going into Kearney for summer jobs. Their parents preferred that," she said.

With twinkling eyes, he referred affectionately to two retired schoolteachers, "the bag ladies," who

walk around the Fort Kearny campground and trails several times a week to pick up trash and tree limbs.
"People like that have been around for so many years," he said.
Boy Scouts, Eagle Scouts and others have done trail work, built picnic shelters and more. Historical re-enactors have kept the park's Living History program going for 30 years. They fire cannons on holiday weekends in the summer, set up Civil War-era camps and do demonstrations in the Fort Kearny blacksmith shop.
Pony Express re-enactors stop for breakfast in early June. Hunt holds a Dutch Oven cooking demonstration every March during sandhill crane season. He leads hikes the first Saturday of each month at sites like Mormon Island, Fort Kearny and Windmill state recreation areas.
Another walk will take place at 10 a.m. July 4. That's been a tradition since 1970.
THE COWBOY WAY
He's also excited about a program, Living the Cowboy Way, with Miss V and cowboys, blacksmith and storytellers ("all old friends") at Fort Kearny State Historical Park 2-4 p.m. Tuesday.
They will include old college friend, Dan Melton, whose great-grandfather homesteaded on Red Willow southwest of Dickens, and Miss V, who will sing and tell stories about living a pioneer lifestyle in Wyoming for 14 years.
Also on hand will be Lyle Henderson, owner of the Platte Valley Saddle Shop, a business begun by his father Elmus in 1942. Henderson worked as a cowboy in Idaho, then returned to Nebraska and ran 5,000 cattle on the Crane Trust island at Grand Island, and at the Taylor Ranch. "There were no fences," Hunt said.
Bob Lamberson, 80, will be there, too, He grew up in the Palmer area. "I told him to bring his favorite cowboy hat, but he said he just gave it away," Hunt said. "Then he said, 'I still have 17 hanging on the rack.'"
The free program will include a campfire and s'mores, and kids will be able to brand their name into a white piece of bread. They can enjoy root beer, lemonade and water, too.
'TOO MUCH FUN'
Hunt can get downright giddy about Fort Kearny State Historical Park. He said the UNK history department has taken "a huge interest" in its history and is digitizing its historical records.
The fort was open 1848-71 to protect pioneers on the Oregon and California trails, and many area homesteaders worked there, he said.
Hunt praised the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, whose members have ranged from successful businessmen to ranchers and farmers "who are dedicated to developing and protecting the state's natural resources."
He and his wife Nellie, a retired registered nurse, were high school sweethearts who have been married more than 50 years. A licensed cosmetologist, she had worked to put him through college. They have two adult daughters. Crystal is an attorney who lives at Nellie's family homestead "constantly fixing things like fences and repairing buildings," Hunt said. Dori Lee is a graduate of the University of Nebraska at Kearney and a dermatologist in Hickory, N.C.
Hunt admitted he's slowing down a bit, but as for retirement, he shook his head, then flashed his engaging smile. "I'm having too much fun," he said.
By Mary Jane Skala

Fremont Tribune: Citizens for Voter ID plan town hall event in Fremont

Citizens for Voter ID will be having a series of town halls across Nebraska featuring Gov. Pete Ricketts.
A town hall is planned in Fremont at 10 a.m. Tuesday, June 28, at LA Fire Proof Door Co., 325 N. Main St.
Voter ID petitions will be available to sign at each event. The governor and Citizens for Voter ID will make remarks before taking questions. This event is open to the public.
Any questions regarding the event should be directed to Citizens for Voter ID at 402-470-1187.
By Tammy Greunke

AP: Iowa doors swing open for Republicans eyeing White House run

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (AP) — The polls were closed in Iowa for less than 48 hours when South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott was shaking hands and posing for pictures with eastern Iowa Republicans at a Cedar Rapids country club last week.
Scott, one of the many Republicans testing their presidential ambitions, hardly has the state to himself.
At least a half-dozen GOP presidential prospects are planning Iowa visits this summer, forays that are advertised as promoting candidates and the state Republican organization ahead of the fall midterm elections. But in reality, the trips are about building relationships and learning the political geography in the state scheduled to launch the campaign for the party's 2024 nomination.
While potential presidential candidates have dipped into Iowa for more than a year, the next round of visits marks a new phase of the ritual. With Iowa's June 7 primary out of the way, Republicans eyeing the White House can step up their travel and not worry about stepping into the state's intraparty rivalries.
"Now that it's done, it's full-bore," state GOP Chairman Jeff Kauffman said. "It's unfettered."
Beyond Scott, former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley is expected to visit late this month, and plans to campaign with as many Iowa congressional Republican candidates as she can in a little more than two days.
Haley, who is also the former governor of South Carolina, another early-voting state in the presidential calendar, plans to begin her trip in eastern Iowa on June 29 with first-term Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks. She'll also headline a state GOP fundraiser in Dubuque.
Working from the Mississippi Valley westward, she plans to keynote a fundraiser for Gov. Kim Reynolds. Haley will also campaign with Zach Nunn, chosen to face two-term Democratic Rep. Cindy Axne, who is among the most vulnerable House members this year. Haley's still-fluid schedule also includes attending Rep. Randy Feenstra's annual fundraiser in GOP-heavy western Iowa.
Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton, who visited several times in 2021, is expected the first week in July to speak at the county GOP dinner in Story County in central Iowa.
Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who has visited Iowa more often than any GOP prospect, is working out details for a late summer return, aides said, likely timed to the Iowa State Fair in August, a storied draw for would-be candidates.
Pompeo did endorse Nunn before the primary, a nod to their shared military experience, Pompeo aides said.
The plans also come in light of the Republican National Committee's unanimous decision in April to open the 2024 presidential selection sequence in Iowa, a question still hanging over Iowa Democrats.

In 2020, a smartphone app designed to calculate and report the Democratic caucuses results failed, prompting a telephone backlog that prevented the party from reporting final results for nearly a week after the Feb. 3 contest. The Associated Press announced it was unable to declare a winner after irregularities and inconsistencies marred the results.

Stripped of their automatic special status in April, Iowa Democrats are trying to salvage their leadoff spot with a plan to allow early participation by mail and streamline the sometimes time-consuming process.

With Joe Biden in the White House, Democrats with White House ambitions have largely kept their distance from Iowa.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent who won the 2016 caucuses and was the final candidate to drop from the 2020 Democratic contest, was in southeastern Iowa Friday to rally support for United Auto Workers striking at a CNH agricultural machinery plant. Sanders' plans, which also included a stop in southeastern Wisconsin, sparked questions about whether the 80-year-old has a third White House bid in mind. He has said he wouldn't challenge Biden if the president sought reelection, and Sanders advisers said there had been no stated changes in his plans.

On the GOP side, Scott's return was not only timely. It reflected the dual aims of these early appearances, part introduction and part demonstration of support for the local party.

The 56-year-old sketched his childhood as one influenced by grandparents who helped raise him. Of his grandfather, Scott said, "For a guy who picked cotton in the 1920s, he lived long enough to watch me pick out a seat in the United States Congress."

Sprinkled with lighthearted contrasts of his Southern home and Midwestern hosts, Scott also wasted no time noting he had contributed money from his campaign fundraising account to Iowa Republican candidates, including targeted eastern Iowa GOP House freshmen members Miller-Meeks and Ashley Hinson.

"It's going to take us all pulling together," he told a table of about 10 eating barbecue sandwiches, as he worked the dining room before the event.

Even before Scott's arrival, former Vice President Mike Pence was on the phone that day to Chairman Kauffman and Steve Scheffler, Iowa's Republican National Committeeman, to talk about the primaries and the summer ahead, they said.

Pence was planning a summer trip to Iowa, though the date was not yet confirmed, a senior aide to the former vice president said.

Notably missing from the Iowa travel schedule is Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, among the most often mentioned rising national Republican figures in conversations with Iowa party activists this year. DeSantis' priority is running for reelection this year, aides said.

"I love DeSantis," said Emma Aquino-Nemecek, a Linn County Republican Central Committee member who attended the Tim Scott event. "Can you imagine if he comes? He would pack the place."

DeSantis got within shouting distance of Iowa in September, when he helped headline a fundraiser for Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, but he did not cross the Missouri River to touch Iowa soil.

Even more notably missing from the summer schedule so far is former President Donald Trump, who staged a massive rally in Des Moines last year at the Iowa state fairgrounds, and has endorsed several Iowa Republicans.

Kauffman said he had not heard from Trump's team. Likewise, Iowa operatives for Trump did not return messages.

Still, Trump sent signals to Iowa Republicans by paying for print ads in the program circulated at the

Iowa Republican Party's state convention Saturday, as did Scott, Pompeo and Florida Sen. Rick Scott.
Scheffler said non-Trump Republicans may feel emboldened in light of Georgia Republicans' resounding rejection in last month's primary elections of the former president's endorsed candidate for governor.
Gov. Brian Kemp won the GOP primary comfortably over David Perdue, whom the former president endorsed after Trump narrowly lost Georgia in the 2020 presidential election, claiming without evidence the results were invalid due to rampant voter fraud.
The speed bump for Trump's influence in the primary elections could signal to other 2024 prospects that the former president is not invincible, Scheffler said.
"If Trump keeps making these endorsements and they go south, like he did in Georgia, who knows?" Scheffler said.
By Thomas Beaumont

NP Telegraph: Gothenburg earns recertification in economic program

LINCOLN — The city of Gothenburg has earned recognition from the State of Nebraska for ongoing developments in the community's manufacturing and housing industries. Lt. Gov. Mike Foley and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development have announced the city's recertification in Nebraska's Economic Development Certified Community program. DED Business Development Consultant Ashley Rice-Gerlach joined Lt. Gov. Foley to honor local leaders during a special presentation on Wednesday, according to a press release.
Gothenburg is one of 40 Nebraska communities to earn EDCC status in the program, sponsored by the Nebraska Diplomats and administered by DED. State officials established the EDCC program in 2005 to recognize communities for preparedness to attract new industries and grow existing businesses. As part of the certification process, qualifying communities must identify a well-defined program that actively engages with their existing business community to offer a supportive environment for economic development. This includes documenting available sites and buildings, supporting local financing and incentive programs and initiating strategic planning. The city of Gothenburg received its first EDCC certification in 2007 and earned recertifications in 2010, 2016 and 2021.
Over the past five years, Gothenburg leaders have expanded their community's strong relationships with the State of Nebraska and DED, the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority and West Central Nebraska Development District. Dawson Area Development, Gothenburg Improvement Company and city officials work together to promote housing and industrial development and attract new businesses, which have resulted in successful economic projects assisted through regional and state partnerships.
The community welcomed the expansion of Iowa-based Curbtender Inc. in 2019, which established the garbage truck compacter manufacturer's first Nebraska location. The company purchased the former Baldwin Filters building following GIC's acquisition of the property and complements Gothenburg's strong manufacturing presence established by Parker Hannifin, Wearparts, Gothenburg Feed Products and Dayton Phoenix.
Officials from the Cities of Gothenburg and Cozad, GIC and DAD have worked extensively to create housing development opportunities through successful partnerships with NIFA and the State of Nebraska. Leadership from both cities resulted in an $850,000 award from the state's Rural Workforce Housing Fund to build single and family owner-occupied homes and rental housing units.

The city and NIFA played essential roles in establishing RWHF assistance by contributing matching funds.
Four new RWHF homes were recently completed in Gothenburg's Crossing Second Subdivision, which is one of two subdivisions established by the City's approval of $1.4 million in Tax Increment Financing.
DAD remains highly focused on job retention efforts in Dawson County. DAD recently utilized CARES Act funding via WCNDD for customized employee training. Local business owners were offered a variety of course options to share with employees, including marketing skills, customer service and logic control training. DAD consistently prioritizes student engagement with local business leaders by hosting annual career fairs and mini-industry tours. In 2021, Dawson Public Power District shared its mobile STEM lab with students in the county's school districts.
In 2019, the National Civic League recognized the City of Gothenburg as one of 10 All-American Cities for local leaders' work in inclusive civic engagement. Gothenburg represented the smallest community in the annual group of award winners and emphasized the community's "All Means All" philosophy, which encourages the City's emphasis on stakeholder engagement for local development.
Community collaboration played an important role in the development of Gothenburg Health's $29.5 million facility. The YMCA building includes a high school regulation-size gym, four-lane swimming pool, second floor walking track and educational space.
For more information, call Ashley Rice-Gerlach at 308-655-0919 or ashley.gerlach@nebraska.gov, or go to opportunity.nebraska.gov/programs/community/edcc.

OWH: Game and Parks' solution for elk problems stirs up Nebraska hunters

Hundreds of Nebraska hunters are irate about a new elk season that could result in the harvest of fewer than 20 animals.
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Director Tim McCoy signed a special depredation order for a season July 1-31 on private land in specific parts of Lincoln, Perkins, Keith, Deuel and Garden Counties.
The order allows hunters to kill as many animals as possible in the area to relieve problems landowners are having with elk destroying their crops. It's believed to be only 25 to 30 of the massive animals.
It's the latest attempt by Game and Parks to control foraging elk that one farmer estimates are causing about $1,000 in damage per acre in some areas of his land, which sits between Paxton and Roscoe on the Perkins-Keith County line.
"We do have a problem with the elk," the farmer said. "I'm glad the Game and Parks are doing something about it."
He declined to share his name because he, like many landowners in the area, is being inundated with calls about hunting on his property. Interested parties are strongly encouraged to secure a place to hunt before they can apply for one of the $20 special resident permits.
Wildlife division administrator Alicia Hardin said Game and Parks has tried to match up hunters with willing landowners during the regular seasons and even issued damage control permits, but it hasn't gotten the job done.
In 2021, a total of 105 regular season permits were available in the unit where the land is located, which is more than double the total of 51 that were issued in 2019. On the land designated for the

2022 special depredation season, only 17 animals were harvested over the past three years during the regular elk season; the land takes up 873 square miles of the 23,769-square-mile unit.
After public meetings and ongoing discussions with the farmers and ranchers affected, biologists, game wardens and other officials decided to try a special season before crops in the area become taller. Once they do so, the animals are almost impossible to find.
"For the most part, they become ghosts," Hardin said. "What we've found is the corn provides an oasis. Once they get in there, it's hard to get them back out. We want to keep them from going in there. Elk tend to respond quickly when they have a little bit of pressure."
She said with this special season, hunters can be part of the solution. However, the decision has caused a firestorm.
Issues brought up by hunters in calls to Game and Parks and on social media include young calves being left orphaned, landowners charging for permits, offering permits to out-of-state residents and the possible waste of the meat, which could go bad quickly with hot July temperatures. The agency has posted responses to many of these concerns on their
website: outdoornebraska.gov/depredation.
It's that opportunity to feed his family that has Kenesaw hunter Noah Young excited about getting a chance at an elk, an opportunity he's wanted for years. With some areas offering only 10 elk tags a year, it's been an almost impossible dream.
"I'm not a trophy hunter," he said. "For $20, to be able to harvest an animal of that size is going to save a lot of money. I want to be able to help out the ranchers there who are having problems as well."
T.J. Harding, the owner of the Minnow Bucket in North Platte who runs the Western Nebraska Big Game Hunting page on Facebook, said most people he's talked to have also been waiting years to get an elk tag. Because of that, they don't like that this special hunt has been opened up to nonresidents.
"I think that is what gets under most people's skins," he said. "The last couple of days it's definitely been the hot topic."
Harding said it's tough to come up with a perfect solution. He said most Nebraskans are ethical hunters, but there is no guarantee with those coming in from out of state. He's hoping Game and Parks has adequate law enforcement in the area for the hunt so people aren't just killing the animals and leaving the carcass to rot. Game and Parks says that is not common and against the law.
He's waiting to see what happens with permits before he decides to apply for one. It will be interesting to see how the first few weeks plays out, he says.
"Once that corn gets 4- to 5-feet high it's going to be a tough hunt," he said. "It's not going to be a slam dunk by any means."
The farmer said he's also seen a lot of social media posts about landowners like him becoming rich off the hunt. But he said he and the neighbors he's talked with are not charging people to hunt on their properties. Hardin said there are no rules saying they can't charge for access, but the six landowners with the worse elk issues have said they don't plan to do so.
The farmer said he's gotten so many calls that he's asked Game and Parks to remove his name from a list of landowners who are allowing people to hunt on their property.
"I've gotten more calls in the last two days than I've gotten the last five years. I could have a different person hunt every day for a month," he said. "We've always let people hunt. It's free of charge as long as they are ethical hunters."
He said he's turned down some hunters who aren't prepared to handle the demands of cleaning a

dead elk in high temperatures and safely transporting the meat. He's seen only 18 elk so far this year.
Harding said there are an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 elk in Nebraska, so harvesting the elk that have been causing problems in that part of the state won't be a big impact.
The farmer said elk cause more damage than deer because they take a different path every day. The large animals can destroy parts of two or three rows of corn or beans every time they cross a field.
"These elk have no known natural predators, so nothing is going to reduce the population outside of hunters," he said.
He said he doesn't know if the special season is the perfect approach but it's a step one after years of problems caused by the animals.
"We just want something done about what is going on," he said.
By Marjie Ducey

OWH: Omaha-area nonprofits to receive millions in grant funding

Nearly two dozen nonprofits in Douglas and Sarpy Counties are slated to receive grants totaling millions of dollars, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development announced Friday.
A total of $115 million in grant funding was set aside for Nebraska nonprofits with shovel-ready projects that were delayed by the pandemic. Seventy-six of the 125 organizations that applied for funding were approved, with awards ranging from $6,000 to renovate a community playhouse in York to more than $12.5 million for a sports complex in Columbus.
Just over $47 million of the total will be distributed to 23 nonprofits in Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The money will help fund projects from restoration of the ceiling in the Durham Museum's Omaha Union Station to a multimillion-dollar outdoor athletics space at Marian High School.
This funding comes via the Shovel-Ready Capital Recovery and Investment Act, a bill passed last year by Nebraska lawmakers aimed at helping nonprofits complete capital construction projects that were put on hold after the pandemic hit. The grant application was open to organizations with a focus on arts, culture and humanities and to nonprofits operating sports complexes.
Legislators approved using $100 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act dollars and $15 million from the state's general fund to support the shovel-ready projects. Nonprofits also had to match the grants with at least an equal amount of privately raised dollars.
Grant recipients in Douglas and Sarpy Counties include:
Douglas County
Omaha Zoological Foundation: $3.8 million to build an Alaska exhibition at the Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium.
Joslyn Art Museum: $3.8 million for museum expansion.
Omaha Performing Arts: $3.8 million to establish a center for arts engagement.
Kaneko: $3.8 million.
Elkhorn Athletic Association: $3.8 million.
Metropolitan Entertainment and Convention Authority: $3.6 million to establish traffic safety barriers.
Marian High School: $3 million for an outdoor athletic project.
El Museo Latino: $2.1 million for "Elevating the Tradition" project.
Lauritzen Gardens: $2 million to develop a "play and grow" area for children.
The Union for Contemporary Art: $1.8 million.

Nebraska Center for Workforce Development and Education: $1.5 million.
The Collective for Hope: $1.4 million for education and support programming.
Nebraska Wildlife Rehab: $1 million for a new rehabilitation center.
The Durham Museum: $625,000 for restoration of art deco ceiling in Union Station.
inCOMMON Community Development: $486,800.
Bennington Soccer Club: $437,700 for development of Neumeyer Park Sports Complex.
Holy Name Men's Club: $350,000 for fieldhouse renovations.
Benson Theatre: $276,000 for renovations and restoration.
Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts: $250,000.
Omaha Children's Museum: $80,000 for projects delayed by COVID.

Sarpy County

Nebraska Multi-Sport Complex: $12.6 million for development of sports complex in La Vista.
Nebraska Vietnam Veterans Memorial Association: $1.2 million.
Sarpy County YMCA: $250,000 for construction and renovations.
By Molly Ashford

LJS: Lincoln area groups getting grants for capital projects

Several local organizations are getting millions of dollars in grants to help them fund capital projects as part of the Shovel-Ready Capital Recovery and Investment Act.
The Nebraska Department of Economic Development on Friday announced 76 recipients of the $115 million in funds that were authorized last year by the Legislature.
"The State of Nebraska and our department are privileged to support so many impactful organizations whose work is serving to build and enhance our communities, improve lives and further economic prosperity," said Anthony Goins, director of the Department of Economic Development.
Most of the money for the program, $100 million, comes from the federal American Rescue Plan Act. The other $15 million comes from the state's general fund.
Among the recipients was the Columbus Community Hospital, which received $12.7 million for its project to build a fieldhouse with sports courts and space for physical and rehabilitation services. A similar-sized grant went to the Nebraska Multisports Complex in La Vista, which will include outdoor fields and a fieldhouse for indoor activities.
Among the Lancaster County organizations that received money were:
* The Nebraska Communities Playhouse in Hickman: $1.5 million.
* Star City Optimist Youth Foundation: $1.255 million.
* Lincoln Children's Zoo: $1.1 million.
* Mourning Hope Grief Center: $768,800.
* Lincoln Sports Foundation: $759,000.
* Malcolm Youth Sports Association: $363,900.
* Nebraska Statewide Arboretum: $66,000.
* Lincoln Community Playhouse: $38,000.
A number of other organizations in Southeast Nebraska also received funding:
* Seward Changing the Game: $5 million.
* Beatrice YMCA: $5 million.
* Bone Creek Museum of Agrarian Art in David City: $673,200.

* Nebraska City Veteran's Memorial Building Project: $608,300.
* Blue River Arts Council in Crete: $333,100.
* Historic Resources Group in Friend: $300,000.
* Community Players in Beatrice: $96,700.
By Matt Olberding

Nebraska Examiner: State doles out $115 million in "shovel ready" grants to 76 Nebraska nonprofits

LINCOLN — A total of 76 nonprofit organizations have been awarded portions of the unprecedented, $115 million in "shovel ready" grants by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

The grants, designed to help projects held up by the COVID-19 pandemic, were made public Thursday by the department, which reviewed about $335 million in grant applications by 125 groups, ranging from art museums and music venues to youth sports complexes and wildlife centers.

The two largest grants, $12.7 million each, were awarded to the Nebraska Multisports Complex in La Vista, a multi-field facility for regional youth sports tournaments, and the Columbus Community Hospital's Fieldhouse Sports Complex.

Two YMCAs, one in Hastings and one in Beatrice, received $5 million each, as did a wellness center project in Seward. Other notable grants went to the Kearney YMCA ($4.5 million), "The Gardens" project at Yanney Park in Kearney ($4.2 million) and Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Josyln Art Museum ($3.8 million each).

The Yorkshire Playhouse in York received the smallest grant, $6,000, followed by $30,000 granted to the Terry and Hazeldeane Carpenter Intergenerational Center in Terrytown and $37,000 for the Fremont Area Art Association.

This year, the Nebraska Legislature earmarked $100 million of its allocation of $1 billion in federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act for qualifying nonprofit groups whose planned museums, sports complexes and other projects linked to arts, recreation and the humanities were interrupted by the pandemic.

The $100 million in ARPA funds was on top of $15 million in state funds approved in 2021 in Legislative Bill 566, the Shovel-Ready Capital Recovery and Investment Act. That bill was sponsored by State Sen. Mike McDonnell of Omaha.

It was an unprecedented windfall of funds for nonprofit organizations that typically rely on donations and private grants to complete expansion or construction projects.

McDonnell said Thursday that the DED, which made the final funding decisions, did a good job of following the legislative intent, which was to distribute the funds evenly among the state's three congressional districts, and to prioritize grant applications of $5 million or less.

"I know Tony Goins (the DED director), and the staff over there, was trying to be as logical and fair to everyone," the senator said.

Nonprofits were required to have raised private funds to match the ARPA request, dollar for dollar. The bill also requires construction to begin by June 30 and to demonstrate that the pandemic hurt their fund-raising effort.

McDonnell said about 11% of the state's workforce is employed by a nonprofit corporation, so granting them funds will have a broad impact on construction and the state's economy.

"The idea is trying to get some of these projects up and moving and helping the economy," he said.

It was designed as a public-private partnership, with the state providing “the last dollars in,” according to McDonnell.
By Paul Hammel

AP: Nebraska Supreme Court denies appeal of death row inmate

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The Nebraska Supreme Court on Friday denied the postconviction appeal of a death row inmate who said his defense attorney was so inept that his right to a fair trial had been compromised.
Roy Ellis Jr., 68, was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to death for the 2005 killing of 12-year-old Amber Harris. Amber’s remains were found buried in an Omaha park six months after she went missing from an Omaha school bus stop.
An autopsy showed she died of blunt-force trauma, and DNA on the girl’s book bag, which was found near Ellis’ home, connected him to the crime. At the time, Ellis was a registered sex offender who had raped children and had been categorized by authorities as most likely to re-offend.
Prosecutors presented evidence indicating Harris had likely sexually assaulted the girl before killing her and had Ellis’ former stepdaughters testify at his 2008 murder trial that he repeatedly raped them when they were ages 14 and 12 and had fathered a child with each of them. In his direct appeal, the state Supreme Court rejected Ellis’ argument that the former stepdaughters’ testimony should not have been allowed.
In its ruling Friday, the state’s high court said Ellis’ argument that his trial lawyer failed to effectively challenge prosecutors’ DNA evidence during his trial was without merit.

LJS: Man sentenced for sexually assaulting a child dies in prison

An inmate died on Saturday in Lincoln at the Nebraska State Penitentiary.
Clyde Hicks, 91, had been serving a 15- to 20-year sentence for first-degree sexual assault of a child out of Hall County.
Officials from the Nebraska Correctional Services said Hicks began his sentence on Sept. 15, 2016.
The cause of death has not been determined. As is the case whenever someone in law enforcement custody dies, a grand jury will conduct an investigation.
As is the case whenever an inmate dies in the custody of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, a grand jury will conduct an investigation.
By Evelyn Mejia

LJS: Don Walton: Brewer in Ukraine; Supreme Court decision on abortion stirs storm

Here we go! Here we go!
Sen. Tom Brewer arrives in Ukraine, eastern Nebraskans prepare to elect a congressman or congresswoman in the unusual month of June, the Legislature eyes the possibility of a special session for the second year in a row.
And the country absorbs a U.S. Supreme Court decision reversing its earlier guarantee of abortion rights, a ruling following right on the heels of a decision strengthening handgun-carrying rights in a nation in which civilians own more than 81 million guns.
The pot is boiling.

Some people are celebrating the Supreme Court decision; some people are mourning.
But, whether you're pro-life or pro-choice, a disturbing aspect of the decision was the apparent deception of the two newest justices in claiming their respect for Roe v. Wade precedent during their Senate confirmation hearings.
You would think the raw partisanship in the Congress -- by both sides -- and the refusal of dozens of its members to officially accept the 2020 presidential election results already had done enough damage.
* * *
If you enjoy visiting your neighborhood polling place, this is your year if you live in eastern Nebraska's 1st Congressional District. You won the trifecta: primary election in May over and done; special election on Tuesday; general election in November.
Either Sen. Mike Flood or Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks will be elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives for the next six months, and now, Pansing Brooks says, abortion rights are on the ballot Tuesday in the form of her candidacy as a strong supporter who would battle to try to protect or restore them.
They'll match up again in November for a two-year term with the voting record of the new congressman or congresswoman likely to be the central issue.
When Tuesday's winner is sworn in, three of the five members of Nebraska's congressional delegation will have moved directly to Congress from the Legislature.
And in metropolitan Omaha's competitive 2nd Congressional District, Sen. Tony Vargas will attempt to hike that number up to four, which would include all three of Nebraska's House members.
Whether Vargas is able to defeat three-term Republican Rep. Don Bacon or not, it appears that the non-partisan Legislature has clearly emerged as a stepping stone to the U.S. Congress now.
And that's something new.
Already in Washington are Sen. Deb Fischer and Rep. Adrian Smith, both of whom moved up from the Legislature.
Along with Bacon, Sen. Ben Sasse followed a different route -- as did former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry.
****
Tom Brewer arrived safely in Ukraine, but his luggage didn't.
So Brewer hitchhiked and taxied his way to Lviv while his traveling companion stayed in Poland to fetch the luggage before joining him.
In a message, Brewer described the resulting inconvenience as "a great adventure of meeting people (and) seeing the countryside because I'm traveling light and I now wear local clothes (and) I'm fitting in."
Brewer said he has a scheduled meeting with the mayor of Lviv, "so that should be a good chance to truly understand the situation here and their challenges," he said.
"Oh, and they have much different potholes here," Brewer said as he attached a photo of a missile that remained penetrated in a highway after it struck.
Brewer, a retired U.S. Army colonel who was seriously wounded in Afghanistan and is now a state senator who led four of his legislative colleagues on a climb up Mt. Kilimanjaro last November, is on a mission to help Ukrainians as they battle the Russian invasion that is devastating many of their cities.
Adventure is a word Brewer chose in describing his journey to Lviv.
Brewer and adventure are a perfect fit.
* * *

Finishing up:
* Separation of powers: The executive branch proposes; the legislative branch enacts; the judicial branch decides.
* Whoever ultimately wins the 1st District seat in the House this year faces the challenge of securing continued funding for the long-sought USDA research center at UNL's Innovation Campus. Jeff Fortenberry was well-positioned on the House Appropriations Committee to make that happen.
* Noticing Tennessee on the 2026 Husker football schedule, a program that has struggled just like Nebraska to become nationally relevant once again.
By Don Walton

OWH: Scientists weigh in on Nebraska's unusual hail storms and whether they are the new norm

Nebraskans have watched severe weather track across the state in waves since May, devastating some areas multiple times.
In Kearney, Realtor Patrick Slack can only shake his head at the damage.
A commercial building was so badly pummeled by hail that the loss was larger than the sale price, Slack said. The roof of a Kearney home was totaled by hail, replaced and totaled by a second hailstorm, all within 10 days, Slack said.
“We’ve had baseball-sized hail, we’ve had tennis ball-sized. We’ve had pea-sized hail that was so hard and rigid that, with 70-mph winds, it caused damage you wouldn’t expect,” said Slack, broker-owner of Century 21 Midlands. “Going back the last three years, it seems like these storms are becoming more common.”
Kearney County Emergency Management Director Craig Lupkes echoed those comments.
“We’ve been hit pretty hard the last couple of years,” he said. “We can never just catch rain. All it is is severe weather. When it comes through, it destroys everything.”
Farm fields have been leveled, homes have been battered and windows blown out as a series of windstorms and hailstorms moved through.
Like the other weather disasters the state has been experiencing — including explosive wildfires and flooding rains — damaging hailstorms are on the increase in Nebraska and are expected to worsen with climate change, scientists say.
This year’s continuous outbreaks of hail are the result of storms riding into Nebraska along the edge of the heat dome that has been suffocating vast swaths of the country this spring and summer. Meteorologists often describe these storms as a “ring of fire” because they follow along the periphery of the mass of hot air.
By several measures, this has been a rough year.
Gannon Rush, a climatologist with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said this has been the second worst June for hail in the last 10 years. The worst was 2014, when baseball-sized hail driven by 90-mph winds tore through communities north and west of Omaha.
Taking a look beyond hail, Rush said the state’s pace of thunderstorms has been well ahead of average.
During the first three weeks of the month, the National Weather Service issued 316 severe storm warnings, about a third more than average over a 20-year period.
So far, five counties have declared local disasters, said Erv Portis, assistant director of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. Those counties are: Kearney, Cass, Seward, York and Gage.

Because of the way federal rules are written and because the damage is largely private and insured, Nebraska won't qualify for a federal disaster declaration, he said.
American Family Insurance, a major insurer in Nebraska, has received 6,200 claims for wind and hail damage this year, with about 4,000 coming in June, said spokesman Ken Muth.
The company assigned catastrophe status to Nebraska this year, which means it has brought in outside help to process claims, Muth said.
By way of comparison, some years the company receives virtually no claims and in other years, it can receive 10,000 claims, he said.
To speed the claims process for vehicles this year, American Family set up drive-through inspection sites in several communities, including at an Omaha Menards.
While storm damage does affect insurance rates, no single year does, Muth said. Instead, the company bases rates on a 20- to 30-year average. The recent sharp increases in insurance rates are due to the rising cost of building materials, car parts, replacement cars and labor, he said.
It's likely this year's storms have caused tens of millions of dollars in damage in Nebraska. While no statewide damage estimates are available, in Buffalo County alone, hail likely caused $32 million in damage, County Emergency Management Director Darrin Lewis said.
The two Buffalo County towns of Ravenna and Shelton, with a combined population of about 2,700, saw 90% to 100% of their homes significantly damaged, he said.
Nebraska can get hail any month of the year, but most hailstorms occur from May through July, with June the peak month, according to the weather service.
This year's outbreak of hailstorms started in late May, with the worst damage concentrated over an 11-day period in early June.
On seven of those 11 days, significant hailstorms occurred somewhere in the state, from the Panhandle to Omaha, according to the U.S. Storm Prediction Center.
"A heck of a couple of weeks," is how National Weather Service meteorologist Mike Moritz described it. He and others point to the night of June 14 as the worst, when a succession of supercell thunderstorms swept across southern and central Nebraska, dropping hail.
"If you saw one hailstorm, you saw two, you saw three," he said.
The storms left about a 90-mile-long, 6-mile-wide damage path, he said. Along the way, Hastings, Kenesaw, Henderson, Giltner, York, Waco and Utica were among the communities most affected.
Making the damage worse was the strength of the winds. In some areas, winds reached more than 100 mph, he said.
Among the largest known hailstones to fall with this year's storms was one that measured 6 inches wide, said National Weather Service meteorologist Shawn Jacobs. It fell near the Calamus Reservoir, in north-central Nebraska. While that's not a record for the state, it's among the largest. (The record is 7 inches wide at Aurora in 2003.)
In terms of agriculture, the good news is the hail fell early enough that some corn is recovering, said Al Dutcher, Nebraska's associate state climatologist. But damage to crops could invite disease and reduce yields, some irrigation equipment is inoperable for the season, expenses are mounting as some farmers replant, and some producers worry about whether they'll be able to meet contractual obligations for their harvest, he said. As a result, some University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension personnel say they are concerned about the mental health impacts on farmers.
Harold Brooks, a senior scientist at the National Severe Storms Laboratory, said research shows that climate change is expected to bring an increase in large hail at the same time that smaller hail occurs less frequently. The reason has to do with how a warmer atmosphere affects hail.

The added warmth and moisture that climate change is injecting into the atmosphere is feeding more energy into storms, he said. As a result, storms have more powerful updrafts, which are the key to keeping hailstones aloft long enough to become large. That's why large hail is expected to become more common, he said.

Based on research in China, where there is a longer record of hail data, and Europe, the occurrence of small hail is declining, Brooks said. This appears to be because the atmosphere near the ground is warming, while the level at which hail freezes is shifting higher. As a result, small stones have more time to melt away before they reach the earth.

Part of this also has to do with the fact that small hail falls more slowly than large hail. Hail that is about an inch in diameter falls to the earth at 15 to 20 mph, while baseball-sized hail falls at about 100 mph (the speed of a top-end major league fastball), he said.

Western Nebraska is in that part of the U.S. that has seen an increase in large hail over about the last 20 years, Brooks said. Farther east toward Omaha, the data is not as clear, he said.

"Over the next decades, the hail threat will probably become larger," Brooks said.

A year like 2022 won't necessarily become typical, he said.

"There will still be lots of variability," he said. "This year has been unusual."

Slack said unrepaired storm damage to a home can complicate a sale, something he's seeing more often. For this reason, he advises people to take their insurance — and repairs — seriously, rather than pocketing the cash from a claim.

"It's a conversation nobody wants to have, but it's imperative that you have it," he said.

By Nancy Gaarder

OWH: Can 'next-Gen' DNA testing help ID the remains of US service members killed in war?

The Golden State Killer never saw the law coming.

Police had never connected Joseph James DeAngelo to a spree of 13 murders, 50 rapes and more than 120 burglaries across California during the 1970s and '80s. Then, in 2018, investigators uploaded a DNA profile of one murder victim's rapist into a commercial database, similar to those created by companies like 23andMe and Ancestry.com.

Bingo.

Several people in the database shared a common ancestor with the killer, and police created a "family tree." They quickly honed in on DeAngelo, then 72, and arrested him after confirming that his DNA matched the killer's. He confessed to numerous crimes and was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

The capture of the Golden State Killer put this technique, called genetic genealogy, in the headlines. Police now regularly use it to catch cold case killers, and to identify the remains of murder and accident victims from decades ago.

It also raised a question for historians and forensic anthropologists at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), which has labs at Offutt Air Force Base and in Hawaii: Could they use the same method to identify the war dead from World War II, Korea and Vietnam?

Four years later, the answer appears to be yes. The accounting agency, working with its partners at the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) in Dover, Delaware, has begun to use a highly sensitive "next-generation" DNA sequencing test developed by scientists at AFDIL and Parabon NanoLabs, a pioneering genetic genealogy firm.

Someday, it may help Carrie LeGarde, a forensic anthropologist at the Offutt lab, tie a bow around DPAA's largest and most successful project to date: the identification of the unknown dead from the battleship USS Oklahoma, sunk in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Over six years, she led a team of anthropologists that examined more than 13,000 bones recovered from the ship and later buried in Hawaii in graves marked "unknown."

They identified 361 of 394 missing sailors and Marines. The 92% identification rate far exceeded the 80% goal set when the first remains were disinterred in 2015.

LeGarde said she was proud to have returned so many World War II heroes to their families, nearly 80 years later. But the fact that 33 could not be given names gnaws at her just a bit.

"We have done everything we can at this point," LeGarde said. "Of course, I would love to identify everybody. But that's a pretty difficult task."

Traditional mitochondrial and Y-chromosome DNA testing involves extracting snippets of DNA from the unidentified bones and comparing them to DNA samples taken from one or more family members.

Those samples are processed at AFDIL and buttressed with traditional forensic work by DPAA anthropologists and historians, such as examining the size and shape of the bones and where and how they were found.

This process has allowed DPAA to meet or exceed a goal of 200 identifications per year — some from field excavations in former war zones, and others buried as unknowns in military cemeteries.

But this method has some drawbacks.

The requirement for family-reference DNA means the Defense Department must spend time and money tracking down relatives and persuading them to submit a DNA sample from a cheek swab.

That can be hard to do. Some relatives may be suspicious of giving a sample to the government.

Some of the missing service members were adopted, so their DNA doesn't match living relatives.

And in some cases, family members just can't be found.

The other significant problem is the DNA itself.

DNA decays with time, making it harder to extract readable samples from bones that have been buried for decades. It deteriorates even faster when burials take place in acidic soil or in warm, wet climates like most burials from Korea, Vietnam or World War II in the Pacific.

"If you don't act, you might lose it forever," said Kristen Mittelman, chief development officer for Othram, a private genetic genealogy lab in Houston that specializes in cold case IDs.

Also, chemical treatments historically used in burials to preserve bodies have had the perverse effect of destroying DNA. This has hampered several of the accounting agency's major projects.

One example: the identification of 859 Korean War unknowns whose remains were retrieved from battlefield graves during and after the war. They were soaked in formaldehyde and treated with other chemicals before they were reburied in Hawaii, and DPAA analysts have had difficulty extracting DNA from them.

In 2016, AFDIL and Parabon introduced a far more sensitive "next-generation" DNA test. It let investigators capture samples from as many as 60% of even highly degraded samples — 10 times the rate of earlier tests.

Later innovations have allowed the lab to accurately match samples with more distant relatives, and to extract DNA from even some of the most highly degraded samples.

"We mimic what 23andMe and Ancestry were trying to do," said Tim McMahon, director of the Armed Forces DNA Lab.

"We're good at getting DNA from the samples they send us."

Mittelman and her husband, David, who is the CEO of the Othram DNA lab, have suggested that genetic genealogy could also offer a path to identification not only of the USS Oklahoma's 33 remaining unknowns, but also 85 unidentified dead from the USS Arizona.

Moored just a few hundred yards from the Oklahoma, the Arizona blew up in a cataclysmic explosion just minutes into the attack when a Japanese bomb exploded in the ship's magazine. Of the Arizona's 1,500-man crew, 1,177 were killed, the highest death toll at Pearl Harbor.

Just 105 bodies were recovered and identified. Most of the rest are permanently entombed in the sunken hull, which is now part of the USS Arizona Memorial.

But 85 sets of recovered remains could not be identified and were buried as unknowns. Currently there are no plans to identify the Arizona unknowns, because doing so would require obtaining DNA reference samples from the families of all of the 1,177 dead.

The Mittelmans believe genetic genealogy could allow DPAA to bypass that step by using their proprietary testing protocol, which they said already has been used to crack hundreds of cold cases.

David Mittelman said they use multiple methods, plug into large DNA databases, and turn over their results to authorities. They charge $5,000 per sample.

"Our success rate is extremely high," he said. "We pride ourselves on taking unsolvable problems and bringing them to conclusion."

They've pitched their idea to officials at the Armed Forces DNA Lab. In a recent report to MIA families, DPAA called it a "fruitful meeting" but has not announced a partnership.

Hope still remains for the 33 Oklahoma unknowns, too.

When the Oklahoma Project wrapped up last year, the unidentified bones were placed in four caskets and reburied at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. They were lowered into the earth after a solemn ceremony on Dec. 7, 2021, the 80th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack.

LeGarde said one of the caskets contains an assortment of bones considered too small to be worth identifying. They will remain permanently buried.

But the three other caskets contain individual sets of remains linked by DNA, segregated and wrapped in blankets — awaiting new technology that will allow them to be identified and returned to their families.

"We know what casket they have gone into," LeGarde said. "They could be accessed in the future if needed."

That's encouraging news for relatives of brothers William and Robert Sellon, USS Oklahoma sailors who grew up in Randolph, Nebraska.

William, 25, known to family as "Billy," was killed in the attack. He is one of the 33 who remain unknown.

Robert, known as "Bobby," survived. But he never escaped the shadow of Pearl Harbor.

"I've been watching the paper, so hopeful," said Diann Sellon Gliem, 72, of Randolph, whose father, Monte, was the brothers' first cousin. "There's always been a sadness in our family, and kind of a mystery."

Billy and Bobby were the only two sons of a cabinetmaker and his wife who had moved from Randolph to Missoula, Montana, in search of work during the 1930s. That is where the brothers joined the Navy.

It's not clear today how they came to be serving together on the Oklahoma, but it wasn't uncommon in the pre-World War II Navy. At least seven other sets of brothers were assigned to the ship, according to the website PearlHarbor.org.

Family stories differ about exactly what happened to them that morning. One account says they were together that Sunday morning but split up when one decided to go to church and the other skipped it. Another story says Bobby slipped out of a porthole of the ship before it capsized and swam back in a vain attempt to find Billy.

They do know Bobby never really recovered from the loss of his brother. He was wounded in the war — perhaps on board the USS Northampton, to which he was transferred after Pearl Harbor. The ship was torpedoed and sunk almost a year later during a disastrous naval battle near Guadalcanal.

After the war, Bobby returned to Montana, married, fathered two daughters, split up with his wife and remarried. He liked bars and guns, and once got shot by another man. His behavior reminds relatives today of post-traumatic stress.

On June 28, 1952, he walked into a bedroom at his parents' house in Missoula with a high-powered rifle and fatally shot himself. He was 31. A newspaper account quoted his parents as saying he had been despondent ever since World War II.

"I was paralyzed with grief when he killed himself," recalls Glenda Rock III, Bobby's younger daughter, who was 6 when he died. "He always called me 'Happy Jack.' He was safety, was warmth."

She said no one would mention her father's name for several years. It took time, but she has worked through her family's tragedy.

"It's not painful anymore. It's a saga," Rock said.

Although she lives in Idaho, Rock said she would like to see her uncle's remains buried in Nebraska if he can be identified.

That's the ending Gliem is hoping for, too.

"The story just got sadder and sadder. It was hard for me to shake it," she said. "It would be a closure on one of those open-ended questions from World War II."

By Steve Liewer

OWH: Over 1,000 Omahans protest Supreme Court abortion ruling

More than 1,000 people flocked to Omaha's Memorial Park on Friday to protest the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on Roe v. Wade and to rally to keep abortion legal in Nebraska.

They heard speeches urging them to not despair but to take action, and then they rallied for more than two hours along Dodge Street, filling the historic green bridge over Dodge and lining both sides of the street for several blocks, nearly from Happy Hollow Boulevard to Elmwood Park Road.

The rally began at 5 p.m., and the crowd appeared to peak at about 6 p.m. Organizers, reporters and police estimated the crowd at least 1,000 and probably more. Passing drivers laid on their horns and many cheered, creating a raucous chorus as the protesters chanted, "My body, my choice," "Bans off our bodies" and "Keep abortion safe and legal."

"We came out in droves," 26-year-old Brandy Moore said over the cacophony as she stood shoulder-to-shoulder with other protesters on the pedestrian bridge. "And we are going to fight for our rights."

Speakers reminded the crowd that abortion is still legal in Nebraska. They urged them to turn their emotion into action, and suggested several steps. Follow the organizations involved in Friday's rally, urged Brandi Bothe, co-chair of the Omaha Women's March. Those groups include Women's Fund of Omaha, Planned Parenthood, Omaha Women's March, I Be Black Girl, the ACLU of Nebraska and Nebraska Abortion Resources. Bothe also urged donations to organizations that provide resources and advocacy.

"Contact your state senators," she said. "Call them. Email them. Write them."
And, several speakers exhorted, vote for candidates who support abortion rights
"Please get out and vote," pleaded Oglala-Lakota mental health therapist Grace Johnson of the Great Plains Action Society. "Tell your friends. Tell your young ones who are just turning 18. Please come out and vote."
Jo Giles, executive director of the Women's Fund of Omaha, told the people to let the rage they felt Friday carry them through the summer, through a potential special session of the Nebraska Legislature, to November elections and beyond.
"Let's win this fight again," Giles said.
The rally in Memorial Park was just one that occurred across Nebraska and the country Friday.
In Lincoln, 300 to 400 people filled the sidewalks and spilled onto Lincoln Mall across 10th Street as they listened to a handful of speakers less than five blocks from the State Capitol, according to the Lincoln Journal Star. Attendees waved signs, both printed and homemade, that expressed anger at the decision, the Supreme Court and Republican politicians, as well as support for other women.
In downtown Omaha, about 60 anti-abortion supporters gathered outside of the Roman L. Hruska Federal Courthouse Friday evening for a rally organized by Nebraskans Embracing Life and the Pro-Life Action League.
The energy of the crowd was celebratory and smiles and cheers abounded as a chant of “we love babies” broke out at the start of the rally. Some attendees waved American flags and others held signs with messages such as “Unborn Children are Humans Too” and “Nebraska is a Pro-Life State.”
Martin Cannon, senior counsel for the Thomas More Society, a nationwide anti-abortion law firm, spoke to the crowd about the magnitude of the Supreme Court’s decision.
“It's a very great day,” Cannon said. “Roe v. Wade was an act of lawlessness, we've been saying that forever. It corrupted our courts and as a country it damaged our soul. It taught millions, most of them young, that due process is not for everyone, that equal protection is not for everyone.”
Deanna Pierre of Bellevue said she was “amazed and delighted” at the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe v. Wade after nearly 50 years.
“I know it’s at the state level now, but at least it’s not mandated nationally,” Pierre said.
Virgil Patlan, a retired Omaha police officer and longtime South Omaha resident, said he knows many abortion rights supporters are angry at the Supreme Court’s decision, but hopes both sides can find a way to come together to support alternatives to abortion.
“I'm not gloating, but I'm happy,” Patlan said. “We've been praying for this day for a long time.”
At Memorial Park, people expressed a range of emotions with their voices and signs.
"Today is not about defeat," Bothe told the crowd. "Today is about hope. Today is about banding together. And take a look around ... this should let every one of us know that you are not in this fight alone, we are not going anywhere, and we will not back down."
Mindy Gilmore, 46, of Omaha, said she felt fury when the expected Supreme Court ruling came down Friday. She held a sign with a drawing of a brick wall between a Supreme Court and a Bible.
"Build this wall," the sign read.
"Fear," said her daughter, Ruth Gilmore, 20, who made the sign. "And sadness."
The Gilmores, standing with a couple hundred protesters still persisting beside Dodge Street after a rainfall nearly two hours into the rally, said the crowd and the warm reception of people driving by lifted their hopes a little.
"But unfortunately, we have a lot of conservative politicians in this state who often pay more attention to the people who are lining their pockets than the people who are out here making a

difference in the world," Mindy Gilmore said. "And we can do all the protests we want but if people don't go out and vote for liberal candidates who support the right to abortion, then all the protests in the world aren't going to make any difference."
Sara McRoberts, 39, of Omaha expressed the same sentiment about voting. She carried a sign that read, "I did not survive the plague just to go back to the dark ages." She said she joined the protest to "let Nebraskans know that this is an important issue to us, that abortion needs to stay legal in Nebraska."
By Christopher Burbach and Luna Stephens

OWH Editorial: After Roe, Nebraska should take measured approach to future abortion laws

The U.S. Supreme Court ruling on Friday that overturned the 49-year-old constitutional right to an abortion now moves the long-controversial issue clearly into the hands of state governments.
In Nebraska, that means 50 people — Gov. Pete Ricketts and 49 members of the Legislature — may soon determine abortion policies for the state. A majority of those people have already signaled that they wanted to ban all abortions in Nebraska if the court scrapped Roe v. Wade.
Now that decision has happened, clearing the way for each state to act.
But when Nebraska lawmakers take up the issue, possibly as soon as a special session this summer, they need to consider carefully just how their actions will play out in the lives of countless Nebraska women facing some of the most difficult and personal situations of their lives.
That includes women — maybe even children — who become pregnant at a time when they are unwilling or unprepared to assume responsibility for raising a child. Or victims of rape or incest who could be forced to endure additional suffering in the form of 40 weeks of pregnancy and the travail of childbirth. Or women who develop a life-threatening health condition. Or women whose fetuses have severe deformities or diseases.
No one should want to harm such women or make their lives harder. But poorly-drafted or ill-considered legislation risks doing just that. We all understand the concept of unintended consequences.
For example, the so-called abortion trigger bill that fell two votes shy of passing the Nebraska Legislature this spring faced criticism that it would have inadvertently banned in vitro fertilization or hindered doctors attempting to perform life-saving operations.
The bill’s author, Sen. Joni Albrecht of Thurston, has indicated that a new version of the bill could address those concerns.
Right now, abortion remains legal in Nebraska up until 20 weeks after fertilization. On Friday, Ricketts didn’t immediately call for a special session to consider abortion legislation, but he reiterated his desire to do more to restrict the practice.
It’s clear that abortion will continue to be a political battle for many years, in Nebraska and elsewhere. The Supreme Court ruling, after all, didn’t make abortion illegal. The court gave each state the right to ban it, or allow it, or tinker endlessly with abortion laws — with state policies possibly changing after each election, based on the political winds.
Here in Nebraska, we think lawmakers need to follow a measured approach. They should think, for example, about whether abortion restrictions would have a disproportionate impact on lower-income women who could not afford to travel to a less-restrictive state. They should prepare for the additional health, welfare and resource costs if pregnant women who can’t care for children are

required to give birth anyway.
And we think Nebraska lawmakers would be cruel and inhumane to force a rape or incest victim to give birth to their attacker's baby.
It's hard to imagine a more divisive issue than abortion. It doesn't readily accommodate compromise or consensus.
Nationally, public opinion polls suggest that most Americans would prefer to leave the matter up to women and their doctors. But far fewer people are in favor of unrestricted abortions.
Those who want to ban abortion are driven by heartfelt emotional and religious motives. Many believe deeply that it's a matter of saving the lives of unborn children.
Those who want to keep abortion legal have a heartfelt conviction that it's unfair and unjust for government to infringe on the reproductive rights of women. Many believe deeply that a woman should be the one who decides how to deal with her own unplanned pregnancy and its life-transforming consequences.
We have no illusions that it will be easy to reconcile the fundamental freedom for women with the sanctity of life.
But as Nebraska leaders move toward possible new abortion restrictions in the wake of Friday's Supreme Court decision, they have the opportunity to be thoughtful about the real-world ramifications for women and respectful of the diverse views of all their constituents.

OWH Midlands Voices: Omaha's streetcar is a vehicle for more than transportation

A city is always in motion. At Omaha by Design, our role is to help guide this momentum towards outcomes that enhance quality of life for residents throughout the metro.
For more than two decades, Omaha by Design has served as the metro's nonprofit hub for people-centered urban design and policy. Throughout that time, we have earned the community's trust as a collaborative resource for planning, zoning, transportation, design and development decisions that have shaped our city for the better.
We operate in a future-oriented mindset, with the civic responsibility to be thinking years ahead while tracing these goals back to concrete actions we can take today. Doing so positions us to advocate for the projects and policies that bring people together, create places we all value, and enable our city to thrive.
That's why Omaha by Design is proud to lend our voice in support of the streetcar and the unique opportunity it presents. Our confident support is centered in the streetcar's capacity to not only increase mobility, but also to catalyze sustainable, people-centered investment in the heart of the city.
Some have tried to diminish the streetcar's use case by suggesting other vehicles are equally capable of moving people, often on that narrow view that ridership or speed is the key metric. However, this misses the broader point.
A modern streetcar is a vehicle for much more than transportation. It just as importantly drives opportunity — fostering a vibrant, walkable urban core in which healthy lifestyles thrive, new businesses prosper, and residents from across the city enjoy greater access to jobs, education and civic amenities.
In simplest terms, this is because a modern streetcar will help transform underutilized land and surface parking lots into places for people. In a city with a demonstrated housing shortage, this includes thousands of units of much-needed housing options, from affordable to market-rate.

As part of a Total Mobility System, including enhanced transit options, a shared parking network, and safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian facilities, the streetcar will boost local businesses and spur new job creation where it is most efficient and accessible to all — within the region's urban core.

As the need for scattered and underperforming parking decreases, density along the line increases — making room for significantly more residents and jobs to locate along the route — 30,000 more of each, per recent studies. This virtuous cycle brings the ability to generate millions of dollars in local wages, which in turn leads to more economic activity and a growing tax base to better support the local schools, parks, and city services which underpin an expanded quality of life for all.

Cities across the nation have proven this out, and Omaha's plan has the benefit of building upon lessons learned from the more than 40 streetcar systems in use today. What most sets our local plan apart is the sustainable, fair way it proposes to pay for the streetcar with just a fraction of the adjacent development value it creates. What's more, it does so while keeping rides fare-free, a compelling alternative as the cost of private vehicle ownership continues to escalate.

Working cooperatively with the City of Omaha's Urban Core Housing and Mobility Redevelopment Plan, the impact becomes significant: Alongside the 30,000 new residents and 30,000 new jobs, $5 billion in new development is anticipated in the next thirty years. Three billion dollars in the next 15 years.

These projections are not merely hopes. They are grounded in the real, learned experience of our peers in Kansas City, Milwaukee, Salt Lake City and Oklahoma City, and the dozens of other metros that have seen modern streetcars serve as a catalyst for powerful economic development, enhanced job opportunities, cultural and entertainment options, and tax revenue to the benefit of the broader community.

And we already have a strong head start, with Mutual of Omaha's investment both downtown and in the redevelopment of their current campus anchoring at least one-fifth, and perhaps even one-third, of that 15-year, $3 billion impact.

This momentum — combined with Metro's transition to a Regional Transit Authority, the Chamber's visionary Urban Core Strategic Plan, and the creative, entrepreneurial spirit of everyday Omahans — promises to keep our city's forward motion.

Omaha by Design supports Omaha's streetcar because it is both a bold move and a wise, measured investment in the future of our city. A modern streetcar will keep us moving toward the more vibrant, livable, and equitably prosperous city we are on the path to becoming.

Scott Dobbe is the executive director of Omaha by Design.

OWH Short-term memory

Short-term memory is a plus for many political incumbents. George Mill's excellent article (June 21) on Gov. Pete Ricketts demonstrated a long history of following sound bite policies including thwarting referendums to the detriment of Nebraska citizens. He could have added the refusal of a gas tax holiday claiming we need the taxes for roads and bridges. This is the same tax he opposed and used against Sen. Brett Lindstrom in the primary. Funding for a recreational lake proposal is apparently more important than helping ordinary citizens during a temporary fuel/inflation. He's counting on our short-term memory for his next elective office bid.

Jeff Johnston, Elmwood

LJS Editorial, 6/26: NU's modest budget increase the right thing

The University of Nebraska Board of Regents on Thursday gave its approval to a $1.03 billion general operating budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

That sounds like a lot of money, because it is. But that budget represents just a 1.3% growth over the current fiscal year.

Importantly, the $12.9 million budget increase isn't coming out of the pockets of university students and their parents.

Rather, the budget holds the line on tuition increases for the second straight year, and, in doing so, keeps Nebraska universities affordable in a time when skyrocketing costs are pricing many out of the opportunity to get a college education.

Specifically, the cost per credit hour for Nebraska undergraduate students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will remain $259, and out-of-state undergrads will continue to pay $830 per credit hour.

Those UNL rates, the highest of NU's four campuses, already compare favorably to the national averages for public four-year universities of $390 for in-state undergrads and $1,126 for out-of-state, both certain to continue to rise, likely even higher than the 4% rate identified by the Education Data Initiative.

Even more encouraging, the new budget raises the household income qualification threshold for the Nebraska Promise program from $60,000 to $65,000. That means that an additional 1,000 in-state students will be able to attend NU without paying tuition.

The budget includes a $10 million infusion into the salary pool for UNL and University of Nebraska Medical Center faculty and an anticipated 9% increase in health insurance premiums.

The growth rate of the university budget, which NU President Ted Carter rightfully called "modest," is less than half the state's 2.8% average annual growth rate and well below the current inflation rate of 8% or higher.

Hopefully, the state budget that will be considered by the Legislature next year will reflect similar restraint and individual departments and agencies will find ways to efficiently and effectively allocate their resources.

Put simply, if the university, the state's most important publicly funded institution, can make things work with a small budget increase, there is no reason to throw money at other agencies who cannot do the same.

Given the reality that inflation will increase prices for goods and services and create upward pressure on compensation, it's unrealistic to expect that the 2023-24 NU budget will have another 1.3% increase.

But the 2022-23 budget is commendable, providing dollars and cents evidence of the prudent fiscal management begun by Carter and the university administration at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic two years ago.

And, perhaps more importantly, it continues Carter's commitment to, in his words, "make sure that we're giving (Nebraska students and their families) the best possible opportunity to get a world-class education at affordable prices."

OWH: Nebraska Reps. Bacon, Smith join Sens. Fischer, Sasse in opposing gun violence bill

All four members of Nebraska's congressional delegation voted against a bill intended to curb gun

violence in the U.S., saying they were concerned that the legislation would impinge the rights of law-abiding citizens.

Supporters of the legislation, which heads to President Joe Biden for his approval, dismissed that concern as unwarranted and stressed the need for action in the wake of deadly mass shootings, including one that killed 19 children and two teachers at a Texas school and another that killed 10 people at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York.

The claims were not enough to win support from Sens. Deb Fischer and Ben Sasse and Reps. Don Bacon and Adrian Smith, all Republicans.

The $13 billion measure would toughen background checks for the youngest gun buyers, keep firearms from more domestic violence offenders and help states put in place red flag laws that make it easier for authorities to take weapons from people adjudged dangerous. It would also fund local programs for school safety, mental health and violence prevention.

While the members of Nebraska's delegation expressed support for some elements of the legislation, those aspects were not enough to override their concerns.

"My vote today was constitutionally based, not politically based," Bacon said in a statement Friday after the vote in the House. "There was much in this bill that is commendable, but the Red Flag portion opens up consequences I cannot support."

Bacon, whose district includes Omaha, pointed to recent court rulings — including Thursday's U.S. Supreme Court decision striking down a New York law that restricted peoples' ability to carry concealed weapons — as signals that the legislation would be found unconstitutional. However, he said, he supports the mental health and school security provisions in the bill.

Fischer also supported some aspects of the legislation but had concerns it would infringe on the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens — an argument echoed by gun lobby groups that opposed the legislation.

"I appreciate that this bill contains funding for expanded mental health services and enhanced school security — these are important ways to help keep our kids and communities safe," Fischer said in a statement. "However, I have serious concerns about other parts of the legislation that would infringe upon law-abiding citizens' second amendment rights and limit due process. I cannot support this bill."

Sasse voiced support for legislation proposed by Sens. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and John Barrasso, R-Wyo. That bill, which called for rededicating more than $38 billion in American Rescue Plan Act money toward enhanced school security and mental health resources, would have been "a more responsible step" to achieve the goals of the gun violence bill "without compromising constitutional rights," Sasse said in a statement.

He said action to combat gun violence should focus on "the mental health issues that are at the root of mass shootings committed by deeply troubled and suicidal young men" while ensuring "strong due process protections."

"Unfortunately, the way this bill has been hastily drafted, it accomplishes the first but not the second, and I cannot support it," Sasse said.

Smith, whose sprawling district includes most of the state, said the bill would not achieve the goal of stopping "senseless and heartbreaking acts of violence."

"I've heard from many Nebraskans who are concerned about their constitutional rights," he said in a statement Friday. "I know the members of the Senate who negotiated the bill — and my Republican colleagues who supported it in the House — have good intentions, but I am seriously concerned parts of the bill, particularly the red flag provisions, are too broad and could have unintended

consequences on Americans who are not a threat."
The votes in both the Senate and House received some level of bipartisan support, though less in the House where 14 Republicans joined every Democrat in the 234-193 vote Friday. In the Senate, 15 Republicans joined all 50 Democrats in passing the bill 65-33 on Thursday.
The measure, as multiple senators noted Thursday, fell well short of what some Democrats had called for. It also required some concessions from Republicans, though those who voted in favor of the package disputed claims that it infringed on the rights of Americans.
"This bill does not take away the rights of any law-abiding American," Sen. Joni Ernst, a Republican from Iowa who voted for the bill, said in a statement Thursday: "Every American wants to keep our kids and our schools safe and provide folks access to mental health treatment, and this proposal helps do that without placing new restrictions on law-abiding gun owners."
Ernst's fellow Iowan in the Senate, Republican Chuck Grassley, voted against the bill. In a statement, he commended the bipartisan group of senators who negotiated and managed to produce an agreement on "a difficult issue."
"Much of their legislation is good, but I have very specific concerns about safeguarding constitutional due process rights that prevent me from supporting the bill in its entirety," Grassley said.
The bill would make the local juvenile records of people age 18 to 20 available during required federal background checks when they attempt to buy guns. Those examinations, currently limited to three days, would last up to a maximum of 10 days to give federal and local officials time to search records.
People convicted of domestic abuse who are current or former romantic partners of the victim would be prohibited from acquiring firearms, closing the so-called "boyfriend loophole."
That ban currently only applies to people married to, living with or who have had children with the victim. The compromise bill would extend that to those considered to have had "a continuing serious relationship."
The measure expands the use of background checks by rewriting the definition of the federally licensed gun dealers required to conduct them. Penalties for gun trafficking are strengthened, billions of dollars are provided for behavioral health clinics and school mental health programs and there's money for school safety initiatives.
There would be money to help states enforce red flag laws and for other states without them for violence prevention programs. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia have such laws. Nebraska is not one of those states.
In his statement, Bacon specifically called out the funding piece for the red flag programs and violence prevention measures.
Biden has said he will sign the bill.
By Ryan Hoffman

LJS: Inflation is immediate priority, candidates Flood, Pansing Brooks say

Both Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln and Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk point to inflation first in listing their immediate priorities if elected to Nebraska's vacant seat in the U.S. House of Representatives on Tuesday.
"We have to address skyrocketing prices in the grocery store and at the gas pump," Flood said, "and that will be my top priority in Congress."
Flood said "we need to stop the out-of-control federal spending that has fueled inflation," provide

tax relief for American families and "reverse the anti-energy policies of the Biden administration and encourage domestic energy exploration."
Pansing Brooks said "we need to reduce the cost of prescription drugs, lower premiums under the Affordable Care Act, boost Social Security, stop price gouging and offset the high price of gas" while also making child care more affordable and accessible.
Flood is the Republican nominee and Pansing Brooks is the Democratic nominee in the rare special election to fill eastern Nebraska's vacant 1st District House seat for the next six months.
The pair will meet again in the November general election to determine who will serve the next two-year term that begins in January. Both won their party's primary election nominations in May.
Each was chosen by their party's leadership to face off in this month's special election to complete the remainder of Rep. Jeff Fortenberry's term after he resigned from the House following his conviction on charges of lying to federal officials about illegal foreign contributions to his 2016 reelection campaign.
"I believe the biggest challenge our country faces is a broken political system in Washington," Pansing Brooks said in responding to a questionnaire submitted to both candidates by the Journal Star.
"I will find other people like me, no matter their party, in Congress and work with them to fix what is broken. We cannot continue to function under the deep divisions plaguing our country."
Flood said "we need to stop the out-of-control federal spending; we need to get government out of the way by slashing red tape and cutting taxes; we need to increase domestic energy production and get us closer to energy independence and bring down gas prices."
And, he said, "we need to build the wall and secure our southern border."
If she's elected, Pansing Brooks said, the House Appropriations Committee and the House Agriculture Committee would be at the top of her preferred committee assignments while also mentioning the Small Business Committee.
Flood listed Agriculture, Financial Services and Appropriations.
Fortenberry's seniority had placed him in a Republican leadership position on the Appropriations Committee, a spot that helped empower him to gain initial funding for a long-sought U.S. Department of Agricultural research center at Nebraska Innovation Campus.
Both Pansing Brooks and Flood pledged to support continued U.S. assistance for Ukraine as it battles the Russian invasion that has devastated Ukrainian cities with missile strikes and created a humanitarian crisis.
"Continued sanctions, even as they clearly have economic impacts here at home, are essential," Pansing Brooks said.
"It is possible that our Nebraska farmers can rise up and be the source of needed grains to Europe that Ukraine can no longer supply," she suggested.
Flood said "we need to maintain our commitment to a sovereign, secure Ukraine."
"Weakness invites aggression," he said. "That's why Joe Biden's inept foreign policy has largely failed, most notably in his botched withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan."
"China, North Korea and Iran are watching," Flood said.
In response to the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol last year by supporters of former President Donald Trump who wanted to overturn the presidential election results, Pansing Brooks said Congress needs to "pass federal legislation to strengthen and ensure voting rights."
And, she said, "we need to remove any loopholes in our system that might allow individuals in the future to try and single-handedly overturn the results of any election."

Flood said the violence at the Capitol was "completely unacceptable," but said Democrats are "focused on scoring political points ahead of the mid-terms and attacking a potential 2024 Republican candidate for president" instead of centering on "the decisions and vulnerabilities that led to security breaches" on that January day.
Pansing Brooks suggested that "one of the biggest differences between my opponent and me is on the issue of women's bodily autonomy." On Friday, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned abortion rights guaranteed by its 1973 decision in Roe v. Wade.
"The rollback in these protections means in vitro fertilization, birth control and marriage equality are at risk since the court is indicating it will alter the right to privacy under the 14th Amendment," she said before Friday's court ruling.
Flood said "this election is about changing course in Washington, ending the failed one-party rule of Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi" while getting America "back on track."
By Don Walton

LJS: Pansing Brooks calls on voters to 'fight back'; Flood touts 'pro-life' record

Game-changer?
That's what Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln, the Democratic nominee in Tuesday's special election to fill the eastern Nebraska House seat vacated by the resignation of former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, is hoping.
The U.S. Supreme Court's decision Friday to end abortion rights previously guaranteed by its 1973 decision in Roe v. Wade means that the Tuesday election in Nebraska provides the first opportunity in the country to "fight back at the ballot box," Pansing Brooks said at a hastily arranged news conference.
"I'm angry, sad, mostly angry," she said. "Now we need to channel our anger into votes."
The two-term state senator appeared at her downtown Lincoln campaign headquarters dressed in white, which she said represented an expression of hope.
The court's decision, which she described as Draconian, transports women "back to the world where we were chattel," or property, second-class citizens, Pansing Brooks said.
"It means safe abortions will not happen.
"Many women will now die," she said. "It's a sad day."
The court's decision has the effect of "push(ing) women back into the Dark Ages," she said.
The news conference attracted the kind of intense media coverage that will give her targeted message wide distribution as voters in the 1st Congressional District prepare to go the polls Tuesday in a battleground that structurally favors Republicans.
Flood praised the court's decision to "return abortion-related policy decisions back to the states and the people where they belong."
Noting that he sponsored "the nation's first pain-capable unborn child protection act" as a state senator, a bill that has banned abortion in Nebraska after 20 weeks, Flood said "we helped pave the way for this landmark decision."
Later, during an interview in the Capitol Rotunda, Flood said he believes the court ruling can spark decisions in the states that "create a culture of life," which includes support for prenatal care, adequate nutrition and a determination to "make sure pregnant women have the support they need."
"Not in the last 50 years have Nebraskans had the opportunity to have such a discussion," Flood said.

"This begins a journey and we need to listen to both sides."
Flood recalled the political criticism he encountered in 2012 when he supported legislation that included prenatal care benefits for illegal immigrants living in Nebraska.
"I chose the pro-life path," he said. "And I stand by that as part of a bigger discussion about providing women the resources they need to be able to deliver a healthy child.
"My position is that life begins at conception," Flood said. "My pro-life record is clear. I believe the state has an obligation to help children who may not be wanted."
Flood said he encourages a big voter turnout next week.
Republicans hold a voter registration advantage over Democrats that tops 67,000 and have recorded 27 straight victories in the district, although it has been reshaped every decade to reflect changes dictated by U.S. census figures.
Pansing Brooks said she is reaching out to moderate Republicans and independent voters, as well as members of her own party.
Lincoln is the district's largest city and viewed in Nebraska's political terms as moderate, and it presumably would need to be a key element in shaping a potential upset.
The district is composed of 10 counties and parts of two other counties and includes Bellevue, Norfolk, Fremont and Columbus in addition to Lincoln.
By Don Walton

AP: Army Guard troops risk dismissal as vaccine deadline looms

WASHINGTON (AP) — Up to 40,000 Army National Guard soldiers across the country — or about 13% of the force — have not yet gotten the mandated COVID-19 vaccine, and as the deadline for shots looms, at least 14,000 of them have flatly refused and could be forced out of the service.
Guard soldiers have until Thursday to get the vaccine. According to data obtained by The Associated Press, between 20% to 30% of the Guard soldiers in six states are not vaccinated, and more than 10% in 43 other states still need shots.
Guard leaders say states are doing all they can to encourage soldiers to get vaccinated by the time limit. And they said they will work with the roughly 7,000 who have sought exemptions, which are almost all for religious reasons.
“We’re going to give every soldier every opportunity to get vaccinated and continue their military career. Every soldier that is pending an exemption, we will continue to support them through their process,” said Lt. Gen. Jon Jensen, director of the Army National Guard, in an Associated Press interview. “We’re not giving up on anybody until the separation paperwork is signed and completed. There’s still time.”
Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last year ordered all service members — active-duty, National Guard and Reserves — to get the vaccine, saying it is critical to maintaining the health and readiness of the force. The military services had varying deadlines for their forces, and the Army National Guard was given the longest amount of time to get the shots, mainly because it’s a large force of about 330,000 soldiers who are widely scattered around the country, many in remote locations.
The Army Guard’s vaccine percentage is the lowest among the U.S. military — with all the active-duty Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps at 97% or greater and the Air Guard at about 94%. The Army reported Friday that 90% of Army Reserve forces were partially or completely vaccinated.
The Pentagon has said that after June 30, Guard members won’t be paid by the federal government when they are activated on federal status, which includes their monthly drill weekends and their

two-week annual training period. Guard troops mobilized on federal status and assigned to the southern border or on COVID-19 missions in various states also would have to be vaccinated or they would not be allowed to participate or be paid.

To make it more complicated, however, Guard soldiers on state activate duty may not have to be vaccinated — based on the requirements in their states. As long as they remain in state duty status, they can be paid by the state and used for state missions.

At least seven governors formally asked Austin to reconsider or not enforce the vaccine mandate for National Guard members, and some filed or signed on to lawsuits. In letters to the governors, Austin declined, and said that the coronavirus "takes our service members out of the fight, temporarily or permanently, and jeopardizes our ability to meet mission requirements." He said Guard troops must either get the vaccine or lose their Guard status.

Jensen and Maj. Gen. Jill Faris, director of the Guard's office of the Joint Surgeon General, said they are working with states adjutants general to get progress updates, including on the nearly 20,000 troops who are not flat refusals and haven't submitted any type of exemption request. Some, they said, may just be a lag in self-reporting, while others may still be undecided.

"Part of those undefined are our soldiers who say, well, I have until 30 June and so I'll take till 30 June," said Jensen.

Others may have promised to bring in vaccine paperwork, and haven't done it yet. Still others are on the books, but haven't yet reported to basic training, so don't have to be vaccinated until they get there. It's not clear how many are in each category.

Jensen acknowledged that if the current numbers hold, there are concerns about possible impact on Guard readiness in the states, including whether it will affect any Guard units preparing to deploy.

"When you're looking at, 40,000 soldiers that potentially are in that unvaccinated category, absolutely there's readiness implications on that and concerns associated with that," said Jensen. "That's a significant chunk."

Overall, according to the data obtained by the AP, about 85% of all Army Guard soldiers are fully vaccinated. Officials said that if those with one shot are counted, 87% are at least partially vaccinated.

Across the country, in all but one case, Guard soldiers are vaccinated at a higher rate that the general population in their state. Only in New Jersey is the percentage of vaccinated Guard solders very slightly lower than the state's overall population, as of earlier this month when the data was collected.

The three U.S. territories — Virgin Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico — and the District of Columbia, all have more than 90% of their soldiers fully vaccinated. The highest percentage is in Hawaii, with nearly 97%, while the lowest is Oklahoma, at just under 70%.

Guard leaders in the states have run special shot programs, and provided as much information as possible to their forces in order to keep them on the job.

In Tennessee, they set up small teams in the east, west and central regions and did monthly events providing vaccines to troops who wanted them. And every Wednesday, Guard members could make appointments for shots in the middle Tennessee region, in Smyrna. In addition, in early June they called in all soldiers who have so far refused the vaccine.

"We held a big, mass event," said Army Guard Col. Keith Evans. "We had all of our medical providers here. So if there were any questions to clear up, any misconceptions, any misinformation, we had all of our our data and were able to provide them all the information."

Evans, who is commander of his Army Guard's medical readiness command, said they also had

recruiting and other leaders there who could explain what would happen if soldiers chose to not get the shot and ended up leaving the Guard.
"We wanted to let them know what benefits they had earned because these are soldiers that had had done their time, served their country," said Evans.
Officials say they believe the information campaign has been working. Jensen said that about 1,500 soldiers a week around the country are moving into the vaccinated category. "We expect, as we approach the deadline, that we'll see some some larger growth."

Very Respectfully,

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