From: Kopsa, Ryan
To: Kopsa, Ryan
Cc: Pinkerman, Justin; Maher, Eric
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 5-27-20
Date: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 8:44:34 AM
Attachments: image001.png

Ag Valley Co-op
Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	May 2020	2.93	-28.00	08:33
Corn	Dec 2020	2.92	-43.00	08:33
Milo	May 2020	3.01	-20.00	08:33
Milo	Dec 2020	2.70	-65.00	08:33
Soybeans	May 2020	7.55	-95.00	08:33
Soybeans	Dec 2020	7.58	-100.00	08:33
Wheat	May 2020	3.95	-57.00	08:33
Wheat	Jul 2020	3.95	-57.00	08:33

TV and Radio
10/11: Lancaster Event Center expects to host high school rodeo finals
NET: Driver Testing To Resume, Seniors To Get License Extensions
NET: Views Differ On Senators Participating Remotely In Session During Pandemic
KETV: Nebraska gets 3 years worth of unemployment claims in two months
NTV: Crete sees surge of COVID cases tied to Smithfield plant

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Bloomberg: The drug remdesivir seems to help mostly those who aren't the sickest

AP: Congress considers next pandemic move

OWH: Taking the test: Reporter tests negative, but TestNebraska still raising questions

"Mask down, chin up — this is going to be uncomfortable," said the man behind the clear, plastic face shield and full-length medical gown.

The white Q-tip-like swab in his hand looked much longer than I expected as he quickly eased it up my nose.

"There we go," he said as it hit the top of my nostril, raising me upward in the seat of my pickup.

So went a reporter's COVID-19 test as administered inside a huge, white tent set up in the parking lot of Omaha's sports arena, the CHI Health Center.

It was quick and, yes, quite uncomfortable. But I felt it was important to know if the mild symptoms I had — scratchy throat and tiredness — were the result of seasonal allergies and a rise-before-dawn puppy or COVID-19.

But why, I wondered, had I been picked for a coronavirus test, and not someone else who had serious symptoms of the infection, or was at higher risk for catching it?

* * *

That's a question more than one person has asked after being selected for a test through Nebraska's $27 million testing program called TestNebraska.

And the question is just one of several raised about the program, the result of a no-bid contract signed a month ago with four Utah high-tech firms.

Gov. Pete Ricketts, whose administration signed the contract, has insisted more than once that he's

satisfied with the performance of TestNebraska, even though it has, so far, fallen far short of its stated numerical goals for COVID-19 tests — an average of 500 tests per day, per mobile testing site. Another goal: ramp up to 3,000 tests per day at six mobile test sites.

On Thursday, four TestNebraska sites swabbed 1,155 tests, or fewer than 300 tests per day at the four sites. That is about the number of daily tests the Ricketts administration has been reporting over the past two weeks.

"We knew it was going to take time to ramp this," Ricketts said Friday, comparing TestNebraska — which began administering testing on May 4 — to a "startup business."

"You find out things you can improve upon, and that's what we've been doing. When we find something we can do a better job on, we fix it," he said.

"The fact of the matter is we are testing more people because of TestNebraska.com," the Republican governor said. "You cannot dispute that at all. We're doing more testing, which is a good thing. People should be happy about that."

As of Friday, nearly 148,000 Nebraskans have signed up for testing, and about 21,000 have received tests through TestNebraska. It has allowed the state to double the rate of testing during May, according to the governor.

Both publicly and privately, however, some state lawmakers, readers and medical professionals question whether TestNebraska can deliver its ambitious goal of delivering 540,000 COVID-19 tests within a year. Others wonder about the quality and accuracy of the tests delivered by the Utah group, and whether enough information about the program is being shared.

So The World-Herald posed several questions to the Governor's Office. Not all elicited immediate answers — such as how many tests per day have been done every day by TestNebraska, how many showed "positive" for the virus and how many were inconclusive — though most did receive responses (unless otherwise indicated, the answers below are from the governor's spokesman, Taylor Gage).

What will it take for TestNebraska to reach its goal? More lab workers? Better lab performance? More people signing up? More personnel at the test sites?

"Yes, to all of those things," said the governor, who has made "process improvement" a major theme of his administration.

More people need to sign up so they can be processed, and six testing teams need to be organized. "No shows" have been a problem, with between 10% and 20% of those scheduled for testings not showing up.

Personnel is not an issue (CHI Health employees administer the tests at Omaha and Lincoln, with National Guard medics and nurses pulling that duty elsewhere). But more people are being scheduled to address the no-show problem.

Will the program meet its goal of 3,000 tests per day by the end of the month?

The key word here is "goal." We are working tirelessly and aggressively to do that. We are proud that we were able to set up a certified lab in less than a week. That can take months. And the state got 200,000 test kits well ahead of schedule.

The test site in Omaha has consistently tested 500 to 600 since May 11, but it's hard to get 500 people at a test site per day in a rural area. But we need to test there, too.

How accurate are these tests?

The tests, developed by Co-Diagnostics and the medical device company ATL Technologies, have a sensitivity rate of 95%, which means that 5% of those tested got a false "negative" result, when they really had the virus. (The accepted standard is 95%). The specificity rate (which describes how accurate a test is at avoiding false "positive" test results) is 94%.

(The Governor's Office did not provide the actual validation test documents, as requested, but offered to allow a reporter a later interview with CHI Health officials, who run the lab, and officials at the Nebraska

Public Health Lab, who have been consulting with TestNebraska to ensure that they meet lab standards for testing.)

Have any test samples, which must be kept cool in transit, spoiled or been rendered useless?

Only 10 so far. Patients were promptly informed to take another test.

Why test someone who has mild symptoms and is younger than 65 years old when others might need a test more?

The priority for testing is those who have COVID-19 symptoms or have been in close contact with someone who is positive, as well as those who are in high-risk groups (age 65 and over) or work in health care, law enforcement or meatpacking or are first responders.

Anyone who meets those qualifications can get tested, if test slots are available. People must sign up at TestNebraska.com and fill out emailed assessments asking about symptoms.

Why not send TestNebraska to hot spots, like hard-hit nursing homes and meatpacking plants? Several people were turned away at South Omaha's One World public health clinic on May 17, for instance, after test kits ran out at 300.

The Nebraska Public Health Lab has been deployed to such hot spots, according to Dr. Peter Iwen, the director of that lab, which is under the wing of the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

The public lab can return results within 24 hours, and has a capacity to do 300 to 400 tests a day. TestNebraska, by comparison, has a stated turnaround time of 72 hours, though the governor said recently that tests were coming back in under 48 hours.

The Public Health Lab, which recently increased from four to five employees, has been working seven days a week, sometimes 12 to 14 hours a day, to keep up, Iwen said.

Ricketts said Friday that TestNebraska sites have been set up at hard-hit meatpacking towns, such as Grand Island and Schuyler. TestNebraska is able to do a higher volume of tests because patients sign up beforehand. Testing at One World was first-come, first-serve.

The governor said the goal is to provide more than one option for testing, because people aren't always comfortable with a certain testing procedure or site.

Has anyone been tested twice?

Yes, 108 people have received more than one test as of Friday. They were selected on the criteria of showing symptoms.

What, exactly, has been learned?

TestNebraska has helped dramatically expand access to testing, and is allowing the testing of some asymptomatic people who may be carrying the virus.

* * *

How was my experience with TestNebraska?

I gotta say, it was overall a good one, though I've heard from many people who've had test results delayed or who wonder why they got picked for testing instead of someone in more serious need.

I even talked to one physician who sees COVID-19 patients who was initially, and wrongly, denied a test. A software problem was fixed, and she was later able to be tested.

In my case, I honestly answered the emailed assessment that yes, I had some symptoms. But the quiz didn't ask if I thought they were linked to COVID-19 or to a new puppy that gets me up before sunrise or to seasonal allergies.

Still, as a reporter, I wanted to see firsthand how the testing was done, and if results could be returned within 48 hours, which was the initially stated goal.

I was tested on Saturday, May 9, arriving about 15 minutes early for my appointment, which was the first slot available that morning. Checking in and being tested took only a couple of minutes — less than the "5 minutes" the governor has mentioned.

Two and a half days later, on the night of May 11, an email told me my results were in. "Negative," the

email said.
That provided some peace of mind that I wasn't spreading the disease unknowingly, and helped me understand the medical meaning of the term "uncomfortable."
But that relief is only temporary. It only showed I was negative at that moment — the virus is still out there, and ready to hitch a ride in my nose and lungs.
So my masks and hand sanitizer aren't going away any time soon.
By Paul Hammel

OWH: Good news for Nebraska teens seeking driver's licenses: Driving tests resume today at some offices

LINCOLN — State officials delivered good news Tuesday for teenage Nebraska drivers.
The Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles will start offering driving tests again as of Wednesday. The tests will be available at the Omaha DMV stations, as well as 29 other counties where offices are open.
But Rhonda Lahm, the agency director, said the tests will not be available where county government offices remain closed to the public, including Lancaster County. The department uses locally controlled space for its services in most counties.
The agency stopped providing driving tests in March as part of the state's effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The decision particularly affected teenagers hoping to get their first driver's licenses. Most others had the option to renew their licenses online.
"It was disappointing for a few, especially our teenagers," Lahm said.
To reduce risks of infection, people being tested will be required to wear face coverings during the driving tests, she said. Testers will be provided with protective equipment.
Lahm said the department is taking steps to address the backlog of people needing to take driving tests. Operating hours have been lengthened where possible, while temporary staff are being hired and existing staff reassigned.
She said she doesn't know what the backlog may be but noted that the Omaha offices averaged about 50 such tests per day.
Also on Tuesday, Gov. Pete Ricketts announced that he had signed an executive order giving an automatic one-year license extension for drivers age 72 and older. The order applies to driver's licenses that expired or are set to expire between March 1 and Dec. 31 this year.
Ricketts said the change was made so that older Nebraskans, who are greater risk from the coronavirus, would not have to stand in line.
Lahm said she does not believe the extension increases safety concerns. It does not change a process through which residents can report people who are no longer able to drive safely. Department officials can ask people, based on those reports, to come in for a driving reexamination.
Among other topics at the governor's daily coronavirus briefing:
Hospital capacity
State officials remain in close contact with Omaha-area hospital systems to monitor how well the hospitals are handling the numbers of coronavirus cases. Dr. Gary Anthone, Nebraska's chief medical officer, said hospital officials so far report that they are able to manage.
He said the number of patients with COVID-19 in metro-area hospitals has been stable over the past week. But only 24% of intensive care unit beds were available as of Tuesday. That's lower than the 30% level that Ricketts had used when deciding whether a hospital could start offering elective surgeries.
The governor has repeatedly said his goal during the pandemic is to avoid overwhelming the health care system. He has not said how the state measures whether the system is getting overwhelmed.
Anthone said he and the hospital officials have been discussing what level of availability for hospital

beds, intensive care beds and ventilators would signal a problem. He noted that patients could be transferred to Lincoln hospitals if necessary.

Memorial Day

Ricketts said he was not aware of any weekend activities in Nebraska that violated the state's current health directives, unlike some states where crowds of people gathered at pools and beaches. Rainy, cool weather may have helped discourage large outdoor gatherings.

Cloth masks

Nebraska Impact has collected about 1,200 cloth face masks, or nearly half of its 2,500-mask goal, Ricketts said. The group, which promotes volunteerism and economic development, plans to distribute masks to vulnerable people in hard-hit Nebraska communities.

Ricketts encouraged people to send masks to: Nebraska Impact, 201 N. Eighth St., Suite 215, Lincoln, NE 68508, or arrange for pickup by emailing masks@neimpact.org.

By Martha Stoddard

LJS: Coronavirus hospitalization eases in Omaha, stable in Lincoln

The recent increase in coronavirus patients in Omaha hospitals has stabilized, at least for now, easing some concerns expressed last week about the rising numbers and their impact on the Douglas County health care system.

Dr. Gary Anthone, the state's chief medical officer, said he remains "in close contact" with hospital officials, "and everybody feels they are managing the situation without any issue."

In Omaha, "it's more of an ICU (intensive care unit) availability issue," he said.

Meanwhile, conditions in the hospital system in Lincoln remain "very, very stable," he said.

Anthone offered those assessments in answer to questions raised at Gov. Pete Ricketts' daily coronavirus news briefing Tuesday.

Contacts and conversations with hospital officials are ongoing, the governor said, as the state reacts to the increase in coronavirus cases in Nebraska's most-populous county.

Answering other questions on the day after a Memorial Day holiday that saw some Americans crowding together in large numbers, ignoring social-distancing standards and not wearing masks at a variety of celebrations across the country, Ricketts said he was not aware of any such activities in Nebraska.

Gatherings of more than 10 people are still prohibited in the state until the end of May, when a new directive will take effect allowing gatherings of up to 25 people through the month of June.

"I'm not aware of any incidents or violations" of the 10-person rule on Memorial Day, Ricketts said. That limit is accompanied by a directive to try to maintain at least 6 feet of physical distancing between people.

"People have been willing to accommodate" those limits and restrictions in a citizen effort to curtail the spread of the virus, he said.

Ricketts said he would hope that Nebraskans would encourage one another to adhere to those standards "if you see somebody who could do a better job."

"If you need somebody else" to help, he suggested, they could "contact the mayor."

Meanwhile, the governor said Nebraska continues to ramp up its testing to identify people who may have been infected with the virus and begin the task of reaching out to others who may have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed positive so they, in turn, can be informed and isolate themselves.

Ricketts has set a goal of 3,000 tests per day.

The number of coronavirus deaths in Nebraska now stands at 153, with a disproportionate number being elderly residents of long-term care facilities.

Confirmed cases statewide climbed to 12,619 on Tuesday, but new cases numbered fewer than 300 for the fourth of five days.
Anthone said the number of beds available in Douglas County hospitals has stabilized, while the number of available beds in intensive care units has actually increased by 3%.
The number of available ventilators "does not seem to be an issue" at all, he said.
In Lancaster County, Anthone said, hospital beds, ICU beds and ventilators are readily available.
Hospitals in Nebraska have "all agreed to cooperate," he said, and that means Omaha hospitals can "use Lincoln capacity if necessary" to meet their needs.
"We have had great cooperation within and between (hospital) systems," Anthone said. "And they all provide excellent care."
Ricketts said 46% of hospital beds, 43% of ICU beds and 77% of ventilators are currently available statewide.
The governor said he has no personal knowledge of the condition of Sen. Mike Moser of Columbus, who is hospitalized at Nebraska Medicine in Omaha after being diagnosed with the coronavirus.
"I've been praying for him and his family," Ricketts said.
On Thursday, the governor said, he will participate in what will be the last in a series of weekly coronavirus town hall telecasts on NET. The hour-long event begins at 8:30 p.m.
By Don Walton

AP: Omaha-area hospitals see another uptick in virus patients

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Omaha-area hospitals have reported another uptick in coronavirus patients but local health officials are still managing the caseload without any issues, the state's top doctor said Tuesday.
Nebraska Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Gary Anthone, said Douglas County's hospitals are treating 135 patients, up from 122 last week. But Anthone said the increase hasn't had much impact on the availability of hospital beds or ventilators.
"Everyone feels like they're able to handle the situation," he said at the governor's news conference.
Among the new coronavirus patients is state Sen. Mike Moser, of Columbus, who is receiving care at Nebraska Medical Center. Gov. Pete Ricketts said Tuesday that he was "praying for (Moser) and his family as he goes through this recovery process."
Moser, 68, was elected to the Nebraska Legislature in 2018. The Columbus music store owner previously served as the city's mayor from 2004-2016. In an April letter to his constituents, Moser said he supported the "tough, but necessary" decision to postpone the legislative session because of the pandemic.
Lawmakers suspended their session in late March but are expected to return July 20 to finish the remaining scheduled days.
Another state lawmaker, Sen. Tony Vargas, of Omaha, announced last month that his 72-year-old father had died in New York after contracting the virus.
Nebraska reported 221 new cases as of Sunday night, bringing the statewide total to 12,355. The largest number is in Omaha's Douglas County, with 3,186 known cases. Among whose who tested positive for the coronavirus, 150 have died.
The actual number of infections is thought to be far higher because many people have not been tested and studies suggest that people can be infected without feeling sick.
Statewide, 46% of Nebraska's hospital beds, 43% of intensive care unit beds and 77% of ventilators are available, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.
Those numbers drop in Douglas County. Anthone said 29% of hospital beds, 24% of intensive care unit

beds and 59% of ventilators are available.
The numbers come as Ricketts prepares to further loosen Nebraska's social-distancing restrictions in June, arguing that the state has kept the virus from overwhelming Nebraska's hospitals.
For some infected people, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, the virus can cause severe illness or death. But for most people, it causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, that clear up in two to three weeks.
By Grant Schulte

OWH: Colleagues express care, concern for Nebraska state senator hospitalized with COVID-19

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts expressed hope Tuesday that State Sen. Mike Moser of Columbus would have a "full and complete" recovery from his hospitalization with coronavirus.
"I've been praying for him and for his family," the governor said, during his daily press briefing.
Moser, 68, is receiving care at the Nebraska Medical Center for COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, according to a fellow senator.
His illness prompted messages of care and concern from colleagues in the Legislature and in Columbus.
In a Tuesday tweet, Sen. Adam Morfeld of Lincoln said: "All of my thoughts are with my colleague Senator Mike Moser and his family for a quick and speedy recovery from COVID."
Sen. Dan Hughes of Venango said he was "very concerned" about Moser, who is a member of the Natural Resources Committee that Hughes chairs. Moser also is on the Agriculture and General Affairs committees.
Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce President Jeanne Schieffer said she had read reports about Moser's hospitalization but did not have personal knowledge in regard to the senator's health.
"The chamber and our board of directors respect the senator's privacy, but if true, we wish him a speedy recovery," Schieffer said.
Some folks left Moser well-wishes on his personal Facebook page.
"Mike, you are in our prayers. Be healed in the name of Jesus! Love you guys," wrote Allen and Connie Newberg-Woodworth, of Cascade, Colorado.
"Get well soon Mike!" wrote Bill Haack of York.
Moser, a moderate Republican, was elected to the Legislature two years ago with the support of his predecessor, Paul Schumacher. The two have been friends since being on the same the debate team at Platte Junior College, now Central Community College, in Columbus.
Schumacher said he does not have any updates about Moser but felt "pretty bad" for him.
Previously, Moser spent 12 years as mayor of Columbus. The city's current mayor, James Bulkley, referred comment to the family, who could not be reached.
Moser has owned the Columbus Music Company for 43 years and plays guitar with a local band. He also has taught community education computer classes at Central Community College.
He is married and has three children, Maria, Anne and Michelle.
By Martha Stoddard

NP Telegraph: Nearly normal holiday at Lake McConaughy

Thanks to Gov. Pete Ricketts' latest relaxation of COVID-19 health restrictions, Memorial Day weekend looked something close to normal at Nebraska's largest lake.
Steve Purol, a staff assistant at the Lake McConaughy Visitor Center, estimated Tuesday that the lake near Ogallala drew 75% to 80% of its typical 75,000 visitors for the three-day holiday weekend.

“According to people I talked to, it was quite full” even with limited camping and a ban on swimming due to COVID-19, Purol said.
“There were a lot of boats out fishing,” he added. “The weather was uncooperative a few times, but we had generally good skies, good weather, and it seemed like everyone had a good time.”
McConaughy’s visitors included many from neighboring Colorado, Purol said, a fact unremarkable most years but more uncertain in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
In announcing his second revised “directed health measure” effective June 1, Ricketts said Nebraskans visiting adjacent states over Memorial Day wouldn’t be required to quarantine upon returning home.
Coloradoans, however, were still being advised to travel no more than 10 miles from home “and avoid very popular or crowded locations where social distancing may be difficult,” according to that state’s website.
The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission currently is limiting RV camping, not allowing tent camping and requiring a 25-foot distance between campsites at its park venues.
Several “day use” sites remained open at McConaughy and smaller Lake Ogallala. The “little lake” below Kingsley was “really packed with RVs,” Purol said.
Holiday weekend reports from the Keith County Sheriff’s Office indicated little of the rowdiness of past holiday weekends and led Game and Parks in January to propose major cutbacks in camping access at McConaughy.
That plan was shelved after hundreds from western Nebraska, eastern Wyoming and northeast Colorado protested at a January open house at the Lake Mac visitor center.
The commission voted in March to ban both alcohol possession and consumption on land it controls at both lakes.
The Crystal Palace Revue at Front Street, which has opened many years on Memorial Day weekend, will launch its 57th season June 3, according to the attraction’s Facebook page.
Front Street, Ogallala’s homage to its 1874-85 cattle-drive era as the “End of the Texas Trail,” debuted Nebraska’s longest-running summer stock show on Aug. 7, 1964.
By Todd Von Kampen

Norfolk DN: New report gives Nebraska, Iowa governors highest grades for balancing safety, economy

Those who choose to run for and be elected to office — especially high-profile positions — know that they will be subjected to criticism.
That’s always been true, but perhaps especially so in recent years as a sense of hyperpartisanship has overtaken the country at times.
Combine that with a global pandemic the likes of which hasn’t been seen since early in the 20th century, and there’s the greater potential — and likelihood — of elected officials being subjected to the ire of critics.
President Donald Trump, obviously, has been the target of much of that, but the nation’s governors haven’t escaped scrutiny either.
Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts has been especially criticized by state lawmakers, most frequently those of the Democratic Party.
Criticism has come, for example, in regard to health directives, the lack of COVID-19 testing and, conversely, the particulars of an effort to get more testing done.
So it seems only fair and proper to share a recent report by a free-market group in existence since the Ronald Reagan administration that focused on how America’s governors are handling the coronavirus crisis and its impact on the economy. The Committee to Unleash Prosperity was created by economists

Art Laffer and Stephen Moore, along with publisher Steve Forbes, and espouses a pro-business approach.

It's worth noting that the report's highest scores went to Govs. Jared Polis of Colorado, Ron DeSantis of Florida, Brian Kemp of Georgia, Kim Reynolds of Iowa, Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma, Kristi Noem of South Dakota, Bill Lee of Tennessee, Mark Gordon of Wyoming — and Gov. Ricketts.

Mr. Moore — one of the report's authors — said one of the reasons for the report was "our analysis shows quite clearly that the states that open up the soonest and the safest … will have much swifter and stronger recoveries than states that stay closed."

The report considered the severity of the coronavirus in each state and the need to keep citizens safe and healthy but also assessed "how measured or damaging their actions have been with respect to safeguarding their economies."

The study measured lockdown orders, business closures, hospital and outdoor activity orders, and the degree of punitive actions on enforcing these measures.

A perspective offered by Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds was highlighted in the report, and it bears worth repeating: "The reality is we can't stop the coronavirus, it's going to remain in our communities until we have a vaccine available. So, we have to learn to live with it without letting it govern our lives."

That's been the mindset of Gov. Ricketts, too, as he has introduced a gradual loosening of restrictions on the state, including businesses. We're glad he's taken that route, and we're pleased he's received some praise for it, too.

OWH: Douglas County records another 291 cases of COVID-19

Douglas County added 291 new COVID-19 cases during the Memorial Day weekend, bringing the county's total to 3,355 throughout the coronavirus outbreak.

Those people would have been exposed to the virus weeks ago.

Statewide, an additional 264 positive cases were reported Tuesday, bringing the Nebraska total to 12,619. Another three deaths were reported for a total of 153.

Among the new deaths in Nebraska was an individual in Lancaster County. Total cases in Lancaster County grew by seven on Tuesday for a total of 1,097.

In Douglas County, 8% of people who tested positive are hospitalized, and 30 people with COVID-19 have died, according to the most recent Douglas County figures.

Hospitalizations in the Omaha area fell since Friday from 210 people with confirmed or suspected cases to 183 through Monday, according to the Douglas County Health Department. But the number of confirmed COVID-19 patients on a ventilator grew from 41 to 46.

One potentially encouraging sign: The most recent tests this week came back positive at a rate of 7.9%, according to the county, reflecting another step down for the time being. In late April and early May, about 23% of tests were positive, and the figure was about 12% last week.

Also Monday, the Winnebago Comprehensive Healthcare System reported one more COVID-19 case in Winnebago, bringing the total to 14 cases on the Winnebago Reservation.

Across the Missouri River in Iowa, Pottawattamie County reported another death and 16 more cases of COVID-19. A man over age 80 and with preexisting health conditions has become the county's seventh death. The new cases are: 10 people from Council Bluffs, three from Underwood, two from Carter Lake and one from Walnut. Three of those infected are under age 17. So far, 243 residents of Pottawattamie County have tested positive.

By Jeffrey Robb

OWH: Ninth resident dies at Life Care Center of Elkhorn nursing facility

The Life Care Center of Elkhorn reported another resident death — the ninth in less than two weeks presumed to be coronavirus- related — on Tuesday.
The long-term care center in west Omaha has been consumed by a coronavirus outbreak that's sickened residents and staff since the end of April.
Of the 79 total residents who have been tested for the coronavirus, 68 have tested positive. Thirty out of 140 staff members have become infected with COVID-19, although officials said more staff have been returning to work over the last several days, an encouraging sign.
The facility did not report the age or gender of the latest victim.
"Our nurses and staff are giving heroic efforts to provide the best care possible in the face of this novel coronavirus," a statement from the facility said.
By Erin Duffy

OWH: 19 more workers at Costco chicken plant in Fremont test positive for coronavirus

Over the last week, an additional 19 workers have tested positive for COVID-19 at the Fremont plant that supplies rotisserie chickens and other cuts of meat to Costco stores.
A total of 73 Lincoln Premium Poultry workers have tested positive since the plant reported its first known coronavirus case in mid-April. One worker died, the company announced in early May.
Another 103 workers have tested negative. The plant employs roughly 1,100 people and is one of many meatpacking plants dealing with coronavirus outbreaks.
Last week, Nebraska officials said infections among meatpackers made up roughly one-quarter of all confirmed coronavirus cases in Nebraska, with 2,601 workers testing positive and eight who have died.
"As the virus continues to be prevalent in our communities, we know we will continue to have cases each week," said Jessica Kolterman, a spokeswoman for Lincoln Premium Poultry. "We continue to keep the curve flat within our facilities and have seen 50 team members return to work. That's encouraging for all of us."
By Erin Duffy

OWH: Another Nebraska prison worker tests positive for COVID-19

Another worker in the Nebraska prison system has tested positive for the coronavirus.
The worker is employed at the Lincoln Correctional Center and is self-isolating at home, according to Scott Frakes, director of Nebraska Department of Corrections.
This is the 11th employee of the prison system to test positive.

OWH: Sheriff's deputies find 'most egregious violation' of coronavirus rules at Surfside Club

The party was in full swing Saturday night at the Surfside Club when Douglas County sheriff's deputies arrived.
Live music, booze, dancing, crowds.
Sheriff's Capt. Wayne Hudson described it as "the most egregious violation" of the state's directed health measures that he's seen.
Here are some of the coronavirus violations he said he and deputies saw:

- The band Taxi Driver was performing, even though large gatherings like concerts are banned. (Deputies arrived about 8 p.m.; Taxi Driver's advertised start time was 5 p.m.)
- People in the outdoor area were drinking but not eating. Alcohol is permitted only while served with a sit-down meal.

- People were at the bar, which is prohibited.
- Large groups were crowded around tables. Seating is limited to six per table under the state's coronavirus rules.
- An estimated 300 patrons were scattered across the popular, indoor-outdoor venue north of Omaha along the Missouri River. With a rated capacity of 350 and state COVID-19 restrictions limiting crowds to 50% of capacity, no more than 175 people should have been there.

When told of the violations observed by the deputies, and the fact that people were drinking without eating, Hudson said the owner offered to buy everyone in the crowd corn fritters.

"We said, 'No, that's not going to be allowed,' " Hudson said.

Representatives of Surfside and Taxi Driver could not be reached for comment Tuesday evening. Surfside had initially advertised Taxi Driver's performance on Facebook as a "band practice," but then promoted the music and club as a destination for boaters taking advantage of Saturday's good weather and the newly reopened, nearby N.P. Dodge Marina.

"He knew the rules," Hudson said of Surfside's owner. "He told me the (rules) were hurting his business."

Surfside, Hudson said the owner told him, is a seasonal business and needed to capitalize on Saturday's nice weather in the middle of a rainy holiday weekend.

Hudson said he issued the owner a warning, in accordance with county policy. And he sent a tavern report to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission, which will put an account of the incident on file.

"We're going to do everything we can to not cite someone," he said. "We're going to give them time, we're going to talk to them to do what we can before we take enforcement action."

Hudson said that as he and the owner were talking, someone went to the microphone at the club and announced: "They're telling us we have to close."

"We didn't tell them that," Hudson said. "But that's fine with us. They closed."

The penalty for violating coronavirus restrictions is a $100 fine and a misdemeanor citation, Hudson said.

"We don't want to spoil anybody's fun," Hudson said. "We understand the weather is nice and people want to have fun. You just have to wait until the directed health measures say you can do these things."

Beginning Monday, the rules will be loosened, allowing some concerts and for bars to reopen, with restrictions. Hudson said the county is awaiting guidance on the loosened restrictions.

By Nancy Gaarder

OWH: Nebraska VA med clinics take first small steps toward normal operations

VA clinics in Nebraska and western Iowa have begun inching toward a return to normal, pre-pandemic operations, according to a video posted on social media over the Memorial Day weekend.

Smaller clinics in the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System are now allowing four to five more patients a day, Director B. Don Burman said in the video, which was posted Saturday on the system's Facebook page.

If this works out well, Burman said, larger clinics — including the VA Medical Center — will follow suit.

"We're going to begin slowly — and I want to emphasize the word 'slowly' — open up our services for folks that need to come to the medical center," Burman said.

The first clinics to see more patients are in Holdrege, Norfolk and North Platte, Nebraska, and Shenandoah, Iowa, said Kevin Hynes, a VA spokesman. The main hospital in Omaha, as well as larger clinics in Bellevue and Lincoln, will follow. So will the facility in Grand Island, which is in an area particularly hard-hit by cases of COVID-19.

"It may be a couple of weeks before we really see an increase," Burman said. "We're going to be a little more methodical to ensure that we keep you safe."

As of Tuesday, the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa System had reported 115 confirmed COVID-19 cases among veterans and 14 deaths, according to a tracker on the VA's national website, accesstocare.va.gov.

That is more deaths than were recorded combined in the rest of Iowa (6), South Dakota (2), Kansas (1) and Wyoming (0), and also more than in such large VA health care systems as Los Angeles and San Diego.
Seventy-seven Nebraska-Western Iowa patients have recovered, while 24 are still being treated, according to the website. Three VA employees reportedly tested positive.
Nationally, the VA lists 13,347 known positive cases among veterans, and 1,133 deaths.
In his video, Burman said veterans visiting clinics in Nebraska and western Iowa will still be required to wear masks. If they don't have one, a mask will be provided.
"We're making sure you're not in a position where you're picking up a virus because we didn't do our job," he said. "And we're going to ask you don't bring one here, which will get us sick, and then we can't do our job."
Burman said one imminent change at the Omaha VA hospital will be in parking. Employees lately have been parking in lots near the building, but they will shortly be returned to a remote parking lot and asked to use a shuttle bus.
That will open some additional spaces near the building for veterans, Burman said.
By Steve Liewer

OWH: Nebraska's state colleges, Creighton plan to complete fall term by Thanksgiving

Nebraska's state colleges in Wayne, Peru and Chadron will change their fall schedule substantially. Creighton University has already announced similar changes. The University of Nebraska system hasn't made such changes in its fall schedule but is considering the possibility.
Each of these schools — Creighton, the state colleges and the NU system — anticipates a return to campus for fall term after months of providing classes online because of the coronavirus pandemic.
The Nebraska State College System announced Tuesday that fall semester will start a week early, on Aug 17, and final tests will conclude just before Thanksgiving Day.
The state college system will add a short December term expected to go from Nov. 30 to Dec. 18. The December term, offered on a trial basis, would enable students to take remedial courses, or find jobs or internships during that time.
Paul Turman, chancellor of the state college system, said the revamped schedule also will eliminate the return to campus in late November from Thanksgiving break. This will reduce the chances that people could travel over the break and bring the coronavirus back to campus, Turman said.
Creighton will start classes on Aug. 17 as well and complete the term just before Thanksgiving.
The state college system said each of its three schools will work through the details individually.
By Rick Ruggles

LJS: Lawsuit: Migrant workers hired to detassel in Nebraska faced substandard conditions

Thirteen migrant workers recruited in Texas to detassel in the Kearney area in 2017 have sued Monsanto and Gulf Citrus Harvesting & Hauling Inc., accusing the companies of labor violations.
The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Lincoln by Texas RioGrande Legal Aid and Legal Aid of Nebraska, alleges the workers, several of whom were teenagers at the time, weren't paid the federal minimum wage and were subjected to substandard working conditions.
The suit alleges Monsanto hired farm labor contractor Gulf Citrus, a Florida company, to recruit, employ and house migrant workers to detassel seed corn on fields it leases in Nebraska, according to the suit.
Gulf Citrus hired the 13 — all temporary foreign agricultural workers — through what is known as the H-2A program, at the Texas Workforce Commission in Edinburg, a town at the Mexican border.
Their contracts guaranteed them $13.79 per hour or $70 per "clean acre," whichever was higher,

housing, reimbursement for travel expenses and three meals a day in exchange for $12.07 a day taken out of their paychecks.
Amanda McMahon, managing attorney of the Agricultural Worker Rights Program at Legal Aid of Nebraska, said Gulf Citrus failed to record all the hours the 13 worked or credit them with all the acres they completed and didn't give them promised bonuses.
She said before the workers were hired, they were shown a menu of meal options, including grilled meat and chicken, burritos and tacos, but for several days in a row were served only eggs, rice and onions.
In the fields, the drinking water workers got was dirty, old and hot and smelled and tasted badly, McMahon said. And one day, an airplane spraying pesticides on an adjacent field led to breathing problems and an asthma attack for one worker. Despite complaints, none got medical care, she said.
They are seeking the unpaid wages, plus an equal amount as liquidated damages, as well as statutory damages of up to $500 per person, per violation, under the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act.
They also are asking a judge to award the state fund for public schools one time the amount of the judgment under the Nebraska Wage Payment and Collection Act or two times the amount of judgment for willfully unpaid wages.
In an answer filed Tuesday, Monsanto denied any working arrangement existed between the company and the 13 and denied the allegations to the extent they purport to relate to Monsanto.
Clifford Godiner, a St. Louis attorney representing the company, said the alleged injuries were "not proximately caused by any unlawful action, policy, custom, practice, and/or procedure promulgated and/or tolerated by Monsanto."
Florida-based attorney David Stefany, on behalf of Gulf Citrus, said the company fully performed its contractual obligations to each of the workers.
By Lori Pilger

AP: Worker shortage concerns loom in immigrant-heavy meatpacking

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — When Martha Kebede's adult sons immigrated from Ethiopia and reunited with her in South Dakota this year, they had few work opportunities.
Lacking English skills, the brothers took jobs at Smithfield Foods' Sioux Falls pork plant, grueling and increasingly risky work as the coronavirus sickened thousands of meatpacking workers nationwide. One day, half the workers on a slicing line vanished; later, the brothers tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.
"It was very, very sad," Kebede said. "The boys teared up seeing everyone."
The brothers — who declined to be identified for fear of workplace retaliation — are among roughly 175,000 immigrants in U.S. meatpacking jobs. The industry has historically relied on foreign-born workers — from people in the country illegally to refugees — for some of America's most dangerous jobs.
Now that reliance and uncertainty about a virus that's killed at least 20 workers and temporarily shuttered several plants fuels concerns about possible labor shortages to meet demand for beef, pork and chicken.
Companies struggling to hire before the pandemic are spending millions on fresh incentives. Their hiring capability hinges on unemployment, industry changes, employees' feelings about safety and President Donald Trump's aggressive and erratic immigration policies.
Trump has restricted nearly all immigration, his administration recently granted seasonal workers 60-day extensions, affecting a smattering in meat and poultry.
Roughly 350 foreign workers were certified for meat and poultry gigs in 2019, according to Daniel Costa at the Economic Policy Institute. Such H-2B visa holders, capped at 66,000 annually, are commonly used

in landscaping and resorts.
But there's been willingness to expand. A plan to add 35,000 seasonal workers — which Trump supports in tight labor markets — was suspended in April for “present economic circumstances.”
Immigrants make up nearly 40% of the industry's roughly 470,000 workers, with higher concentrations in states like South Dakota, where they are 58% of workers, and Nebraska, where they're 66%, according to the nonprofit Migration Policy Institute. Estimates on illegal immigrants vary from 14% to the majority at some plants.
The industry argues it offers ample jobs with benefits and opportunities to advance for all workers. Paulina Francisco said her 21 years at Smithfield in Sioux City, Iowa, helped her buy a home, something she didn’t think possible when she immigrated from Guatemala. She’s now a citizen.
Still, most jobs are rural, limiting workers' access to lawyers, favorable union laws and other jobs. Hourly pay averages as low as $12.50 for backbreaking work, often conducted side-by-side. Workers in the country illegally fear deportation for speaking up.
“Vulnerable populations work well for them,” Joshua Specht, a University of Notre Dame professor, said of the industry.
Chicken plants extensively recruited immigrants in the 1990s as union organizing among majority African-American workers increased. One Morton, Mississippi, plant advertised in Miami's Cuban stores and newspapers, busing workers willing to accept lower wages, a tactic replicated across the South, according to University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill anthropologist Angela Stuesse.
Initially, it was immigrants with work authorization, but they were replaced by Mexicans and Guatemalans here illegally. Argentinians, Uruguayans and Peruvians followed. By the 2000s, the labor pool was self-sustaining with word-of-mouth.
“This is part of the way this industry works, is by having these different communities they can lean into to keep costs down and keep the lines running,” said Stuesse.
One window into the industry's response to sudden labor shortages is immigration raids.
In 2006, agents swept Swift & Co. plants, netting 1,300 arrests, the largest single-worksite raid in U.S. history.
Full production resumed within months. One Greeley, Colorado, plant offered more pay, hiring about 75 workers, mainly U.S. citizens and Somali refugees, according to the Center for Immigration Studies, which supports restricting immigration.
Today, meatpacking has the fifth-highest concentration of refugee workers, according to the nonprofit Fiscal Policy Institute.
Sudanese refugee Salaheldin Ahmed, 44, heard about Smithfield's jobs while in New Hampshire and moved to South Dakota six years ago. After escaping war, little fazes the forklift driver, not even a positive COVID-19 test.
“They were killing in front of you,” Ahmed, who experienced mild symptoms, said of atrocities he once witnessed. “The coronavirus is nothing.”
Some data suggests raids may temporarily decrease immigrant hiring.
Noncitizens comprised 52% of meatpacking in 2006, dropping to 42% by 2008, according to Michael Clemens at the Center for Global Development. He cited an annual March employment survey.
But that trend reversed during the Great Recession's high unemployment. By 2011, noncitizens were roughly 56%.
After raids last year on Mississippi poultry plants, some citizens were hired but many immigrants returned to work, according to activists and local leaders.
“There is a need of workers, and they don’t have any other possibilities,” said the Rev. Roberto Mena, whose Forest congregation includes poultry workers.
Koch Foods and Peco Foods, the largest companies targeted, didn’t return messages. Both have touted

use of the federal E-Verify system to confirm worker eligibility.
Some blame the business model. With rapid turnover, it's not uncommon for plants to rehire an entire workforce annually, says worker advocate National Employment Law Project.
“This is the industry’s own short-sightedness,” said Debbie Berkowitz, a director. “They want to look for workers they can exploit, rather than workers that would feel comfortable raising concerns.”
After the outbreak closed several plants, they got Trump's help; he issued an order classifying meat processing as critical.
The North American Meat Institute estimates most plants are at 70% production. Many added plexiglass barriers and other protections.
Little, the institute spokeswoman, noted that many meatpacking companies continued to pay employees even when plants shuttered and suggested more people might be drawn to meatpacking amid high unemployment.
“There’s so many unknowns,"' she said. “I don’t know what’s in store for us."
The pandemic has accelerated some workers' decisions.
Guadalupe Paez, 62, likely won't return to his job cleaning cattle at JBS Packerland in Green Bay, Wisconsin, after being hospitalized for COVID-19. Weaker, he fears more illness, says his daughter Dora Flores. Paez immigrated from Mexico through a 1980s guest worker program and obtained a green card.
“He only goes out for the doctor appointments," she said. “He's traumatized.”
By Stephen Groves and Sophia Tareen

OWH Editorial: Law enforcement coordination vital for finding missing Native American youths

It’s a trauma whenever a young person goes missing. For Nebraska’s Native American community, it can bring added pain. That’s because law enforcement agencies often fail to coordinate on investigations for such cases. Agencies also lack a uniform reporting system for data-sharing.
A new initiative, prodded by the Nebraska Legislature, offers hope. Law enforcement and other agencies must use this opportunity to build strong, effective relationships. Constructing a standardized reporting system also is a must, to ensure that these cases receive the proper level of attention and commitment.
In this new initiative, the Nebraska State Patrol worked with a wide range of tribal, local and federal agencies over the past year to collect information on missing Native American adults and youths, under legislation sponsored by State Sen. Tom Brewer of Gordon, the Legislature’s only Native American member.
Boys age 17 or younger account for 73.3% of all Native American missing persons in Nebraska, the State Patrol reported last week in releasing its findings. In fact, across all racial demographics, 59.6% of Nebraska missing persons are boys age 17 or younger.
In preparing the report, the State Patrol held listening sessions in Nebraska’s Native American communities. Citizens and advocates described the underlying factors for missing persons cases in their communities, including domestic violence, substance use, mental health challenges, lack of affordable housing and poverty. Distrust of the current system leads some women not to report domestic violence because they fear the state will remove their child, the patrol was told.
Officials acknowledge that the process thus far is only a first step, but it does set the stage for improvement. The patrol will work with the Nebraska Crime Commission to develop a standard operating procedure for handling missing persons cases. And the process over the past year has helped agencies begin to understand how they can work constructively together.
All Nebraskans, regardless of ethnic background, deserve the utmost commitment of law enforcement to provide justice. Through this new initiative, the patrol and other agencies must work to see to it that

they fully meet that obligation.

LJS Editorial, 5/27: Union Bank, Lopez making city stronger

COVID-19 has revealed some fractures and flaws in our society. At the same time, it's spotlighted strengths and reasons for hope and optimism.

In this space, we've lifted up people and businesses that have gone above and beyond, helping others and making our community a better place. Call them coronavirus kudos. And today we offer two more.

Back in early April, the Journal Star reported on Union Bank and Trust being the nation's second most-active lender in the federal Payroll Protection Program. The $350 billion effort was aimed at helping small businesses that have been hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Borrowers sang the praises of Union Bank and Trust for its speed and customer service. Their hard work and innovation drew national attention when The Washington Post featured the local business in lengthy story that detailed how the bank got out in front of an enormous financial opportunity and did it all in a time of remote working and great uncertainty. Nebraska's Pinnacle Bank also was a top lender.

The federal program was so popular that all the money in its initial allocation was doled out within two weeks. Because of the speed of Union Bank, a huge number of businesses are better positioned for where we are and where we are headed.

"The demand for PPP loans is unlike anything we've experienced," Angie Muhlheisen, CEO of Union Bank & Trust, said in a statement quoted in the Journal Star. "We feel honored to provide this kind of help, on this scale, to the community. And we are grateful for our hard-working, dedicated team members."

Union Bank and Trust's success is a community success, and many business borrowers said the bank went above and beyond to help them.

Speaking of going above and beyond, there are few better examples than Pat Lopez.

The interim Director of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department has had a high profile and huge impact in the weeks since the pandemic hit our community. Lopez had been a 30-year health department employee and served the state as well when she was appointed interim director a year ago, when Shavonna Lausterer took a medical leave for breast cancer, passing away in June.

With no consensus pick among three candidates for the permanent job and with COVID-19 a small headline on the international news page, in January Lopez agreed to continue as interim director. Little could she – or anyone else – have expected what would come.

Lopez has been a steady hand at Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird's press conferences. She's been a voice of reason and toed the fine line between transparency and protection of sensitive health data, always with the public's safety in mind.

In these trying times, it's good to remember these two examples – and the many other great ones we've all witnessed – of people, businesses and organizations making the bad better.

LJS Local View: Meat-processing workers deserve better

For months, governments around the world have instituted shutdowns and partial closures to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 contagion, reduce the loss of life and avoid overwhelming our health care sector.

Meat packing plant workers have been deemed "essential" given their role in the nation's food supply, and their places of work have generally remained open. However, more than 14,000 meat packing workers (at least) have been infected around the nation with at least 50 of these workers dying from the virus.

In the case of Nebraska, more than 2,500 meatpacking and other food processing workers have tested

positive for the virus, representing one in six of all of cases in Nebraska, with at least eight deaths. In fact, a study from the Environmental Working Group has found that Nebraska and Iowa have the highest number of meat-industry related COVID-19 cases in the country.

The extent that workers work extremely close together on fast dangerous production lines, the thousands that work together in a typical plant and a corporate culture that expects workers to show up no matter what helps to explain the emergence of these hot spots around meatpacking plants.

Not surprisingly, the towns and counties where these plants are located (such as Hall and Dawson counties) have seen their overall numbers increase as the virus works its way through the larger community.

Activists in solidarity with meatpacking plant workers have demanded that these workers receive increased hazard pay, paid sick leave, slower line speeds to allow for greater social distancing, personal protective equipment for all workers, confidential tools to report safety violations, universal testing of all workers and clarity on the number of positive cases in each plant.

In the face of this pressure, companies such as JBS, Smithfield and Tyson have taken incremental steps on PPE and hazard pay but have refused to be transparent about the number of positive cases in a plant, and workers report that the companies have been inconsistent in implementing safety protocols. In addition, some workers remain fearful of losing their jobs if they report having symptoms.

In the face of this struggle to get these companies to do right by these workers, Gov. Pete Ricketts' leadership on behalf of these workers and their communities has been missing. For example, in the case of Grand Island, the health director of the Central District Health Department as well as doctors in Grand Island asked the governor to shut down the JBS plant for two weeks for the welfare of its workers and the greater Grand Island community. Governor Ricketts refused to shut it down, claiming they were “essential” and must remain open despite the risks to the community.

Not only is the governor refusing to shut down problematic plants, but he has worked to assist these companies by withholding information about the number of cases in a plant. This is information that the public in Grand Island, Lexington and Crete could use to determine how poorly, or well, a specific plant is doing in reducing its cases.

Activists across the state of Nebraska who are working to support these workers and their communities demand that Governor Ricketts do more to prioritize the health and well-being of working Nebraskans over the interests of companies accumulating profits at their expense.

Will Avilés is a member of Solidarity for Packing Plant Workers in Nebraska.

AP: Iowa casinos can reopen, evictions and large events can resume June 1, Gov. Kim Reynolds says

IOWA CITY — Gov. Kim Reynolds moved Tuesday to lift a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures and allow gatherings of more than 10 people to resume, as she continues to end restrictions meant to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The governor said that casinos, outdoor amphitheaters, amusement parks, bowling alleys, arcades, racetracks, skating rinks and outdoor playgrounds can reopen June 1. Iowa's ban on social, community and recreational gatherings larger than 10 people will expire the same day.

Events such as parades, festivals and conventions can resume if public health measures are implemented, including requiring participants to practice social distancing. Practices and competitions for youth sports such as baseball and softball will also be permitted.

The continued reopening comes as COVID-19 deaths in Iowa have increased to 471, including a one-day record of 26 announced on Saturday. Iowa's number of cases has increased to 17,690, the 12th highest per capita among states, tracking data show.

The state on Tuesday confirmed two new workplace outbreaks, at Perdue Farms plants in Sioux Center and Sioux City.
On Monday, the virus claimed a fifth employee of the Tyson Foods plant in Waterloo, according to workers' advocates. Jose Ayala, 44, died in Cedar Rapids after a six-week hospitalization.
The other people who died were a 65-year-old laundry department worker, a 58-year-old Bosnian refugee, a 60-year-old Latino father and a refugee from Congo.
The plant is Tyson's largest pork processing facility. Local officials have said that at least 1,031 out of the plant's 2,800 workers have been infected by the virus. Tyson idled the plant in Waterloo on April 22 before resuming production two weeks later with new safety protocols.
Unlike the majority of other states, Iowa never implemented a stay-at-home order and instead banned large gatherings and closed many businesses and schools. Over the last month, the governor has steadily removed those restrictions.
On Thursday, bars, wineries, breweries, distilleries and social clubs can reopen statewide.
"For our state, recovery means striking a balance between getting life and business back to normal while continuing to manage the virus activity," Reynolds said Tuesday. "Our recovery is contingent upon our ability to protect both the lives and livelihoods of Iowans. We can't prioritize one over the other."
Advocates for low-income residents have warned that scores of people who have lost income during the pandemic could face eviction or foreclosure when the moratorium for nonpayment expires at 11:59 p.m. Wednesday. The American Civil Liberties Union and several other groups had asked the governor to extend the moratorium, which she first imposed March 19.
Some landlords, however, had reported that they were struggling financially as renters stopped paying amid skyrocketing levels of unemployment.
Reynolds said the moratorium was designed to keep people in their homes during the emergency and not intended to freeze people's financial obligations indefinitely.
She said the Iowa Finance Authority would announce the details of a new federally funded program designed to prevent evictions and foreclosures. She said the program should open Friday for residents who "have experienced a documented loss of income due to COVID-19" and are unable to pay their rent or mortgage payments.
Details on eligibility and the types of assistance offered will be announced this week, she said. She promised that enough money would be set aside and available quickly enough to provide relief to those who need it.
"We are changing the parameters in which we are providing the assurance that people aren't thrown out of their homes in these really difficult times," she said.

Bloomberg: The drug remdesivir seems to help mostly those who aren't the sickest

BloomBerg News Gilead Sciences Inc.'s remdesivir, the first medicine cleared for the treatment of COVID-19, mainly benefited healthier patients who weren't dependent on ventilators or heart-lung bypass machines, according to published results of the study used to get the medicine on the market.
The drug helped patients infected with the coronavirus heal faster, allowing them to return home after about 11 days, compared to 15 days for those who were treated with a placebo, according to the report in the New England Journal of Medicine. There also were signs the medicine increased their survival rate: 7.1% on patients on remdesivir and 11.9% on a placebo died within two weeks. Still, the difference wasn't statistically significant, meaning it could have stemmed from chance.
Use of the drug received emergency clearance by the Food and Drug Administration on May 1. The clinical trial of the drug began in Omaha in February.
While a fuller analysis is still underway, the researchers said it's already clear that antiviral drugs like

remdesivir alone won't control the outbreak.
"Given high mortality despite the use of remdesivir, it is clear that treatment with an antiviral drug alone is not likely to be sufficient," the researchers concluded. "Future strategies should evaluate antiviral agents in combination with other therapeutic approaches or combinations of antiviral agents to continue to improve patient outcomes in COVID-19."
The publication also allowed greater insight into which patients seemed to respond best to treatment. The only group to do significantly better on remdesivirwere those who were sick enough to need supplemental oxygen, but who weren't yet on a ventilator or a heart-lung bypass machine. While the lack of benefit might have stemmed from the limited number of patients in those groups, there were few initial signs that the drug was helping the sickest patients
"Our findings highlight the need to identify COVID-19 cases and start antiviral treatment before the pulmonary disease progresses to require mechanical ventilation," the researchers concluded.

AP: Congress considers next pandemic move

WASHINGTON — Deadlocked over the next big coronavirus relief bill, Congress is shifting its attention to a more modest overhaul of small business aid in hopes of helping employers reopen shops and survive the pandemic.
Bipartisan legislation that would give small employers more time to take advantage of federal subsidies for payroll and other costs is expected to pass the House this week, as lawmakers return to Washington for an abbreviated two-day session.
Yet absent from the agenda are formal talks between congressional leaders on the next “phase” of the federal coronavirus response. Democrats have already pushed a $3 trillion-plus measure through the House, but negotiations with the GOP-controlled Senate and White House have yet to begin.
“We can’t keep propping up the economy forever,” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday in Lexington, Kentucky. It was one of his first public appearances in his home state since mid-March because of the pandemic.
“The ultimate solution is to begin to get back to normal,” he said. “There are three things that are essential to have full normalcy — testing, treatment and vaccine.”
Senate Republicans are divided on the next steps and wary of another sprawling negotiation where Democrats and the White House call the shots. They are also split on a central element — how much aid to provide state and local governments and other coronavirus response after earlier relief bills totaled almost $3 trillion.
Even as they hit “pause” on a larger bill, Republicans are enthusiastic about improving the Paycheck Protection Program, which was established in March under the $2 trillion CARES Act and was replenished last month. All told, Congress has provided about $660 billion for the program.
The House's return to Washington for voting Wednesday comes after Senate Republicans — who are on recess after spending the past three weeks in Washington — have been knocking the decision by top Democrats to largely stay out of session during the pandemic.
House GOP Leader Kevin McCarthy’s office announced it was filing a lawsuit Tuesday against the new system of proxy voting. Approved by House Democrats earlier this month, the first-of-its-kind rules change will be in practice this week as dozens of lawmakers sign up to have another person vote on their behalf so they can avoid travel to Washington. Republicans call it unconstitutional.
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called the lawsuit a “sad stunt” as the nation's virus-related death toll approaches 100,000.
It appears the House could be out of session for much of June as well. The House, which has more than four times as many members as the 100-person Senate, is operating under the Capitol physician’s

guidance, as Washington, D.C., remains under stay-home orders.
Meanwhile, Donald Trump's demand for a full-capacity Republican convention in August is putting pressure on North Carolina health officials — and local Republicans — as coronavirus cases surge in the host county and statewide.
Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's administration has refused to give in, though, responding with a letter demanding a written safety plan from organizers of the Republican National Convention, slated for August in Charlotte. Even local Republican officials note that Trump doesn't have the power to unilaterally move the event scheduled to start in 90 days after two years of planning.
Asked about Trump's tweets threatening to move the convention, Cooper said Tuesday he's "not surprised at anything that happens on Twitter," without mentioning the president by name. He said discussions with RNC organizers are continuing.
"We have asked them to present a plan on paper to us laying out the various options that we've already discussed," Cooper said. "They know we're talking about a time that's three months from now, so we have to have options regarding how this convention is going to be run depending on where we are with the virus in August."
State Health and Human Services Secretary Mandy Cohen's letter signed Monday asks Republican convention organizers for a written COVID-19 safety plan "as soon as possible," noting that Cohen and Cooper discussed various scenarios with GOP officials by phone Friday. She wrote that it's important to plan for multiple options, because the "status of COVID-19 infections in our state and in the Charlotte area continues to rapidly evolve."
By Tuesday, Mecklenburg County had at least 3,400 COVID-19 cases — more than twice the next-highest county — and 73 deaths, also the most in the state, according to state health officials. A third of the cases were tallied in the past two weeks. County officials said hospitalized patients with COVID-19 dropped from more than 100 in April to 75 by Monday.
Trump complained again Tuesday that Cooper hasn't committed yet to a full-capacity convention.
"We have a governor who doesn't want to open up the state," Trump said, suggesting Cooper's decisions were politically motivated. "He's been acting very, very slowly and very suspiciously."
By Lisa Mascaro

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