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Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	May 2022	7.82	-15.00	07:42
Corn	Oct 2022	7.15	-45.00	07:42
Milo	May 2022	7.37	-60.00	07:42
Milo	Oct 2022	7.05	-55.00	07:42
Soybeans	May 2022	15.58	-103.00	07:42
Soybeans	Oct 2022	14.42	-70.00	07:42
Wheat	May 2022	12.57	-85.00	07:42
Wheat	Jul 2022	12.57	-85.00	07:42

TV and Radio

NCN: NCN Exclusive: Ricketts mum on national future but 'would not' challenge Fischer in 2024
CNN: GOP governor says that rape victims should have to carry child to term
CNN: Nebraska GOP governor says he will call a special session to pass total abortion ban if Roe is overturned
KETV: 'They're still babies': Gov. Ricketts supports total abortion ban, including cases of rape or incest
KLKN: Gov. Ricketts says he will push for total abortion ban if Roe V. Wade is overturned (no video)
Fox News: Roe reversal: Nebraska Gov. Ricketts vows to protect 'pre-born babies' if Court strikes abortion ruling
WNAX: Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts Ready to Move on more Abortion Restrictions
KMTV: Need for foster families is high in Nebraska, but so is support

Governor

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LJS: Don Walton: Pillen's victory also a Ricketts win, Trump loss
OWH: Ricketts says he would support abortion ban, including in cases of rape or incest
Forbes: Nebraska Governor Will Push For Total Abortion Ban If Roe V. Wade Is Overturned
The Hill: Nebraska GOP governor would call special session to ‘do more to protect preborn babies’ if Roe v. Wade overturned
Newsweek: Ricketts Vows Total Abortion Ban if Roe Overturned, Even for Rape, Incest
OWH: Hundreds rally again in support of abortion rights in Omaha
Newsmax: Nebraska Gov. Urges 'Preventative' Measures Over Restrictions to Stop Mass Shootings

OWH: Primary success energizes conservative candidates for Nebraska's state ed board
LJS: Lincoln attorneys appointed to district court judgeships
Gambling News: Nebraska Governor Paves the Way for Casino License Applications in June

Agency
OWH: State agrees to pay $479K to settle lawsuit over Scottsbluff man's killing at hands of cellmate
AP: Nebraska to pay $479,000 to settle inmate death lawsuit

Legislature
OWH: Political parties confident about flipping seats in Nebraska Legislature

University
AP: Federal judge tosses most misconduct cases against Nebraska

State, Local and Regional
AP: Nebraska tax collections beat expectations in April
LJS: Storms cause extensive damage to parts of Nebraska
OWH: Final early primary ballots clear up some races, including 1 in Douglas County
OWH: Nebraska moms among many nationwide on the hunt for baby formula
LJS: Lincoln woman loses legal fight to keep her home following Supreme Court ruling
OWH: Report: Air Force made 'reasonable' choice choosing Huntsville over Offutt for SpaceCom HQ

Opinion
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OWH Midlands Voices: You can't spell 'farmers' without 'e' and 's'
OWH Midlands Voices: Federal law needed to protect LGBTQ Americans from discrimination
OWH Midlands Voices: Do Good Days brings us together to do good in every way we can
OWH Public Pulse

1. Independent voter blues
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3. What we sow
4. Cease the carnage
5. Benefits of composting
6. Policy service regulation
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LJS Editorial, 5/15: Few themes emerge after brutal primary
LJS Letters

1. Justices need term limits
2. Choose truth, not propaganda
3. Fiction is becoming fact
4. How about pro-compassion?
5. Tax cuts help wrong folks

Hastings Tribune: Praying for those who govern, serve public
Nebraska Examiner: Still among the lucky ones, even after catching COVID

National/Federal

Cedar Rapids Gazette: Iowa cryptocurrency site eats up electricity
CQ Roll Call: 2020 saw most firearm deaths since 1994, CDC reports

OWH: With only months remaining in office, Gov. Ricketts says work is far from over

LINCOLN — The final regular legislative session of Pete Ricketts' tenure leading the state is in the books, but the two-term Nebraska governor said his work is far from over.

"Even when the Legislature's out, we're still running business here," Ricketts told The World-Herald.

Barred by term limits from running for reelection, Ricketts has just over seven months left in his final term as governor. He said his remaining time in office will largely be spent ensuring state business continues running smoothly, and overseeing the first steps of several major pieces of legislation passed during the session that concluded in April.

However, Ricketts' remaining months could be defined by an upcoming U.S. Supreme Court ruling that could overturn Roe v. Wade. Depending on the decision, Ricketts said, he may call for a special legislative session to take up major changes to Nebraska's current abortion laws.

Earlier this year, Nebraska lawmakers attempted to pass a bill that would have banned all abortions in the state if Roe v. Wade is overturned. Ricketts expressed support for the bill, but it died after it failed to reach 33 votes for a filibuster-ending cloture motion. The final vote was 31-15.

If a special session does happen, Ricketts could play a pivotal role in the outcome, as he is planning on appointing two new senators in the coming months. The replacement for State Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha, who died in late April, will likely be appointed within the next month, Ricketts said. He will also replace either Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk or Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln, depending on who wins the June 28 special election in Nebraska's 1st Congressional District.

Barring a special session, Ricketts said, many parts of the governor's job are invisible to most Nebraskans. He said he will continue working with state agencies on day-to-day business such as improving customer service, monitoring public infrastructure projects and promoting Nebraska business development to other states and countries.

Ricketts will also have a role overseeing the implementation of several major pieces of legislation that passed during this year's session. One example he cited was Legislative Bill 1014, which allocates more than $1 billion in federal funds for pandemic relief projects through the American Rescue Plan Act.

Within 60 days of the bill's passage, Ricketts said, the state must complete guidance for how to apply for several grants listed under the bill. He said the state has to share information within 90 days on how applicants can qualify for those grants.

Another prominent bill was LB 1015, which authorized the construction of a $500 million canal-and-reservoir system in eastern Colorado and western Nebraska. Ricketts, who proposed the canal project, said the state just released a request for proposals on the project.

Outside his official capacity as governor, Ricketts said he plans to spend time campaigning for Republican candidate Jim Pillen, who won Tuesday's gubernatorial primary election, and whom Ricketts has endorsed.

Part of the governor's official duty is to develop a transition plan for the winner of November's

general election, Ricketts said. That will include information on the next state budget and a lineup of the biggest decisions the next governor must make soon after taking office.
Ricketts also plans to continue using the platform he has as governor to speak out about issues he finds important. Most often, he said, these issues are federal actions he considers government overreach, but he has also criticized local decisions.
Last year, Ricketts spoke out about the Nebraska State Board of Education's proposed development of health and sex education standards. The standards were both inclusive of diverse genders and sexual orientations and extremely controversial for some Nebraskans. He said this prompted more parents to speak up, and ultimately led the board to shelve the draft standards.
Recently, Ricketts has been speaking out about President Joe Biden's energy policies, which he said are contributing to inflation.
"One of the things that as a governor you can be effective doing is having that megaphone to be able to talk about these issues," Ricketts said.
By Erin Bamer

OWH: Pillen's victory may boost Ricketts' political future — but not in a big way

On the heels of a victory by his preferred candidate in Nebraska's GOP gubernatorial primary, Gov. Pete Ricketts is throwing his political weight behind another candidate locked in a heated battle for governor — in Georgia.
Ricketts, a two-term Republican governor from a wealthy and influential family, and other leaders in the Republican Governors Association are expected to campaign this month for Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp. The Georgia race, much like Nebraska's primary, puts Ricketts opposite former President Donald Trump, who has backed Kemp's opponent.
The trip for Ricketts, who has largely focused his political power inside his home state, raises the question: Does the outcome of Nebraska's primary impact the outgoing governor's chances of success in a potential bid for higher office?
The short answer: probably not, or at least not by much.
Political observers have speculated about Ricketts' potential aspirations for months, but he's largely refrained from discussing his future.
He confirmed to The World-Herald that he does plan on remaining in politics after he leaves the Governor's Office in January, but he declined to specify what position he plans to pursue.
He said his recent out-of-state travel has been mainly to promote business development for Nebraska. He'll travel to Dallas this coming week to meet with executives of major companies like PepsiCo to discuss expansion opportunities in Nebraska, he said. The following week, he will visit Las Vegas to promote Nebraska beef. He did not mention Georgia.
Ricketts has also been vocal about national issues, most recently criticizing President Joe Biden's energy policies as contributing to nationwide inflation. But Ricketts said that's nothing new: He has consistently used the governor's "megaphone" to speak about issues he thinks should matter to Nebraskans. The governor became especially vocal last year after Biden took office.
Former Nebraska Gov. Ben Nelson said the president's office is the only elected position he could

foresee Ricketts pursuing in the near future, barring any openings in Congress.
A handful of political observers pointed to the U.S. Senate as the most likely and beneficial option for Ricketts.
But that would require either an opening or an intra-party fight. The next potential contest affecting Nebraska would be in 2024 for the seat currently held by Sen. Deb Fischer, who easily won her 2018 reelection bid. Sen. Ben Sasse, also a Republican, handily won reelection in 2020.
"I'm just skeptical that Ricketts has much of a national future," said John Hibbing, a political science professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Hibbing said Ricketts looks like other Republicans who support many of Trump's policies without going all the way in their support for him. Also, Hibbing said, Ricketts is from a small state and isn't particularly photogenic.
If he does run for president, another former governor, Bob Kerrey, said Ricketts would be a strong candidate in the 2024 Iowa caucuses.
"People in Iowa know who he is," said Kerrey, who unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for president in 1992.
Even so, Kerrey said he would be surprised if Ricketts won the Republican nomination.
He is notably absent from many lists of potential 2024 presidential contenders, including a poll earlier this year of Conservative Political Action Conference attendees, who overwhelmingly said they would vote for Trump, followed by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.
Kerrey said Ricketts could stay out of what might be a crowded presidential race and instead look to endorse a candidate in hopes of securing a Cabinet position.
He wouldn't be the first Nebraska leader in recent memory to hold such a position. Former Gov. Mike Johanns left the governorship early to become secretary of agriculture during the George W. Bush administration. He then ran for a U.S. Senate seat and won.
Nelson, who was governor from 1991 to 1999, had a brief break from elected office before moving on to the U.S. Senate in 2001. Having run for and lost a bid for the Senate in 1996 while governor, Nelson said his reentry into politics was expected.
During his short break, Nelson said, he mainly focused on continuing his law practice, but he still remained engaged publicly.
Ricketts' post-governor political moves will largely depend on what office he plans to pursue, Kerrey and Nelson said.
"Only he can answer that question," Nelson said.
Regardless of the office, Ricketts will have to forge a path in a political landscape that is discernibly different from when he was first elected governor in 2014. Trump, who called Ricketts a RINO (Republican In Name Only) the day after Nebraska's primaries, continues to hold sizable influence over the GOP and its voters.
"I try to focus on things that I can control, and what President Trump says is not one of those," Ricketts said in response to Trump's comment.
Daron Shaw, a professor in the government department at the University of Texas at Austin, said Ricketts may have presidential ambitions, but a couple of big questions remain.
One is whether Trump is going to run in 2024. If he doesn't, Shaw said, he will still loom large — so, the second question concerns a candidate's identity and where they'd take the party.
"We live in a world where if you're going to endorse people, if you're going to support people you think are good for the party, that's always going to be juxtaposed against what President Trump is doing," Shaw said.
If Trump continues to fixate on 2020, Hibbing said, many Republicans might decide it's OK to break

with him, as long as they still share policy positions. He sees Ricketts occupying that space.
"I think, increasingly, Republicans are going to be attracted to a lane that is reflecting a lot of Trump's policy positions but hopefully does not have the baggage that Donald Trump's personality has," he said.
There was more to the Nebraska gubernatorial race than its Trump-vs.-Ricketts optics. Among other influential factors, Trump's pick was embroiled in scandal near the end of the campaign, while big spending and negative advertising also played key roles.
Ricketts' preferred candidate, hog producer and University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen, won with about 34% of votes in unofficial results. Trump's preferred candidate, cattle rancher and Conklin Co. CEO Charles Herbster, got about 30% of the vote. Roughly 26% went to State Sen. Brett Lindstrom, who presented himself as a fresh-faced conservative alternative.
Ricketts said the outcome was more an indicator that Nebraska Republicans share Pillen's conservative values than it was a win over Trump. According to Ricketts, Herbster was just a flawed candidate, from his business's roots in Missouri to recently reported allegations of sexual misconduct against him — allegations that Herbster has denied.
Hibbing said he doesn't think the race's outcome reflected a diminishment of Trump's influence as much as bad judgment on his part for sticking with a deeply flawed candidate. And Nelson said the results were close enough that they couldn't act as a reliable indicator of whether Nebraska voters are shifting away from Trump.
Both Nelson and Kerrey said Ricketts' endorsement of Pillen likely had less to do with Ricketts positioning himself against Trump, and more to do with the fact that Ricketts considered Pillen to be a better candidate.
Ricketts has not been an anti-Trump Republican — far from it. He consistently backed Trump during his presidency and praised the former president for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic during a 2020 visit to the White House. The governor was among the Nebraska officials who appeared with Trump at a rally at Eppley Airfield a week before the 2020 election.
The feelings at least appeared to be mutual, with former Trump campaign adviser Corey Lewandowski telling The World-Herald in 2019 that Ricketts "has any future he wants." Ricketts at the time was the chair of the Republican Governors Association. He's now co-chair.
"If he wanted to go to Washington — which, I don't know why he would — I'm sure he could do that in either an appointed capacity or some other capacity," Lewandowski said at the time.
Even when breaking with Trump over the Herbster endorsement, Ricketts noted he was "a champion of President Trump's conservative leadership and his America First agenda." And in his endorsement of Herbster, Trump noted that Ricketts had been "terrific."
Whatever Ricketts' ambitions, Pillen's win was better than a loss for the governor and could hypothetically boost his national profile. But it's a far cry from a fast track to the White House.
"If you're a governor of a state, you want to be seen as competent," said J. Miles Coleman, associate editor of Sabato's Crystal Ball. "You'll want to be seen as having your house in order. You know, this probably bodes well for him on that front, that he's going to get his (preferred) successor likely elected."
But it's challenging to rise up from a small state, said Coleman, who pointed to Ricketts' leadership role in the Republican Governors Association as an indicator that he does have some national prominence already.
Ricketts also has another resource that goes far in politics: money. Federal election filings show Ricketts — a member of the billionaire family that owns the Chicago Cubs — has contributed tens of

thousands of dollars in just the first three months of 2022 to candidates and causes in Nebraska and beyond.
He has donated to U.S. Senate candidates in Washington and Nevada and a U.S. House candidate in Arizona. He contributed $50,000 to a super PAC supporting former North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory's campaign for Senate, and he donated $10,000 to the Illinois Republican Party, according to federal filings.
He also donated to Pillen's campaign and spent big on third-party advertising attacking opponents in that race.
As for Pillen's victory, Kerrey doubts it will contribute much to Ricketts' political future. Ultimately, he said Nebraska's primary elections don't matter much to people outside Nebraska, and Ricketts' own time as governor does a lot more for his political résumé than his endorsement of Pillen.
"No offense to Nebraska, but it wasn't a race that got a huge amount of national attention," said Tim Hagle, a political science professor at the University of Iowa.
Hagle, however, said he thinks it's important that things never got particularly nasty between Ricketts and Trump. The former president — not known for withholding criticism of perceived opponents — notably did not refer to Ricketts during a May 1 rally in Nebraska to support Herbster.
Shaw, the Texas professor, said the win doesn't do anything to Ricketts' national profile.
It could give Ricketts an opportunity — if he so chooses — to back candidates outside of Nebraska who he thinks could help form his vision of the Republican Party, Shaw said. He could try to establish credibility as a spokesperson for a particular approach within the party and try to build credentials as a champion for that approach. As a credible spokesperson among elites and important party figures, he could become a credible candidate for higher office.
"In other words … it's possible that it's a springboard, but ... a springboard into a fairly small pool," Shaw said.
By Sara Gentzler and Erin Bamer

LJS: Don Walton: Pillen's victory also a Ricketts win, Trump loss

The first crack in Donald Trump's castle, a couple of intriguing congressional matchups, the approaching battle for a filibuster-proof Legislature.
All of those are storylines developing from Nebraska's primary election results.
Jim Pillen's defeat of an embattled Charles Herbster in the Republican gubernatorial race stirred considerable national political attention largely because of Trump's engagement.
"Former President Donald Trump wasn't on the ballot in Nebraska's crowded and combative Republican gubernatorial primary ... but the former president suffered a defeat," Fox News stated online.
"Mr. Herbster becomes the first Trump-endorsed candidate to lose in a 2022 primary — but most likely not the last," The New York Times reported.
Nebraska primary election voters moved two big contests for House seats into play.
State Sens. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln and Mike Flood of Norfolk won nominations for a two-year term in eastern Nebraska's 1st District House seat.

And one of them will be running as the incumbent when that election matchup occurs in November — because first they will meet in a special election on June 28 as party leadership choices to fill the remaining six months of former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry's final term in office following his resignation in the wake of his conviction in California.

It's complicated.

Although Republicans have dominated that congressional district and still hold an advantage in voter registration numbers, next month's unusual special election contest is intriguing because it will not include a 1st District incumbent for the first time since 2004.

And the election will occur in a newly revised congressional district whose Republican registration advantage has been narrowed by the Legislature's redistricting decisions during a special session last year.

Meanwhile, in metropolitan Omaha's competitive 2nd District, three-term Republican Rep. Don Bacon is being challenged by state Sen. Tony Vargas, the Democratic nominee who has been a steady voice for South Omaha's Latino community and an advocate for meatpacking workers rights.

Bacon has skillfully avoided the partisan pitfalls that are present in a politically divided district in which Republican voters in Sarpy County recently have been called upon to ride to the rescue on Election Night after Omaha voters give a divided nod to the Democratic candidate.

It's Nebraska's battleground congressional district, an urban district where Barack Obama and Joe Biden have won presidential electoral votes.

* * *

On to the Legislature now.

Republicans have dreamed of a filibuster-proof majority of 33 senators or more in Nebraska's nonpartisan Legislature.

That's the number of votes required in the 49-member Legislature on a motion to cease debate and free a proposal for advancement.

There are 32 Republicans in the Legislature now; actually 31 until Gov. Pete Ricketts names a successor to Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha, who died during the concluding days of the legislative session.

But that figure is misleading; members of the Nebraska Legislature are free and independent actors not bound to party, or party discipline. There is not a 32-member Republican voting bloc now.

Four or five of the current senators who will be gone at the end of the year are Republicans who have been determined to be free and independent from partisan or political party considerations.

And that independence has given them power and a leadership role within the legislative body to accomplish their legislative goals. Their votes, and their voices, have mattered. And they have built a legislative record during their eight years in the legislative chamber.

In a nonpartisan legislative body without party control, corralling a dependable filibuster-proof political majority is far harder, and more complicated, than it may sound.

It's not 33 Republican members and done.

* * *

That was a sure-footed performance by Ricketts on Sunday morning before a national TV audience on CNN's widely watched "State of the Union" program.

And a welcome opportunity to raise his national profile.

With Ricketts' acknowledged preference to remain in the public sector rather than return to the private sector upon completion of his two terms as governor next January, the future may point Ricketts toward a national political role, whether elective or appointive.

Ricketts will travel to Georgia this month to campaign for Gov. Brian Kemp in his Republican primary battle against former Sen. David Perdue, who has been endorsed by Trump.

* * *

Finishing up:

* Only two incumbent senators, Machaela Cavanaugh of Omaha and Mike Jacobson of North Platte, received less than 50% of the vote in primary elections in their legislative districts, both in three-candidate races. Cavanaugh led with 47% and Jacobson, a recent gubernatorial appointee, ran second with 44%.

* Largely unrecognized in election results because of the more competitive primary contests was Rep. Adrian Smith's nomination to a ninth term in the House representing the vast 3rd Congressional District. Smith is dean of Nebraska's congressional delegation and a senior Republican member of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee.

By Don Walton

OWH: Ricketts says he would support abortion ban, including in cases of rape or incest

Gov. Pete Ricketts voiced support Sunday for an abortion ban in Nebraska, including in cases of rape and incest, and repeated his intent to call a special legislative session to take up the matter if the U.S. Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade.

Speaking on CNN's State of the Union on Sunday morning, Ricketts said Nebraska would take "further steps to protect those preborn babies" if the court strikes down Roe, which the governor called "a horrible constitutional decision," according to a transcript of the interview.

Host Dana Bash then asked the Nebraska governor if that would apply to cases of rape or incest.

"They're still babies, too," Ricketts said. "Yes, they're still babies."

A draft Supreme Court opinion published by the news outlet Politico earlier this month revealed the court could overturn the 1973 ruling that legalized abortion across the U.S. An opinion is expected in June. If the court overturns Roe, it would send the abortion issue back to the states.

Ricketts reaffirmed his commitment to work with Speaker of the Legislature Mike Hilgers to call a special session on abortion if Roe is overturned.

"Nebraska is a pro-life state. I believe life begins at conception. And those are babies, too," Ricketts said Sunday.

The governor's remarks came less than 24 hours after hundreds of demonstrators rallied in downtown Omaha in support of abortion rights. It was at least the second large rally in Omaha since news of the draft court opinion broke May 2.

Despite Ricketts assertion, lawmakers are far from unified in the Nebraska Legislature, where recent attempts to limit abortion have failed to advance.

Legislation that would have banned abortion in the state if the Supreme Court strikes down Roe — a measure known as a trigger bill — fell two votes shy of overcoming a filibuster, which effectively killed the bill for the session.

The failed bill would not have provided any exemptions, including for rape or incest.

Several other abortion-curbing measures failed to advance out of their legislative committee, with

backers saying at the time that they were putting their effort behind the trigger bill.
It's unclear if lawmakers would reach a different outcome on an abortion ban during a special session, although Ricketts will have an opportunity to fill two seats. One of those was held by State Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha, who died in April. Ricketts also will fill the seat vacated by the winner of a June 28 special election between Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk and Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln. The two are squaring off to serve out the remaining term previously held by U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry.
Ricketts also was asked about the Republican primary for Nebraska governor. Hog producer and University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen won that contest Tuesday, followed by businessman and rancher Charles Herbster. Ricketts backed Pillen, while Herbster had the endorsement of former President Donald Trump.
Echoing remarks he made to The World-Herald earlier this week, Ricketts called Herbster a flawed candidate.
"It's one of the reasons why I picked one of his opponents," he said Sunday. "In a contested primary, we ought to expect that the Republicans are going to be on different sides of this. It's not unusual. I support many of President Trump's policies, but, in this case, we were on opposite sides of it."
Ricketts acknowledged that he asked Trump last summer to stay out of the Nebraska primary and Trump "said he would get back to me later." Ultimately, Trump chose to endorse Herbster.
"I guess that's a great example of things you can control and things you can't control," Ricketts said.
By Ryan Hoffman

Forbes: Nebraska Governor Will Push For Total Abortion Ban If Roe V. Wade Is Overturned

TOPLINE
Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts (R) told CNN's State of the Union on Sunday he hopes to work with the state's GOP-dominated legislature to pass a statewide abortion ban—without exceptions for rape or incest—if the Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade, possibly joining several other states slated to ban abortion if the Supreme Court allows them to do so.
KEY FACTS
If the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision is overturned, Ricketts intends to call a special session of the state legislature to pass an abortion ban, he told CNN's State of the Union anchor Dana Bash.
Ricketts' remarks came one month after an abortion "trigger law"—which would have automatically banned abortion if Roe is reversed—failed in Nebraska's legislature by a vote of 31-15, two votes short of the 33-vote minimum to overcome a filibuster.
The bill was subject to eight hours of debate, during which Democratic lawmakers argued the law infringed on womens' bodily autonomy by banning abortion in practically all instances, the Nebraska Examiner reported.
Asked if he would support legislation banning abortion even in cases of rape or incest,
Ricketts replied on CNN, "They're still babies, too, yes—they're still babies."
Ricketts said Nebraska Republicans were "hopeful" Roe v. Wade will be overturned, but that they would have to wait before taking further steps.

KEY BACKGROUND
Almost two weeks ago, Politico published a leaked draft of a Supreme Court opinion that would overturn Roe v. Wade, which holds that a woman's right to choose to have an abortion is constitutionally protected. Thirteen states passed "trigger laws" that would immediately ban abortion if Roe v. Wade is ended, while 16 states have passed laws that would protect abortion rights, according to the pro-abortion-rights Guttmacher Institute. Publication of the draft opinion—which Chief Justice John Roberts confirmed is authentic but isn't necessarily final—has led to renewed debate around abortion rights, which would largely return to the hands of state leaders in the absence of a national law protecting or banning abortion. Some Republican legislators are reportedly working to advance a national abortion ban if the GOP retakes control of Congress after the November midterms, though a few other Republican politicians have argued a national ban would run into constitutional problems and state bans would be more effective. A bill that would have codified national abortion protections failed in the Senate Wednesday 49-51, falling decisively short of the 60-vote threshold necessary to overcome a filibuster, after Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and all 50 Republicans voted no.
By Zachary Snowden Smith

The Hill: Nebraska GOP governor would call special session to 'do more to protect preborn babies' if Roe v. Wade overturned

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts (R) said on Sunday that he will call for a special session in his state's legislature to "do more to protect preborn babies" should the Supreme Court ultimately decide to overturn Roe v. Wade.
During an appearance on CNN's "State of the Union," co-host Dana Bash asked Ricketts if he thinks there should be exceptions for abortions in the cases of rape and incest.
"So, can you clarify? Do you think that the state of Nebraska should require a young girl who was raped to carry that pregnancy to term?" Bash asked Ricketts.
"So, Nebraska is a pro-life state. I believe life begins at conception. And those are babies too," Ricketts replied. "So, if Roe vs. Wade, which was a horrible constitutional decision, gets overturned by the Supreme Court, which we're hopeful of, here in Nebraska, we're going to take further steps to protect those preborn babies."
Ricketts then said he would call on Nebraska state House Speaker Mike Hilgers (R) to go into a special session "to protect preborn babies" without going in to detail on what further restrictions he would seek on a woman's access to an abortion should it be banned on the federal level.
"So, if Roe is overruled and overturned, will you call a special session right away to ban abortion in Nebraska?" Bash asked Ricketts.
"Well, if we do get that, Roe vs. Wade, overturned, we will take — I will work with our speaker of the legislature to work on a special session and do more to protect preborn babies," Ricketts said. "We will have to wait and see what that decision is before we can take further steps, but that would certainly be my intention."

Earlier this month, Politico obtained and published a draft opinion decision that signaled the majority of justices would favor overturning the landmark 1973 decision. If the federal law is overturned, more than 20 states have mechanisms in place that would ban abortions.
By Olafimihan Oshin

Newsweek: Ricketts Vows Total Abortion Ban if Roe Overturned, Even for Rape, Incest

Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts said that he intends to call a special session of his state's legislature to ban abortions if Roe v. Wade is overturned by the Supreme Court.
The governor's comments, which were made during an interview on CNN Sunday, come nearly two weeks after Politico reported on a leaked draft majority opinion written by Justice Samuel Alito showing that the Supreme Court had voted to jettison the landmark decision that has been in place since 1973.
In the interview, CNN host Dana Bash noted that Nebraska doesn't have a Roe v. Wade "trigger law" on the books like some states. These laws are designed to implement abortion bans in the event that Roe v. Wade is overturned. Bash noted that an effort to pass a trigger law in Nebraska "failed by only two votes last month."
"The abortion ban that you tried to pass did not include any exceptions for rape or incest, so can you clarify: do you think that the state of Nebraska should require a young girl who is raped to carry that pregnancy to term?" Bash asked.
"Nebraska is a pro-life state," the governor responded. "I believe life begins at conception and those are babies too. So if Roe v. Wade, which is a horrible constitutional decision, gets overturned by the Supreme Court, which we're hopeful of, here in Nebraska we're going to take further steps to protect those pre-born babies."
"Including in the case of rape or incest?" Bash then asked.
"They're still babies too, yes, they're still babies,' Ricketts replied.
By Xander Landen

OWH: Hundreds rally again in support of abortion rights in Omaha

Nearly two weeks after a leaked draft opinion suggested the U.S. Supreme Court will overturn Roe v. Wade, hundreds of people gathered in Omaha Saturday to denounce the anticipated decision and reaffirm their commitment to protect abortion rights.
The demonstration outside the City-County Building was just one of many throughout the nation as local organizers billed the day as Roe v. Wade Day of Action. Wielding signs with messages like “Keep abortion safe and legal” and “No uterus, no opinion,” attendees rallied and heard from speakers who promised to keep fighting no matter what happens.

Saturday's rally was at least the second one to occur in Omaha since the media outlet Politico broke the story of the draft opinion on May 2.
Support for personal choice was one of the common themes expressed by attendees.
"Women can make their own choices," said Suzanne Ritchie, 59. "We shouldn't have the court decide."
Becky Havlat, 72, has been a supporter of abortion rights for decades and has passed her viewpoint down to her daughters, Robin Winchester and Heather Graves, and granddaughter, Alesha Graves.
Havlat's dedication was perhaps best captured by the sign she held: "My arms are tired of holding this sign since the 1960s."
Havlat views the matter of abortion as a personal choice among individuals.
"I really think that people need to let (others) do their own thing," she said.
Alesha Graves concurred with her grandmother.
"Human rights are really important to me," the 28-year-old said. "What the Supreme Court is planning to do is not right. I'm just trying to fight for my rights out here."
Attendees found a like-minded individual in State Sen. Jen Day. One of several speakers at the event, Day opposed Legislative Bill 933 — a trigger bill that would have banned all abortions in Nebraska if the Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade — last month. The bill failed to gain the necessary support to advance.
Day vowed to continue fighting for women to maintain abortion access even if the Supreme Court overturns the 1973 landmark ruling and the Nebraska Legislature subsequently considers bills to curtail access.
"This is the hill that I will die on as a senator," she said.
Speaker of Legislature Mike Hilgers has said he would work with Gov. Pete Ricketts, who supported the failed trigger bill, to schedule a special session on abortion if the Supreme Court ultimately strikes down Roe.
The demise of Roe would return the abortion issue back to individual states. In a press release issued May 3, Sandy Danek, executive director of Nebraska Right to Life, said it should be up to states to set abortion regulations.
"Elections matter," Danek said. "It's why we work so hard to elect pro-life officials. Returning this decision back to the states allows for the people to decide, which is where it should have always been."
By Dan Crisler

Newsmax: Nebraska Gov. Urges 'Preventative' Measures Over Restrictions to Stop Mass Shootings

Nebraska GOP Gov. Pete Ricketts on Sunday urged "more preventative" measures, especially in mental health for children, be taken in the wake of a racially fueled mass shooting in Buffalo, N.Y.
In an interview on CNN's "State of the Union," Ricketts cited his own state's measures that avoided being "restrictive."
"When we're talking about events like this, one of the things we ought to be doing, what we've kind of done in Nebraska, is work to be able to open up good lines of communication

between educators, law enforcement, behavioral health specialists to be more preventive," he said.
"I think the focus should be on preventive rather than restrict legal buying from people," he asserted. "It really needs to be focused on what is the issue here with each individual and trying to find how we can be more proactive in spotting those folks and getting them the help they need."
Ricketts also weighed in on the recent win of Jim Pillen in a crowded Republican primary for governor over a candidate endorsed by former President Donald Trump.
"In a contested primary we should suspect the Republicans will be different sides of this," he said. "I support many of President Trump's policies. In this case we were on opposite sides of it. At the end of the day I think voters in individual states, certainly true here in Nebraska, make their own decision."
Ricketts said last summer he had asked Trump to stay out of the primary in Nebraska, and called it "a great example of things you can control and can't control."
"At the time he didn't refuse," he said. "He said he would get back to me later…I guess that's a great example of things you can control and can't control."
He also said he's got no interest in trying to control Trump's picks for candidates, including in the contentious Georgia gubernatorial race in which GOP Gov. Brian Kemp is seeking reelection.
"As co-chair of the Republican Governors Association, we've been very clear we support our incumbents," he said.
By Fran Beyer

OWH: Primary success energizes conservative candidates for Nebraska's state ed board

It's hard to imagine a better night for four conservative candidates hoping to win seats on the Nebraska State Board of Education.
Elizabeth Tegtmeier of North Platte, Sherry Jones of Grand Island and Kirk Penner of Aurora all finished Tuesday night holding wide margins over their general election opponents.
The fourth candidate, Marni Hodgen, advanced to the general election as well, edging out former state board member John Sieler in the Douglas County district.
If they maintain their margins in the general election, the board will have some new conservative faces in January.
To win seats, they will have to beat four candidates backed by the Nebraska state teachers union: Robin Stevens, Danielle Helzer, Helen Raikes and Deborah Neary. All four of them advanced.
Tegtmeier, who will face incumbent Stevens in the general election, said Wednesday that the results "hopefully send a strong referendum to our current board."
Tegtmeier captured 62.5% of the votes in District 7, which generally encompasses the western half of the state. Stevens managed just over 20%. Pat Moore of Litchfield got 17% and was eliminated. All three are registered Republicans.
"I think for so long, the state board has flown under people's radar, and this past year has really highlighted that our representatives are not reflective of the voters," Tegtmeier said. "Instead, they seem to be the mouthpiece for special interest groups."
Stevens on Wednesday credited Tegtmeier for a strong, well-organized, well-funded campaign.

He said he's not sure how to make up the ground by fall, describing the outcome of his race in sports terms.
"If it was a prize fight, they'd call it," he said. "If it was a Nebraska high school basketball game, there'd be a running clock."
"I'm an old coach. I know when I get my butt handed to me, so I have to give credit to the other team. We'll get better."
Unlike in the primary, Stevens in the general election could receive votes from Nebraska Democrats, given the teachers' union support for him.
The four conservative candidates were endorsed by the Protect Nebraska Children PAC, the group that mounted a relentless fight against proposed health education standards last year.
Sue Greenwald, one of the group's leaders, said Wednesday that "we're happy that the voters are seeing what we're seeing."
"The public has been awakened to the direction that the State Board of Education has been taking us, and the public wants to go a different direction," Greenwald said.
The PAC's stated goal is to support strong conservative Nebraska candidates for local, regional and statewide offices.
The group said it supports parents' rights and opposes comprehensive sex education and the teaching of "gender ideology" in schools.
As initially proposed, the board's health standards called for teaching students in early elementary grades about gender identity and sexual orientation. A second draft took out most of those items. If adopted, the standards would have been recommended for local school districts but not mandated.
The board indefinitely postponed the standards adoption last September, but a majority of board members could restart the process.
Jenni Benson, president of the 28,000-member Nebraska State Education Association, said Wednesday that the union is pleased their preferred candidates advanced.
"These four candidates earned the recommendation from our members for their strong support of children and public education," Benson said.
Raikes, Helzer and Neary were endorsed by Women Who Run Nebraska, a group that endorses progressive women.
Helzer also is endorsed by Nebraskans for Educational Excellence. That group supports teaching students about "reproductive health, sexual orientation, gender identity and social-emotional well-being."
The group says that critical race theory is not being taught in public schools and that the issue has been politicized with a chilling effect on teachers.
The number of voters who weighed in on state board races was far greater than in the primary four years ago.
Interest no doubt was boosted by a rancorous and close race for governor, the sex ed controversy and concerns over critical race theory and other hot-button education issues. Sixty-two percent more votes were cast in the four board districts than in 2018.
Jones received more than 69% of the votes in District 6.
"I certainly appreciate this vote of confidence of the people in the 17 counties of District 6, and I certainly do not take this support for granted," she said. "I intend to continue campaigning throughout the summer and fall to let people know who I am and for what I stand."
She and Helzer, also of Grand Island, will face off in the general election. Helzer had 31% of the vote Tuesday. They are vying to replace incumbent Maureen Nickels, who declined to run again.

Helzer said Wednesday that she intends to focus on connecting with voters in District 6, hearing more about their vision for public education and sharing her ideas.
"I'm forward-focused from here on out," Helzer said Wednesday. "We've got great data to look through, and now we build momentum."
Republican Kirk Penner, Gov. Pete Ricketts' outspoken conservative appointee, was the top vote-getter in District 5.
He led 61% to 39% over Raikes, a retired professor of education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a registered independent.
Penner, after his appointment in December, tried unsuccessfully to permanently shelve further development of the standards. At another meeting, he read aloud explicit passages from children's books to draw attention to the fact that some could be found in Nebraska school libraries.
Neary, an advocate of creating state sex ed standards for Nebraska schools, was the top vote-getter in District 8.
The district is an L-shaped chunk of central Douglas County, encompassing the Boys Town area and parts of the Interstate 680 corridor.
Neary finished with just over 48%, leaving a window of opportunity in the general election for Hodgen, a political newcomer. As a former board member, Sieler had name recognition and experience, but Hodgen had joined the standards fight early on, mounted a vigorous door-to-door campaign and raised a significant campaign war chest. She edged him out 27% to 25%.
Neary has been targeted for defeat by conservative critics who claim she overstepped bounds as a board member and improperly influenced the development of proposed health education standards for Nebraska schools.
She has dismissed the criticism, saying that it's coming from outside of her district and that her actions were proper and had little impact on the draft standards.
Her support for creating inclusive state health standards, however, has gained her support from advocates of comprehensive sex education and from LGBTQ youths and families.
By Joe Dejka

LJS: Lincoln attorneys appointed to district court judgeships

Two Lincoln attorneys have been appointed to open judgeships — one in east-central Nebraska and the other in Southeast Nebraska.
Gov. Pete Ricketts appointed Jason Bergevin, who has been working as an assistant Nebraska Attorney General in the criminal bureau since 2015, to be a district judge in the fifth judicial district, replacing Platte County District Judge Robert Steinke.
And Ricketts appointed David Bargen of Adams, who has practiced law at Rembolt Ludtke in Lincoln since 2006 and became a partner in 2012, to be a district judge in the first judicial district, replacing Saline County District Judge Vicky Johnson.
Steinke and Johnson both recently retired.
The first judicial district consists of Fillmore, Gage, Jefferson, Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee, Richardson, Saline and Thayer counties.
The fifth judicial district consists of Boone, Butler, Colfax, Hamilton, Merrick, Nance, Platte, Polk, Saunders, Seward and York counties.

At the Attorney General's Office, Bergevin, 47, has assisted county attorneys across Nebraska with complex criminal prosecutions and grand jury investigations. He's prosecuted cases involving murder, kidnapping, child sexual assaults and motor vehicle homicides. And he has served as the legal adviser for multiple state agencies.

He also has served as a judge advocate in the United States Air Force since 2010, has been assigned to the Nebraska Air National Guard since 2016 and provided defense services to airmen as the area defense counsel from 2016-2019. Since 2019, he has advised commanders, processed administrative actions and provided legal assistance to airmen in the role of deputy staff judge advocate.

Bergevin got his law degree from Western New England University School of Law in Massachusetts.

His practice has included municipal and governmental law, water law and civil litigation. He has served as city attorney and assistant city attorney to several Nebraska municipalities and has served as a special assistant Attorney General for the State of Nebraska in various lawsuits.

Bargen's water law practice has included representing public power and irrigation districts in litigation involving water rights and related matters, natural resources districts on interbasin transfer permits and challenges to integrated management plans in contested hearings at the Department of Natural Resources, and advising on plans for water offset programs.

Bargen got his law degree from the University of Nebraska College of Law, where he graduated with high distinction.

By Lori Pilger

Gambling News: Nebraska Governor Paves the Way for Casino License Applications in June

After legislative Bill 876 aimed at expanding the gambling market in Nebraska gained traction at the end of March with senator Tom Briese by its side, it was Governor Pete Ricketts' turn to bring his contribution to the saga. Last Wednesday, Ricketts signed off the rules that would allow casino gambling in the Cornhusker State. The rules are expected to come into effect today, giving the green light to operators eager to apply for a license. However, the actual starting date of the licensing procedure has been postponed until June 2 at the earliest.

Why the Delay?

The Nebraska Racing and Gaming Commission still needs to work out how much applicants will need to pay to get their licenses. Last November, the commission talked about a $1 million fee for a 20-year licensing permit.

Since their next meeting will be held on June 2, casino operators will need to remain patient until then and wait for the hurdles to be cleared. According to information made public by the Commission's director Tom Sage, the processing procedure will between 30 to 60 days. Next, the request will need to be added to the commission's agenda to be granted or denied its approval.

Translation: operators will need to wait until the start of fall or at least the end of summer for a license. The first in line to apply for one will be Nebraska Horseman's Benevolent and Protective Association together with its new partner Ho-Chunk. Together, the two are eager to build a number of WarHorse branded casinos in Nebraska, with selected locations in South Sioux City, Lincoln, and Omaha. Ho-Chunk spent the last five years eagerly waiting to add the gaming vertical to their War

Horse business. The company will, however, need to wait at least one more year and a half to open its Lincoln venue. Nonetheless, an interim gaming venue is expected to open in the upcoming months.

Keep the Money in Nebraska

Close to 65% of voters in Nebraska showed their support for casino gambling at the state's racetracks during the 2020 ballot. The ballot was also supported by Ho-Chunk and the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association owned by the state. The success of the self-entitled "Keep the Money in Nebraska" ballot was explained through Nebraskans' pride and a desire to keep the money within state lines. This came in the context of state racetracks going on a descending trend ever since Iowa made casino gambling legal over three decades ago.

Close to $400 million from Nebraska's players reach casinos in Iowa on a yearly basis. The legalization of gambling in Nebraska was regarded as a means of beefing up the state treasury's pockets by $60 million to $120 million a year.

The Lincoln Race Course, Fonner Park, Caesars Entertainment, the Chickasaw Nation, and other important operators in Nebraska have all expressed their plans to build or redevelop racetracks and casinos at various locations within the state. However, their proposals will only be taken into consideration after the Racing and Gaming Commission will finish assessing the economic and social impact of the new constructions, as part of the new regulations. Columbus, Lincoln, Grand Island, Omaha, Hastings, and South Sioux City are the six counties that will originally accept new casinos.

By Melanie Porter

OWH: State agrees to pay $479K to settle lawsuit over Scottsbluff man's killing at hands of cellmate

The state of Nebraska has agreed to pay $479,000 to the family of a 22-year-old Scottsbluff man strangled to death by his cellmate at the Tecumseh State Correctional Institution in 2017.

Terry Berry Jr.'s family blamed state prison officials and employees for the decision to place Berry, who was just days from a parole hearing on a short sentence for forgery and assault, in a cell with Patrick Schroeder, who was serving a life sentence for killing a 75-year-old man and dumping his body in an abandoned well.

Five days after the move, Schroeder killed Berry, then asked a guard who he should report an unresponsive inmate to and pointed at Berry, who was lying on the floor with a towel around his neck.

Schroeder later pleaded guilty to first-degree murder for Berry's killing and now is on death row.

In 2019, a federal judge dismissed Scott Frakes, director of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, and Brad Hansen, the warden at the time, from the suit filed by Telena Moser, on behalf of Berry's estate.

Attorneys for Berry's family argued unsuccessfully that the officials were liable for failing to properly supervise and train the employees who made the decision or created a policy that led to it.

But the case was allowed to go forward against Athena Brown and Todd Haussler, the unit managers who made the decision to house the inmates together; JoAnn Helton, a caseworker who expressed concerns about the decision; and Dustin Gustafson, an acting lieutenant who Helton had gone to

about it but who did nothing.
"Given Schroeder's regular placement in restrictive housing and known behavioral problems, it is plausible that Brown and Haussler were deliberately indifferent to a substantial risk of harm posed by Schroeder to Berry," then-Senior U.S. District Judge Laurie Smith Camp wrote in her order.
She said she also couldn't conclude that the assault would've come as a surprise to Helton or Gustafson.
According to the lawsuit, Helton warned others that she "personally felt that it was not the best idea" because Schroeder didn't want a cellmate, had a temper and would not want a cellmate like Berry, who was known to be "very talkative and bothersome."
When she told Gustafson, he told her there wasn't much that could be done unless she called the person who had made the decision at home.
Five days later, Schroeder wrapped his arm around Berry's neck and squeezed for five minutes, then got a towel and twisted it around Berry's neck until he was sure Berry was dead, according to Schroeder's confession.
“Yeah, I did it. He wouldn’t shut up,” he said.
Staff attempted CPR but Berry couldn't be saved.
Attorneys on both sides asked to dismiss the case this week, saying the lawsuit had been settled.
When reached Thursday, the Attorney General's Office declined to comment, and Moser's attorney, Rodney Dahlquist, didn't respond to a request for comment.
The Nebraska Department of Administrative Services confirmed the amount of the settlement a day later.
By Lori Pilger

AP: Nebraska to pay $479,000 to settle inmate death lawsuit

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska has agreed to pay $479,000 to the family of a “talkative” Scottsbluff man who was strangled to death in 2017 by a fellow inmate who didn’t want a cellmate .
The lawsuit filed by Terry Berry Jr.’s family against prison officials they argued were responsible for the 22-year-old’s death because they put him in the same cell as Patrick Schroeder was dismissed last week after both sides agreed to the settlement.
Berry was nearing parole on a sentence for forgery and assault when he was placed with Schroeder who was serving a life sentence for killing a 75-year-old man and dumping his body in a well. The Lincoln Journal Star reports that Schroeder later pleaded guilty to killing Berry and was sentenced to death.
Berry’s family argued in the lawsuit that prison officials should have known there would be problems if they placed the two men together and a caseworker at the prison even warned coworkers involved in the decision that Schroeder didn’t want a cellmate and wouldn’t likely tolerate Berry well because he was known to be “very talkative and bothersome.”
Back in 2019, a federal judge dismissed the head of the state Department of Correctional Services and the prison’s warden as defendants, but the case had been allowed to move forward against several prison employees involved in the decision to make the two men cellmates.
Schroeder killed Berry five days after they were placed in the same cell by wrapping his arm around Berry’s neck and squeezing for five minutes before getting a towel and twisting it around Berry’s

neck until he was sure Berry was dead.

OWH: Political parties confident about flipping seats in Nebraska Legislature

LINCOLN — Republicans could gain a filibuster-proof majority in the Nebraska Legislature if the results of Tuesday's primary election are repeated in November.

Unofficial election tallies from the Secretary of State's Office show Republican candidates leading in two districts now held by Democrats, while a Democrat leads in one district held by a Republican.

If that proves to be the general election outcome, Republicans would have 33 seats in the 49-member Legislature, enough to push through bills banning abortion, allowing Nebraskans to carry concealed guns without a permit and returning the state to a winner-take-all Electoral College system.

Jane Kleeb, chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party, dismissed that possibility. She said she's confident of keeping all 17 seats held by Democrats and possibly adding one or two. Her watch list includes an Omaha race in which Cindy Maxwell-Ostdiek, an independent, is running against R. Brad von Gillern, a Republican.

"There's lots of potential of red to blue," she said. "I'm not worried that we're going to lose any seats."

Taylor Gage, executive director of the Nebraska Republican Party, was bullish about the GOP's showing in the primary and optimistic about the general election.

"Obviously we started off in a really strong position," he said. "We're going to pick up seats in November."

The Nebraska Legislature is nonpartisan, meaning that candidates appear on the ballot without party labels and political parties play no official role in the legislative process. But the parties do get involved in elections and, within the Legislature, votes on some high-profile issues split along generally partisan lines.

This year, the stakes have been raised for legislative races because of a potential U.S. Supreme Court decision on Roe v. Wade. A leaked draft of a high court opinion suggested the court will strike down the landmark 1973 ruling that legalized abortion nationwide. A ruling is expected in late June.

Such a decision would leave it up to states whether to allow abortions. What Nebraska does on the issue could depend on the November election. This spring, a bill that would have banned all abortions in the state if the high court overturned Roe fell two votes short of overcoming a filibuster against it.

Kleeb, who spoke while attending a meeting of top Democratic Party state officials, said state legislatures are an "absolute focus" of the party this year.

She ticked off factors that make her optimistic about the fall.

First, a heated battle over the GOP gubernatorial nomination brought out more Republican voters than Democrats for the primary. Kleeb said the difference in turnout pumped up totals for Republican candidates in the primary but is unlikely to be repeated in November.

In both Douglas and Lancaster Counties, the number of Republican ballots cast equaled about 43% of that party's registrations, while the number of Democratic ballots cast was closer to 30% of party

registrations.
In addition, national interest in the Omaha-area congressional race, pitting State Sen. Tony Vargas, a Democrat, against the GOP incumbent, Rep. Don Bacon, means more resources to get out the Democratic vote, she said. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee recently included the race in its list of seats targeted to flip parties.
A ballot measure to increase the state's minimum wage could drive turnout among Democrats and like-minded independents, if a petition drive to put the issue before voters succeeds, she said.
A pair of proposals to legalize medical marijuana also could draw voters. But it's not clear whether the medical marijuana petition drive can gather the needed signatures after losing its major donors.
"Progressive issues on the ballot help," Kleeb said.
Gage has his own list of reasons for confidence.
Republicans have more candidates, including for all of the state's top elected positions and 23 of the 24 legislative races, he said. At the top of the ticket is University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen, who survived a bruising battle to become the GOP gubernatorial nominee. He will face Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue, the Democratic nominee.
Gage said he expects an initiative proposal to require that people present photo identification before voting will bring out Republican voters. A petition drive is underway to get the proposed constitutional amendment on the ballot.
He also pointed to what he called a "right wave" across the country and to the size of Republican campaign coffers, an advantage that extends from the state party through to individual legislative races.
"They (Democrats) don't have much reason to turn out in the general election," he said.
Based on the unofficial primary results, only one of the 11 incumbent state senators up for election appears to be in jeopardy. Primary results will not become official until the Board of Canvassers meets June 6 to certify the election.
Sen. Mike Jacobson of North Platte came in second to Chris Bruns, also of North Platte. Jacobson, a banker, has held the seat for less than three months after being appointed to replace former Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte, who resigned after taking inappropriate photos of a female staff member.
Groene, who was term-limited and in his last year in office, endorsed Bruns last year. Bruns, a rancher and Lincoln County Board member, said he overcame Jacobson's financial advantage through grassroots campaigning.
Thirteen legislative seats are open because the incumbents are term-limited or, in two cases, opted not to run for reelection. The late April death of Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha will add another open seat in November. It occurred too late for candidates to get on the primary ballot. Candidates for his seat will have to submit at least 2,000 valid petition signatures to appear on the November ballot.
By Martha Stoddard

AP: Federal judge tosses most misconduct cases against Nebraska

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A federal judge dismissed the claims of seven women who alleged the

University of Nebraska-Lincoln didn't adequately respond to their complaints of being sexually assaulted or harassed, including four women who said they were victims of Cornhuskers athletes.
In his ruling Wednesday, U.S. District Chief Judge Robert F. Rossiter, Jr. allowed two other women who are plaintiffs to proceed with a portion of the case.
The lawsuit filed in July 2020 alleged violations of Title IX, the federal civil rights law ensuring equal opportunities for women in education. It said university training for students on sexual misconduct policies and investigation and reporting procedures are inadequate.
Rossiter, Jr. found the university did make mistakes but was not "deliberately indifferent" in its response to the seven women's complaints and didn't put the students at risk of further harm or violate their civil rights.
"The opinion provides substantial affirmation for the university's confidence in its overall Title IX process," the university said in a statement to media outlets. "While we cannot comment on the specifics of any Title IX case, every case is difficult and investigated on the information made available. The University disagrees with the factual assertions in the remaining claims and will continue to actively defend the litigation."
A former Nebraska volleyball player and eight other women alleged a pattern of unresponsiveness, sloppiness and indifference by university employees in charge of investigating allegations of sexual misconduct.
The volleyball player, Capri Davis, alleged she was groped at an off-campus party. She later transferred to Texas.
Two athletes named in the case and accused of wrongdoing are former football players Katerian LeGrone and Andre Hunt. They were expelled in April 2020.
Both were criminally charged. LeGrone was found not guilty of sexual assault and Hunt was ordered to pay a $1,000 fine for a misdemeanor charge of false reporting. Hunt was initially charged with first-degree sexual assault but later pleaded no contest to the misdemeanor charge.
The Title IX lawsuit attracted the attention of the U.S. Department of Justice. The department's Civil Rights Division, in a filing last summer, criticized the university's response to the women's claims.

AP: Nebraska tax collections beat expectations in April

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska collected more tax revenue than projected in April and is still well ahead of expectations for the current fiscal year, according to new numbers released Friday.
The state Department of Revenue reported net April tax receipts of $939 million, which is 66.7% above the official state forecast of $563 million. The numbers are often higher in April as taxpayers file their returns.
Net sales-and-use taxes were slightly below the forecast, while net indivdual and corporate incomes taxes and net miscellaneous taxes all came in higher than predicted.
Nebraska has collected $5.153 billion in the current fiscal year that ends on June 30. That's 11.1% above the official forecast of $4.637 billion.
The projections were set by the Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board at its last meeting in February. Nebraska lawmakers and governors use the projections to determine how much tax money they have at their disposal.

LJS: Storms cause extensive damage to parts of Nebraska

The storms that rolled across Nebraska on Thursday left behind some significant damage.
In Burwell, high winds blew through the Garfield County Fairgrounds, severely damaging the grandstands, according to a Facebook post from Nebraska's Big Rodeo.
"80+ mph winds, hail and heavy rain blew the roof off our north grandstands and there is debris strewn all over the northern area of the grounds," the post said.
Pictures accompanying the post showed the damage to the grandstand as well as roofs torn off buildings and debris scattered on the ground.
No one could be reached at the office of Nebraska's Big Rodeo, which is held in July at the fairgrounds. Local emergency management personnel also were unavailable Friday morning.
Though no tornadoes were reported in Nebraska, some areas of the state saw wind gusts of more than 80 mph, including Valley County, where a gust of 89 mph was reported near Ord.
Reports submitted to the National Weather Service showed there was damage to trees, power poles and homes and buildings in numerous areas, including Lexington, Ord, Oakdale, Rising City and Niobrara. There also were reports of semi-tractor trailers and other vehicles being blown off roads or toppled.
Nebraska State Patrol spokesman Cody Thomas said a dust storm between Hershey and Sutherland caused near-zero visibility Thursday afternoon, which led to a crash involving 11 vehicles. Only minor injuries were reported, but the highway was closed for about 2 hours during clean-up.
Troopers also responded to eight incidents on Interstate 80 between Aurora and York, including blown-over semis and a couple of vehicle collisions. Only minor injuries were reported, but I-80 eastbound lanes were closed for a short time during response to the crashes, Thomas said.
Some areas also saw large hail, with the weather service's Omaha office receiving a report of 2 1/2-inch-diameter hail in DeWitt.
The weather service said most of the damage occurred north of Interstate 80, although wind gusts of more than 50 mph in Lincoln caused brief power outages for nearly 4,000 customers. All power had been restored by Friday morning.
The weather service said Thursday's storms met the definition of a derecho, which is a long-lived windstorm that produces thunderstorms as it moves across a wide area. There were at least 55 reports of wind gusts of 75 mph or more across Nebraska, the second-most in a single day since 2004. The only storm to produce more was the Dec. 15 derecho that spun up a dozen tornadoes in Nebraska.
The storms Thursday also produced large walls of dust, known as "haboobs," in some areas of western and central Nebraska.
A haboob occurs when dust is kicked up shortly before a thunderstorm moves in. A downdraft of cold air reaches the ground and kicks up dust, creating a dust wall that moves quickly and turns the sky pitch-black, according to Jordan Thies, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hastings.
"If conditions are dry enough and winds are strong enough, it can make for a pretty ominous sight," Thies said.
Western Nebraska — which is in the grip of severe drought — was most impacted by the dust storms. Parts of South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota were also clouded in dust as severe

thunderstorms rolled through the region.
By Matt Olberding

OWH: Final early primary ballots clear up some races, including 1 in Douglas County

Final early primary ballots were added to the vote count Friday, clearing up some races that had been too close to call.
Those included the race for the Democratic nomination for Douglas County sheriff. The updated numbers put Greg Gonzalez ahead of Wayne Hudson by more than 1,300 votes.
On the Republican side of the county sheriff's race, Aaron Hanson won easily against George Merithew.
Douglas County Election Commissioner Brian Kruse said 31.5% of the county's registered voters participated in the primary election. The previous high for a gubernatorial primary of 27.6% was set in 2006. Historically, Kruse said, turnout is around 20%.
Turnout across the state sat at 32%, said Cindi Allen with the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office. That number, she said, is typical for a primary.
Kruse said officials still are counting provisional ballots and looking into a handful of ballots where signatures may not match or cases where voters received a replacement ballot. He expects an additional 950 ballots to be added to the count.
The race for Legislative District 18 in Douglas County is another one Kruse said officials are watching. Clarice Jackson and Christy Amendariz are separated by 21 votes for second place.
Automatic recounts are triggered if the difference between second and third place is less than 1% of the top vote-getter's total, Kruse said.
For the most part, things went smoothly Tuesday, Kruse said. He credited patient voters and a strong contingent of poll workers.
"They really are, for the most part, Nebraska nice, which makes everything just go smoothly," he said.
By Kelsey Stewart

OWH: Nebraska moms among many nationwide on the hunt for baby formula

Corinne Ehlers of Papillion tried everything she could to breastfeed her now-3½-month-old daughter, Charlotte.
She saw multiple lactation consultants, who concluded her milk supply just wasn't adequate. By then, Charlotte had lost more weight than was usual for a newborn, so Ehlers started supplementing with infant formula. Ultimately, she took her pediatrician's advice and switched to formula entirely.
"It was really disappointing; it was heartbreaking," she said of her realization that her body wasn't

going to provide for her child as she had planned.
Over the last month or two, Ehlers has seen stocks of infant formula on store shelves dwindle, the result of a nationwide shortage of formula created by a combination of short- and long-term problems that have affected most of the biggest U.S. brands.
Thanks to a network of family and friends who pick up the type of formula she uses whenever they see it in stores, Ehlers has collected what she estimates is a month's supply of formula. But she worries about what will happen if the shortage gets worse and she can't find the product, particularly as Charlotte grows and eats more.
A family friend visited multiple stores in the Omaha metro area Thursday and couldn't find the brand Ehlers uses.
"It's just scary to think you may not be able to feed your child," she said.
Ehlers isn't the only parent on the hunt for formula these days. Millions of babies in the U.S. rely on formula, which is the only source of nutrition recommended for infants who aren't exclusively breastfed.
The supply problems began last year as the COVID-19 pandemic led to economy-wide disruptions in labor, transportation and raw materials that also affected the formula industry. Inventory was further squeezed by parents stockpiling during COVID lockdowns.
Then, in February, Abbott Nutrition recalled several major brands of powdered formula and shut down its Sturgis, Michigan, factory when federal officials began investigating what happened when four babies suffered bacterial infections after consuming formula from the facility.
Abbott is one of only a handful of companies that produce the vast majority of the U.S. formula supply, so its recall wiped out a large segment of the market.
The company says its products have not been directly linked to the bacterial infections in children, pointing out that genetic samples collected from its factory did not match those found in several infants who got sick.
President Joe Biden announced this week that the federal government is working with manufacturers to increase production of formula and help families access existing stock.
As a result, federal officials said, more infant formula has been produced in the last four weeks than in the four weeks preceding the recall, even with the Abbott facility offline.
The White House also announced additional steps to get more formula on shelves as quickly as possible without compromising safety.
The U.S. Department of Agriculture is working with states to allow people in the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC, to use their benefits on a wider variety of products, both brands and sizes. The White House also called on federal agencies to crack down on price gouging and to increase imports of formula.
Peggy Trouba, manager of Nebraska WIC, said the state has received a waiver from USDA to broaden its offerings. The agency has a list of recommended substitutes if parents and caregivers can't find their usual formula, and WIC clinic staff also can help.
"We're doing everything we can to help," she said. "It's a tough situation for parents and caregivers out there."
The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services on Friday urged parents and caregivers to contact their health care provider before pursuing other alternatives. Agency officials warned against watering down formula to stretch supplies or making homemade baby formula.
Most formulas contain protein from cow's milk that has been altered to be easier to digest and enhanced with extra nutrients needed for growth and development. The FDA sets specific nutritional

requirements, including minimum amounts of protein, fat, calcium and a number of vitamins. Watering down formula, state health officials said, is dangerous, can cause nutritional imbalances in infants and could lead to serious health problems. Caregivers, they said, always should mix formula as directed by the manufacturer or a pediatrician.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has advised that recipes for homemade formula circulating on the internet may not be safe and do not meet infants' nutritional needs.

Phil Rooney, a spokesman for the Douglas County Health Department, said the Douglas/Sarpy County WIC clinic has been dealing with the shortage for months because of the Abbott shutdown. Program participants are being encouraged to make regular checks of multiple stores to try to find formula, he said. If they're still having difficulty, they should contact their local WIC clinic. Nutritionists can help them make adjustments under the looser purchasing options.

Nationally, some officials also have advised contacting food banks for formula. Locally, the Food Bank for the Heartland hasn't often received formula and therefore doesn't usually distribute it, officials said.

But in light of the supply chain problems, the food bank in July will begin transporting and distributing formula returned to the Douglas/Sarpy County WIC locations. "The Food Bank is hopeful that through this partnership we can further assist families during this difficult time," food bank officials said in a statement.

Dr. Jeremy Toffle, a pediatrician with Children's Physicians West Village Pointe office, said the clinic gets calls every day from parents wondering where to get formula and seeking manufacturer samples.

The clinic typically doesn't have samples these days, he said, because manufacturers are focused on getting formula on shelves and supply in the WIC program.

For infants who don't require formula to meet special dietary needs, he suggests parents contact their pediatrician to recommend a substitute if they're having trouble finding their regular brand. Most brands have similar formulas and they often are interchangeable, at least for a short time. The West Village Pointe clinic keeps lists of substitutes for such calls, he said.

Most of the calls, however, are coming from parents of infants who require special formulas, often because of intolerance to dairy or soy. In such cases, Toffle said, staff members can reach out to WIC clinics or other sources or even contact a manufacturer's representative to see if they can find a couple of cans for a parent who can't find it.

"We haven't reached the point where we couldn't find something for somebody yet, at least from our office's standpoint," Toffle said.

But parents with infants who have special dietary needs face a particular challenge.

Ehlers, the Papillion mom, said her young nephew can consume only a certain soy-based formula. His parents are stocked up, but she worries about him nonetheless.

"I just feel sorry for those moms with special needs," she said.

Heather Whitehead of Lincoln is one of those moms. Her 8½-month-old son, Kobe, is sensitive to lactose and uses a special formula, which she has had trouble finding. She currently has two large cans and already is on the hunt for more, although she's careful to use conventional retailers like Amazon. "I get online every day looking for it ... because what if I get to the bottom of that can?" she said.

Health officials warn against buying formula via social media websites or outside of conventional retailers because they could be counterfeit.

Whitehead said she's part of a group on Facebook for moms involved in the formula search. Some

are offering to donate. But one member recently urged caution with buying online, posting a photo of cans that someone else had bought only to find them already opened and filled with flour.
Meanwhile, the FDA is working with Abbott to fix the issues that triggered the shutdown of its Michigan plant, which produces Similac, EleCare and several other leading powdered formulas.
The Chicago-based company said this week that, pending FDA approval, it could restart manufacturing at its plant within two weeks. After that, it would take another six to eight weeks before new products hit store shelves.
By Julie Anderson

LJS: Lincoln woman loses legal fight to keep her home following Supreme Court ruling

A Lincoln woman Friday lost her legal fight to keep her home following a Nebraska Supreme Court ruling where she had challenged the sale of her property tax liens when she had gotten behind on real estate taxes.
"Despite legal protections, (Sandra) Nieveen, who suffers from mental illness, will lose her home of nearly 50 years based on today's ruling," attorney Mark Bestul of Legal Aid of Nebraska said in a news release.
Under Nebraska law, counties can sell property tax liens to private parties when homeowners fall behind on their real estate taxes. Regardless of how much equity a homeowner has in his or her property or how small the amount the owner owes in taxes, state law allows the county to take the property and all of the equity in it and transfer it to a private purchaser who pays the unpaid taxes.
If the property owner doesn't pay the money back within three years, the private party can take ownership of the property.
Bestul said Nieveen tried to rely upon a two-year extension of time for the redemption period based on her mental illness.
Extensions are allowed under Nebraska law if a property owner is determined to suffer a mental disorder at the time of the tax sale.
But both the trial court and the Nebraska Supreme Court determined that Nieveen did not prove she was entitled to it.
In Friday's decision, Justice Jonathan Papik said to qualify for the extension, the party must establish that he or she has a mental health condition and that it prevented them from understanding their legal rights or taking action to protect them.
He said Nieveen acknowledged in testimony that she knew she had to pay her bills and that there were consequences if she did not.
"While we have no reason to question that Nieveen suffered from depression and anxiety in 2015, we do not believe she proved that those conditions prevented her from understanding her legal rights or taking action to protect them," Papik wrote.
And, he said, Nieveen failed to avail herself of the opportunity for a hearing on the requested extension.
In response to Friday's decision, Bestul said: "The fact our clients, like Ms. Nieveen, who are already dealing with many facets of instability, now also have to lose their home due to a lack of a basic

notice is heartbreaking. We firmly believe that low-income, elderly and disabled clients deserve better, and we will continue to fight for fair and equal property rights for all Nebraskans."
He said they are reviewing the decision and determining all possible remaining options, including requesting additional review by the U.S. Supreme Court.
Legal Aid of Nebraska was involved in a similar case before the Nebraska Supreme Court, Continental Resources v. Kevin Fair, in which Fair argued Nebraska's tax sale scheme is unconstitutional.
The state's high court ruled against him in March.
Bestul said Fair plans to seek review in the U.S. Supreme Court.
By Lori Pilger

OWH: Report: Air Force made 'reasonable' choice choosing Huntsville over Offutt for SpaceCom HQ

The Air Force followed proper procedures and made a “reasonable” decision early last year in choosing Huntsville, Alabama, over Nebraska’s Offutt Air Force Base and sites in four other states for the permanent headquarters of U.S. Space Command, the Pentagon’s official watchdog said in a new report.
But the Department of Defense inspector general faulted the Air Force for failing to keep full records supporting the site-selection decision. A redacted version of the report released to the public said the lack of records hampered auditors’ ability to verify that the process was done correctly. The report included several improvements.
The report detailed how the Air Force made its selection, including the points system used to evaluate the six finalists before then-Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett’s selection of Huntsville on Jan. 13, 2021 — her last day on the job.
The inspector general blacked out all ratings and comments by the site-selection committee from the report released to the public, except to show that the panel had scored Huntsville’s Redstone Arsenal on top.
However, according to the digital magazine Breaking Defense, which obtained an unredacted draft version of the IG report, the committee scored Offutt’s bid third among the six finalists — behind Huntsville and Albuquerque, New Mexico, and ahead of San Antonio, Texas; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Cape Canaveral, Florida.
The report also showed that top Air Force and Space Command officials intervened to push the bid of Colorado Springs — the longtime home of Air Force space operations — to the top of the list after it scored below other sites, part of a flurry of adjustments to the ratings in the last days before the decision was announced.
Huntsville was selected, anyway, after a meeting involving President Donald Trump. Accounts of that meeting by some of the people who participated were redacted from the report.
The IG launched the investigation at the urging of members of Congress from several states that lost out, including Nebraska Sen. Deb Fischer. Rep. Doug Lamborn, R-Colorado, denounced the decision as “horrendous,” alleging it had been tainted by politics.
Press and politicians in Colorado suggested Trump handed the SpaceCom headquarters to deep-red Alabama as a political favor for supporting his 2020 reelection bid.

Trump himself gave credence to those claims when he boasted in an interview last August that he had "single-handedly" delivered the headquarters to Huntsville.
Landing the headquarters of Space Command — similar in stature to Offutt's U.S. Strategic Command — was certainly a plum prize for any city. The new headquarters building is expected to cost $1 billion to $2 billion and attract about 1,400 high-paying jobs.
Established in 1985, SpaceCom was headquartered at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs until 2002, when it was merged into StratCom at Offutt. In 2019, SpaceCom was re-established as a separate command. Its temporary headquarters was again placed at Peterson.
Tasked with choosing a permanent site, the Air Force selected six bases as finalists — four in Colorado (including Peterson), and one each in Alabama and California.
But after complaints from Congress about a lack of transparency, the Air Force restarted the process in 2020. Sixty-six sites in 26 states were nominated. Six top-scoring finalists were announced in November 2020.
Peterson and Redstone were the only bases to appear on both lists.
The qualifiers were scored in 21 areas involving mission compatibility, capacity, community support and cost to the Defense Department.
Boosters of each finalist made video teleconference pitches and received site visits from the selection committee in December 2020 and early January 2021.
Some observers gave Colorado Springs the edge because of its long and deep ties with the Air Force's space operations.
Huntsville touts itself as "the Rocket City" because it is the home of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and the headquarters of several Army missile commands.
Still, members of the team boosting Offutt, headlined by Fischer and Gov. Pete Ricketts, thought they stood a solid chance of winning because of the area's low living costs, solid schools and strong support for the military. They sweetened the offer with $107 million in financial incentives and the pledge of a space-oriented academic research alliance led by the University of Nebraska.
The report shows Huntsville earned the highest marks from the selection committee.
But several officials, including SpaceCom chief Gen. James Dickinson and then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff John Hyten (a former StratCom commander) said they thought Colorado Springs' bid had been underscored.
In two meetings and a flurry of emails, they argued the committee should have looked at how quickly SpaceCom could be fully functional at each site. They said that would happen much faster at Peterson, since the command was already based there.
As a result, the IG report says, the committee recommended Colorado Springs to Trump during an Oval Office meeting Jan. 11. But two days later, Barrett announced the selection of Huntsville.
Construction is slated to start on the new headquarters in 2023, pending an environmental review.
This week, political leaders in Colorado called for the Pentagon to keep SpaceCom's headquarters at Peterson permanently.
"Our position remains that the previous administration used a basing process for U.S. Space Command that was untested, lacked transparency, and neglected critical national security and cost considerations," Colorado Sens. Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper, both Democrats, said in a joint statement.
Nebraska leaders seem to have moved on. The Legislature passed a bill this spring to shift $50 million in state SpaceCom incentive funds to support Offutt in other ways.
Fischer said through a spokesman that she was waiting to see the results of a separate audit by the

Government Accountability Office, a federal watchdog agency. That report is expected to be released within weeks.
By Steve Liewer

OWH Editorial: Nebraska's primary turnout isn't good enough

The 2022 Nebraska primary is over. Congratulations to the winners who will advance to the general election in November, and respect to those who were defeated after engaging in this important democratic process.
Thanks to the poll workers and other election officials who ensured that votes were properly counted.
And thanks to the voters, whether you cast your ballots early from home or in a voting booth on Election Day. This year, turnout was on the higher side as primaries go. Statewide, 33% voted. The record is 35% for a gubernatorial primary, 40% overall.
But let's not congratulate ourselves too much about our somewhat better-than-average turnout. For every voter who showed up, two others skipped the whole affair.
It's hard to assert that "we the people" are in charge when only a minority of us are choosing our leaders and deciding on important issues.
True, a primary usually isn't the final chance voters have to weigh in. But sometimes it is.
In Omaha, primary voters decided Tuesday to spend $260 million on major street projects, buildings, parks and more — and to borrow the money to do that.
We're glad that Omaha's streets will have the money to be upgraded and maintained, and Omaha's bond package is designed to avoid raising property taxes more than previously authorized. But the fact is that without the newly-approved bonds, taxes might have declined. Which means that a minority of Omahans on Tuesday committed everyone else in the city to higher levels of property taxes.
It's tempting to say to the non-voters: "You snooze, you lose."
Those who cared enough made the choice. But that's hardly the way to ensure that Omaha's residents, collectively, will be behind the policies that are chosen.
Low turnout isn't the only way that our primaries may not reflect the will of the broader electorate. For example, Republican candidate Walt Peffer won a three-way GOP primary for Douglas County Assessor/Register of Deeds. Since no Democratic candidate ran for the office, Peffer is set to be unopposed in November.
But the 19,234 votes Peffer received in the primary hardly represent the county's voters. He got less than 42% of the votes cast in his primary race. Since Democrats and nonpartisan voters weren't allowed to vote in the Republican primary, Peffer had only 16 percent of all ballots cast in the election.
And Peffer's vote total was only 5% of all Douglas County registered voters.
Yet that partisan 5% group effectively chose the person in charge of setting fair and accurate property valuations for every one of the county's property owners.
That's not the kind of participation in representative democracy that we should want.

To do better, more candidates need to step up and run. Many more voters need to show up at the polls. And along with those things, perhaps we need to consider changes that would create better incentives to vote and ensure representative results.

Nonpartisan voters are taxpayers who contribute just as much as Republicans and Democrats to the cost of running elections, but any independent voter who shows up at the polls in a primary is likely to be disappointed by the paltry number of races they can vote in. They shouldn't be prevented from voting for offices that are classified as partisan, from the governor to county sheriff. They should be able to give their preference on which candidates will advance to the general election ballot, especially if there might not be much choice at that point.

Right now, it's up to the parties to decide whether to open up their primaries to nonpartisan voters. Democrats, Libertarians and the Legal Marijuana NOW party did this year. Republicans did not, which may be the reason why thousands of voters changed their registrations to Republican in the months before the primary, the only way that they could vote in the state's hottest primary contest, the GOP race for governor.

The nearly 22% of Nebraska voters who didn't want to sign up for a party were left on the sidelines as just over one-third of Republican voters picked Jim Pillen to face Democrat Carol Blood in November.

And that GOP primary may well have chosen the state's governor for the next four years. Given that Republican-leaning Nebraska hasn't elected a Democrat for governor since Ben Nelson in 1994, Pillen is clearly the favorite.

We're not sure of the right solution to make primaries more meaningful for independent voters and more representative overall. Some advocate more open primaries or entirely nonpartisan primaries or shifting to ranked choice elections. There are advantages and disadvantages to any change.

But we know this. Primaries like the one we just completed are drawing too few voters, partly because they aren't set up to encourage participation of all Nebraskans.

And when these low-turnout elections effectively make final decisions in races and ballot issues, the outcome is undemocratic.

Nebraska should look for ways to do better.

OWH Midlands Voices: You can't spell 'farmers' without 'e' and 's'

ESG is a lot more than a Wall Street acronym.

It is dominating board room discussions and business decisions in publicly traded companies across the country, and it is one reason U.S. businesses were so quick to turn their backs on Russia after Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine.

ESG stands for environment, social and governance, and it reflects the understandable expectation that corporate America will act responsibly towards investors, workers, customers, the environment, and society as a whole.

As the CEO of a publicly traded company that invests in farmland, ESG is a responsibility I take seriously. As someone who has been involved in production agriculture for much of my life, it's something that comes naturally.

When I think of ESG as it relates to our company, I start with the core belief that everyone on the planet has the right to eat.

Providing nourishment to all people and reducing starvation is non-negotiable in my mind.

Therefore, decisions should not be made in the name of ESG that reduce food production and create greater food insecurity around the globe.

For example, we wouldn't expect our tenants to shun proven technologies or alter their crop rotations at the expense of food affordability because a handful of vocal opponents have competing agendas.

The key is to maximize production while minimizing environmental impact.

We understand that farmland and the farmers who cultivate it today create a more sustainable future for all by affordably feeding the world's growing population in an environmentally responsible way.

To prove that point, our company recently sent a survey to 137 tenants who farm crops on land we own and/or manage across the country.

More than 60% responded, and the results reinforced something that most of us in agriculture already know — farmers are leading the way in sustainability. Among the results:

94% of respondents use some form of conservation tillage to reduce erosion, improve soil health, and conserve water.

72% have grassed waterways, buffer strips around fields, or drainage structures to help slow surface runoff and trap sediment.

82% primarily use equipment with diesel exhaust fluid technology to control emissions.

87% use variable rate application technology to efficiently apply seed, fertilizer, and other inputs.

98% split nitrogen applications and/or use tools like nitrogen inhibitors to reduce nitrogen loss.

66% invest in conservation activities to benefit wildlife and pollinator habitat.

We also found that numerous tenants planted cover crops and have worked closely with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service through a variety of programs designed to improve and preserve the land. Some are also involved in carbon credit programs.

Oh, and 90% of the tenants who responded to our survey are defined as family farms by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This picture is different from the false narrative perpetuated by some, who want to paint U.S. agriculture as industrialized factory farms that do more harm than good.

Our tenants, just like most farmers, have friends and relatives who live near the same land that they depend on for their livelihoods. It's the same land their parents and grandparents farmed. It's the farm they dream of leaving to the next generation. Why would they do it harm?

Earlier this year, Robert Bonnie, USDA's undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation, responded to one high-profile attack on agriculture's environmental record that was published by the New York Times.

"I think farmers, ranchers, forest owners are all great stewards of the land. I think they all depend on the productivity of the land," he explained when testifying before Congress. "Agriculture has the opportunity to be a critically important partner — in fact, it is already … in climate, water quality, wildlife, and other ways."

He's spot on. The modern-day American farmer is feeding the world and taking care of the planet at the same time. That's what effective ESG looks like in practice.

Paul Pittman is chairman and CEO of Farmland Partners Inc. The company owns and/or manages 186,000 acres in 19 states, including Nebraska.

OWH Midlands Voices: Federal law needed to protect LGBTQ Americans from discrimination

Most elected officials say the right thing these days about wanting to end the HIV epidemic in the United States. But if our legislators really want to beat this disease, they need to ensure that LGBTQ Americans are provided with equal rights, better access to care and more secure housing. Federal nondiscrimination legislation will help us get there.

The lack of understanding around HIV paired with the fact that our country does not have an explicit federal law prohibiting anti-LGBTQ discrimination make it challenging for those of us with the virus to live our lives freely. More than 1-in-3 LGBTQ Americans report facing discrimination in our everyday lives, and for people living with HIV, the chance of experiencing discrimination is, unfortunately, even more likely.

I've experienced both employment and medical discrimination in just the last few years. At my past place of work, a finance call center, I told my boss I was planning to do a media interview about HIV. There were no Black gay men in my area speaking out on this issue and it was important to me to be a voice for change. I wasn't "out" at my job, but I felt folks knew I was gay. I wasn't open about living with HIV, but I trusted that I was safe at work. I did the interview, which aired on a Sunday at 10 pm. I walked into the office on Monday morning to find that an employee had printed the article and highlighted my name and the word "HIV." They were reprimanded, but the workplace wasn't the same after that.

My experience of medical discrimination during my HIV diagnosis made me want to fight for compassionate and competent health care for all people. In January 2010, I noticed a strange outbreak on my skin. I assumed it was just cosmetic, but I went to the dermatologist to be on the safe side. The doctor was cold and uninviting. He didn't ask any medical or personal questions — just did a quick exam and asked if I had ever been tested for HIV.

I left that appointment feeling like assumptions were made about me that affected my care. I'm Black, and the doctor made it clear that he assumed I was gay. His attitude was judgmental and dismissive, and I dreaded coming back to get my test results.

A week later, I brought a friend with me for support when I returned for my follow-up appointment. The same doctor was there, with the same dehumanizing tone. He didn't even come into the exam room to give me my results. He just stood in the doorway, with the door wide open, in front of the nurses' station, and told me I was HIV positive.

Then he said, "We'll get you on your way." He offered zero information about what living with HIV would be like. He gave me no resources, no pamphlets, no plan, no referral, no "Here's how we can help." Nothing. No level of comfort was provided. He didn't even stay in the room for any follow up questions.

I wanted a second opinion. I knew the Nebraska AIDS Project's free clinic offered walk-in testing, so I steeled myself for another uncomfortable doctor's appointment and went to their office. Right away, I could see the experience was going to be different. The receptionist was friendly. The staff made eye contact. I was treated in a private room. The person who handled the testing asked to hear my story, and when they saw I was scared, they comforted me. When my second HIV test came

back positive, they referred me to an infectious disease specialist who put me at ease, educated me, created a plan and showed me support.

I'm glad I sought a second opinion even though I got the same result the second time around, because I deserve compassionate, quality medical care. So does every Nebraskan. The Nebraska AIDS Project was there for me, advocating for my health. Ultimately, a doctor I paid to see was less knowledgeable than the staff at a free clinic. Here in Nebraska, we suffer from a deep lack of education about HIV and about trans and queer people. Even medical providers know less than they should about HIV.

My experience set me on a path of advocacy I still walk today. I now work at the Nebraska AIDS Project, so I can be that advocate for others trying to navigate a system that isn't always educated or kind. No one should be discriminated against because of who they are, who they love or their health status.

Although 21 states and more than 300 cities have passed LGBTQ nondiscrimination protections, 50% of LGBTQ people live in states that lack comprehensive statewide laws. This patchwork of protections is unsustainable and leaves too many people behind.

A federal nondiscrimination law would help all LGBTQ Americans — regardless of their HIV status — to thrive, when seeking employment, finding a place to live, or getting the medical care they need.

Tommy Young-Dennis is an award-winning HIV advocate and educator who currently resides in Omaha. After his own diagnosis, he dedicated his life to advocating for other PLWHIV.

OWH Midlands Voices: Do Good Days brings us together to do good in every way we can

The past couple of years have challenged our community in many ways. Individuals, families and organizations have all been stretched thin in one way or another. But despite this, our community has stepped up and answered those needs.

Doing good is valued here and we can soon come together to make an even greater impact.

Do Good Days on Tuesday through Thursday asks the community to focus support on over 650 nonprofits in the metro area that have been foundational in providing not only food, clothing, housing, education and health support, but also culture, environmental stewardship and animal well-being.

The campaign is powered by SHARE Omaha, the giving platform where donors and volunteers can find the causes they are passionate about and the organizations that support them.

These organizations need to regain funds, restock shelves and reinvigorate volunteers to keep our community flourishing. Many fundraising events were still on hold last year, adding to their strain, but nonprofits across the metro didn't slow down their work. They need support now more than ever.

Decide how you can do good this year. On Tuesday, every dollar donated is doing good right here in our community. Wish List Wednesday is your chance to purchase items needed by nonprofits to continue their programs. Volun-Thursday focuses on volunteer efforts by dozens of groups across the metro. Whether you participate in one day or all three, you can learn more and start searching for opportunities now at shareomaha.org.

Last year, the Do Good campaign's first year, our community raised $2.5 million. Wish List Wednesday provided 1,874 items to organizations, and 1,247 people got involved on Volun-Thursday for a combined 2,885 hours of volunteerism. This year, we need your help to multiply these numbers. Let's come together to do good in every way we can.
SHARE Omaha's core mission is to extend and inspire philanthropy throughout the year. With a single website, shareomaha.org, local nonprofits can list their volunteer opportunities, material wish lists and financial needs so people can find and participate in the causes most important to them.
SHARE Omaha's Do Good Days is presented by First National Bank of Omaha (FNBO).
Marjorie Maas is the executive director of SHARE Omaha.

OWH: LB 873

Gov. Pete Ricketts signed LB 873, a bill that contains a provision to eliminate all Nebraska state taxes on Social Security benefits by 2025. This is a monumental victory for Nebraska's Social Security recipients who will now be able to keep more of their hard-earned Social Security benefits.
This is particularly important for older Nebraskans on fixed incomes at a time when we see inflation and rising costs for necessities like housing, food and prescription drugs.
AARP Nebraska has fought to eliminate this unfair tax for many years, and we are pleased to finally get it over the finish line. We appreciate the bipartisan support in the Legislature for this provision and thank Sen. Brett Lindstrom for introducing the bill for many years.
David Holmquist, Omaha
State president, AARP Nebraska

LJS Editorial, 5/15: Few themes emerge after brutal primary

The national analysis of Nebraska's Republican gubernatorial primary boils down to Donald Trump lost to the Ricketts political machine in one of the first major defeats of a candidate who had been endorsed by the former president.
While there's some truth to that view, it's both simplistic and discounts the discernment of the 261,518 GOP voters who chose between three major candidates and a handful of others in casting some of the record number of primary ballots over the month from mid-April to Tuesday.
Gov. Pete Ricketts' endorsement of, campaigning for and his family's donations to Pillen's campaign and the dark money groups that ran attack ads against Trump's endorsee, Charles W. Herbster, and Sen. Brett Lindstrom, unquestionably impacted the hotly contested primary.
But Herbster, a flawed candidate who faced issues over the location of his businesses, his home in Missouri and years worth of late payments of his Nebraska taxes, was derailed by the eight women, including Sen. Julie Slama, who allege that Herbster groped them at events over the last seven years.
It is impossible to know exactly how many votes Herbster lost due to the allegations. But he lost to Pillen by 9,500 votes, just over 3% of the total, in the race – a margin close enough to assume that the groping allegations, combined with Pillen's support from the Ricketts' GOP establishment, cost

him the nomination.
As for the remainder of the election, senators Patty Pansing Brooks and Mike Flood each secured their party's 1st Congressional District nominations for November. But they will first meet in next month's special election to fill the seat vacated by Jeff Fortenberry after his conviction on federal charges of lying to the FBI.
Jazari Zakaria, the 26-year-old University of Nebraska-Lincoln student and community activist, who was easily defeated by Pansing Brooks, and Schuyler Windham, a 29-year-old lawyer who ran for the Legislature, were two among a group of emerging leaders in Nebraska politics, and we encourage their continued involvement in public service.
Two Lancaster County contests were notable because voters in each party tossed out a long-term incumbent, with Republican voters choosing Matt Schulte over Deb Schorr for County Board and Democrats voting for Kristi Eggers over her former boss Joe Nigro in the race for Public Defender.
There is one positive from Tuesday on which all will agree. The attack ads that could not be avoided on television and social media are, for now, off the air and internet.
Those ads, by both the Herbster and Pillen campaigns, and from dark money groups that supported each candidate, were brutal and ugly – and when not attacking an opponent, stirred up culture wars that, largely, have nothing to do with Nebraska.
Sadly, those ads are likely to return in the fall, when chances are that the GOP dark money machines will use them to smear Democratic gubernatorial candidate Carol Blood.
Blood, who easily secured the nomination, has been and has pledged to run a positive campaign focusing on Nebraska issues through November. It's a fine sentiment that should be applied by all candidates.

LJS: Tax cuts help wrong folks

Newspaper headlines read that Nebraska lawmakers unanimously passed a historic $900 million tax cut.
Newspaper photos showed Gov. Pete Ricketts and his loyalists looking as fat, sassy and giddy as a herd of pigs cooling off on a hot August afternoon in a poop-filled hog wallow.
Hell bent on destroying George Norris' 98-year-old, unique, nonpartisan, Unicameral legislature. multimillionaire Ricketts should be smiling. His power grab gave him and his fellow multimillionaires and billionaires a 14.6% individual and a 22% corporate "trickle down" income tax cut of which a large chunk will go to out-of-state corporations.
Governor Ricketts rewarded his millionaire and billionaire ag landowners base with an increase in their inheritance tax exemption amount, decreased inheritance tax rates, and eliminated the tax entirely on any millionaire or billionaire heir 21 years old or younger.
State Sen. Wendy DeBoer attempted to give Nebraska's middle-income earners a 20% tax break. However, after passing the millionaire and billionaire tax breaks, Sen. Lou Ann Linehan, doing Ricketts' bidding, said Nebraska could not afford the $97 million revenue loss from the DeBoer amendment.
Duped by a Social Security tax cut "dangling carrot," many have been deceived by Ricketts and Linehan.
After "controlling spending to cut taxes" for multimillionaire Pete Ricketts, our local property taxes

will accelerate as rapidly as an American F-35 jet fighter climbing into the sky!
Alvin Guenther, Dunbar

Hastings Tribune: Praying for those who govern, serve public

Thursday, May 5, was the National Day of Prayer in the United States.
I had the privilege of being the sponsoring senator for the event held in the Capitol rotunda in Lincoln.
The prayer gathering was sponsored by Nebraska Family Alliance.
Gov. Pete Ricketts gave remarks and several ministry, business and community leaders prayed over key prayer focus areas: government, military, media, business, educators and students, the family and the Church.
I was asked to pray for government, and here is my prayer from that day:
"Dear Lord, we pray for rulers all over this earth, both righteous and wicked. We pray that wicked rulers may turn from war, aggression, and oppression and instead choose peace and freedom.
We pray that these leaders may have a change of heart and follow you.
We ask that you guide our own President Biden at the national level and Governor Ricketts at the state level in the way you would have them go.
We pray that you would surround President Biden and Governor Ricketts with wise counsel — men and women of integrity who place your agenda and the good of this nation and state above their own.
We pray for the U.S. Congress and the Nebraska State Legislature, that by your power they make laws that are just.
We pray that Congress and the Legislature may be motivated more by your hand than by partisan or personal concerns.
We pray for our Supreme Court. We pray that its decrees would be your decrees.
We pray that they would make rulings in line with your will. We pray that they would set a standard of justice and balance not only on a national level but for every legal decision in our nation.
We know that all judges in the U.S. are appointed by humans. We pray that each new selection will judge rightly according to the Constitution, which is based on biblical values.
Finally, we pray for everyone that serves in local government.
From county officials to city officials to school boards and others.
Please grant all of them wisdom to act with integrity. Please help them to seek your face and to pursue wise council as they make their decisions.
We pray Father especially for members of the Law Enforcement community in our country.
For FBI agents and other federal law enforcement agencies.
For sheriff's departments and police departments across the country. Please protect them, especially during these unsettled times.
Please help us to remember that You are the original law giver, and that we should strive to always be respectful of those who enforce our laws.
Finally, we pray that Christians will exercise their privilege to vote. May there arise such a force of righteousness in our electoral system that it would affect every level of government in our nation.
May those in government have a profound respect not only for the political strength of the Christian

community but for our spiritual influence in our nation as well.
We pray all of this in Jesus' name and to Him be the Glory!
Amen."
Sen. Dave Murman of Glenvil

Nebraska Examiner: Still among the lucky ones, even after catching COVID

LINCOLN — For months on end, I have been among the lucky ones.
Never got COVID.
I followed the advice of the health experts and the governor and kept my distance, sang "Happy Birthday" twice while washing my hands, limited my travel and wore a mask when out to shop or reporting at the Capitol.
When the vaccine came out, I was among the throngs who swept through Lincoln's Pinnacle Bank Arena for two incredibly well-choreographed vaccination clinics.
And when the booster was recommended for us "seasoned" Nebraskans, I rolled up my sleeve for another shot last fall.

"Don't give it to others'

My main goal was always "don't give it to someone else."
So when I got even a slightly sore throat or congestion, I went and got tested. More than a dozen times I drove through the free, Test Nebraska testing sites. When they went away, it meant a trip to a local drug store for a test. More recently, it was using a home test.
I did not want to be the guy who gave it to someone else, someone who really got sick, or had to go to the hospital, or heaven forbid, ended up on a ventilator or worse.
Since the pandemic arrived in Nebraska in March 2020, I've had a front-row seat to the pandemic, covering dozens of governor's press conferences while masked and distanced, writing about Nebraska's first COVID-19 patient and about small towns struggling through lockdowns and the uncertainty.
More recently, I've covered stories about doctors and nurses, desperately trying to save lives of those gasping for breath while dealing with the divisions in our world over using masks, taking precautions and trusting medical professionals.
After all that, I can honestly say that being cautious and taking precautions has worked for me.
Neighbors got it, friends got it, relatives got it. Not me.
Until two weeks ago.
My lucky streak ended April 26 when a home test showed positive.
Where I got it is anyone's guess.
Like a lot of people, I've let my guard down, put away the N-95 masks and tried to live a little in the past couple of months. Case counts were down, masking requirements were going away.

A concert and few masks

My wife and I went to an Elton John concert recently. It was sold out, and few people wore masks. There was a certain novelty, and feeling of freedom, for not masking up. And I was fine after the concert.

The week before I tested positive I covered the final days of the Legislature's session, went to a bill signing at the Capitol Rotunda, attended a funeral visitation and drove to central Nebraska's Calamus Lake to visit an old buddy — all without masking.

A friend had come up to our family farm nine days before I tested positive, and he told me later that he'd turned up positive just after our visit. But we were mostly outside, seemingly far enough apart.

I write this to make a couple of points. The first is that COVID-19 is still out there.

As one widely known public health expert said recently, "We may be done with it, but it isn't done with us."

This is a disease that has killed more than 4,200 Nebraskans. Nineteen more Nebraskans died last week. And cases, nationwide, are on the rise again, according to the New York Times. That's also according to the health director in Lincoln, where I live.

Think of it – 4,200 dead. That's about the population of cities like Aurora, Wahoo, Ogallala and Falls City. Pick one of those towns. Gone.

In Lincoln and Lancaster County, cases have increased in each of the past five weeks. A surge seen nationwide is showing up here, said Pat Lopez, the city-county health director, who said she's seeing an increase in older residents who haven't gotten their second booster shot yet.

About 1 million Americans have died since March 2020. And for the first time since World War I, the life expectancy for Americans has dropped, from 78.9 years in 2019 to 76.6 years in 2021.

Depressing facts

Those are cold, hard, depressing facts.

(And we need to consider that the number of people infected with COVID-19 is probably a major undercount. That's because we're all using home tests now. And I have stopped counting the people who told me they probably got COVID but never got tested. Wonder if they spread it.)

Here's my second takeaway: I do believe that getting the shots made my symptoms manageable, and mostly mild.

Sure, the shots didn't prevent COVID — I got it — but getting vaccinated, wearing a mask, etc., might have kept it at bay for me through months of continuing to work, continuing to shop at the grocery store and elsewhere, and doing things like ushering at church.

(One note: I did test "positive" in December 2020, but I never had any symptoms other than a scratchy nose. And a month later, two tests showed I didn't have any antibodies. So it was a "false positive.")

Others got it

Meanwhile, I've heard story after story of friends, relatives and neighbors — some vaxed, but several not — getting COVID and dealing with high fevers, the loss of taste and smell, and the lingering after-effects, like a foggy brain or lack of energy.

But my symptoms were no worse than a typical flu. I was run down for a day or two, had a slight sore throat and was a bit achy. But, except for one morning sleeping in, I continued to work from my isolation at home.

My ability to taste and smell was impacted, but for only a couple of days, and only for the blandest food.

The best news is this: I haven't heard of anyone catching it from me.

As soon as I tested positive, I called everyone I came in contact with to let them know. I still haven't heard from anyone who got it, and I am hoping that I didn't spread it to anyone.

Tried to do my part

From friends, relatives and neighbors, I've heard of much more serious fights with COVID, of real

sickness, trips to the ER, the awful funerals and regrets.
I've tried to do my part by trying to avoid getting it and spreading it. I've urged others to get the shots, but in our world today, some people don't trust what the experts are telling reporters, or what we are reporting. I get it. I don't understand it, but I get it.
Still, when an unvaccinated buddy got a bad case, I tried to help him track down a monoclonal antibody treatment. I even made a mad dash through a blizzard to Beatrice to pick up a home test because they were all sold out in his town. He needed a test.
So now I'm among the majority of Americans who have had COVID-19. It knocked me down for a day or two, but I got over it, and hopefully I didn't become a super spreader.
I still think I'm still among the lucky ones.
By Paul Hammel

Cedar Rapids Gazette: Iowa cryptocurrency site eats up electricity

GRUNDY CENTER, Iowa — About 8 miles west of here is a white Quonset hut that hums with the sound of industrial fans.
Unlike other rural outbuildings equipped with fans, this one doesn't house hogs. It's stacked with computers that spend all day and night working complex mathematical problems that create bitcoin, the most well-known cryptocurrency.
"I knew there was a place out there," said Jill Krausman, owner of the Landmark Bistro in Grundy Center. "I don't have enough knowledge about it. It hasn't affected me."
The nondescript facility is one of the first — if not the first — large-scale cryptocurrency mining site in Iowa. But its owner, a company called the MiningStore, wants to expand with five more locations in eastern Iowa, capitalizing on wide-open spaces, low property taxes and cheap electricity.
Cheap electricity is crucial because crypto mining uses a lot of juice. The Grundy County site uses more electricity than all the residential customers in Grundy Center, population 2,800, combined.
The industry's massive energy use at a time when climate change is a threat should be a red flag to Iowa utilities and residents, said Kerri Johannsen, energy program director for the Iowa Environmental Council.
"There is a larger fundamental question about why we need to use energy in the first place to create cryptocurrency," she said.
Bitcoin was created in the late 2000s as a way for people to send money directly to each other without a bank or third party. Other cryptocurrencies, such as ethereum and litecoin, have followed.
Bitcoin transactions are verified and monitored by independent computers running a secure algorithm to solve blocks of numbers that represent groupings of transactions. These computers, or "miners," race to solve each block with the payout being the next block of bitcoins, which is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.
The Grundy County site is too small to solve blocks on its own, so miners there work as part of a mining pool that pays out a daily rate based on the amount of work the computers do, explained J.P. Baric, founder and chief executive officer of the MiningStore.
"Bitcoin is important to me because it's a monetary system that can't be influenced by the

government and it can't be changed," he said.
Baric, 24, dropped out of North Carolina State in 2017. With his parents and grandparents, he invested $1 million to start the MiningStore.
Right now, each of the site's 1,900 computers mines $17 per day, but that amount fluctuates with the value of bitcoin. It's been as high as $35 a day. But at current rates, the site makes about $32,000 a day. The power bill is over $5,000 a day, Baric said.
Baric found the Iowa site through a Colorado economic development group that identifies areas with low energy costs.
"It doesn't surprise me they set up shop in Grundy County, because they have really low-cost energy there," said Jim Martin-Schramm, a Luther College emeritus professor who focuses on energy and climate policy.
At 4.05 cents per kilowatt-hour, the Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative has some of the cheapest industrial electricity in the state, according to filings with the Iowa Utilities Board. The MiningStore bought one acre of land in 2019 right next to an electrical substation.
Magnus Anderson, the MiningStore's Grundy County site manager, said electricity moves through a 1,500-kilowatt transformer directly to the site. The company's contract with the REC says six months of the year the MiningStore will agree to temporarily power down when there is peak electrical usage, such as on hot summer days.
"We use it (electricity) until everybody else needs it," he said.
The site uses 6 megawatts of power during operation, which is 24/7 unless part of the system is undergoing repairs.
To put this in perspective, Luther College in Decorah, with 1,800 students, uses about 2 megawatts during most of the year, rising to 2.8 megawatts in the summer, Martin-Schramm said.
An average Iowa home uses about 11,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity per year, Johannsen said. The MiningStore uses about 54 million kilowatt-hours a year, or the equivalent of 4,900 houses.
"All of Grundy County in the census has 5,146 households," she said. "We're talking about 95 percent of the households in Grundy County."
So where does the power come from?
Grundy County REC is one of nine rural electric cooperatives and one municipal cooperative that own Corn Belt Power Cooperative, based in Humboldt and serving 41 northern Iowa counties. Corn Belt owns the nine substations within Grundy County REC, including the one that powers the MiningStore.
Corn Belt's power mix in 2019 was about 50 percent coal, 18 percent purchased power, 15 percent renewables and smaller shares of natural gas, hydro and nuclear, according to its website.
A half-dozen wind turbines are visible from the MiningStore site, but those turbines are owned by MidAmerican Energy and do not power the crypto mining facility, said Mike Curtis, the REC's general manager.
The cooperative's electricity sales to large commercial and industrial customers more than doubled from 16.5 million kilowatt-hours in 2018 to 36.9 million kilowatt-hours in 2020, which Curtis said is largely due to the MiningStore.
For bitcoin to become a viable worldwide currency, some environmental groups say, it must slash its energy use.
A group called Change the Code Not the Climate says changing the "proof of work" required to validate transactions to a "proof of stake" — meaning miners pledge coins to verify transactions — would cut energy use by 99 percent, according to a March article in the Guardian.

Energy use isn't the only challenge.
"Since cryptocurrencies are too volatile to be used as an actual currency, people treat it as a sort of investment scheme," wrote Jon von Tetzchner, co-founder and CEO of Vivaldi Technologies, in a Jan. 13 blog post.
"The problem is that to extract actual money from the system you have to find someone willing to buy the tokens you are holding. And this is only likely to happen as long as they believe they will be able to sell them on to someone who'll pay even more for them. And so on, and so on."
Bitcoin mining operations that want to grow need to keep adding investors because the computers cost thousands of dollars, Baric said. But, he said, it's not like a pyramid scheme that needs new investors to make previous investors whole.
"People buy the bitcoins because they believe more people are going to believe bitcoin has value," Baric said. "That's why people put money into it."
Baric and his investors would like to open five more bitcoin mining sites in eastern Iowa: Another in Grundy County, one in Black Hawk County and three in Tama County.
The Grundy County Planning and Zoning Commission has recommended the Board of Supervisors deny the request to change zoning from agricultural to commercial to allow the second site.
The MiningStore pays property taxes, employs nine people full time and hires electricians to help at the site, Baric said. Company leaders also are looking to do more community outreach, such as leading school tours and speaking about bitcoin.
The Iowa Economic Development Authority does not track cryptocurrency sites, spokeswoman Kanan Kappelman said.
That should change, said Johannsen, of the Iowa Environmental Council.
"If there's a planned expansion, it would be something for the state to get a handle on from the perspective of what we can expect in terms of (energy) load growth," she said. "It's not that the organization is anti-crypto or we have a particular reason to be. But if we're going to use our energy resources most efficiently, is this really the most efficient use of energy resources?"

CQ Roll Call: 2020 saw most firearm deaths since 1994, CDC reports

The first year of the COVID-19 pandemic saw the highest firearm homicide rates since 1994, with substantial increases among Black and American Indian/Alaska Native males and young adults, according to a new report released Tuesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
From 2019 to 2020, homicides involving firearms rose 35% to 6.1 per 100,000 people, with the largest increase occurring among Black males between ages 10 and 44 and American Indian/Alaska Native males between ages 25 and 44.
The increase widened racial and ethnic disparities in firearm homicide deaths, the CDC said. From 2019 to 2020, the firearm homicide rate for Black people between ages 10 and 24 was more than 21 times higher than for White people in the same age group.
The overall firearm suicide rate remained relatively unchanged from 2019 to 2020 at 8.1 per 100,000 people, but there were increases among some groups of people, including American Indian/Alaska Native males. In total, there were 24,000 firearm suicide deaths in 2020.

“The increases in firearm homicide rates and persistently high firearm suicide rates in 2020, combined with increases among populations that were already at high risk, have widened disparities and heightened the urgency of actions to prevent violence,” Thomas Simon, associate director for science at the CDC’s Division of Violence Prevention, said in a call with reporters Tuesday.

The study did not examine the reasons for the increasing rates, but Simon suggested the pandemic exacerbated long-standing inequities that contribute to gun violence and suicide, including poverty, housing instability, social isolation, job loss and structural racism.

Other reasons could include increases in firearm purchases, intimate partner violence and strains in relationships between police and their communities.

In total, there were more than 19,350 firearm homicides in 2020, compared with nearly 14,400 in 2019.

Firearms were involved in 79% of all homicides in 2020, an increase of between 4 and 6 percentage points over the past five years.

Firearm homicide rates increased across all populations and age groups and in both rural and metro areas.

Firearm homicides and suicides were highest among people living in lower-income areas. About 53% of suicides involved firearms.

Housing assistance, child care subsidies, tax credits and livable wages can bring people out of poverty and potentially reduce firearm deaths, the CDC said. Safer storage of firearms has been proved to reduce deaths.

Very Respectfully,

Andrew Shelburn
Digital Communications Manager

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