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To: Shelburn, Andrew
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Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jul 2022	7.45	99.00	11:00
Corn	Oct 2022	5.98	-40.00	11:00
Milo	Jul 2022	6.31	-15.00	11:00
Milo	Oct 2022	5.68	-70.00	11:00
Soybeans	Jul 2022	14.76	-65.00	11:00
Soybeans	Oct 2022	13.58	-65.00	11:00
Wheat	Jul 2022	8.52	-75.00	11:00
Wheat	Jul 2023	8.16	-100.00	11:00

TV and Radio

NTV: GOP politicians receive rejection letters to state convention
KSNB: Drama ensues during the NEGOP convention
KMTV: Drama around excluded delegates shows divide between Nebraska GOP leadership and its voters
KETV: Nebraska GOP chairman voted out, reports of 10 leadership resignations
WOWT: Nebraska GOP leadership sees changes, chairman voted out
NTV: 10 members of the NE Republican Party resign after the party hosts its 2022 GOP Convention
KPTM: Becka's Beat: Hold on loosely
NPM: Pansing Brooks tells VP Harris Abortion Fight Continues in Nebraska
KMTV: Mixed reviews: Nebraskans react to executive order to protect access to reproductive healthcare
KETV: Abortion rights activists rally at Memorial Park Saturday
KMTV: 'We can get a lot done': Filibuster-proof majority in play for Nebraska conservatives in Unicameral
NTV: Big bucks back petition drives that gathered the most signatures

Governor

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OWH: Quarrel over credentials likely at Nebraska GOP state convention, six barred from event
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Nebraska Examiner: Youngkin stumps for Pillen, GOP in first Midwest foray amid presidential buzz

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Agency

LJS: Norfolk woman sues over miscarriage in prison, alleges nurse flushed the baby

Nebraska Examiner: Senators express hope that state picks Medicaid managed care providers based on service, not least cost

State, Local and Regional

OWH: Health care sector in Nebraska works to rebuild, bolster workforce

OWH: 'It destroyed me': OPS teachers forced to move schools to fill staff shortages

LJS: Railroad workers rally in the Haymarket demanding a new fair contract

Sioux City Journal: Drought conditions continue in Missouri River basin

Opinion

OWH Midlands Voices: An abortion ban in Nebraska ultimately hurts women

OWH Column: North Omaha begins a new chapter

OWH Weysan Dun: Some concepts for gun control not as effective as some may think

OWH Michael Kelly: The new Leahy Mall changes a skeptic to a believer

OWH Midlands Voices: As elections loom, a plea for 'radical moderation'

OWH Public Pulse

1. Life begins at conception
2. Rejoice to remember
3. Public-private partnership

LJS Editorial, 7/10: A better plan for troublesome intersection

LJS Letters

1. Marking Fourth another way
2. Get smaller to refill stands
3. What motivates people to act?
4. Choice helped a mother, family
5. Tribes might offer a solution
6. Body autonomy is everything
7. No case for 25th Amendment
8. So much for accountability
9. Justices don't have total control

Sterling Journal Advocate: POLIS: Water is life in Colorado

National/Federal

Nebraska Examiner: Nebraska Democrats miffed that plum political positions have not been filled

AP: New gun law's critics could pressure states over reporting of juvenile records

AP: Biden says he's mulling health emergency for abortion access

Fremont Tribune: Ricketts appointments area residents to boards

Governor Pete Ricketts announced recent appointments he has made to fill Nebraska's boards and commissions.
Shelly J. Holzerland of Fremont was appointed to the Enhanced Wireless 911 Advisory Board.
Herbert L. Freeman of Yutan was appointed to the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority.
These appointments will provide crucial insight and expertise to their respective boards, committees, and commissions. To learn about openings and apply to serve on a board or commission, go to https://governor.nebraska.gov/board-comm-req.
By Tammy Greunke

OWH: Quarrel over credentials likely at Nebraska GOP state convention, six barred from event

LINCOLN — The Nebraska Republican Party's state convention appears likely to turn into a fractious family brawl when members gather Saturday in Kearney.
The controversy began this past week, when the party's convention credentialing committee sent letters barring six party members from attending the convention. At least some of the six have said on Facebook they plan to show up anyway and push to participate.
Matt Innis of Crete, a Donald Trump loyalist who backed Charles W. Herbster in this year's GOP gubernatorial primary, is among the six.
He got a letter Tuesday saying he would not be credentialed as a delegate because of his "vocal criticism of Gov. Pete Ricketts, the top Republican elected official in the state and leader of our party."
But Innis argued in a radio interview and on Facebook that the credentialing committee doesn't have the authority to bar him as an elected county delegate. He said he expects delegates will vote Saturday to seat him and the others.
He blamed the credentials committee action on "establishment" members of the party, such as Ricketts and Jessica Flanagain, a campaign consultant with close ties to the governor, who he said are trying to control the party and hang on to power.
"Do not let the establishment's tactics keep you from the convention," Innis wrote. "Do not be silenced. I will be there and you should also. It is a sad day when the republican establishment use liberal tactics to try to silence those they don't care for."
The state GOP responded with a statement from Pam Dingman, the credentials committee chair.
In it, she 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, noting that members "from all wings of the party" would be attending the event. "We won't, however, allow the convention to be used as a platform to help recruit or elect people who aren't Republicans."
Ricketts spokeswoman Alex Reuss said the governor was not involved in the committee's action. He "did not ask (for) or make any decision to revoke anyone's credentials at the state convention," she said.
She did not respond when asked if the governor supported the decision to revoke the credentials of the six.

Another of those barred from the convention was Robert Borer of Lincoln, who unsuccessfully challenged Secretary of State Bob Evnen in the May primary and has sharply criticized state election security.

A copy of the letter posted to Facebook showed that he was told his credentials were denied because he is mounting a write-in candidacy for governor against the GOP nominee, Jim Pillen.

Faith White of Lincoln said she got a letter barring her because she had taped a conversation with state Republican Chairman Dan Welch concerning the party's role in targeting then-Republican legislative candidate Janet Palmtag of Nebraska City.

Palmtag lost to State Sen. Julie Slama of Dunbar, who was a Ricketts' appointee. Palmtag has since switched parties and is involved in a lawsuit against the Republican Party.

Nebraska Democratic Party Chair Jane Kleeb used the credentialing kerfuffle to promote the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Carol Blood.

"The Republican Party screeches about freedom of speech and then turns around and treats grassroots leaders of their party with Putin's playbook of silencing any opposition," Kleeb said. "The way Ricketts is treating grassroots members of his own party is no different than how he governs — which is one-party, one-ideology and one-voice rule."

The GOP convention features a keynote speech by Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, who is making the trip as a favor to Ricketts, the co-chairman of the Republican Governors Association, according to the Richmond (Virginia) Times-Dispatch.

Other speakers will include Ricketts, Pillen and Congressman-elect Mike Flood, and there will be sessions promoting school choice, opposing President Joe Biden's conservation proposals and setting out a plan to reach a filibuster-proof majority in the Nebraska Legislature.

The quarrel over convention credentials is just the latest high-profile intraparty spat for the Nebraska GOP.

The 2020 race between Slama and Palmtag revealed a rift among prominent party members. Former Gov. Dave Heineman and then-Rep. Jeff Fortenberry were among the Republicans backing Palmtag. Slama, who served as a Ricketts campaign staffer before he appointed her to the Legislature, had the governor's backing and an endorsement from the GOP Central Committee.

More recently, the party saw a contentious primary race for governor. Ricketts supported Pillen while Herbster boasted about his backing from Trump, who endorsed the Falls City businessman despite Ricketts' request that the former president stay out of the race. Trump visited Nebraska less than two weeks before the May 10 primary.

Ricketts contributed nearly $1.3 million to Conservative Nebraska, a political action committee that reported spending over $1.8 million opposing Herbster and Sen. Brett Lindstrom in the Republican primary for governor.

Herbster, a Republican megadonor, also was the subject of groping allegations from eight separate women, including Slama. She was the only woman identified in an initial report by the Nebraska Examiner, which was first to report the allegations. The report caused a firestorm in the GOP with numerous elected officials calling for Herbster to quit the race.

He denied the allegations and called them a "political slam" orchestrated by Pillen and Ricketts. Both men separately rejected Herbster's claims.

Herbster and Slama are currently engaged in a dueling legal battle, with Herbster alleging defamation and Slama alleging sexual battery.

Despite calls from GOP officials for party unity in the wake of the primary, Herbster declined to endorse his former rival in the governor's race. His campaign released a statement after the primary

saying Herbster would not endorse any candidate until his lawsuit with Slama was resolved.
It's unclear if Herbster will be in attendance at Saturday's convention.
By Martha Stoddard

OWH: Nebraska Republicans oust party leader during turbulent GOP convention

KEARNEY, Neb. — Nebraska GOP Chairman Dan Welch opened the state's GOP convention Saturday by saying he hoped the event would "clear the air" in what he admitted was a divided Republican Party.
He ended the day fired.
Nebraska GOP delegates voted to oust Welch after eight years as the party chairman during a tumultuous convention that also saw one party activist be arrested outside the venue, win reinstatement as a delegate while he was still in jail, and then return to the meeting.
Welch later was replaced by Lancaster County GOP Chairman Eric Underwood through a majority vote of delegates. Underwood had introduced the motions that led to Welch's firing.
"I'm not asking you to trust me tonight … but I'm asking you for the opportunity to earn your trust," Underwood said after being chosen to finish Welch's term, which runs through this year. The state party will elect a chairman for a full term at the end of the year.
A wave of resignations followed Welch's termination, including the party's executive director, Taylor Gage, who previously served as spokesman to Gov. Pete Ricketts.
Other resignations included national committeewoman Lydia Brasch, the first and second district chair, the party treasurer and secretary, and the assistant chairman and assistant state party chair.
Welch blamed the turmoil on divisions caused by the hard-fought gubernatorial primary race, which was won by Jim Pillen. He said many believed the Nebraska GOP took sides in the election to favor Pillen, although he claims the party was "absolutely neutral."
"The only thing I wish you knew was the real information," Welch told delegates in some of his final words as chairman.
Those who supported Welch's termination said the upheaval was because some Nebraska Republicans have felt excluded and unheard by the Ricketts-led party establishment.
During the primary campaign, Ricketts endorsed Pillen. That put him at odds with fellow Republicans who supported former President Donald Trump and Charles Herbster, the gubernatorial candidate Trump endorsed. Herbster came in second behind Pillen, and so far has refused to endorse Pillen.
The division was on display during the morning's speeches from Republican leadership. Though all of the speakers shared messages touting similar conservative talking points, Ricketts and Pillen did not receive the same full standing ovations as other speakers, such as newly elected U.S. Rep. Mike Flood, Rep. Adrian Smith and Sen. Deb Fischer.
Before Welch's termination, delegates passed a resolution to amend the state party's constitution to allow delegates to immediately remove an officer with or without cause by a majority vote. Welch supporters called his termination a "coup d'etat" and criticized other delegates for trying to push thorough motions without debate.
"Go start your own party," one attendee yelled.

The tension was high from the start of the convention after the state party's credentials committee last week revoked credentials for six delegates. One of those delegates, Matt Innis from Crete, Nebraska, was arrested in the morning for third-degree assault and second-degree trespassing, according to Buffalo County Jail records.

But following his arrest, a majority of the GOP delegates voted to reinstate him, along with four others who been blocked from attending the meeting.

Their credentials had been revoked because they had spoken out against Republican leadership or nominees, including Ricketts and Pillen.

The debate over the credentials issue dragged into the lunch hour, delaying it over an hour.

Ultimately, delegates also voted to cancel several workshops that had been scheduled in the afternoon to save time for more debates on party resolutions.

The convention was supposed to end at 3:45 p.m. but continued well into the evening following Welch's removal, which came on a 204-120 vote.

Tensions rose during the credentials debate as some delegates questioned the authority of GOP leadership to block some delegates and criticized the decision as an attack on free speech. One delegate compared the GOP leadership to Soviet Russia and the British monarchy before the American Revolution.

"That's not America, and that's not the Republican Party," the delegate said.

Loud cheers and boos echoed through the convention center during the comments and GOP leaders' attempts to manage them. Welch repeatedly asked the crowd to remain civil and refrain from applauding or booing any speakers — to no avail.

Saturday evening, after the leadership changes, the delegates began considering a number of policy resolutions.

One such resolution called for increased election security. As amended by delegates on the floor, the resolution also backs counting ballots by hand under continued video surveillance.

By Erin Bamer

AP: Nebraska Republicans fire chairman at tumultuous convention

KEARNEY, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Republicans fired their longtime party chairman at a tumultuous state convention that highlighted divisions within the party driven by activists who support former President Donald Trump and want to take the party further to the right.

After convention delegates voted to remove Chairman Dan Welch on Saturday, most of the other state party leaders, including Executive Director Taylor Gage, resigned, the Omaha World-Herald reported.

Republicans were sharply divided during this spring's gubernatorial primary battle between two conservative candidates: the eventual winner, Jim Pillen, and businessman Charles Herbster, who was endorsed by Trump. The race to replace Gov. Pete Ricketts, who couldn't run because of term limits, became more controversial after eight young women accused Herbster of groping them. Herbster denied the allegations, describing them as a politically motivated attack. He filed a defamation lawsuit against one of his accusers, state Sen. Julie Slama, who responded with a lawsuit

of her own accusing Herbster of sexual battery.
Herbster has refused to endorse Pillen, who is still expected to win in November over Democratic state Sen. Carol Blood because the state strongly favors Republicans.
The divisions within the party were exacerbated in the days before the convention after the party refused to issue credentials to six activists who had been critical of Pillen or Ricketts. One of those delegates, Matt Innis of Crete, was arrested for third-degree assault and second-degree trespassing after he tried to enter the meeting Saturday morning. But he was allowed to participate later in the day after he and most of the other activists were reinstated.
The debate over the credentialing issue was tense at times, with some delegates criticizing the decision to withhold access to the activists as an attack on free speech.
Welch, who led the party for eight years, said he thought the disputes were related to the hard-fought gubernatorial primary that saw Ricketts and many established Republican leaders endorse Pillen. Welch said many in the party seemed to believe the state GOP sided with Pillen during the primary, but he maintained that the party remained neutral even though Ricketts spent aggressively to support Pillen.
"The only thing I wish you knew was the real information," Welch told the convention before he was removed.
Welch was replaced as chairman by Lancaster County GOP Chairman Eric Underwood, who had introduced the motions that led to Welch's firing. Underwood asked delegates for "the opportunity to earn your trust" as he leads the party through the rest of this year. The state GOP will elect a chairman to a full term near the end of this year.
Not long after electing Underwood, the delegates voted in favor of a conservative resolution calling for election ballots to be counted by hand under video surveillance.

Nebraska Examiner: Old-guard conservatives and Trump populists take Nebraska GOP from Ricketts

KEARNEY, Nebraska — A motivated group of old-guard conservatives and Trump-era populists took over the Nebraska Republican Party on Saturday, ousting and replacing state GOP Chairman Dan Welch. The move sparked at least a dozen resignations from GOP leaders.
By Saturday night, the state's dominant political party had lost its chairman, executive director, two of three district chairs, national committeewoman, three assistant state party chairs, secretary, treasurer and lawyer, among others.
Party critics had pressed for change, with several saying they sent a message to Gov. Pete Ricketts and party leaders that the state GOP is more than a "party of one." Cheers erupted when the amendment passed allowing delegates to fire GOP leaders. The crowd was quieter when Welch lost his vote.
Ricketts had no immediate comment.
Old complaints
Some Republicans have complained for years that the governor and state GOP had taken sides in open races with Republicans running against Republicans. Several cited the legislative race between State Sen. Julie Slama and then-GOP activist Janet Palmtag.

Others pointed to the May GOP primary for governor. Welch said delegates believed bad information that the GOP had taken sides. Ricketts spent aggressively to sway the governor's race toward his pick, University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen, who won the primary.

Motivated opponents

Some of what happened Saturday was telegraphed leading up to the convention. The Freedom Coalition held a 125-person rally Friday for people who wanted new leadership in the state GOP. Most who attended raised their hands when asked if they were delegates.

Successful floor fights to credential five of six Republicans that the state GOP had rejected from attending offered additional clues. One of the six, Lancaster County GOP activist Fanchon Blythe, helped lead the takeover after being allowed into the convention Saturday.

Another one of the six, unsuccessful U.S. Senate candidate Matt Innis, was arrested on suspicion of trespassing and assault for trying to enter the meeting hall before the group voted to let him in. After being released from Buffalo County Jail, Innis walked into the convention hall to applause.

Innis said after the vote, "Pete (Ricketts) brought this on himself" by letting the state party and staff change the rules and interpret the party constitution to achieve their ends. Trying to reject the six delegates before the convention "didn't help," he said.

The party's state convention had high off-year turnout of more than 600 people, including 346 delegates at its peak. The people who took over the party plan to quickly push it farther to the right, including adopting a resolution calling for counting election ballots by hand.

'I wanted change'

Sarpy County Republican delegate Robert Anthony, who supported the changes, said many rank-and-file Republicans felt they were not being heard by the Ricketts establishment. He said he thought his group's "rebellion" might die on the vine.

He said people who assume the group had help from friends of former President Donald Trump are wrong. Many, but not all, of the people who pushed for change are fervent supporters of the former president, he said, but the group was "organic."

"I voted 'Yes' on Welch because I wanted change," Anthony said. "There's just a movement within us. Some of it is frustration with RINOs (an acronym meaning Republicans in Name Only). People are tired of these milquetoast Republicans."

It's happened elsewhere

Nebraska's troubles with Republican Party conflicts are not unique. GOP activists also took over the Arizona Republican Party in 2019, and the Nevada Democratic Party lost its leadership to a similar revolt by progressives in 2021.

Support for Trump was a factor in some delegates' decisions, as was support for Trump's pick for governor, Charles Herbster. A few supporters of State Sen. Brett Lindstrom, another Republican candidate for governor, said privately that they wanted Ricketts to pay for attacking their candidate in negative campaign advertising.

Many in the winning group wore red dot pins that several said signifies they believe Trump's unproven allegations about the 2020 election, although independent experts and Republican-led audits have confirmed that Trump lost to President Joe Biden.

New leader

Delegates chose Lancaster County Republican Party Chairman Eric Underwood as the GOP's next chairman. Underwood said he wants to bring the party together to support Republican candidates, including GOP gubernatorial nominee Jim Pillen and GOP House candidates.

Underwood said he knows he needs to repair a lot of division in the party. He told delegates he

would “earn your trust as people and conservative Republicans.” He said he would help elect GOP candidates and define “what we are” with the party platform.
“We can only do it together,” he said.
Underwood will finish the rest of Welch’s term, which runs through the end of this year.
Some Republicans expressed angst about Underwood. Former 2nd District Chair Nancy McCabe pointing out that Democrats have made major gains in Lancaster County. Democrats hold the Lincoln Mayor’s Office and a supermajority on the Lincoln City Council.
James Wright, a former staffer for Republican 2nd District Rep. Lee Terry, who was there when Ron Paul supporters took over the Douglas County GOP, argued that Welch had done a lot to pull the party together. Others highlighted Welch’s work to get Republicans in the Legislature.

Welch speaks

Welch, when he realized he didn’t have the votes to remain as state GOP chairman, told delegates that the state party would be strong with or without him. He said the same in a followup interview but said it might take time to get the party back on its feet financially.
“I hope the party doesn’t suffer for this, and we have to come back together,” Welch said.
“Republicans have a great majority in the state, and the state will remain red because Nebraskans are common-sense conservatives. That always carries the day.”
Replacing Ricketts
The move to new management reduced Ricketts’ influence over the state party apparatus, which could spur financial risk for the state GOP, depending on how party donors react. Ricketts is the party’s top elected official and top donor.
The governor has been personally responsible for about 75% of the party’s private funding, which was a common gripe by critics of the party, including Patrick Peterson of the Nebraska Freedom Coalition. Welch was the party’s second-best fundraiser.

Resignations followed

GOP Executive Director Taylor Gage, the governor’s former spokesman, confirmed his resignation Saturday. He had been the subject of complaints from some county party chairs who said they didn’t like how party officials in Lincoln treated them.
Other party members who left included National Committeewoman Lydia Brasch, Treasurer Rod Krogh, Secretary Paul Burger, Assistant Party Chairs Darlene Starman, Trenton Snow and former State Sen. John Kuehn, General Counsel Dave Lopez and 1st District Chair John Orr.
“My true passion is campaigns,” Starman said. “I serve a role in both the Pillen and the Mike Flood campaigns, and I look forward to getting Jim Pillen and Mike Flood elected in November. I have plenty to do to keep me busy.”
National Committeeman J.L. Spray, who did not resign Saturday, said it was too soon to tell what to make of what happened in Kearney.
“Ask me next week,” he said.
Peterson said he was pleased with what party delegates did, but not with how some former party officials reacted.
“It’s unfortunate people fled the party,” Peterson said. That proves they didn’t want unity.”

GOP infighting

Nebraska Democrats celebrated the Republican infighting.
“Even Republicans are sick and tired of Ricketts using his father’s money to buy elections,” Nebraska Democratic Party Chair Jane Kleeb said. “The majority of Nebraskans want our government to work for the people.”

The abrupt shift in party leadership left some candidates wondering privately how to interact with new party leadership and questioning how much help the party would be able to provide. Several said they don't know Underwood.
Lancaster County GOP members, including Blythe, described Underwood during the meeting as someone who listens to all Republicans, not just those that they like.
Many Republicans said they feel caught in the middle. Several said the last time tensions in the state GOP were this high was in the years 1996-2000, when some Republicans wondered whether the party had taken sides in a U.S. Senate primary and gubernatorial primary.
"I'm sick to my stomach about it," Omaha City Councilwoman Aimee Melton said. "I have friends on both sides who have been part of this party a long time. It's like when your parents get divorced, and you have to pick one to live with, but you love them both."
By Aaron Sanderford

LJS: Don Walton: GOP coup in Kearney raises questions for November

A coup in Kearney.
The sudden takeover of Nebraska's Republican Party by conservative activists — many or perhaps most of whom appear to be strong supporters of Donald Trump — was a lightning strike.
It's no longer the party led by Gov. Pete Ricketts and that's a stunning overnight reversal of Republican politics in the state.
Perhaps it's also a reminder that the governor is down to his last six months in office when elected leaders acquire the awkward title of lame duck and power begins to invisibly seep away.
Since I wasn't in Kearney, I don't have the on-the-scene presence that is so important in understanding how this happened and exactly what it means. But the on-the-scene reporting was excellent, so it's clear that this was a well-planned and well-executed takeover.
The coup in Kearney raises some questions:
* Will the party be as helpful, or useful, in supporting Jim Pillen's gubernatorial bid now as it had been prepared to be?
It appears that many of those engaged in the takeover supported Charles Herbster over Pillen in the Republican gubernatorial primary race.
Robert Borer of Lincoln, who received 72,150 votes in a bid for the Republican nomination for secretary of state in the May primary election, was seated at the convention after being denied credentials by the party. He is now a write-in candidate for governor.
* In the wake of mass resignations of key state party officials following the takeover and the split with Ricketts, will the party be able to be an effective fundraising and organizational machine?
Vince Powers says no.
Yes, yes, he is a Democrat, but he has had the experience of having been a state party chairman and understands the fundraising challenges along with the nexus with national party funding tools.
"It is doubtful new NEGOP leadership can raise money nor will national repubs trust NEGOP w/big dollars," Powers tweeted in response to the news from Kearney.
These are questions, not answers, at this point.

* * *

Doug Bereuter put country above party when he was a member of Congress and he still does today. I'm not sure there's much of that left in the Congress today.

The priorities often appear to be the next election — and perhaps the next Supreme Court vacancy.

It's probably not all that fair to single out Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, but he's one senator who has made it absolutely clear that country isn't at the top of his list.

"The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president," he said in 2010.

McConnell blocked Senate consideration of Obama's nominee to fill a U.S. Supreme Court vacancy when there were roughly 11 months left in his presidency and then rushed through confirmation of President Trump's nomination of a justice a week before Trump was defeated for reelection.

And now he has declined to say whether the Senate would even consider a nomination to the court by President Biden during the last two years of his presidential term if Republicans gain control of the Senate in the 2022 general election.

That's breathtaking.

* * *

Norfolk Mayor Josh Moenning, who has championed downtown riverfront development in Norfolk, reenergizing the city and making it more attractive for young new residents, will not be pursuing the legislative seat opened by the election of Mike Flood to Congress.

"I think being mayor of a first-class city in our state is one of the best jobs in politics," he wrote on Facebook last week.

"A) You can have an immediate impact and see positive change happen before your eyes.

"B) You can engage directly in the work of community building, bringing new ideas, new ways of doing things and new voices to the table.

"C) You can do all this outside the hyper-partisan environment that dominates both federal (certainly) and state (ever-increasingly) government and so often stifles forward movement."

Gov. Pete Ricketts will appoint a senator to serve the remaining two years of Flood's term, and then District 19 voters will elect a senator to a four-year term in 2024.

* * *

Finishing up:

* A bust of Ted Sorensen, who earned his law degree at the University of Nebraska in 1951, will be dedicated at the Law College on Aug. 26.

* Secretary of State Bob Evnen and participants in a Nebraska agricultural trade mission met with the prime minister and the foreign minister while they were in Bulgaria.

* Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha, an outspoken and energetic state senator, has been chosen to participate in a Council of State Governments leadership development program. She's one of 48 legislators selected from 32 states.

* Doesn't it begin to seem increasingly possible that the names of Donald Trump, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris may not be on the presidential ballot in 2024?

By Don Walton

Nebraska Examiner: Youngkin stumps for Pillen, GOP in first Midwest foray amid presidential buzz

KEARNEY, Nebraska — Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin spoke Saturday to the Nebraska Republican Party, in an appearance close enough to Iowa that Fox News and the Washington Post wrote about a potential White House bid.

Youngkin, in an interview with the Nebraska Examiner, said he is focused on doing the job he was elected to do. He said he came to Nebraska because Gov. Pete Ricketts asked him.

“I think that there’s a lot of speculation around presidential stuff, and therefore my head’s down, I’m paying attention to Virginia,” he said. “I’m helping out other governors.”

Ricketts helped Youngkin

Ricketts co-chairs the Republican Governors Association, which helps elect GOP governors. Youngkin said Ricketts helped him win in 2021, including by acting as an informal campaign adviser.

Youngkin pledged to support Jim Pillen, Nebraska’s GOP nominee for governor and attended a luncheon fundraiser for Pillen in Omaha. Youngkin said he hopes to help Republicans in a handful of other races, including a few Virginia congressional races.

Many conservatives see Youngkin’s win in Virginia as a model for harnessing the energy of base voters who love former President Donald Trump, without turning off suburban voters, who do not.

“It’s not an ‘either-or’ moment,” Youngkin said. “It’s an ‘and’ moment. I just hugged everybody. … In Virginia, we had independents and Democrats come with us.”

“We need everybody in order to march to where we think we need to go, which is a better America.”

He and pundits credited his focus on engaging parents in public education for reversing Virginia’s drift to Democrats, driven by voters in the growing suburbs of Washington, D.C.

Much of the language now being widely used in Republican circles about critical race theory and coronavirus closures in education resonated in Virginia during Youngkin’s race.

Red energy

Youngkin said during his speech Saturday that residents of a Virginia border city watched businesses in Tennessee thrive while Virginia businesses closed under Democratic leadership.

Youngkin said his campaign’s focus was on low taxes, great schools, empowering parents, supporting law enforcement, protecting constitutional rights and making government work.

The governor said he spoke with Ricketts and heard that the 600 people attending the Nebraska GOP convention Saturday was a record crowd. He said he sees that same red energy in Virginia.

“I’m really, really optimistic about where we stand right now,” Youngkin said of GOP momentum. “This is a chance for us to recognize that we have to stay together.”

By Aaron Sanderford

LJS: Pansing Brooks tells vice president she'll fight to protect abortion rights

Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln, the Democratic nominee in November's rematch with Republican Congressman-elect Mike Flood of Norfolk, told Vice President Kamala Harris on Friday that she and other supporters of women's abortion rights will continue to "fight with passion and

determination" to protect them.
The recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling overturning abortion rights guaranteed in its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision would usher women "back to the Dark Ages," Pansing Brooks said during a meeting in Washington with the vice president and a number of other state legislative leaders called to discuss action in the wake of the court's decision.
The decision has "spread fear, sadness and rage," Pansing Brooks said.
"The government does not deserve a seat at my daughter's exam table," she said.
"And banning abortions does not end them," she said.
Harris met with legislators from Indiana, Florida, South Dakota, Nebraska and Montana in a session livestreamed online.
A White House announcement said the invited legislators are "fighting on the front lines to protect reproductive rights."
Harris described the court's decision as "unthinkable" and said it "took a constitutional right away from the women of America."
Although it is still uncertain, the Nebraska Legislature may be called into special session by Gov. Pete Ricketts later this year to consider legislation to ban abortion in the state as a result of the court decision.
Pansing Brooks, who will be term-limited out of office at the end of the year, would be a participant in the special session.
Last month, Pansing Brooks lost a special election contest with Flood called to determine who will serve the remaining six months of former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry's term in office representing eastern Nebraska's 1st Congressional District.
Flood and Pansing Brooks will meet again on the Nov. 8 general election ballot as their party nominees to serve a new two-year term beginning next January.
Flood will be sworn into the House seat Tuesday.
Fortenberry resigned following his conviction on charges that he lied to federal officials about illegal foreign contributions to his 2016 reelection campaign.
By Don Walton

LJS: Norfolk woman sues over miscarriage in prison, alleges nurse flushed the baby

A Norfolk woman who was sent to prison while six weeks pregnant and miscarried is suing the state and three prison nurses, including one who she says flushed her 13-week fetus down the toilet in her cell.
In the lawsuit initially filed in York County District Court and later transferred to U.S. District Court in Lincoln, attorney Maren Chaloupka alleged the state was negligent for the miscarriage.
She said the state had a duty of care to her client, Haleigh Gerard, to perform appropriate evaluations, request consultations and give orders for maternity patients, "rather than sending a miscarrying mother back to her prison cell to miscarry her baby alone."
On Jan. 28, 2020, less than a week after Gerard arrived at the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women in York to serve a 3- to 4-year term on an attempted drug delivery charge, she reported to a

nurse at the infirmary that she was experiencing bleeding and cramping.
Chaloupka said Gerard was given a maxi pad and told to return to her housing unit and keep an eye on the bleeding.
Over the course of the next seven weeks, Gerard, then 24, reported concerns multiple times about continued spotting and asked to see a doctor because she was nervous about the pregnancy, her first.
It prompted an appointment at the York Medical Clinic on Feb. 20, where a follow-up appointment was scheduled March 19.
Chaloupka said a week before the appointment, infirmary staff learned Gerard had been cramping for two days and documented an abnormal fetal heart rate. Twice that night, she was taken to the infirmary for persistent bleeding.
Staff contacted the York Medical Clinic, which scheduled an ultrasound.
But on the night of March 13, Gerard returned to the infirmary in a wheelchair, still bleeding, with abdominal cramps and nausea. And nurses sent her back to her cell, the attorney said.
"It was evident that she was experiencing a miscarriage. Still, defendants provided neither medical nor emotional support for Haleigh in this extremely upsetting event, which was the traumatic end of her first pregnancy," she said.
Chaloupka said early March 14, 2020, one of the nurses went to Gerard's cell and found her physically and emotionally exhausted, her skin yellow and her underwear saturated with blood. She'd been vomiting and told the nurse to look in the toilet.
Chaloupka said Gerard had delivered the baby in the toilet overnight.
She said the nurse then flushed the baby down the toilet, which the state denied in its answer.
Chaloupka said Gerard said she didn't want to go to a hospital, though it was obvious she needed outside medical evaluation.
About 12 hours later, she went to the infirmary with continuing cramps and vaginal bleeding. She was emotional and weeping because of the trauma of her miscarriage, Chaloupka said. Her abdomen was painful to touch. She was given ibuprofen and sent back to her cell.
The state claims board denied her tort claim in January.
In the lawsuit, Chaloupka is seeking compensation for pain and suffering and punitive damages against the nurse who allegedly flushed the baby for her alleged reckless and callous indifference to Gerard's constitutional rights.
The nurse was a contract employee for the Department of Correctional Services, according to a state prison spokeswoman.
In an answer, Assistant Nebraska Attorney General Jennifer Huxoll said Gerard was provided with reasonable care and any damages were the result of "unrelated, preexisting, or subsequent conditions" unrelated to employees' conduct.
Huxoll also said immunity prevents the state and the nurses from being sued.
By Lori Pilger

Nebraska Examiner: Senators express hope that state picks Medicaid managed care providers based on service, not least cost

LINCOLN — Five health insurance companies have submitted bids to handle the state's Medicaid managed care program, a contract that now costs the state nearly $3 billion a year.

Two state senators voiced hope Friday that the winning bidders would be selected on superior service and not least cost, which has caused problems in past state bid selections.

Two to three of the companies will be announced as winning bidders in late August, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

They will provide physical health care, behavioral health care, pharmacy and dental services to about 340,000 low-income and disabled Nebraskans.

The bidders are:

- Community Care Plan of Nebraska Inc., d/b/a Healthy Blue
- Medica Community Health Plan
- Molina Healthcare of Nebraska Inc.
- Nebraska Total Care Inc.
- United Healthcare of the Midlands Inc.

Three of those companies — HealthyBlue, United Health Care and Nebraska Total Care — currently share the five-year state contract.

The department said the bids will be scored based on specific and general expertise by Medicaid leaders. Two rounds of bidders' questions have been answered prior to the July 1 deadline to submit bids.

State Medicaid Director Kevin Bagley said that a goal is "to improve our members' and providers' experiences by building on previous successes and making thoughtful changes in response to stakeholder feedback."

Some state legislators have expressed concern about the state's Request for Proposals (RFP) process given multimillion-dollar mistakes over "bad bids" that were approved for services including the state's Medicaid managed care program and for two computer systems.

In 2019, the state made what would later amount to a $158 million mistake in awarding a contract to oversee the state's child welfare system to St. Francis Ministries of Kansas. That financially troubled nonprofit's $197 million bid was later revealed to be horribly low, requiring $158 million more in funding.

State Sen. John Arch of La Vista said he was encouraged that five bids were received for the Medicaid managed care contract.

"What we're looking for are companies that can demonstrate that they can improve the health of the population that they're managing," Arch said, and not because they are the "cheapest" bid.

He said he was very encouraged by the procurement process so far.

Omaha Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh, who led criticism of the St. Francis contract, said she hopes the state isn't focused on picking the lowest bids but by considering which services will be covered and not covered, at the cost they're offering.

"I don't want another situation of an underbid that hurts people," Cavanaugh said.

Arch said that a consultant has already been hired to delve into the state's procurement process, as required under a bill passed by state lawmakers this spring.

The consultant will offer recommendations for improvement in a report due Nov. 15, he said.

By Paul Hammel

OWH: Health care sector in Nebraska works to rebuild, bolster workforce

As high school students, Camila Delgado Garcia and Joerdy Flores-Garcia both were interested in health care careers.

So the Omaha youths signed up for a health and wellness internship offered by the Latino Center of the Midlands and CHI Health. Their internships helped them decide what they wanted to do.

Both became certified nursing assistants through the program, which covered their costs. Both will be freshmen at the University of Nebraska at Omaha this fall and have their sights on becoming dental hygienists. Garcia-Flores plans to apply to work through college at CHI Health to help cover expenses.

Delgado Garcia said a lot of careers are available in health care that people don't know about. "If you don't like one, there's hundreds more that go into it," she said.

The program is one of a growing number of initiatives in Nebraska aimed at helping attract and connect young people to health care careers. The larger goal: Grow the state's health care workforce.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the state had long-running shortages of many types of health care professionals. The pandemic has exacerbated those shortages, causing some health care workers to retire early or leave the profession. Others left for more lucrative traveling medical jobs. Hospitals, long-term care facilities and home health and hospice outlets all have struggled to maintain adequate staff.

Jeremy Nordquist, president of the Nebraska Hospital Association, said hospitals still are seeing a staff vacancy rate of somewhere between 10% and 15%, with some as high as 20%. Some larger systems still rely on a significant number of traveling medical professionals.

On the positive side, he said, some travelers are starting to return to their former employers. Rates charged by medical staffing agencies for travelers have begun to inch down. Anecdotal reports from large systems also indicate that some retired nurses are reassessing the impact of inflation on their finances and returning to the job.

But just as worker shortages have helped drive wage increases in other industries, employers in the health care sector also are seeing increased labor costs. Many hospitals and nursing homes have increased wages and offered bonuses to recruit and retain staff. They also have had to pay more for travelers to fill needed positions.

Those higher costs, combined with inflation, increased medication costs and other expenses are putting pressure on the bottom lines of hospitals, nursing homes and home health and hospice providers.

Reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid, which make up 60% to 70% of a typical hospital's revenue, are set to increase only slightly, Nordquist said. But internal surveys of members indicate that labor costs for hospitals were up nearly 20% over the past two years, while supplies were up 15%, utilities 8% and medication 30% to 40%. Those numbers align closely with a national report prepared earlier this year by the Kaufman Hall consulting firm.

"It's a tough situation right now," Nordquist said. "We thought COVID would be the worst of the worst and we'd all be able to catch our breath ... But hospitals are in a real tough spot now financially, and it's going to take some creative work to pull our way out of this. The big driving piece

of it really is the limited workforce and the costs needed to keep up with workforce costs."
Many of the state's hospitals are trying different models to make nursing in particular more attractive and bring people back in. Meanwhile, health systems and health colleges are stepping up efforts to recruit young people to fill the pipeline, including offering more scholarships.
State lawmakers earlier this year put a share of the state's federal COVID relief dollars toward initiatives to bolster the health care workforce. The Legislature allocated $5 million to help rural health care providers pay off college loans, $5 million to provide scholarships for nursing students and $60 million for a rural health complex on the University of Nebraska at Kearney campus, a joint project with the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Also included was $60 million for capital projects at community colleges to grow the state's workforce, including in health care.
Those efforts are important, Nordquist said, because the state will face a tremendous demographic challenge over the next 10 years as practitioners in the baby boom bracket retire.
According to the Nebraska Center for Nursing, Nebraska will face a shortage of 5,435 nurses by 2025.
A 2022 health care workforce report by UNMC, based on 2021 data, indicates that the number of nurse practitioners in the state had increased significantly and the number of pharmacists increased modestly since 2020.
However, rural areas of the state still lack needed health care professionals, including physicians. Nicole Carritt, director of the UNMC Office of Rural Health Initiatives, said the report doesn't capture the full impact of the pandemic. She said shortages have been exacerbated since the data was collected.
UNMC has two long-running, successful pathway programs in collaboration with UNK and state colleges focused on bolstering the rural health workforce, Carritt said. Studies show recruiting students from rural and underserved areas and training them close to those communities increases the likelihood that they will practice there.
Nordquist said the Legislature is conducting an interim study under a measure introduced by State Sen. Terrell McKinney, who represents part of North Omaha, to look at ways to grow and diversify Nebraska's health care workforce.
The hospital association, he said, also is considering ways to collaborate with nursing schools to make sure they don't lose applicants. The goal would be to make sure that applicants who are turned down by one nursing college are provided information about other programs or are enrolled in a program where they can earn an associate's degree.
Selene Espinoza, a surgical assistant with CHI Health, said she got involved in the Latino Center/CHI program last year when it added the CNA certification option. She wanted to make sure Latino students were exposed to health care settings and could see people like themselves in those workplaces.
She talks them through the training required for various careers, from CNAs to physicians, as well as their earning potential. She takes them on tours of hospitals and clinics, where they meet health professionals, don gowns and gloves and get their hands on equipment, including a surgical robot.
Espinoza moved to the United States from Mexico as a preteen. As a student at Omaha's Bryan High School, Espinoza said she didn't think a career in health care was possible because of language and financial barriers. Her parents hadn't gotten a higher education and didn't know the U.S. education system. But she was exposed to career options in a program through Midlands Hospital. She now serves on the hospital's community board and is a member of the Douglas County Board of Health.
"I feel like I've walked the path and can do a little bit of guidance," Espinoza said, noting that the

pandemic also highlighted the need for health care workers who could speak patients' languages and understand their cultures.
Ricky Solis, a UNO junior who joined the program this year, had thought to one day work for an international health organization. But he has shifted his focus to local public health after working for the Central Public Health District in Grand Island during the pandemic and for the Latino Center/CHI program.
"I'm working on the stuff I've studied in college," he said.

Bolstering the existing workforce

While the staffing crunch for hospitals has eased since the last pandemic peak, hospitals still are busy, in part because they're catching up with delayed care.
Sue Nuss, chief nursing officer at Nebraska Medicine, said the health system had 450 employees out with COVID at the peak of omicron surge in January and February. Both that and the number of patients ill with COVID have decreased significantly, although COVID continues to sideline some employees.
Since then, the health system, like many others, has increased compensation packages for bedside nurses. Like other health systems, Nebraska Medicine still employs travelers, although Nuss said it has fewer than at the pandemic peak. It also added 130 nursing school graduates and 90 nurse residents this spring.
But with projections indicating that the number of nurses never will be adequate, Nuss said, the health system is trying out different care team models. It has brought licensed practical nurses back to inpatient units, a role it had eliminated years ago, and also has some paramedics working in those units.
Rather than having one nurse alone oversee four or five patients, for instance, that nurse might instead cover eight or nine patients with the help of an LPN, nursing assistant and paramedic, Nuss said. While stretching nurse-to-patient ratios can impact quality of care, having a team allows nurses to delegate some tasks. By working together, a team may be able to care for more patients.
Tim Plante, chief nursing officer for CHI Health, said that health system also has focused on incentivizing nurses who have stayed and working to get new ones in the field.
A number of health care workers who left to travel have started to return, he said. So far, 100 practitioners, from nurses to respiratory therapists, have joined the health system's new internal travel pool. Some have come from across the country.
CHI Health also is trying several new programs aimed at increasing job flexibility, Plante said. Under a weekend option, instead of working every third weekend, the local standard, a nurse could work every weekend or every other weekend in exchange for additional pay. That option works for a lot of nurses with families who want to arrange child care around their shifts.
The health system also is incentivizing nurses to learn new skills and work in different areas — say, the intensive care unit in addition to labor and delivery — and to work in different metro-area hospitals.
CHI Health also has two pilot programs that involve bringing pharmacists and occupational therapists onto floors to help nurses with tasks such as administering complex IV medications and helping patients with strength training.
Russ Gronewold, president and CEO of Lincoln-based Bryan Health, said the system is down to 470 open positions from a peak of 550 during the last pandemic peak. It's also down to 110 travelers of all types from a high of 170.
In the short term, Bryan has adjusted wages, offered retention bonuses and restored team-building

activities such as company picnics and zoo nights. Health system officials are trying to figure out how to accommodate workers' desire for flexibility, which has increased as wages have increased.
The health system also has started an internal traveler pool, Gronewold said, and has been able to get some employees who had been traveling elsewhere to commit to moving among Bryan's hospitals in Lincoln, Grand Island, Kearney and Central City.
Gronewold said he also sees a role for more technology. Bryan is using artificial intelligence to extend staff in some areas, including working with a Lincoln software firm to monitor patients at risk of falling with 3D cameras and a fall-predicting algorithm. That has freed about 30 people a day who otherwise would be sitting with patients.
Other systems monitor incoming test results and alert nurses if interventions are needed right away and pre-sort lab results and CT scanner images to help practitioners pick up on any problems more quickly.
"These are things that make their job more efficient, but it doesn't replace the person who does the job," Gronewold said.
Ivan Mitchell, CEO of Great Plains Health in North Platte, said his hospital also is bringing back LPNs, medical assistants, certified nursing assistants and paramedics.
If a task doesn't have to be done by a nurse, he said, "we're having it be done by someone else." The same generally goes for physicians.
Mitchell and Gronewold said Nebraska practice standards required some professionals to perform tasks that could be done by others with lesser training. Making such changes would require legislation, and hospital officials are discussing the idea with state lawmakers.
"There are no projections that suggest it's going to be anything but a long-term issue," Gronewold said of the shortages. "Simply increasing the folks going to nursing school by 10 or 20%, that still doesn't even address 50% of the shortage. We have to come up with other programs, of how do we use technology, how do we use other individuals."
Great Plains has taken a different approach to recruiting. Mitchell said the health system began recruiting nurses from the Caribbean, the Philippines and other nations after he arrived more than six years ago. The nurses all have passed the certification exams that allow them to practice. Since 2018, the hospital has employed about 175 international recruits.
Many move on after their three-year contracts run out, Mitchell said. But some stay. And while they're in North Platte, their children go to school there. They pay rent and shop in the community. If they move elsewhere in the U.S., they remain part of the larger pool of health care workers.

Nursing home challenges

Meanwhile, both nursing homes and home health and hospice outlets face workforce and financial challenges of their own. A side effect, Mitchell said, is increased length of stay for patients in hospitals because nursing homes don't have the staff to take them. Some nursing homes have closed.
Jalene Carpenter, president and CEO of the Nebraska Health Care Association, said a lot of nursing homes still are ending up in outbreak status due to COVID, meaning a single resident or employee has tested positive. Some employees have left due to requirements for testing and protective gear, which are stricter than in other industries.
A survey of 759 nursing home providers in mid-May by the American Health Care Association indicated that 98% of homes are having difficulty hiring staff. In addition, 73% are concerned about having to close their facilities over staffing woes.
In Nebraska, home operators have not only raised wages but also are looking at other strategies to

grow their workforce, Carpenter said. At the national level, the association recently advocated for shortening the wait time for people in the country who are on certain visas to be eligible to work.
Still relatively new to the industry is an online labor platform for long-term care facilities called KARE, which is in place in Omaha and Lincoln. It works a bit like an Uber program for staffing and is "seeing incredible success," Carpenter said.
With KARE, facilities can post available shifts, and caregivers interested in work can select the ones that work for them — say, a four-hour shift on a Tuesday. Employers, rather than staffing agencies, set the wages. If the employer likes the worker, they can offer to hire the person.
"Those are the things that give me hope," Carpenter said. "Innovation comes from times of crisis, and we are seeing (people) coming up with new and innovative things."
Janet Seelhoff, executive director of the Nebraska Association for Home Healthcare and Hospice, said agencies are having to turn away patient referrals because they can't staff enough nurses and aides. That comes in the face of growing demand for such services.
"Need is greater than it's ever been," she said, "but at the same time, there are challenges in staffing." Costs have gone up with inflation, and home health and hospice agencies can't compete with the hiring bonuses and benefit packages hospitals and other health care settings are offering.

Building the pipeline

Meanwhile, the push continues to get more people into the health care pipeline, with the help of a host of programs, scholarships and loan repayment programs. Colleges and universities continue to reach out across the state to build programs in more locations.
Deb Carlson, president of Nebraska Methodist College, said the pandemic could have scared people away from the field, but it hasn't.
"People are saying they want to go into health care because they want to make a difference, they want to make an impact," she said, acknowledging that publicity about salary increases and loan payback programs also have helped spur interest. For those who don't want to work directly with patients, plenty of careers are available that aren't at the bedside.
Employers now are focused on how they can get students in the system even before they have degrees and are offering tuition assistance to help them continue their education once they're in the door, Carlson said.
Nebraska Methodist College, for instance, offers a free student nursing assistant program that allows people 16 and older to study to become nursing assistants at Methodist Hospital and get paid, on-the-job training with a two-year work commitment. The college also began offering its first full-ride scholarships last year for traditional bachelor's of nursing students.
Carlson said the college also is doing more to reach out to minority communities and has a free master's program for existing minority providers who want to go into nursing education, which also is a shortage area.
People who earn degrees in health care have no trouble finding jobs, she said. This year, for the first time, even junior nursing students were being hired.
Gronewold said Bryan is automatically offering jobs to junior nursing students at Bryan College of Health Sciences. The health system also is offering more tuition reimbursement for employees seeking additional education and just rolled out a program covering half the tuition for the children of employees who have been with the system for three years, as long as they stay with the system.
Over the course of the next few years, said Dr. Bo Dunlay, dean of Creighton University's medical school, Creighton will increase the number of graduating physicians from 600 to 1,000. The university also has created two physician assistant programs that eventually will add at least 100

practitioners to the workforce each year. The university also accelerated bachelor of nursing programs in Phoenix and Grand Island.
"It's created an opportunity for growth," he said of the expansion. "But the important thing is we've got clinical partners there whose missions are aligned with ours, and that's what makes it so successful."
By Julie Anderson

OWH: 'It destroyed me': OPS teachers forced to move schools to fill staff shortages

The majority of Meghan Witty's past three years in the Omaha Public Schools were filled with exhaustion, sacrifice and uncertainty as working conditions deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic.
She started teaching social studies at North High School in 2019. By the end of 2020, with staff shortages hurting the school, she had taken on additional responsibilities, becoming an AP teacher, dance coach and speech coach.
She said she had less than half of her plan time the entire 2021-22 school year. Just a few months ago, before what would be her last days at North, she had an anxiety attack so severe that paramedics thought it was a heart attack. She returned to school that Monday, because "there were no substitutes."
Witty was one of more than 70 teachers who recently learned they're being reassigned to other buildings as the district tries to address its staff shortage. OPS officials have said that with more than 200 unfilled positions across the district, the reassignments are necessary to help ensure each classroom has a teacher.
While reassignments happen every year, Robert Miller, president of the Omaha Education Association, said the district's method of selecting and notifying teachers for reassignment was "questionable."
"When we had discussed with OPS, they did tell us that there will be reassignments based on student numbers. We asked for a deadline to be met, so (reassignments) didn't mess with summer school and for teachers to be compensated," he said. "Sadly, they pulled notifying teachers in the middle of the summer."
Some reassigned teachers have said they didn't know they were going to be moved until they received a phone call from OPS human resources out of the blue with their new school for the 2022-23 year.
"The only reason I knew it was coming is because teachers spread rumors faster than high schoolers. I said, 'No, I teach four different classes, how are they going to replace me?'" Witty said. "Getting the call on July 1 ... it destroyed me."
After 22 years in OPS and 17 years at Buffett Middle School, Andy Staberg received a call June 30 from a district official who told him that he was being reassigned to Monroe Middle School. A physical education teacher at Monroe said earlier this year that the school lost more than 60% of its staff after teachers transferred or resigned this spring.
Staberg, a technology teacher, had just been hired as Buffett's assistant boys basketball coach in

June and worked summer school that month “without a thought” of being reassigned, he said. He had started at Buffett in 2005 after he was reassigned from Monroe, but he said that process was completely different.

“We were informed that they were going to have to cut a team of teachers because they weren’t going to have enough students,” he said, recalling his reassignment in 2005. “They brought in the seventh grade teams of teachers and went through this process with us. Based on what the reaction of some of the veteran teachers were, being newer, I offered to transfer because I didn’t want to force someone to leave who doesn’t want to go.”

Miller said this process is how he has experienced reassignments: Building principals will meet with the grade level team that needs to cut numbers and will ask for volunteers first. Sometimes decisions were based on seniority, he said.

Charles Wakefield, chief operations officer for OPS, told school board members at a June 6 meeting that the process would be similar, even though it’s more difficult to reassign secondary teachers based on their certifications.

“As we go through that in high school especially, you start getting into certifications. ‘Well, I was fully staffed math but as I reduce sections, I don’t need this math teacher.’ So then HR would come in and talk to the math teachers, seek their input, seek principal input, ask for volunteers first and then work with them to assign them to a school that does need a math teacher,” he said at the meeting. “It is heavily involved with communication, it’s heavily involved with input, both the principal and the teacher level.”

Board member Margo Juarez told Wakefield she was concerned that forcing teachers to move to a different school could impact staff morale.

“I do hope that it does work out that teachers are going to be able to volunteer and that maybe we’re going to have a sufficient number to make the changes that we need, but I am concerned about it being forced upon them,” she said at the meeting.

Juarez said she hopes that if a teacher is forced to leave a school, that the district would be flexible with them in the future and might even let them return to that school if staffing improves.

“We actually have done that in the past, and we’ll continue to do that,” Wakefield said at the meeting.

In an interview with The World-Herald, Wakefield said elementary reassignments did go through a process in which officials asked for volunteers. But because middle school and high school teachers are so specialized, it “became much more difficult to ask for volunteers.”

He said it was up to building principals to choose how they wanted to handle the reassignment process and each principal approached it differently. He said that while some asked for volunteers, others worked with teacher leaders, deans or curriculum specialists to identify who would move.

This year is also different because reassignments are happening on a much larger scale than normal, he said.

“Principals worked with groups of staff, but they didn’t necessarily talk with the staff that were being reassigned. But they did work in a collaborative process to try to best identify schedules as they went forward,” he said. “And teachers knew this was happening. But I fully understand that you never expect that phone call to come to you. We all think that we’re OK, that it’s going to happen to somebody else. And it’s a shock to get that call. That’s why we want to support teachers.”

Amanda Leet, who had been at OPS for 14 years and was a reading teacher before being reassigned, said her principal didn’t know she was going to leave before she got the call.

Leet was reassigned from Bryan High School to McMillan Middle School after receiving a “cold call”

from OPS human resources. She chose to resign.
“I want to make sure that it’s super clear, because some people are just pissed that they’re having to move to a low-income school, but I am not,” she said. “I am pissed at how they continue to treat their employees who are dedicated and ... are there because they want to be, which, if you’ve been in a school, you know that is priceless.”
Leet said she wouldn’t have resigned if she had been treated differently in the reassignment process. She said the only communication she’s received from the district is about her certification, which could be suspended since she resigned after the district’s deadline.
OPS is allowed to reassign teachers to different locations, according to this year’s contract. If a teacher resigns after the resignation deadline, which was earlier this spring, the district has to report it as a breach of contract, Wakefield said.
He said the Nebraska Department of Education then decides if the contract was actually breached and what discipline, if any, should be assigned. A teacher’s certification could be suspended for a year or more.
Though he hasn’t resigned, Staberg said the situation makes him feel like he’s just a number.
“There are dates you have to resign by, dates if you want to retire, you have to submit paperwork by a certain date,” he said. “You have to do all these things by certain dates and if you don’t, you’re stuck. And not having this (reassignment) information before now, I am now stuck.”
Wakefield said he doesn’t anticipate there will be any more reassignments before the start of the school year. The number of reassignments is still in the range of 70-75, he said.
It’s normal for some teachers to be reassigned once school starts and student enrollment numbers become official. He said the district is trying to “work with teachers to help them through this process.”
“We understand that frustration, we get it. I would be frustrated, too,” he said. “We want to support our teachers. But ultimately, we have to meet the needs of our students. So that’s the most important thing we do each and every day.”
Miller said the teachers union is trying to secure compensation for the teachers who were reassigned to help with relocation expenses.
“This is disruptive and disconnecting because teachers have relationships with their school community,” Miller said. “Students and school environments will be negatively impacted.”
By Lauren Wagner

LJS: Railroad workers rally in the Haymarket demanding a new fair contract

Rail workers from all over the Midwest gathered in the historic Haymarket on Sunday to call attention to worker safety and pay concerns.
As the nation recovers from a pandemic and navigates a supply chain crisis and inflation surge, U.S. railroad workers say they have been pushed to the brink.
"Every rail worker here has a story about something the railroads do to save a nickel, despite their quality of life and dignity at work," said Ash Anderson of Railroad Workers United.
Sunday's rally of about 50 people at Seventh and Canopy streets was meant to show that railroad

workers are united in their demands for higher wages, better benefits and more tolerable working conditions.
It comes after years of failed contract negotiations and a week before the July 18 deadline for President Joe Biden to create an emergency negotiating board to avoid a possible nationwide strike.
Last month, after nearly three years of contract negotiations, U.S. rail workers entered into a 30-day cooling-off period that will expire next Monday.
Matt Weaver, assistant to the president of Brotherhood of Maintenance Employees Division, said if no agreement is reached, Congress would be forced to intervene.
Before it gets into the hands of lawmakers, Biden would be required to appoint a Presidential Emergency Board, which would make recommendations for a new contract.
While no local railroad workers said Sunday that they intend to strike, they, along with the National Carriers Conference Committee, which represents more than 30 U.S. railroads, would have to agree to the board's recommendations.
"We have good faith President Biden will elect a PEB soon, but we're worried the NCCC might reject its recommendation because they're more concerned with profit," Weaver said.
Railroad workers received wage increases in 2019, but pay isn't the only issue, they say. Healthcare concessions and working conditions are also on the table.
During the rally, rail workers shared stories of their labor shortages on the job and being incentivized to go to work ill in fear of being fired.
Several attendees of Sunday's rally shared a common message: They need the community's support to obtain a new fair contract.
"I want people to call their congressmen, senators and local representatives, and let them know that these people are underpaid, they haven't had a wage increase in over three years, and they will strike if they need to" said Mary Gunther of Grand Island, the wife of a railroad worker.
By Evelyn Mejia

Sioux City Journal: Drought conditions continue in Missouri River basin

SIOUX CITY, Iowa — Despite an uptick in runoff in June, water conservation measures in the Missouri River reservoir system will continue through the rest of the summer, and likely into 2023, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced Wednesday.
Though flow support service will be increased slightly for downstream navigation, ongoing drought conditions and low water levels in the system's six reservoirs will lead to the navigation season being three days shorter.
"While soil moisture has improved in some areas over the last month, drought conditions persist across much of the Missouri River basin, and mainstream reservoir levels remain below normal," John Remus, chief of the corps' Missouri River Basin Water Management Division, said in a news release.
June runoff into the basin above Sioux City was 5.2 million acre-feet, 94% of average, raising the 2022 runoff forecast to 20.0 MAF, which is 1.7 MAF higher than last month's forecast but 78% of average. Average annual runoff is 25.8 MAF.

Heavy rain on the upper Yellowstone River and mountain snowmelt led to runoff 110% of average into the Garrison Dam reservoir in North Dakota. Runoff into the river between Gavins Point Dam near Yankton, South Dakota, and Sioux City also was 136% of average.
Water releases from Gavins Point Dam currently are 22,500 cubic feet per second and will be adjusted during the summer for flow support. Normal summer releases from Gavins Point are about 33,000 cfs. The corps expects winter releases to be at the minimum rate of 12,000 cfs.
By Nick Hytrek

OWH Midlands Voices: An abortion ban in Nebraska ultimately hurts women

Over a month ago, we started a Facebook group, Save IVF Nebraska, in anticipation of Roe v. Wade being overturned. It was meant to be a place for concerned physicians, patients and citizens to connect and elevate the discussion surrounding infertility and the potential effects that a complete abortion ban could have on the practice of infertility.
As a group we were horrified at the prospect of a ban, but with Roe still firmly in place, we knew that access to safe and appropriate reproductive care in Nebraska was not in imminent jeopardy.
What we feared has become a reality. The world is a different place than it was on June 23, 2022. The Dobbs decision not only upended the practice of medicine, more importantly, it stripped women of their liberty and a fundamental right to privacy.
We are physicians. We educate. We heal. We empower women and men, helping them create the families they so deeply desire. We are not politicians, nor do we want to be politicians. But as concern in the public and medical community has grown, we felt compelled to act to protect our patients, our profession and all of Nebraska.
To our amazing patients, know that we will never stop working to ensure access to fertility treatments in this state. We have met with two state senators hoping to highlight the dangers of legislating medical care. Our goal was to educate and voice your concerns as well as our own and those of our colleagues. The ability to build a family in a way and at a time that is appropriate for the involved individuals is a right that should not be taken from any Nebraskan family. Though we advocate for you, we cannot stop at fertility. We must advocate for all women. To that end, and to all the people of Nebraska, know that our goal is to prevent any abortion ban.
To the Nebraska politicians who have insinuated that we are helping to draft this legislation, please stop. This is not the case. The meetings that we have had with conservative senators should not be interpreted as collaborations or our acceptance of a watered-down version of LB 933. We are not helping to draft an abortion ban nor will we in the future.
To our fellow physicians and the Nebraska Medical Association, please stand with the American Medical Association, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Society of Reproductive Medicine, the Maternal Fetal Medicine Society, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Physicians, and the American Psychiatric Association and do what's right. Advocate for your patients and for all women. Tell our Legislature that they have no right to enter our exam rooms, ORs and emergency departments. Demand that they let us do the jobs that we love and are trained to do.

We will not support any abortion ban that is brought before the Nebraska Legislature. It is contrary to who we are as physicians, women and mothers. We recognize that some of our colleagues may not agree with us. We recognize that some of our patients may not agree with us. To those of you who don't, please believe that we are still the physicians you trusted to make your dreams of a family a reality. We are asking you to trust us again. Any abortion ban in this state will ultimately hurt all women. Do not let this happen.
Meghan B. Oakes, M.D., F.A.C.O.G
Stephanie L.F. Gustin, M.D., F.A.C.O.G
Abigail A. Delaney, M.D., F.A.C.O.G
Elizabeth S. Constance, M.D., F.A.C.O.G
Elizabeth A. Weedin, D.O., F.A.C.O.G

OWH Column: North Omaha begins a new chapter

On July 4, of this year, I turned 80 years old. I have lived, witnessed, experienced and even studied, the evolution of my beloved North Omaha, for my entire years. I have studied the fact that we have had two lynchings in Omaha, we've experienced the devastating effects, of racism, discriminatory practices, redlining, segregated schools, lack of access to public and private accommodations, and — because of race — the killing of 14-year-old Vivian Strong, by police in 1969.
Yet despite that, I've witnessed the glory of North Omaha, and its wonderful history, heritage and culture. We have produced, some of the greatest people in America, in every aspect of life: athletics, (God bless our beloved, late Marlin Briscoe), professions, the arts, music, and in business, all of which are too numerous to mention, but worthy to be noted in the aggregate.
In the past, North Omaha was vibrant in every way: in church, in commerce and community. While we were a poverty-stricken community, we were rich in our culture and in our social fiber and family. When discriminated against, in most areas within our community, we produced our own alternatives. Two examples: When White mortuaries refused to bury Blacks, we created generationally successful mortuaries of our own. And when the daily newspaper produced only bad and biased news about African Americans in North Omaha, we created our own, evidenced by the long-standing Black newspaper, the Omaha Star.
The focus of this article is the historical economic devastation that this community experienced for generations, and in my lifetime. My generation, in large percentages, left Nebraska as soon as we were mature enough or we had completed our high school or college educations. We left Nebraska to seek opportunities that were not available to us in our hometown. I could be counted in that number. But when we left, we drained our beloved North Omaha of our valuable brain power, our financial potential, and our talents and skills. The community was destroyed repeatedly, from the killing of Vivian Strong, to the tumultuous times in the 1960s, and more. These destructive events devastated our community and its vibrancy. The north freeway cut a slice through North Omaha and caused unrepairable damage to our culture and economics. The resulting accumulation of these facts left North Omaha economically devastated. Evidence of that devastation that can still be seen in the community.
I provide a service called the North Omaha Legacy Tours, where I tour our key corridors and teach about our culture and history. Part of that education involves the residual, and currently present

remains from years of economic devastation. That story is made more horrible by the fact that, in spite of all of the wonderful people and history and culture, there has been 40 to 50 years of economic neglect and disinvestment in North Omaha.

I submit to you that today North Omaha is turning the pages of history and beginning a new chapter. That chapter promises the long-awaited, thoughtful and substantial, albeit not yet comprehensive, development . I submit the evidence of this new chapter, 10 wonderful, small to large, economic development projects that are at different stages, but are all essential to the new chapter of development in North Omaha:

1. The total renovation of the northwest corner sector of 24th and Lake, where the organization Fabric Spark has totally renovated and upgraded the buildings from Lake Street to Ohio Street, and a new music and arts venue called North Omaha Music and Arts (NOMA).
2. The Union for Contemporary Arts, which provides wonderful programming related to the arts and more, on the southeast corner of 24th and Lake.
3. On the southwest corner of 24th and Lake is the new and exciting Revive Center, which includes a place for meetings, lunch and events.
4. On the northeast corner of 24th and Lake, is the exciting and dramatic plan for a $40 million multi-use complex, built by African American businesswoman Carmen Tapio's Forever North Development.
5. The planned, new Black Box Theater Complex, to be named after Shirley Tyree, being built by the Union for Contemporary Arts, and will provide a new live theater space, a block off of on North 24th Street.
6. The newly established, community-owned financial institution in the historic Carver Savings and Loans building space, half a block off 24th Street. This project came from the partnership of Willie and Yolanda Barney, Martin and Lynnell Williams, and American National Bank.
7. The Small Business Complex, developed by the Omaha Economic Development Corporation, that includes small spaces for businesses, a restaurant, and more, in the newly developed Fair Deal Village at 24th and Burdette.
8. The potential new and wonderful development in the Omaha OIC building, which has sat empty for nearly 20 years, and is now promised to provide an exciting venue.
9. Three significant renovations of the old Carnation Ballroom at 24th and Miami, the historical Spencer Street Barber Shop at 24th and Spencer, and the new and exciting Culxr House, at 24th and Wirt.
10. There is also the potential expansion and visionary implementation at the Malcolm X Foundation, 34th and Evans; the exciting and responsible boxing gym, developed by Bud Crawford, at Sprague and John Creighton Boulevard; the potential new development of the Ernie Chambers Museum on 20th and Ames Streets; and the North Omaha Trail, which is currently under construction.

We celebrate all of these wonderful segments led by the Carmen Tapio's Complex Development. Together, they represent wonderful new components that make up what is becoming North Omaha's new and exciting future. There are still many needs still unaddressed. Hopefully, our progress will be joined by recognition and respect for the greater community to provide comprehensive but thoughtful, major investment, as partners and collaborators in this new chapter.

Preston Love Jr. is a longtime Omaha civic engagement activist who also teaches black studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. These views do not represent those of UNO.

OWH Weysan Dun: Some concepts for gun control not as

effective as some may think

Gun control has recently been a hot topic. The wrangling over how to solve the problem of gun violence is not likely to end any time soon because people on both sides of the debate have sincerely held beliefs supported by data.

Today's column highlights some challenges and offers a path forward from my perspective as a supporter of Second Amendment rights and a career law enforcement official who recognizes the need to reduce gun violence.

I grew up in the rural Midwest where guns are common. I remember wilderness campouts where adult leaders discretely carried guns to protect us from poisonous snakes and rabid animals. I learned firearms safety and marksmanship as a pre-teen. I got my first gun, a .22 caliber rifle, when I was 14 years old and many of my peers had similar guns. Despite the prevalence and availability of guns, gun violence was nonexistent and shooting a person was unthinkable.

I know the heartache caused by the criminal use of firearms. I started and led a gang task force in Hartford, Connecticut, after a 5-year-old girl was killed when rival teenage gangs engaged in a shootout on a busy street. I have attended funerals of police officers, some of whom I personally knew, who were shot and killed in the line of duty. I have personally been shot at (fortunately not injured), so I know the danger posed by guns in the wrong hands and I support reasonable gun controls.

There is much disagreement regarding the extent of the problem. Data from the Gun Violence Archive (GVA) showing there have been more than 250 mass shootings so far this year is often cited. The GVA's definition of a mass shooting is four or more victims shot regardless of the extent of injury. To be sure, any gunshot wound causes suffering but conflating fatalities with injuries, some of which may be minor, is misleading. Northeastern University professors James Fox and Jack Levin published a research study this year in the journal Homicide Studies, entitled "Mass Murder in America: Trends, Characteristics, Explanations, and Policy Response." This research showed nearly half of the mass shootings documented in the GVA resulted in no fatalities, less than one-quarter involved multiple deaths, and only 7% reached the threshold of a mass killing (defined by the FBI as four or more victim fatalities).

Fox and Levin differentiate between mass killings, mass shootings and random mass public shootings (as opposed to domestic violence or shootings while committing another crime). Their research concludes the numbers have remained relatively level over the past 15 years, with an average of approximately 30 mass killings annually, roughly two dozen of which were committed with guns. The annual number of random, mass public shootings has ranged from three in 2020 to 10 in 2018, with an average of less than six. While any death is a tragedy and mass shootings of any type are distressing, it is important to understand the nuances in the definitions, data and analyses.

The 1994 attempt to address mass shootings by banning "assault weapons" and large capacity magazines is generally viewed as having mixed results at best. A 1999 National Institute of Justice (NIJ) paper by Roth & Koper titled "Impacts of the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban: 1994–96," says the ban may have contributed to reducing the gun murder rate, but it failed to reduce the average number of victims per incident or multiple gunshot victims.

A 2013 memo authored by NIJ Deputy Director Greg Ridgeway stated that gun buybacks are ineffective as generally implemented, the 1994 ban on high-capacity magazines had limited effectiveness, and the complete elimination of assault weapons would not have a large impact on

gun homicides. Similarly, a 2013 study by Northeastern University's James Fox in the journal Homicide Studies, concluded the 1994 ban did not make a significant difference. Fox's data showed from 1976 to 1994, an average of 18 mass shootings occurred each year. During the ban, 1995 to 2004, the average was 19 incidents per year. After the ban, through 2011, the average went up to 21.

Rather than controlling specific types of guns, a more effective way to address gun violence might be focusing on changing behavior. I believe contributors to the recent spike in gun violence include the "grievance mentality" embraced by some, and the current tendency to emphasize individual rights rather than personal responsibility and respect for the rights of others. Renewed attention to traditional values and focus on the behaviors that contribute to gun violence, rather than trying to control the instrument used, might be more productive.

The scourge of drunken driving deaths was addressed by enacting severe penalties for driving while intoxicated and holding people accountable for supplying alcoholic beverages to obviously inebriated individuals, not by banning motor vehicles or alcoholic drinks. There are also concerted efforts to educate the public on the dangers and illegality of drunken driving as well as messaging to make it socially unacceptable. According to Responsibility.org, drunk driving fatalities have decreased 45% since 1982 while overall traffic fatalities declined only 12%. Moreover, drunk driving fatalities decreased 83% for people under 21.

A similar approach to gun violence would entail increasing the penalties for committing gun crimes; holding accountable those who provide a gun, or allow easy access to a gun, used in a crime; and enacting laws to curtail straw purchases of guns for persons prohibited from buying guns themselves. A concomitant public service messaging campaign to highlight these initiatives would be beneficial, and a renewed societal emphasis on self-responsibility and respect for others might help ameliorate several societal issues in addition to gun violence.

Weysan Dun is a retired veteran of the FBI and served as the special agent in charge of multiple FBI field offices around the U.S., including the Omaha field office, which covers Nebraska and Iowa.

OWH Michael Kelly: The new Leahy Mall changes a skeptic to a believer

In early 2019, city officials and philanthropists turned dirt in a groundbreaking for the renovation of the downtown Leahy Mall. I was not an enthusiast.

The mall was already our postcard park, its lovely lagoon and footbridge captured in countless photos — including one above my desk at home and another on the opening inside page of "Uniquely Omaha," my 2016 book for The World-Herald.

When I learned of renovation plans that would fill in the sunken park and raise it to street level, I got a sinking feeling.

As the newspaper's city hall reporter from 1973 to 1979, I wrote numerous articles about the demolition of late-1800s structures (the city took 104 parcels by eminent domain) and the creation of the mall. Later, I wrote columns about it through the years. Shoot, now the city was starting over?

After the groundbreaking, I said to civic leaders Ken Stinson and Mogens Bay, co-chairmen of the redevelopment: "Hey, Ken and Mogens, thank you for all you do for our community. But I don't think

I like this."
Stinson, former CEO of the Kiewit Corp., chuckled and said, "I know you don't." (Before I retired, I had quoted city planners from the 1970s who also regretted the draining of the lagoon and the raising of a mall that had received national design awards.) Bay good-naturedly added: "Give us a couple of years. You'll like it."
Well, last weekend I walked among an estimated 50,000 attending some of the four-night grand-reopening events. Like most everyone else, I liked it. A lot. The new Leahy Mall is almost magical. And the $300 million-plus price tag is split, with $250 million-plus from private donors and $50 million from taxpayers. How many communities would turn down that deal?
Though I retired to my Cincinnati hometown, I stay in close touch with my long-adopted hometown, Omaha. I followed the renovation's progress, impressed by the workers' skill and the Office of James Burnett redesign.
The night before the July 1 reopening, I heard the Omaha Symphony rehearsing. The construction fences of the past three years had been removed, but security guards kept folks away. In a lame attempt at name-dropping, I mentioned to a guard that, ahem, I knew Stinson and Bay. Sorry, the guard said, but nice try.
Next thing I knew, Ken saw me and we both waved. We first met more than 30 years ago when our daughters were high school volleyball teammates. He motioned me to come in. Before long, Tony- and Grammy-Award recipient Kristin Chenoweth said hello. The original Glinda the Good Witch in Broadway's "Wicked" had walked across the street from the Farnam Hotel to rehearse with the orchestra.
The next night she sang like an angel and told charming, witty stories. Omaha wouldn't be a good place for a "Real Housewives" TV series, the native Oklahoman quipped, "because y'all would nice-yourselves to death: 'I'll get the coffee. No, I'll get the coffee. No, I'll get it.'"
The next night, country music star Brett Eldredge sang up a storm. He told of his arrival in Nashville — at first, singing for two or three people, and later upgrading to a motel lounge. Saturday night at the Leahy Mall, thousands sang along with him.
The third night, 46 students from 21 Omaha-area schools performed "Fame the Musical" as part of the UNO Summer Musical Theatre Academy. And on the fourth night, the symphony played patriotic music for the Fourth of July, followed by fireworks.
Of course, the mall's Performance Pavilion, a covered amphitheater, isn't booked with national acts every weekend, and the spectacular light show of the reopening won't always be on display. But there's more to come.
The renovated Leahy Mall kept its iconic "jumbo" playground slides and added a few more. The area is beautifully landscaped, with six large sculptures, kids' play areas and other attractions — including, yes, water features on the east end.
It gets better. Soon, the elevated Leahy Mall (partially opened in 1977) will connect with future improvements to the Heartland of America Park (1990) and to Lewis and Clark Landing (2003) along the Missouri River — a 72-acre trifecta. Overseen by the Metropolitan Entertainment and Convention Authority (MECA), it's hoped the area will become an activity mecca.
Gene Leahy, a Marine who served in Korea and became an attorney, a judge and mayor of Omaha from 1969 to 1973, pushed a "return to the river" movement that has led to many improvements. They included the Central Park Mall, as it was first called before it was renamed the Leahy Mall in 1992. (He died in 2000.)
From Mayor Gene to Mayor Jean (Stothert), city officials of both parties as well as a generous

philanthropic community over the past half-century — and taxpayers, too — have helped change the face of Omaha.

We removed a lead-smelting plant and junk yards along the riverfront and have added the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge, the CHI Health Center Omaha convention center and arena, the Charles Schwab Field ballpark and the Holland Performing Arts Center, to name a few. Coming soon is a Mutual of Omaha skyscraper and streetcar lines.

Yes, we appear to be short one lagoon, and I do miss it. But as Kristin Chenoweth might say — she did say something to this effect — it's a beautiful mall, y'all.

Michael Kelly is a former Omaha World-Herald columnist and the author of "Uniquely Omaha: 101 Things to Know About the Big O."

OWH Midlands Voices: As elections loom, a plea for 'radical moderation'

With the passing of the Fourth of July and the summer sun growing brighter, election season is officially upon us. Campaigns are in full swing, attack ads abound, and primary elections are taking place all over the country.

What an incredible opportunity for us to do something radical this election season: to listen to each other. To reject hyperpartisanship. To build relationships with those whom we disagree. To come together to find solutions for our communities and our nation.

In other words, to conduct ourselves with charitable and countercultural moderation. Since our politicians don't seem to be willing to lead the way on this, we can take the lead in spreading "radical moderation" throughout our communities.

I'm not talking about moderate politics. I'm not talking about centrism. You can (and should) be passionate about issues that affect your life and the lives of your neighbors. I mean moderating our discourse in a way that views our political opponents' positions charitably and refuses to assume malevolent motives. The challenges American voters identify as the most important ones to solve in the upcoming election — inflation, the economy, gun violence, abortion, and gas prices — are difficult enough when we aren't accusing each other of being evil, naïve, lazy and stupid.

Radical moderation means refusing to attribute those ill motives to the "other" guys. It might even mean sitting down with them over a cup of coffee and trying to understand their perspective better.

Radical moderation means consuming your favored news, pundits, analysis and social media with the same kind of skepticism you bring to disfavored sources.

Radical moderation means turning down the temperature when the issue, the moment and the culture want you to turn it up.

One useful tool may be the Ideological Turing Test, a concept introduced by economist Bryan Caplan. The general idea is that a partisan invited to explain his political opponent's views should be able to do so in a way that neutral judges could not tell that the partisan doesn't actually believe those views. We are terrible at this.

Liberal friends — your conservative neighbor most likely does not "enjoy" school shootings, and she is probably not trying to turn our country into a theocracy. Conservative friends — your liberal neighbor most likely does not favor a "government takeover" of your personal property, nor is she

interested in “indoctrinating” your children. The next time you feel your blood pressure rising, consider employing this Turing Test thought exercise as a moderating influence.
This election will pass. And the next one. Politicians will come and go, but our families, neighbors and communities will remain. This election season, let’s be radically moderate in our discourse — for their sake and our own.
Jay Jackson is an Omaha attorney, U.S. military veteran with multiple overseas deployments, and author of “Decent Discourse: Saving Your Country by Loving Your (Wrong?) Neighbor.”

LJS Editorial, 7/10: A better plan for troublesome intersection

Sometimes rising prices can be a good thing.
That was the case when the city was forced to abandon its much-criticized plan for an elevated roundabout at the intersection of 14th Street, Old Cheney Road and Warlick Boulevard because costs for the plan rose to $44 million, some $8 million more than the original estimate.
So “hell’s halos,” as project opponents tagged the original plan, are in the scrap heap, replaced by a more cost-effective, traditional, signalized intersection proposal that was unveiled at an open house last week and is subject public comments through Thursday.
The new plan will keep the at-grade intersection that would serve Warlick Boulevard to the southwest, 14th Street to the north and Old Cheney to the east. A section of Old Cheney Road would be removed between the connection to Warlick and Salt Valley View while a new connection is proposed between Old Cheney and Warlick on the southwest side of Christ Place Church.
What all that means is a new roadway design that will improve safety while increasing traffic flow at one of Lincoln’s busiest – and during rush hours, slowest moving – intersections. It now handles more than 40,000 vehicles per day.
That number is expected to grow by 30%, to 52,000 by 2045. That’s another reason why a “new” intersection is warranted and, frankly, should have already been constructed.
After all, in July 2015, seven years ago, the elevated roundabout was chosen as the winning design in a competition seeking solutions to the problems that were already vexing the intersection.
But the project never moved far enough forward to break ground, and a 2019 petition drive threatened to the put the project on the ballot, where the odds were very high that it would been rejected by the voters.
2019 was also the first time it was shelved by the city when the cheapest bid for construction came in 7% higher than the $36 million estimate. The continued increase to $44 million sealed the design’s fate, sending the city back to the drawing board after seven years of bottlenecks and accidents at the troublesome crossroads.
The new plan is estimated at $29.3 million, which is far from cheap, but a bargain, and far less of a headache, than the $44 million elevated roundabout proposal.
It’s less-complicated traditional design also should make it easier and quicker to complete. While still in its design phase – some details of the plan might well be tweaked before final approval -- city officials expect construction to start sometime next year and be completed in 2025.
Area traffic will undoubtedly be snarled during construction. But the South Beltway, which is

scheduled to open May 1, around the time the new project is likely to start, should ease some congestion.
The beltway will probably offer some relief to the traffic troubles at 14th and Warlick, but the real, long-term fix will come when the new, wisely revised project is completed three years from now.

Sterling Journal Advocate: POLIS: Water is life in Colorado

Water is life in Colorado, something we hold sacred. Sacred to our health, to our land, and to our livelihoods. We use it to grow crops and raise livestock that are exported around the world, we use it for our thriving outdoor recreation industry, we use it to live our lives. What we don't do is use water as a weapon for political games.
So Colorado farmers, ranchers and officials were disappointed when one of our own neighboring governors began making meandering, baseless claims about Colorado's compliance with the South Platte River Compact, a legally binding water agreement between our two states. And using those baseless claims as a reason to build a canal in Colorado, no less. The compact has existed for nearly 100 years, and in all that time Colorado has never failed to meet our obligations.
Yesterday, I visited the site of this potential canal, and spoke with local farmers and ranchers about what its construction would mean for their land and their livelihoods. These are men and women who have dedicated their lives to agriculture, and have done their part to support our strong economy and industry.
We are also disappointed in the way Nebraska's Governor has mischaracterized — whether deliberately or ignorantly — Colorado's locally-driven water planning process. We manage our waters thoughtfully, knowing full well that we are privileged to have seven major river systems that start in our snowy mountains and flow to 18 different states. Colorado manages nine different interstate compacts, along with two interstate decrees and two interstate agreements, and this isn't something we take lightly.
Instead of stirring up fear, we work with Coloradans on the ground to develop thoughtful project ideas to meet the water needs of our farms, rural communities, cities, and streams. These proposed water projects must then endure a rigorous system of checks and balances including an evaluation of their consistency with existing water compacts, and only a few well-vetted, high-value projects move forward.
Plain and simple, any water project in Colorado is designed and built to comply with our interstate compact obligations.
Colorado and Nebraska have a lot in common. We both cherish our strong agricultural economies, and to drive production, we rely on the use of water to which we are legally entitled. Our development of water from the South Platte River is to support the needs of our economy, not to take water away from hardworking Nebraskans. We never have, and never will encroach on the water rights of another state.
What's most disappointing is not only the fact that Ricketts is threatening Colorado farmers and ranchers' water and property, but also that this publicity stunt is not actually helping the Nebraskans he is sworn to serve. The Nebraska legislature has already approved more than $50 million dollars of taxpayer money for this billion dollar canal to nowhere, when they could be investing in projects that would actually support water development in their state. In Colorado, we responsibly manage

taxpayer dollars and build up budgetary reserves.
Whatever the intentions of our neighbor to the east, I want to assure Coloradans that our state will defend our water rights, environment, wildlife and our equitable system of funding multi-benefit water projects to the fullest extent of the law.
Colorado and Nebraska share many of the same challenges and goals, and by working together I know we can help each other succeed. I hope someday soon our friends in Nebraska will rejoin our strong relationship. Until then, we will rely on the knowledge that the South Platte River Compact works well for both Colorado and for Nebraska. So, let's get back to working together across state lines on real water solutions, so the South Platte River can work for us both for the next century.
Jared Polis is governor of Colorado.

Nebraska Examiner: Nebraska Democrats miffed that plum political positions have not been filled

LINCOLN — Prominent Nebraska Democrats are expressing dismay that the Biden administration hasn't taken steps — 18 months after taking office — to appoint Democrats to two, plum political jobs: U.S. attorney and U.S. marshal.
Former U.S. Sen. and Gov. Bob Kerrey said he has heard nothing but "radio silence" from the administration after he and others pushed the candidacy of former State Sen. Burke Harr for the U.S. attorney's post shortly after Biden's election in November 2020.
Kerrey had also advocated for the appointment of Greg Gonzalez, a former deputy Omaha police chief, to the U.S. marshal's post. But Gonzalez, after hearing nothing about his application for the job, opted instead to run for Douglas County sheriff.
Kerrey called the lack of appointments "a failure."
"I'm afraid this adds to people's concerns about whether this administration is sufficiently competent," he said. "This is not difficult."
State that 'time forgot'
Former U.S. Attorney Deb Gilg, who served during the Obama administration, said the lack of a permanent presidential appointee means that Nebraska is losing out on having influence in Department of Justice policy and obtaining law enforcement grants.
"It's like Nebraska is the state that time forgot," said the veteran prosecutor.
To be sure, Nebraska is not alone, and it's unclear who to blame.
A check of a website of U.S. attorneys shows that at least 41 U.S. attorney posts, out of 94 judicial districts across the country, have not been permanently filled. That includes the Nebraska and northern Iowa districts with "acting" U.S. attorneys.
Thirty-five of the unappointed positions are in states that voted for former President Donald Trump. However, Nebraska, one of those states, provided one electoral vote to Biden in 2020 from the Omaha-based 2nd Congressional District — something that strikes some Nebraska Democrats as ungrateful.
"It's very important if you want to build a political party that you don't ignore these positions," said Vince Powers, a former state chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party.
Usually filled quickly

“The Republican Party immediately takes care of business. That’s important,” Powers said.
Typically, work to fill these kinds of positions happens quickly after a new administration is elected. The White House works with each state’s U.S. senators to screen and select candidates. There are also weeks of vetting. If the Senate is busy on other matters, a confirmation vote can be delayed. But an 18-month delay is excessive, those interviewed said.
U.S. attorneys and U.S. marshals serve at the pleasure of the president, and it’s expected that if the administration changes, they will lose their job.
Tim Becker, a former chief of staff to then-U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson, said Nelson’s office set up a committee to interview applicants shortly after Obama was elected president. That committee then forwarded its recommendations to Nebraska’s U.S. senators and the White House for approval.

‘Light a fire’

Sometimes, Becker said, it’s necessary to “light a fire” with the White House to get the process going.
“This is going to sound political,” he said, “but this is why it’s never good to not have representatives of both parties (in Washington), because you don’t have someone picking up the phone and saying, ‘What’s going on?’”
One Capitol Hill source, who spoke on the condition of not being named, said that the holdup isn’t with Nebraska’s two Republican U.S. senators and that Nebraska law enforcement officials seem satisfied with the current occupants of the U.S. Attorney’s Office and U.S. Marshal’s Office.
But there are some indications that Senate Republicans aren’t playing ball with the administration’s attempts to get positions filled. Bloomberg Law reported in December that Republicans broke with tradition by requiring a cloture vote to clear the way for the appointment of a federal prosecutor in the Boston area.

‘Interim’ to ‘acting’ attorney

Messages sent to the White House for comment were not returned.
Veteran Assistant U.S. Attorney Steve Russell became “acting” U.S. attorney for Nebraska in May, replacing Jan Sharp, who had been the “interim” U.S. attorney.
Nebraska’s U.S. marshal is Scott Kracl, who was appointed by then-President Donald Trump in 2018.
The U.S. attorney is the top federal law enforcement officer in the state, and the office plays a major role in gang and drug crimes, as well as white-collar thefts. Similarly, the U.S. marshal leads federal law enforcement efforts that include drug task forces.

‘Working on it’

Jane Kleeb, the current chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party, said Friday that she could not explain why it’s taken so long to make the appointments and that when she talks to the White House, she’s told “they’re working on it.”
Kleeb said she had one bit of news: Chief Deputy Douglas County Sheriff Wayne Hudson, who lost to Gonzalez in the May primary for the Democratic nomination for Douglas County sheriff, recently submitted an application to become U.S. marshal.
Powers, a Lincoln attorney and former chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party, said it’s inexcusable that the positions remain unfilled, 18 months after Biden took office. There are plenty of qualified Democrats for the posts, he said.
Such a delay, Powers said, makes it less likely that qualified candidates would want to interrupt careers for a job that might last only two years.
Gilg, who is now retired, said she served on an advisory committee to the U.S. attorney general, which she said gave her, and Nebraska, a voice on policy decisions. It also helped lead to a federal

grant to address domestic violence, she said.

Can't serve on advisory council

An acting U.S. attorney cannot serve on such advisory councils, she said.

Gilg said it may take a push from U.S. Sens. Deb Fischer and Ben Sasse to get candidates appointed. But, she said, they could "probably care less if someone is appointed."

Sasse did not respond to a query sent to his office. A spokeswoman for Fischer didn't respond directly to a question about why it's taken so long.

"Senator Fischer is grateful for the current U.S. marshal and acting U.S. attorney, who have stepped up and are doing good work in these roles," the spokeswoman, Brianna Puccini, said. "She and our staff continue to stay in touch with law enforcement and follow this closely."

By Paul Hammel

AP: New gun law's critics could pressure states over reporting of juvenile records

WASHINGTON — The new federal law passed in response to a series of mass shootings includes provisions to better incorporate juvenile records into the federal background check system, but states vary greatly in the way they approach access to guns and the background checks themselves. As states navigate the new law, they will face pressure from critics who view gun-related scrutinizing of juvenile records as unfairly penalizing people for youthful mistakes.

Sen. John Cornyn of Texas was the chief Republican in the bipartisan Senate gun negotiations that arose after 18-year-old Salvador Ramos committed the horrific mass shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, that left 19 children and two teachers dead.

Cornyn looked for areas where the system failed in Uvalde — and found many — but particularly seized on the challenge presented by those who buy guns shortly after their 18th birthday, as Ramos did.

"Right now, the criminal background check system doesn't look back before you were 18 to see whether you had a mental health adjudication or some disqualifying criminal conviction," Cornyn said during floor debate on his proposal. "That's a problem."

In retrospect, Ramos displayed plenty of warning signs in the form of violence to animals and threats to others, although it's not clear whether any of that disturbing behavior resulted in official records that would have set off alarms in a background check.

Federal law bars gun purchases by anyone convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year.

Other prohibited individuals fall into various categories: those who have renounced their U.S. citizenship, been dishonorably discharged, are in the country illegally, use illegal drugs or are a fugitive from justice.

Also prohibited are individuals who have been convicted of a misdemeanor domestic violence offense and anyone who "has been adjudicated as a mental defective or committed to a mental institution."

Cornyn has been adamant that he would not support proposals unduly burdening the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens and said he resisted calls for additional prohibited

categories.
“We essentially are, by doing what we’ve done here, saying that we are going to make sure that existing law is enforced but not add additional requirements,” he said of the juvenile records provisions in the new law.
Cornyn said the bill incentivizes states to upload juvenile records they have to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System to ensure any disqualifying convictions or mental health interventions are available.
In his view, those people already were prohibited from buying guns under previous laws.
“This is, to be clear, not an expansion but a clarification,” Cornyn said.
In part because of the potential technical challenges to folding juvenile records into the background check system itself, the new law includes an enhanced review for those under 21.
Authorities will have an opportunity to extend their background probes to 10 days for those under 21, rather than the typical three days, in part so they can look into juvenile records.

Gun lobby objects

Some gun rights groups objected to the new law for a host of reasons, including the juvenile records provisions.
Aidan Johnston, director of federal affairs at Gun Owners of America, raised the prospect of a person involuntarily committed as a juvenile who is blocked from owning a gun as an adult.
He also said expanding the records included in background check searches is likely to increase the rate at which individuals are incorrectly blocked from purchasing a firearm.
Johnston agreed that anyone convicted of a felony in adult court is supposed to be in the system.
But he said if states are failing to upload such records, that shouldn’t require a new law or what he described as an unconstitutional review period for those under 21.
“Juveniles who commit felonies should be in the database and the states who retain those felony records from juveniles who commit them should be submitting them to the NICS system,” he said.
“But generally states that allow for the expungement of mental health records haven’t been submitting their names according to their own state law, and that’s a good thing.”
As legislative director for the Texas State Rifle Association, Andi Turner focuses more on state gun laws than federal, but she questioned holding the missteps of minors against them as adults.
Turner said she understands that some young people might display troubling signs, such as hurting animals.
“Should the police or social services look into it? Sure, absolutely,” Turner said. “But do I think we (should) take away constitutional rights of adults without due process? I do not.”
Supporters of the juvenile record provisions say criminal records captured by them would typically be those who were tried and convicted in adult court when they were under 18.
Those records already should be uploaded to the background check system, but states have interpreted the law in such a way that they don’t always, according to those backing the change.
When it comes to mental health issues, the new law calls for looking back at records only as far as age 16.
There are avenues for people to have their gun rights restored, but those processes can vary greatly from one state to another.

Two-pronged problem

Critics have described the enhanced review period, which would sunset after 10 years, as a federally mandated waiting period, but Cornyn disputed that, saying many background checks are resolved in a matter of hours.

The senator said sometimes the FBI needs more time to investigate. For example, he said it might be initially unclear whether a misdemeanor assault conviction was the result of a bar fight that does not prevent the person from getting a weapon or a disqualifying case of domestic violence.
More time was an issue in the case of Dylann Roof, who killed nine people at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, Cornyn said.
Despite having recently admitted to drug possession, Roof was able to purchase his gun based on a provision that says sales can proceed after three days even if the background check is not complete.
Dru Stevenson, a professor at the South Texas College of Law who has researched gun violence prevention and firearm regulations, said the current system has a two-pronged issue.
On the front end, some state officials don't upload records that might be relevant for a background check. On the back end, the quality of a background check can depend partly on the resourcefulness of the person running it.
"The FBI will have to develop some new internal procedures in response to the new law, and instruct their staff accordingly, and it's too soon to know how that will work," he said. "And if the (Texas) Legislature fixes this, or the (Texas attorney general) does so with an opinion letter, that would make the back end part less important because the information will be there in one location already."
Cornyn acknowledged the role of states during his floor speech ahead of the final Senate vote on the measure. He said states approach the issue differently and the federal government has no way to compel states.
"I would think that governors and state legislatures would want to work with us to try to keep guns out of the hands of people who we know are a threat to themselves and a threat to public safety," he said.

AP: Biden says he's mulling health emergency for abortion access

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. (AP) — President Joe Biden said Sunday he is considering declaring a public health emergency to free up federal resources to promote abortion access even though the White House has said it doesn't seem like "a great option."
He also offered a message to people enraged by the Supreme Court's ruling last month that ended a constitutional right to abortion and who have been demonstrating across the country: "Keep protesting. Keep making your point. It's critically important."
The president, in remarks to reporters during a stop on a bike ride near his family's Delaware beach house, said he lacks the power to force the dozen-plus states with strict restrictions or outright bans on abortion to allow the procedure.
"I don't have the authority to say that we're going to reinstate Roe v. Wade as the law of the land," he said, referring to the Supreme Court's decision from 1973 that had established a national right to abortion. Biden said Congress would have to codify that right and for that to have a better chance in the future, voters would have to elect more lawmakers who support abortion access.
Biden said his administration is trying to do a "lot of things to accommodate the rights of women" after the ruling, including considering declaring a public health emergency to free up federal resources. Such a move has been pushed by advocates, but White House officials have questioned

both its legality and effectiveness, and noted it would almost certainly face legal challenges.
The president said he has asked officials “to look at whether I have the authority to do that and what impact that would have.”
On Friday, Jen Klein, the director of the White House Gender Policy Council, said it “didn’t seem like a great option.”
“When we looked at the public health emergency, we learned a couple things: One is that it doesn’t free very many resources,” she told reporters. “It’s what’s in the public health emergency fund, and there’s very little money — tens of thousands of dollars in it. So that didn’t seem like a great option. And it also doesn’t release a significant amount of legal authority. And so that’s why we haven’t taken that action yet.”

Very Respectfully,

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