From: Shelburn, Andrew
To: Shelburn, Andrew
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 7-8-22
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Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jul 2022	7.10	94.00	08:19
Corn	Oct 2022	5.64	-40.00	08:20
Milo	Jul 2022	6.01	-15.00	08:19
Milo	Oct 2022	5.34	-70.00	08:20
Soybeans	Jul 2022	14.19	-65.00	08:07
Soybeans	Oct 2022	13.06	-65.00	08:20
Wheat	Jul 2022	8.29	-75.00	08:17
Wheat	Jul 2023	8.03	-100.00	08:05

TV and Radio

KETV: Nebraska State Patrol reaches new heights with drone program
KSNB: Nebraska State Patrol showcases drones
10/11: Drones benefit Nebraska State Patrol throughout first year
NTV: State Patrol says drones significantly reducing time it takes to investigate crashes
WOWT: Nebraska State Patrol to use mapping drones in crash investigations
NCN: Bacon tops 'Common Ground' scorecard; Fischer, Ricketts, Sasse not so much
NCN: Norfolk Mayor Moenning says he's not applying for Unicameral

Governor

OWH: Ricketts, Nebraska State Patrol tout benefits of drone program
LJS: Watch now: Drones have reduced time spent investigating crashes in Nebraska, officials say
Nebraska Examiner: Nebraska State Patrol says drones help save time and money
LJS: Ricketts critic Matt Innis vows to go to state party convention despite GOP ban
Nebraska Examiner: Six rejection letters add fuel to weekend fight over future of Nebraska GOP
OWH: Voter ID, minimum wage and medical marijuana campaigns submit petition signatures
Nebraska Examiner: Initiatives to raise Nebraska's minimum wage, require voter ID appear headed for vote in November
LJS: Medical marijuana petitions submitted amid legal uncertainty of requirements in Nebraska
LJS: Watch now: Voter photo ID requirement appears headed to the ballot
OWH: Petition to give Nebraska governor more authority over education fails
Fremont Tribune: New clerk magistrate to serve in Plattsmouth

State, Local and Regional

OWH: Eppley awarded $20 million for planned roadway and canopy project

OWH: Judge finds removal of Sarpy County treasurer was proper

Opinion

OWH Public Pulse

1. Feelings on fireworks
2. Pets need relief
3. Trump's behavior
4. SCOTUS direction
5. Abortion is health care
6. Walk my path

LJS Editorial, 7/8: Big Ten changes just part of evolution

LJS Guest column: Helping hurting warriors

LJS Letters

1. Democrats can tout issues
2. Hardly acting pro-life

National/Federal

AP: Nebraska Republican Mike Flood to take House seat on Tuesday

AP: Some states move to protect abortion from prosecutors

OWH: Ricketts, Nebraska State Patrol tout benefits of drone program

LINCOLN — One year after the Nebraska State Patrol introduced its drone program, officials say the program has drastically reduced the time troopers spend at crash sites, improving safety for patrolmen and Nebraska drivers.

"This is a week we are looking toward the future," State Patrol Superintendent John Bolduc said Thursday.

The program, implemented in June 2021, brought 36 drones to the patrol, and 32 troopers so far have been trained to pilot them, Bolduc said. The drones have mainly been used to oversee crash investigations. Over the nearly 100 sites observed in the last year, the drones have reduced the average time spent at crash scenes from 2½ hours to about 53 minutes, said Gov. Pete Ricketts.

The time reduction improves safety for troopers and Nebraskans, Bolduc said. Ricketts said it also saves money, as research has shown that road closures cost the public about $310 per hour.

Some of the drones can also take up to 250 photos of crash sites, which are uploaded to State Patrol software to aid with ensuing investigations, Patrol trooper and pilot Matt Maus said.

In addition to helping out at crash sites, the drones have been used for aerial observation during wildfires in western Nebraska, and were even used to find a fleeing suspect who had climbed a tree in an attempt to escape pursuing police, State Patrol Commander Jason Scott said.

Patrol Lt. Brent Bockstadter said a future evolution of the program could see drones used as oversight in active shooter situations as well.

"It's really a game changer," Bockstadter said.

The drones can stay in the air in high winds but are limited in rain or snow, Bockstadter said.
The patrol started the program after looking into innovations other state patrols were introducing across the Midwest. Bolduc said drone programs have become increasingly popular among law enforcement agencies nationwide, and will likely become the industry standard within the next few years.
Some 1,182 law enforcement entities across the country are using drones in some capacity, according to the Atlas of Surveillance, which documents technologies used by U.S. law enforcement agencies.
Drone use by law enforcement has generated concerns from some civil liberties advocacy organizations.
Dave Maass, director of investigations with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, one of those organizations, said the degree of concern largely depends on the use. For example, using a drone to help reconstruct the scene of a vehicle crash makes sense, Maass said. The same goes for dangerous situations, such as fires or search and rescue missions.
The more worrisome uses, particularly regarding state police forces, come from monitoring gatherings protected by the First Amendment, including protests and other demonstrations, Maass said. He also flagged the use of drones to gather information that would otherwise require a warrant.
“Those are the sorts of things that concern us,” he said.
In an email, State Patrol spokesperson Cody Thomas reiterated that the drone program is primarily focused on crash investigations but has also proven useful for locating missing persons and assisting with wildfire responses.
“NSP does not use this technology for surveillance of law abiding citizens,” Thomas said in an email. “Each deployment must have a public safety nexus and supervisory approval.”
Bockstadter said most of the patrol’s drones cost about $3,000 each, with their three thermal imaging drones costing up to $8,500 each. The drones are battery-powered, with an estimated lifespan of three to four years, he said.
By Erin Bamer

LJS: Watch now: Drones have reduced time spent investigating crashes in Nebraska, officials say

In its first year, the Nebraska State Patrol has deployed drones 185 times to assist in crash investigations and to monitor fires.
Gov. Pete Ricketts appeared at a Thursday morning news conference at the State Patrol headquarters to applaud its drone program, which he said will continue to make investigations more cost effective.
By hovering over a crash site, drone pilots are able to take photos and measurements of scenes where troopers ordinarily would've had to stand in the road with tape measures.
Use of drones in investigations has reduced time on site from 2.5 hours to 53 minutes, Ricketts said.
Closing a roadway costs Nebraska drivers $310 an hour, he said, and drones saved citizens $1.7 million last year by keeping traffic flowing.

Col. John Bolduc, superintendent of the State Patrol, said it hopes to grow the program substantially as it adds more pilots in the coming year.
"I want to congratulate the colonel and his entire team for continuing to look for ways to be able to serve the people of Nebraska, leveraging this new technology that will help keep people safer, help keep good people on the way to where they're going, and make our whole experience in Nebraska better," Ricketts said.
The State Patrol has 32 certified pilots who have deployed drones not only in crash investigations, but also to capture images of fires, helping firefighters to locate the source of a blaze more effectively.
The program has 36 drones. Three have thermal cameras, which can help locate the hot spots of a blaze.
Each drone costs about $3,000, but thermal drones are $8,500.
Bolduc said drones eliminate the risk troopers face by being on the roadway during an investigation.
"Time on scene is very important," Bolduc said. "Drone technology has assisted us in reducing that time on scene, which makes it ultimately safer for everybody involved in that event."
By Jenna Thompson

Nebraska Examiner: Nebraska State Patrol says drones help save time and money

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts briefly took the controls Thursday of one of the drones used by the Nebraska State Patrol to investigate and reconstruct vehicle accidents and to search for hidden suspects and lost children.
“That’s very cool,” Ricketts said, after handing the controls back to Trooper Ravi Singh.
Singh is one of 33 troopers that are FAA-trained to operate the agencies’ 36 Autel drones, 33 of which cost $3,000 each. Three others, which cost about $8,000 each, are equipped with thermal imaging technology, which aids in finding hidden suspects.
Col. John Bolduc, superintendent of the Nebraska State Patrol, said the drones have been a tremendous time saver when troopers are investigating accidents. They are also a safety measure, he said, since they get troopers off the roadway faster.
Ricketts said it used to take an average of 2 1/2 hours to investigate an accident, but with a drone, which takes video that is used to measure distances, the average time has been cut to 53 minutes.
The governor said drones also cut the amount of time a roadway has to be closed for accident reconstruction, saving motorists time and money.
“It’s really a game changer,” said Capt. Jason Scott.
In the past year, the Patrol has deployed drones 185 times. They helped find a suspect hiding in a tree in Red Willow County and helped identify hot spots in the wildfires that consumed 44,000 acres in southwest Nebraska.
They are also programmed with a “follow mode” to track suspects on foot.
Officials said the drones will not be used to catch speeders but may eventually have the ability to monitor active shooter events.
By Paul Hammel

LJS: Ricketts critic Matt Innis vows to go to state party convention despite GOP ban

The Nebraska Republican Party has decided to bar Matt Innis of Crete, an outspoken Donald Trump supporter who has been sharply critical of Gov. Pete Ricketts, from its state convention in Kearney this weekend.

The decision has stirred traffic on Facebook and within GOP circles.

Innis, a former Lancaster County Republican chairman who unsuccessfully challenged Sen. Ben Sasse in the 2020 GOP primary election and supported Charles Herbster in this year's Republican gubernatorial primary election, has aimed a steady stream of criticism at Ricketts on his Facebook page.

Jim Pillen of Columbus, who won the GOP gubernatorial nomination in May, has also been a recent target.

Innis said he was informed by the party that "your vocal criticism of Governor Ricketts, the top Republican elected official in the state and leader of our party, caused the (credentials) committee to decline to credential you."

And Innis was told that "this means you will not be admitted to the 2022 Nebraska GOP state convention."

"I'm going to Kearney," Innis said during a subsequent "Drive Time Lincoln" radio interview on KLIN. "I will be at the convention.

"You can't make change if you're not involved," Innis said. "I'm going."

In a statement released Thursday afternoon, credentials chairwoman Pam Dingman said the committee "declined to credential six individuals who are either switching parties, starting new parties or supporting non-Republican candidates."

"We welcome vigorous debate and even criticism within our ranks," she said.

"We won't, however, allow the convention to be used as a platform to help recruit or elect people who aren't Republicans."

In an earlier response to the committee's action on Facebook, Innis said: "So if you say truthful criticisms of Pete the establishment moves to block you from participating at the convention."

Innis wrote: "Many others who refused to bend the knee to the establishment have been told the same thing."

A review of Innis' Facebook entries shows multiple entries criticizing Ricketts and, more recently, Republican gubernatorial nominee Pillen of Columbus, who was supported by the governor in the May 10 primary election.

Herbster was endorsed by Trump, who came to Nebraska to urge Republicans to vote for him.

"Just remember that Jim Pillen never once stood up against the university," Innis stated on Facebook during the campaign.

"Pillen never stood up to UNL or cut their spending," he wrote.

Among an ongoing number of entries criticizing Ricketts:

"Why does he feel the need to take credit for the hard work that others do?"

"Pete has always been a reactionary governor. He's never been proactive; he waits until others stand

up on an issue before he jumps in just to make sure it's politically good for him."
"It is clear that Ricketts has completely tarnished his time as governor with his actions over the last two years."
By Don Walton

Nebraska Examiner: Six rejection letters add fuel to weekend fight over future of Nebraska GOP

LINCOLN — The Nebraska Republican Party has told six GOP activists who have agitated for changes in the party that they are not welcome at its annual convention Saturday in Kearney.
This week, the state party sent letters to a half-dozen people saying it would not credential them because they either had switched political parties, started new parties or supported candidates outside of the GOP.
The letters inflame a years-long fight over the party's future between populists, like these six, and the part of the state's political power structure led by Gov. Pete Ricketts, several Nebraska Republicans said.
Five of the six people who got the letters told the Nebraska Examiner on Thursday that the fight involves who should control the state party.
Three of the six challenged GOP incumbents in recent primaries. Two said the incumbents lacked loyalty to former President Donald Trump and his unproven allegations about the 2020 election. A third wants the state to count ballots by hand.
One of the six, Matt Innis, challenged U.S. Sen. Ben Sasse in the 2020 primary. His rejection letter cited his "vocal criticism" of Ricketts as a reason he was turned away. He regularly posts memes targeting political officials and staff.
'A stupid thing to do'
Innis has called Ricketts' top political staffer a "dirty trickster" and questioned whether she and Ricketts were behind groping allegations against former gubernatorial candidate Charles Herbster. Eight women alleged in an April 14 Nebraska Examiner article that Herbster had groped them. Herbster has denied wrongdoing. Ricketts has denied taking part in any conspiracy.
Innis said the rejection letters were intended to serve as a "deterrent, so that people don't go to the convention."
"But it doesn't matter. … It was a stupid thing for the committee to do," he said, adding that he plans to be in Kearney and have his supporters in the meeting press delegates to overrule the credentialing committee and let him in.
Robert Borer, who lost a primary election challenge in May to Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen, was rejected for threatening to create a new political party after he lost.
Borer said Thursday that he is now running a write-in campaign for governor and that he plans to hand out business cards for his campaign Saturday in Kearney.
He said he won't acknowledge University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen as the GOP nominee for governor because Borer questions the machines that Nebraska uses to count paper ballots. He worries they can be manipulated.
"I think they're running scared," Borer said of the state GOP sending him a letter. "It's an awakened

‘We the People’ against the self-appointed ruling elite.”

He lost faith in Ricketts

Pam Dingman, who chairs the state GOP’s credentialing committee, said in a statement that the state party welcomes debate and criticism from GOP voters.

But, she said, the Nebraska GOP would not let people use its annual convention to help recruit or elect candidates running against Republicans.

Otoe County Republican Rex Schroder, who also challenged Evnen in the primary, said his letter said he was rejected because he sent an email in May to state GOP leaders saying he planned to register as a Libertarian.

He said he never registered to go to the state convention because it cost too much and said he won’t be going because he “wants no part of the Pete Ricketts swamp.”

Schroder said he lost faith in Ricketts because of how aggressively he and his team pressed for Pillen over other Republican candidates worth considering for the nomination for governor.

Some Republicans have spent years trying to wrest control of the party from Ricketts. Privately, some said they have found help from fervent fans of Trump in the state GOP. In other states, Trump supporters have seized control over state and local parties.

Ricketts endorsed Trump in 2016 and 2020. But Ricketts and Trump supported different candidates in this year’s governor’s primary race. Ricketts backed Pillen. Trump backed Herbster, even after Ricketts lobbied Trump to stay out of the race.

“Ricketts controls everything,” Schroder said, including Evnen, who he said should be counting ballots by hand and not by machine.

The letter sent to Lancaster County GOP activist Fanchon Blythe cited one of her social media posts expressing curiosity about a potential write-in candidate for governor, Dave Wright.

“They’re trying not to let people be credentialed that go against them,” Blythe said of the establishment.

More than 600 expected

The letter sent to Lancaster County Republican Faith White said she was denied credentials because she recorded a phone call with state GOP chairman Dan Welch that became the subject of a news story.

In that June 2020 call, Welch told White that the state party had made a mistake by targeting then-GOP legislative candidate Janet Palmtag in a GOP on GOP legislative race. Welch pointed out that Ricketts had made the decision to target Palmtag, who has since re-registered as a Democrat.

The other person who received a letter from the state GOP was Amy Tharp, the newly elected chairwoman of the Custer County GOP. She could not be reached for comment Thursday.

The state GOP expects more than 600 delegates, alternates and guests at the convention. The convention typically draws between 200 and 300 people, officials said.

By Aaron Sanderford

OWH: Voter ID, minimum wage and medical marijuana campaigns submit petition signatures

LINCOLN — Nebraska voters appear on track to decide at least two major issues and maybe three in

the November general election.
Organizers of petition drives to increase the minimum wage and require voters to show photo ID turned in substantially more signatures to the Secretary of State's Office on Thursday than needed to qualify for the ballot.
For a campaign to legalize medical marijuana, though, it's going to be a close call. State Sen. Anna Wishart of Lincoln, a co-sponsor, said Thursday afternoon on Twitter that the campaign had gathered over 184,000 total signatures between its two petitions. The group put forward the two petitions, rather than one, in an effort to avoid a setback that kept the issue off the ballot in 2020.
With each petition needing about 87,000 valid signatures to make it onto the ballot, the total of 184,000 doesn't leave much of a cushion as state and local officials begin to verify the signatures — a process that always results in some being tossed out.
Sen. Adam Morfeld of Lincoln, the other co-sponsor, expressed optimism Thursday on Twitter.
"Normally with well funded campaigns you have around a 20 percent buffer, but since ours was largely volunteer and small donor driven our buffer rate is a lot lower," Morfeld said.
Raise the Wage Nebraska submitted petitions Thursday morning containing around 160,000 signatures from all 93 Nebraska counties, nearly twice as many as needed. The minimum wage proposal also needed about 87,000 valid signatures to qualify for the ballot.
Later in the day, Sen. Julie Slama of Dunbar with Citizens for Voter ID announced that the group's petition had garnered over 172,000 signatures from at least 58 counties. As a constitutional amendment, the petition needs about 124,000 signatures validated by the Secretary of State's Office to get on the November ballot.
If passed by voters, the minimum wage petition would raise the state's minimum wage in four annual steps. It would increase from the current $9 per hour to $10.50 per hour on Jan. 1, eventually reaching $15 per hour by 2026. The measure also would provide for annual cost of living increases, starting in 2027.
Nancy Williams, president and CEO of No More Empty Pots and a sponsor of the petition, said the proposed law would benefit nearly 150,000 Nebraska workers. She said they are people who are struggling to get by, especially with inflation.
"No one working full time should struggle to make ends meet," she said. "The cost of groceries, housing and basics have gone up for years ... but the minimum wage just hasn't kept up."
Cindy Meyer, a married mother of two elementary-aged children, is one such worker. She said she has worked for 19 years in various education, child care, retail and service industry jobs. All paid minimum wage or barely above it. At times, she said, she had to work multiple jobs to get by.
"If everyone was earning at least $15 an hour, we would be able to take better care of ourselves, better care of our families and contribute more to our communities," she said.
At a Thursday press conference, Gov. Pete Ricketts criticized the effort, arguing that Nebraska's minimum wage should be controlled by the market. He said a livable wage isn't a "one size fits all" system, and that a livable wage looks different in rural counties than in Omaha or Lincoln.
The voter ID petition, meanwhile, would require future Nebraska voters to provide a valid photo ID before casting their ballot. Slama said 35 states already require this, and she described the effort as a "common sense" measure that has bipartisan support, although all of the main backers of the petition are Republicans.
Slama thanked Ricketts for his support of the campaign, particularly for attending several town halls to spread word about the initiative. Ricketts has openly supported the voter ID effort, and his mother, Marlene Ricketts, was the campaign's primary financial backer, donating more than $1.8

million to the group.
Although the campaign gathered nearly 50,000 signatures more than the requirement, recent controversy surrounding the petitioners leaves questions as to how many will be accepted by the Secretary of State's Office.
The campaign is currently under investigation by the Nebraska Attorney General's Office after complaints arose accusing voter ID petitioners of falsely claiming to be state employees. Slama did not have an update on the investigation as of Thursday.
Separate complaints were also filed against the campaign alleging that petitioners were being misleading about the initiative's intent. There is not an investigation into these complaints, However, Slama mentioned that people have suggested online that there may be a lawsuit filed to challenge the campaign.
Slama, who previously described these complaints as a "Democrat-led hit job," said she is prepared to fight a lawsuit against the campaign if one comes up.
"If whatever party wants to waste their resources in a lawsuit to nowhere, I'm more than happy to take them on," Slama said.
Civic Nebraska, which has opposed the voter ID campaign, did not mention whether the organization would pursue a lawsuit. However, the group said in a statement Thursday that it is "preparing for the next phase of opposition" against the initiative.
"For thousands of Nebraska voters, voter ID would be a hindrance and impediment to freely cast a ballot," Civic Nebraska said in the statement.
The Secretary of State's Office will do an initial review of the petitions, then distribute them to county election offices to have the signatures checked against voter registration records. Counties have 40 days to complete the signature verification but can request 10 more days. Petitions are checked in the order they are submitted.
The process must be completed in time for the Secretary of State to certify the November ballot on Sept. 16. Court challenges to the petition proposals or any part of the process are possible.
In 2020, a petition seeking to legalize medical marijuana was kept off the ballot after a lawsuit was filed and the Nebraska Supreme Court determined the petition contained more than one subject. To avoid the same fate, the medical marijuana group put forward two initiatives this year. The first aims to establish protections for doctors and patients, while the second seeks to create protections for private entities that produce and supply marijuana for medical purposes.
In more recent news, a lawsuit is pending over the constitutionality of Nebraska's requirement for petitions to get valid signatures from 5% of registered voters in two-fifths, or 38, of the state's 93 counties. ACLU of Nebraska filed the suit on behalf of Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana. It's unclear whether the case will be decided before the Sept. 16 deadline.
Last month, a federal district judge issued an injunction to stop the state from enforcing that requirement. But a federal appeals court on Wednesday allowed state officials to proceed with enforcing it.
By Martha Stoddard and Erin Bamer

Nebraska Examiner: Initiatives to raise Nebraska's minimum wage, require voter ID appear headed for vote in November

Editor's note: This report has been updated to reflect news at the 5 p.m. Thursday deadline for submitting signatures on initiative petition drives.

LINCOLN — Two well-funded initiative petition drives appear to be headed for a vote in November, while a third — to legalize medical cannabis — looks iffy to gain a place on the ballot.

"We'll know in the next couple of months if we qualify or not," said State Sen. Anna Wishart of Lincoln, who co-chaired the signature drive conducted by Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana.

Wishart said the predominantly volunteer effort submitted 93,000 signatures for one of its two petitions, and 91,000 for the other. About 87,000 valid signatures of registered voters are needed to qualify for the ballot.

Election officials say that, typically, between 10% and 15% of signatures submitted for such petition drives are deemed invalid after checking. So that makes it uncertain if the marijuana petition drive will qualify.

"It's going to be a photo finish," said Omaha Sen. Wendy DeBoer, who was among those submitting petitions Thursday afternoon at the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office in downtown Lincoln.

Mad scramble

It was a mad scramble for the medical marijuana group just prior to the deadline as volunteers dug through boxfuls of petitions, which were scattered on the floor outside the election office, to divide them by county and by the two petitions. They crossed their fingers that some petitions from rural Nebraska would also arrive because they must provide a sufficient number of signatures in 38 of the state's 93 counties.

"This is what a grassroots campaign is," said Crista Eggers of Omaha, the campaign coordinator for Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana.

The cannabis group gathered more than enough signatures in 2020 to qualify for the ballot. But their issue was tossed off the ballot by the Nebraska Supreme Court, which ruled the initiative violated the state's "single subject" rule.

This year, after losing major donors, the medical marijuana effort had to rely primarily on volunteers to circulate its petitions.

Others had $1 million

It spent about $200,000, according to Eggers. Meanwhile, the two initiatives that appear to have qualified for the ballot each had war chests of over $1 million.

Citizens for Voter ID, whose leaders said they submitted about 172,000 signatures on Thursday, reported raising $1.7 million to collect signatures and campaign for the idea. That included a $1.5 million donation from Marlene Ricketts, the mother of Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts.

Raise the Wage Nebraska leaders said they submitted 160,000 signatures to qualify their issue — to raise the state's minimum wage to $15 an hour by 2026. That group reported raising about $1.3 million so far.

"We weren't one of the rich campaigns," Wishart said. That, she said, included being able to afford a signature verification system that gives an accurate count of how many valid signatures have been submitted.

Some signatures uncounted

That means that the signatures submitted Thursday by the Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana are "raw," Wishart said, and that several hundred signatures may not have been counted since they came in so late.

The voter ID initiative, because it proposes to change the Nebraska Constitution, must provide about

124,000 valid signatures of registered voters in Nebraska to qualify for the ballot. The two other initiatives, because they propose state law changes, only need about 87,000.
Thursday was the deadline for submitting signatures for the fall ballot.
Several other proposed ballot initiatives did not turn in signatures. Those include initiatives to toss out Nebraska's motorcycle helmet law, to allow concealed weapons to be carried without a license and training and to do away with the Nebraska Department of Education and the Nebraska Board of Education.
One petition circulator for the medical marijuana issue, Samantha Chavez of Omaha, said she collected 136 signatures on Thursday as part of a last-minute push.
Several signers, she said, told stories of friends and relatives who suffered from cancer or seizures who could be helped by medical cannabis.
"A lot of people understand this is something people need," Chavez said.
Opponents of legalizing medical marijuana, who include Gov. Ricketts, have maintained that it has not been proven to work or cleared by the Federal Drug Administration and that it could lead to permitting recreational use of cannabis, which he says endangers youths.

35 states now have voter ID

State Sen. Julie Slama of Dunbar, a leader in the voter ID initiative, said requiring someone to provide identification at a polling place is a "common sense" requirement that is supported by both Republicans, like herself, and Democrats.
She said that Citizens for Voter ID stands ready to defend its initiative against any lawsuits, calling them "lawsuits to nowhere."
Thirty-five states now have voter ID requirements, according to Slama.
Jane Kleeb, the chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party, said Thursday that adding "barriers to voting is un-American."
"The good news is even if this passes at the ballot box, the (State) Legislature will determine which IDs will be accepted," Kleeb said, saying she hopes it is a "broad list" of IDs.
Advocates for raising the minimum wage estimated Thursday that about 150,000 Nebraskans would benefit from raising the minimum wage to $15 an hour. That is about 20% of the state's workforce, they said.

$9 an hour is current minimum

Nebraska's minimum wage was last increased when voters approved another ballot initiative in 2014. It ultimately increased the wage to the current $9 an hour.
Advocates maintain that $9 an hour is too low to sustain a household and that raising the wage is "the right thing to do" amid rising costs of housing, food and fuel.
"Fair wages are the single best way to show employees that they are valued," said Alma Cerretta, the owner of Mana Games and Cafe in Lincoln, at a press conference Thursday.
Opponents maintain that raising the minimum wage results in job losses and makes companies less competitive with states that don't have higher minimum wages.
Ricketts said Thursday that raising the minimum wage is not a "one size fits all" proposition. It may cost jobs and close shops in rural areas of the state, he said.

Concerns unfounded

Kate Wolfe, campaign manager for Raise the Wage Nebraska, said many of the complaints about raising the minimum wage were raised in 2014 and turned out to be false.
Cindy Meyer of Omaha, a mother of two, said raising the minimum wage would reduce the "stress" of having to work two to three jobs and balancing that with spending time with her kids and

husband.
"If everyone was earning at least $15 per hour, we would be able to take better care of ourselves and our families and contribute more to the community," Meyer said.

D.C. group largest donor

The largest contributor to Raise the Wage Nebraska came from a Washington, D.C.-based, progressive group called the Sixteen Thirty Fund, which has been described as a "dark money" organization. It gave $634,490.

Wolfe, when asked, did not identify the source of that group's funding. Another Washington-based group, the Fairness Project, gave nearly $252,400.

Nebraska Appleseed provided nearly $200,000 for the initiative. Other Nebraska contributors included the ACLU of Nebraska, Civic Engagement Nebraska, the Center for Rural Affairs and the YWCA of Lincoln.

Among those Slama thanked for helping with the voter ID initiative was Roscoe Ricketts, the governor's son, who is working with Axiom Strategies, a Kansas City-based, Republican election consulting firm.

The petition signatures will now be examined by the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office and county election commissioners to see determine how many are valid. The November ballot must be finalized by Sept. 16.

By Paul Hammel

LJS: Medical marijuana petitions submitted amid legal uncertainty of requirements in Nebraska

Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana submitted more than 90,000 signatures to the Secretary of State's office on Thursday to put a pair of initiatives legalizing cannabis for medical use before voters in November.

The campaign said it surpassed the 87,000 names it estimated it would need to qualify for the ballot, said Lincoln Sen. Anna Wishart, a co-sponsor of the petitions, but the fate of the initiatives in 2022 remains in question.

"There's no campaign in the history of the state of Nebraska who has turned in, on a total grassroots basis, this number of signatures," Wishart said on Thursday. "But we've had a lot of challenges against us."

After falling victim to a court challenge in 2020, the campaign lost two major donors this year, forcing Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana to launch a grassroots effort relying predominantly on volunteers to scour the state asking for registered voters to add their names to the petition.

In response to a federal lawsuit filed by the campaign's coordinator alleging that Nebraska's requirement that proposed ballot measures have the support of 5% of voters in 38 of its 93 counties was unconstitutional, a federal judge issued a temporary injunction in June, paving the way for the medical marijuana petitions to make it to the ballot by meeting the 87,000 signature threshold alone.

But on Wednesday, the 8th Circuit Court granted a stay on the lower court's decision to prevent Secretary of State Bob Evnen from enforcing the geographic requirement, reinstating the 38-county

rule until the issue could be considered on its merits.
Daniel Gutman, a contract attorney working with the ACLU of Nebraska to represent Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana on the lawsuit, said a hearing should be scheduled in the near future for that process to play itself out.
The stay issued by the 8th Circuit Court was “unusual,” Gutman said, and the two-sentence order makes it difficult to determine which way the judges are leaning on the issue.
The 5th Circuit Court recently granted its own stay overruling a lower court’s decision on an election case in Texas, he added, but included a 10-page order outlining its reasoning.
“It’s hard to read the tea leaves as to what that means,” Gutman said. “There have been orders in the past that are a sentence or two, and some that are much longer and more thorough. I don’t know what to make of the fact that ours was only two sentences.”
At a Nebraska State Patrol event Thursday morning, Gov. Pete Ricketts said he thought it was important to uphold the requirement for petitions to collect signatures from 5% of voters in 38 counties so that “Lincoln and Omaha don’t decide all the votes.”
This week’s roller-coaster ride has added further uncertainty to what has already been a campaign to legalize medical marijuana filled with question marks, Wishart said.
“We’re close to the raw signatures on around 38 counties,” she said, “but I won’t know — we won’t know — until they verify them.”
Many campaigns, dipping into their war chest built through big-money backers or individual donors, will have verification efforts built in to their campaign.
“We’re not one of these million-dollar campaigns, so we haven’t been able to verify anything,” Wishart said. “Typically, a campaign will come in like we did last time, and you can spend $50,000 on a verification system. We just can’t do that.”
That means Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana likely won’t know whether or not it has qualified for the ballot until the end of August, a few short weeks before the general election ballot is finalized on Sept. 16.
Petitions submitted to the Nebraska Secretary of State on Thursday will be distributed to county election officials beginning next week.
From there, counties have 40 days to verify the name, address and signature of each signer, which will then be communicated back to the state’s top election official.
On Thursday, as other petition drives were turning in boxes of signatures, Wishart and other medical marijuana organizers and volunteers were continuing to fan out across the state in places like Hamilton and Thayer counties, among others, to secure as many signatures as possible before the end of the day.
At the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 265 in southwest Lincoln, signers were trickling in shortly before the lunch hour to add their names to both petitions, which would protect doctors and patients who recommend and use cannabis, as well as suppliers and distributors.
David Swarts, of Palmyra, helped gather signatures across the Nebraska Sandhills, including in some of the state’s most rural counties like Grant and Arthur, Thomas and Logan.
In those counties, Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana might need just 40 people to sign the petition, Swarts said, which even then hasn't been easy.
Signers in those rural counties, he said, would be surprised to find out they were the 35th people to sign and would come back later with friends or family to sign. He recalled a grocery store owner who provided them a table inside an air-conditioned store to help the campaign.
“It’s a miracle to get where we are today,” Swarts said as he counted petitions signatures at the

IBEW hall on Thursday.
Wishart said the work of people like Swarts and countless others, as well as the support shown by the state has been crucial.
“The reason we’re here at 90,000 signatures with probably 5% of the budget of these other campaigns is because this is so widely supported,” Wishart said. “The issue for us is overcoming the challenges of the system that is set up to make it so hard for people, unless you have millions of dollars, to get an issue on the ballot.
“Once this gets on the ballot, I’m confident it will pass.”
If it doesn’t make it to the ballot, Wishart said she’ll try one more time to get a bill passed through the Legislature, which will reconvene in January for a 90-day session with more than a dozen new members.
Wishart’s last effort to legalize medical marijuana in Nebraska fell two votes short of overcoming a filibuster late in the 2021 session, attracting some former opponents of the bill along the way.
She said she’s privately received encouragement from many in the Legislature, including Republican senators in the officially nonpartisan body, about the work the ballot initiative has done under difficult circumstances.
“The way you win on an issue is you just don’t give up,” Wishart said. “We’re not going to give up.”
By Chris Dunker

LJS: Watch now: Voter photo ID requirement appears headed to the ballot

A requirement that Nebraskans must show a photo ID in order to vote appeared headed to the Nov. 8 general election ballot Thursday after supporters turned in petitions with 172,000 signatures gathered in all 93 counties across the state.
The voter ID measure was one of two initiative petition efforts that claimed they met the legal requirement and Thursday's deadline for November's ballot.
Raise the Wage Nebraska also said it had gathered enough signatures for Nebraskans to vote on whether the state should raise its minimum wage to $15 per hour by 2026.
The voter ID proposal long championed by the Republican Party appears certain to meet the threshold of at least 124,000 valid signatures scattered to include at least 5% of the voters in 38 counties.
At least 68 counties may meet that threshold, Sen. Julie Slama of Sterling said. Slama led the petition drive.
Speaking in the Capital Rotunda in front of a mountain of boxes containing the petitions prior to their submission to the Secretary of State's office for verification, Slama said the vast number of signatures demonstrates "overwhelming support" for the election security proposal.
Voter photo ID requirements are "a basic security measure," Slama said, which simply "makes sure voters are who they say they are."
The proposal, which would be submitted to voters for inclusion in the state constitution, would help build a barrier to any potential voter fraud, Slama said.
The petition drive was almost solely funded by Marlene Ricketts, the mother of Gov. Pete Ricketts.

The latest campaign finance report filed with the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission showed a $376,000 contribution to Citizens for Voter ID from Marlene Ricketts along with $1,000 contributed by former Republican Rep. Hal Daub of Omaha.
The petition drive had the assistance of hundreds of volunteers, Slama said.
Secretary of State Bob Evnen, a Republican officeholder, has endorsed the proposal, suggesting that it "gives the voters additional confidence in the security of our elections."
Democrats have argued that it creates an unnecessary burden for elderly, low-income and non-white voters when there is no evidence of voter fraud in Nebraska.
Most of those voters are more likely to vote Democratic, opponents have noted.
Democratic State Chair Jane Kleeb of Hastings said "adding barriers to vote is un-American."
"The good news is even if this passes at the ballot box, the Legislature will determine which IDs will be accepted," Kleeb noted.
"To ensure a broad list from campus IDs, driver's licenses and Tribal IDs are accepted, voters must send more Democrats to the Legislature," she said.
"That is our party's focus," Kleeb said.
"For thousands of Nebraska voters, voter ID would be a hindrance and impediment to freely cast a ballot," Civic Nebraska stated in a news release.
"As longtime observers of Nebraska's elections, we know this: They are safe, they are secure and they are the envy of the nation."
Civic Nebraska said petitioners used "several questionable tactics" in obtaining signatures and said it is "preparing for the next phase of opposition to this harmful initiative."
A number of Republican officeholders and party officials, including Congressman-elect Mike Flood of Norfolk, gathered with Slama at the podium in the Rotunda. Sens. Robert Clements of Elmwood and Joni Albrecht of Thurston were among them.

Raise the Wage Nebraska

Raise the Wage Nebraska had its own news conference earlier Thursday where it announced it had gathered more than 160,000 signatures on a petition to gradually raise Nebraska’s minimum wage to $15 per hour by 2026.
That's nearly double the required number of signatures it needed. It also said it had gathered names from voters in all 93 counties across the state.
If approved for the ballot and passed by voters, Nebraska’s minimum wage would increase from $9 per hour to $10.50 per hour on Jan. 1, 2023.
The minimum wage would then raise by $1.50 per year until 2026, when it would reach $15 per hour and be adjusted annually to account for increases to the cost of living.
Raise the Wage Nebraska said the increase would benefit about 1 in 5 workers in the state, affecting 150,000 people, about three-fourths of whom are over the age of 20 and one-quarter who are over the age of 40.
The campaign also said increasing the wage would benefit 60,000 full-time workers in Nebraska.
Nancy Williams, the president and CEO of No More Empty Pots, and a sponsor of the petition, said the campaign heard “loud and clear” from voters across the state that Nebraska’s low wage workers are struggling.
“Hardworking Nebraskans are choosing between paying rent and filling their cars to go to work,” Williams said. “We can do better.”
Raise the Wage Nebraska was backed by 27 organizations and politicians, including the ACLU of Nebraska, the Arc of Nebraska, Center for People in Need and Nebraska Appleseed, as well as

Omaha Sens. Terrell McKinney and Megan Hunt.
The campaign also found backing from several business owners, who said ensuring workers could earn a livable wage produced better employees, which was better for their companies.
Alma Cerretta, the owner of Mana Games and Café in the Haymarket, said as a longtime worker in the service industry she's seen how low pay hurts employees and businesses.
The café that opened in the Creamery Building in January pays its employees a starting wage of $11 per hour, above the state law of $9 per hour, Cerretta said, with plans to increase that further.
Paying a fair wage to employees makes them happy, which in turn provides better customer service that keeps customers coming back, she said.
"In opening Mana, we knew we wanted to avoid the low-pay, high-turnover, low-morale business model that is way too common in our industry," Cerretta said.
Employed in customer service, child care and education since the age of 16, Cindy Meyer said she has always enjoyed working with people.
"As I worked in education, I realized I couldn't grow in my career unless I went back to school, but low wage jobs make it extremely difficult to balance school, to care for my family, and to pay my bills," Meyer said.
At a minimum, workers should make enough to meet their needs, she added, but Meyer said there have been periods when she has had to work multiple jobs in order to make ends meet, which has forced her to be away from her family.
"So many Nebraskans are working two and three jobs just to get by," she said. "And a higher wage could mean spending more time with our kids and getting time to just live. Earning $15 per hour means I can say yes to more things."

Other petitions fail

Other petitions launched for the 2022 election ended on Thursday.
Petitions to authorize Nebraskans age 17 and older to carry a firearm without a permit, to enact a "Stand Your Ground" law and to amend the state constitution to prohibit medical mandates will not go before voters this fall, organizer Michael Connely said.
Connely said three of 10 petitions he sponsored for 2022 were set to be turned in before an appeals court re-implemented a geographic requirement on Wednesday.
Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana sued Secretary of State Bob Evnen earlier this year to prevent him from enforcing the constitutional requirement that petitions be signed by 5% of voters in 38 of the state's 93 counties.
A federal judge blocked Evnen from enforcing the rule in an order issued in June. On Wednesday, the 8th Circuit Court granted the state's motion to stay the injunction, which put the requirement back in place.
"That shot us out of the water," Connely said in an email.
By Don Walton

OWH: Petition to give Nebraska governor more authority over education fails

A petition drive that sought to give the Nebraska governor substantial oversight of K-12 education

failed Thursday.
Michael Connely of York, one of the sponsors, said the effort fell short of the signatures needed to put the proposed constitutional amendment on the November ballot.
The deadline for submitting signatures was Thursday.
The organizers had sought to replace the Nebraska State Board of Education, education commissioner and Nebraska Department of Education with a new Office of Education accountable to the governor.
Under the proposal, the governor would have had authority to appoint the director of the office, subject to confirmation by a majority of state senators.
The petition sponsors had argued the change would make the department more accountable and return some of the department's responsibilities back to local districts.
Critics, however, said the petition would have had the opposite effect, eliminating an elected board and concentrating power in the Governor's Office.
Patsy Koch Johns, state board president, said she's not surprised the effort failed.
"I believe Nebraskans know the importance of education and the importance of keeping it bipartisan as much as possible," Koch Johns said.
Koch Johns said that in states that appoint education leaders, education becomes very political.
She said Nebraska's current structure — an eight-member, nonpartisan board with four seats up for election every two years — is a more stable system.
Robin Stevens, the board vice president, said the restructuring plan was a "knee-jerk reaction" and not a good concept.
"Once again, cooler heads have prevailed," said Stevens, who is running for reelection.
"The powers of education are best left to a vote of the people, and we're going to have an election here in November."
The board ignited controversy last year when it proposed health-education standards for Nebraska schools that called for teaching elementary-school kids about gender identity and sexual orientation.
A rift grew last year between the board and the governor over the proposed standards. A watered-down second draft was criticized as well, and the board voted to indefinitely postpone adoption.
Connely, who finished a distant fifth in the Republican primary for governor in May, said a family crisis hampered his efforts to organize signature collection in critical counties after the May primary.
He said Nebraska sets a high bar for signatures, and complying with the state's 38-county rule is "like pulling out all of your molars."
The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Wednesday reversed a lower court's decision, which meant the state can enforce a requirement that initiative petition drives collect valid signatures from at least 5% of registered voters in 38 counties to make the ballot.
Connely and Robert Rhodes of Elkhorn authored and sponsored 10 initiatives, all of which failed.
"There are 10 freedom-restoring initiatives that will not be on the ballot," Connely said.
Among those failing were petitions dealing with concealed and open carry of firearms, a so-called "stand your ground" proposal and a proposed constitutional amendment to prohibit vaccine and other medical mandates in the state.
Other proposals sought to repeal motorcycle helmet laws and allow the governor to override any state rules, laws or regulations.
By Joe Dejka

Fremont Tribune: New clerk magistrate to serve in Plattsmouth

PLATTSMOUTH – Cass County Court employees will have a new leader beginning next week.
State officials announced Thursday afternoon that Otoe County Court Clerk Magistrate Cindy Cich has been selected for the same position in Cass County. Cich has worked as clerk magistrate in Otoe County since 2014. She will begin her job as clerk magistrate of Cass County Court on July 11.
Sheryl Connolly, who serves as trial court services director for the Nebraska Supreme Court, said she felt Cich would be successful in her new job.
"Cindy has been clerk magistrate in Otoe County Court for eight years and brings that knowledge to her court in Cass County," Connolly said. "Her experience is invaluable in handling the demanding and complex work of the courts."
Cich will replace Kimberly Durow as county court clerk magistrate in Cass County. Durow has been in Plattsmouth for many years and has been in several state leadership positions. She is currently serving on the education committee of the Nebraska County Court Association and is past president of the NCCA's clerk magistrate committee.
Cich will work with Cass County Court Judge David Partsch on all judicial matters. Partsch formerly served as Otoe County Attorney before being appointed by Gov. Pete Ricketts to his role in Cass County Court in 2019.
County court clerk magistrates in Nebraska are responsible for supervising, assigning and directing the work of all staff within the county court system. Connolly said the position carries a high level of responsibility for the people, paperwork and finances in the court office. She said Cich will also be responsible for evaluating potential procedural changes in Cass County and for making sure the court's administrative functions are efficient.
Cass County Court is part of the 2nd Judicial District, which includes Sarpy, Cass and Otoe counties. Cich will work with her replacement in Otoe County and Sarpy County Court Clerk Magistrate Barb Pousson. Partsch and fellow judges PaTricia Freeman and Todd Hutton preside over the three courts and direct the clerk magistrates in the 2nd Judicial District.
The Cass County Court office is located on the second floor of the Cass County Courthouse. The courtroom is located on the third floor. Cass County Court typically handles more than 5,000 cases each year. These include traffic-ticket violations, protection order hearings, time-pay agreements and misdemeanor and felony criminal cases.
By Brent Hardin

OWH: Eppley awarded $20 million for planned roadway and canopy project

The Omaha Airport Authority will receive a $20 million boost from the federal government for the next phase of its roadway expansion project at Eppley Airfield.
The money comes from a pool of nearly $1 billion awarded to 85 airports across the country by the

Federal Aviation Administration, including a $150 million pool for medium hub airports like Eppley. The $1 billion funding pool is part of the $1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill signed into law last year.

Airport Authority CEO Dave Roth and Steve McCoy, the authority's chief information and development officer, said the money will be spent to widen the roadway and add a lane next to the curb adjacent to the terminal building for a total of seven lanes.

The project's next phase, which is being designed, also includes a proposed canopy covering that portion of the road between the terminal and a garage. The canopy would measure about 94,500 square feet and provide shelter for pedestrians and vehicles dropping off and picking up passengers. According to a press release from the White House, the project will increase the roadway's capacity by 65%.

McCoy called the grant "good news for Omaha."

"It's going to increase capacity, improve throughput of vehicles through the drive there and improve the overall customer experience and customer service at Eppley Airfield," he said.

Officials expect to compete for additional rounds of federal funding for the canopy and other projects over the next four years.

Construction work on the project is expected to begin early next year. It's projected to cost about $50.5 million, although that amount could change as the design process continues.

The project will follow a $20.3 million project underway that, among other highlights, moved the airport's main entrance to the south. That project is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

The projects are part of an overall $715 million terminal modernization program. The effort is expected to include additional aircraft gates, consolidating security screening and baggage handling systems and a central utility plant.

"The sequencing of the funding and the receiving of these infrastructure dollars really play nicely into the overall scheme of our terminal program," Roth said.

The Lincoln Airport also benefited from the latest funding, with $850,000 awarded for the airport's HVAC and equipment upgrades. The FAA also awarded Council Bluffs Municipal Airport $112,500 for installation of an elevator in the general aviation terminal to provide access to the second floor.

U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer praised the news of the FAA funding.

"It's exciting to see investments from the infrastructure law go to airport projects that will make a difference for Nebraska travelers," Fischer said in a press release issued Thursday. "This is big news for Nebraskans who rely on our airports for travel, business, and to stay connected."

Fischer and Rep. Don Bacon, both Nebraska Republicans, were the only members of the state's congressional delegation to vote in favor of the infrastructure bill.

By Dan Crisler

OWH: Judge finds removal of Sarpy County treasurer was proper

A Sarpy County District Court judge has dismissed Brian Zuger's request to overturn his removal from the office of county treasurer.

Judge Geoffrey C. Hall on Tuesday dismissed Zuger's petition with prejudice and found that the Sarpy County Board provided him with appropriate due process and conducted "a fair and impartial hearing." Dismissal with prejudice means that the plaintiff cannot refile the same claim again in that court.

"This Court finds that the Board's decision was reasonable and was supported by the testimony and exhibits that were received during the evidentiary hearing," Hall wrote. "The record from the hearing contains several admissions by Mr. Zuger that he failed to carry out and comply with the duties of his office."

The board removed Zuger from office on April 13, 2021. The decision came after a state audit detailed a number of alleged accounting errors, including miscalculated tax payments to school districts, inaccurate financial reconciliations and a patchwork system of bookkeeping.

Zuger, who was elected to the post in 2018, has argued that the problems predated his tenure and that he had been working on correcting them but that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused delays. County officials said Zuger failed to remedy the issues in a timely manner even as he was aware of them.

The board installed Trace Jones as the interim Sarpy County treasurer following Zuger's dismissal. Jones won a three-way race for the Republican nomination for the treasurer position in May and will face Democrat Kim Young in the November general election.

As treasurer, Jones is the defendant in a lawsuit filed in December by the Omaha, Millard, Gretna and Springfield Platteview school districts. The districts allege that Jones has refused to pay back what the county owes the districts in tax payments — more than $6.5 million — despite recommendations from state audit officials.

By Kevin Cole

LJS Editorial, 7/8: Big Ten changes just part of evolution

It won't happen, but it's tempting to imagine a coast-to-coast Big Ten conference football championship played smack-dab in the middle of the country. Say, maybe, in Lincoln, where we happen to have a good-sized stadium available in mid-December.

Of course with no roof, no guarantee of good weather and a dozen other objections and logistical problems, it seems unlikely. But so did Nebraska joining the Big Ten 11 years ago. And, even further fetched geographically if not philosophically, is USC and UCLA joining the Big Ten.

It seems odd that institutions of higher learning, which ought to be good at math, can't even count to 10 or 12. The Big Ten hasn't had 10 since adding Penn State in 1989. And the Pac-12 will need to account for its two impending departures. You can't even trust the simple math.

There is a certain faction of diehard Husker fan for whom the N on the helmet is as much about nostalgia as it is Nebraska. It's a style of football, a type of player and legacy of dominance.

And it's not just football. Husker volleyball enjoys a heritage of success, and an even more recent one at that. Basketball, baseball, softball, wrestling, soccer, gymnastics, bowling and track and field have all tasted varying degrees of success, though perhaps not with the high profiles football and volleyball have.

Competition on the court or field has been a wild ride for Husker fans. But it doesn't compare to the business of college athletics. Big money gets spent on facilities, coaches, training and travel. Big

money gets raised through TV contracts and, now for athletes, Name, Image and Likeness deals. Traditional conference alliances and rivalries become casualties of a system that generates enormous revenue for lots of figurative players and, now, literal ones, too.

It's tempting to get wistful for the crisp autumn afternoon, the marching band, the tailgating and the simplicity of student-athletes squaring off on a football field. Volleyball may remain slightly less infiltrated with big money, but the Huskers' success and fans' enthusiasm means there's opportunity there, too.

But here's the truth: There's no turning back. There was a time -- very long ago -- that collegiate sports were about the athletes. But radio, TV, streaming, licensing, NIL, sponsorships and all manner of other money-making have changed the game.

And the change is fueled by demand -- our demand -- for winning, for watching a game or match whenever and wherever we want, for wanting to look like or eat like or bet on or in some other way be affiliated with our favorite players and favorite teams.

Husker Athletic Director Trev Alberts warned last week that the changes were just beginning. Fans can bemoan what was and is no more. Or fans can embrace the wild ride to come, where surprises don't have to wait until the last two minutes of a game.

LJS Guest column: Helping hurting warriors

Gov. Pete Ricketts recently convened an event in Lincoln to discuss the troubling rate of suicide among military veterans. Reports indicate that 87 vets have taken their life in the past two years in Nebraska alone.

Nationally, the statistics are just as troubling, with the rate of veterans committing suicide per 100,000 people nearly double that of the general population, and active duty military suicides also alarmingly high.

Some may believe that the situation should improve following the American withdrawal from wars abroad, but veteran advocates like me think differently.

In addition to lasting psychological trauma for some service members, there is reason to be concerned about lasting physiological issues that could lead to suicidal behavior down the road. Of particular concern is the exposure of thousands of service members to blast waves or other aspects of standard training and operations, resulting in undiagnosed traumatic brain injury (TBI).

The complex rubric of post-traumatic stress disorder, moral injury, substance use disorder and TBI (diagnosed or undiagnosed) is often characterized as “invisible wounds.”

In the military, mBTIs are commonplace and can be sustained in many ways, “including athletics, recreational activities, physical training, falls, motor-vehicle accidents and exposure to explosive blasts,” researchers reported in the Journal of the Alzheimer’s Association.

A 2018 study published in the journal Psychological Services found that post-9-11 veterans with a history of traumatic brain injuries were at much greater risk for considering suicide.

What’s more, service members may still be sustaining mild traumatic brain injuries in their current training. We simply don’t know at what level of typical training and operations are they sustained.

Ricketts’ advocacy and involvement in the “Governor’s Challenge” to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans and Families is commendable. That project of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration and Department of Health and Human Services provides

useful guidance for helping veterans, including addressing that many veterans are not in touch with critical services.
Yet meaningful progress will come down to greater connection at the “deck plate” and grassroots level – particularly peer-to-peer within the military community.
Put simply, service members and veterans are all too often disconnected from peers, friends, family and support systems. At the same time, vets can be burdened with moral injury from their experiences. The traumas and undiagnosed traumatic brain injury can impact and erode a person’s sense of hope.
Invisible wounds are not invisible to those who struggle every day with them or to their families who desperately try to support their loved ones. They are invisible to the rest of us and a system that is largely blind to them.
The Warrior Call initiative, a project of the Troops First Foundation, is designed to create greater connection. The campaign’s motto calls on all Americans, but especially those who have worn or are wearing the uniform, to make a call, take a call and have an honest conversation.
Pick up the phone or schedule a face-to-face and ask how a service member or veteran is doing. And, if needed, point this individual to resources, such as those hosted by Vets 4 Warriors. It may not be an easy conversation, but it could save a life, particularly if done habitually.
Calls to warriors empower families and communities to know what to look for — and more importantly what to do — before their family member or friend is in crisis. The idea is born out of years of touring military bases like Offutt Air Force Base and speaking to those in service.
Warrior Call is no panacea, but we also know from firsthand experience can it help people from descending into dangerous isolation.
To shine more attention on the need for greater connection with vets, National Warrior Call Day will take place the Sunday after Veterans Day, and we are asking for the support of U.S. Sens. Deb Fischer and Ben Sasse in gaining official congressional recognition of the effort.
Our hope is that with National Warrior Call Day on the calendar every year, and with efforts like those championed by Ricketts, Nebraskans and all Americans can help save lives. We can’t wait any longer for greater connection to our warriors.
Frank Larkin live in Annapolis, Maryland, is chief operating officer of the Troops First Foundation and chair of the Warrior Call initiative.

LJS: Hardly acting pro-life

The recent Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade is a major disappointment, to say the least! Nebraska's Gov. Pete Ricketts and many of our other elected representatives are celebrating the decision to repeal a woman's choice on this sensitive topic, a choice women do not take lightly when having to face this difficult decision.
They are claiming victory as being "pro life," yet have consistently let the people of our state down. None of them voted for any form of gun control to protect us from the mass killings experienced across the country. Ricketts sits on his pile of money and won't apply for aid our state needs to help people pay to put a roof over their children's heads.
It took much too long to expand the Medicaid coverage voters approved, leaving many citizens in financial hardship. And don't forget Ricketts opted out of the increase in emergency food stamp

benefits just four months into the pandemic. So no, don't tell me Nebraska is "pro life." Those who come from privilege and have no conscience are blind and choose to play politics over having common sense. It's disgusting.
Sharon Miller, Lincoln

AP: Nebraska Republican Mike Flood to take House seat on Tuesday

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Republican state Sen. Mike Flood will officially join the U.S. House on Tuesday when he's sworn in to fill the seat of disgraced former U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry.
Flood will take his oath of office at the U.S. Capitol.
Flood, a former speaker of the Nebraska Legislature, defeated Democrat Patty Pansing Brooks in a special election to represent the state's 1st Congressional District, which includes Lincoln and dozens of smaller communities.
Fortenberry, a Republican, resigned in March shortly after a California jury found him guilty of charges that he lied to federal investigators about $30,000 in illegal campaign contributions from a Nigerian billionaire. He was sentenced to probation and fined.
Flood will hold the seat until at least January, for what would have been the rest of Fortenberry's term. He'll face Pansing Brooks again in the November general election to determine who serves the next full term.

AP: Some states move to protect abortion from prosecutors

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Democratic governors in states where abortion will remain legal are looking for ways to protect any patients who travel there for the procedure — along with the providers who help them — from being prosecuted by their home states.
The Democratic governors of Colorado and North Carolina on Wednesday issued executive orders to protect abortion providers and patients from extradition to states that have banned the practice.
Abortions are legal in North Carolina until fetal viability or in certain medical emergencies, making the state an outlier in the Southeast.
"This order will help protect North Carolina doctors and nurses and their patients from cruel right-wing criminal laws passed by other states," Gov. Roy Cooper said in announcing the order.
The governors of Rhode Island and Maine also signed executive orders late Tuesday, stating that they will not cooperate with other states' investigations into people who seek abortions or health care providers that perform them.
Rhode Island Democratic Gov. Dan McKee said women should be trusted with their own health care decisions, and Democratic Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos said Rhode Island must do all it can to protect access to reproductive health care as "other states attack the fundamental right to choose."
Maine Democratic Gov. Janet Mills said she will "stand in the way of any effort to undermine, rollback, or outright eliminate the right to safe and legal abortion in Maine."

Their offices confirmed Wednesday that they are preemptive, protective moves, and that neither state has received a request to investigate, prosecute or extradite a provider or patient.

Their attempts to protect abortion rights come as tighter restrictions and bans are going into effect in conservative states after last month's Dobbs v. Jackson ruling in the U.S. Supreme Court, which overturned the nearly half-century-old holding from Roe v. Wade that found that the right to abortion was protected by the U.S. Constitution. The issue reverts to the states, many of which have taken steps to curtail or ban abortions.

The specific fears of Democratic officials are rooted in a Texas law adopted last year to ban abortions after fetal cardiac activity can be detected. The law lets any person other than a government official or employee sue anyone who performs an abortion or "knowingly engages in conduct that aids or abets" obtaining one.

The person filing the claim would be entitled to $10,000 for every abortion the subject was involved with — plus legal costs.

The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to hear challenges to the Texas law so far.

Bernadette Meyler, a professor at Stanford Law School, said it's not clear whether judgments against out-of-state abortion providers would hold up in courts, especially if they are not advertising their services in states with bans. But she also said it's not clear that the liberal states are on firm legal ground to protect their residents from any out-of-state litigation.

"Probably, they assume that some of the laws that they're passing won't be upheld or may not be upheld, and they're trying to come up with as much as possible in order to resist the effects of the Dobbs decision," Meyler said.

The resistance to cooperating with abortion-related investigations could hold up, though, she said. Places that declared themselves "sanctuary cities" and refused to cooperate with federal immigration investigations during former President Donald Trump's presidency were able to carry out similar policies.

In Raleigh, North Carolina, Planned Parenthood President Alexis McGill Johnson said her group and other advocates for abortion access are pushing for the protections. "Everywhere we can push the imagination of what a free and equal world looks like," she said, "we are working with those governors."

Connecticut was the first state to pass a law to protect abortion providers, patients and others from legal action taken by other states. Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont signed it in May, before the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade.

The Democratic governors of Minnesota, New Mexico, Nevada, California and Washington and the moderate Republican governor in liberal Massachusetts all signed executive orders within days of the ruling to prohibit cooperation with other states that might interfere with abortion access.

Very Respectfully,

Andrew Shelburn
Digital Communications Manager

Office of Governor Pete Ricketts

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