From: Shelburn, Andrew
To: Shelburn, Andrew
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 6-1-22
Date: Wednesday, June 1, 2022 8:10:40 AM

AG VALLEY CO-OP

Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jun 2022	7.49	-5.00	07:48
Corn	Oct 2022	6.67	-45.00	07:47
Milo	Jun 2022	6.94	-60.00	07:48
Milo	Oct 2022	6.57	-55.00	07:47
Soybeans	Jun 2022	15.74	-55.00	07:45
Soybeans	Oct 2022	14.50	-70.00	07:54
Wheat	Jun 2022	10.97	-85.00	07:46
Wheat	Jul 2022	10.97	-85.00	07:46

TV and Radio

KLKN: Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts reveals new license plate design
NTV: New license plate features design from Capitol mosaic
NPM: New Nebraska License Plates Feature Capitol Mosaic
10/11: Nebraska's new license plate design unveiled
KETV: Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, First Lady Susanne Shore unveil state's new license plate design
KMTV: Gov. Ricketts announces new Nebraska license plate design: 'Genius of Creative Energy'
KMTV: Nebraska unveils new license plate design, drivers deliver mixed reaction
NCN: Gov. Ricketts announces Nebraska's new license plate design (no video)
NCN: Nebraska getting new license plate design, in 2023 (no video)
KPTM: Not your typical license plates for Nebraska's new design (no video)
WSCJ: Ricketts Says Mass Shootings Focus Should Target Mental Health
NPM: Baby Formula Still Scarce, Even After Nebraska's WIC Relaxes Restrictions (no audio)
KETV: Environmental Protection Agency samples air at former AltEn ethanol plant in Mead, Nebraska

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OWH: New Nebraska license plate design features art from Capitol

LINCOLN — Nebraska's newest license plate will feature a backdrop of an original mosaic described as "the crown jewel" of art pieces on display inside the Capitol.
Gov. Pete Ricketts, along with first lady Susanne Shore and several state officials, unveiled the new license plate design Tuesday morning. Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles Director Rhonda Lahm said she expects the state will print about 3 million new plates before the end of the year and

start issuing them in January.
The new general plate depicts a mosaic called “The Genius of Creative Energy,” which features a man riding atop the clouds behind a backdrop of lightning and clouds. It is one of dozens of original mosaics designed by artist Hildreth Meiere, but Drew Davies, owner of Oxide Design Co. who submitted the design, described it as “the crown jewel” of the Capitol, as it is one of the first pieces visitors see displayed on the floor coming through the building’s main entrance.
Ricketts said the image also represents Nebraska’s agricultural community, whose members routinely come up with creative solutions that help power the state.
Shore led the plate design project and said she started brainstorming in 2018, after Ricketts was reelected. It wasn’t until late 2021 when they settled on the final design.
Though some may not recognize the image on the plate, Ricketts said he thinks the design will educate Nebraskans about the original art that is available to view inside the Capitol.
“The building is like a history book,” said Capitol Administrator Bob Ripley.
Nebraska’s license plate designs, which are renewed every six years under state law, have encountered a fair share of controversy over the last decade.
In 2009, a plate design contest was hijacked by internet comedy company CollegeHumor, which encouraged its audience to vote for a plain gray design that then won the contest — temporarily. After Omaha World-Herald reporters asked to see the raw data, the company that ran the state website admitted that it had given state officials bad information and that another plate actually had won.
In 2017, Ricketts’ administration selected the design, going with an image of a Sower statue that was supposed to represent the one that sits atop the Capitol. However, The World-Herald later reported that the image was the wrong Sower, and was actually a statue at Michigan State University. The state quickly revised the design to showcase the correct Sower.
Though she stands by the latest design, Shore said she expects the newest plate will see its share of public criticism.
“It is sort of a state sport in every state,” Shore said.
However, she said she hopes over time, the design will come to be known as a beloved license plate for Nebraska.
By Erin Bamer

LJS: Watch now: New license plates unveiled, will depict renowned Nebraska Capitol mosaic

A depiction of the mosaic artwork that initially greets visitors to the state Capitol as they walk toward the Rotunda will adorn new Nebraska motor vehicle license plates for the next six years.
The mosaic embedded in the floor at the Capitol's second-floor north entrance depicts stars and lightning, the sun, the moon, a planet and represents "the genius of creative energy," Gov. Pete Ricketts, first lady Susanne Shore and state officials said in unveiling the new design at a Tuesday news conference.
The mosaic was the creation of Hildreth Meiere, a renowned American muralist whose artwork adorns Radio City Music Hall and St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.

"It embodies the spirit of Nebraska," Shore said, in its depiction of energy.
Meiere received the gold medal in mural decoration from the Architectural League of New York for her designs at Nebraska's Capitol.
"It's kind of a cool thing that we've got things in Nebraska that you may not expect," Ricketts said.
Capitol Administrator Bob Ripley described the mosaic as "a great piece of Nebraska fine art."
Drew Davies, owner and design director of Omaha-based Oxide Design Co., which fashioned the license plate design, described the choice as "a winner."
Shore said Nebraska's license plate will be incredibly unique and she recognizes in advance that it's "a state sport in every state to criticize license plates."
But, she said, she believes it will become "a very beloved license plate."
The new license plate will be issued beginning in 2023 and remain attached to cars and trucks for the next six years.
Answering questions on other topics, Ricketts continued his broad defense of gun ownership rights in the wake of the latest school shooting in Texas that left 19 children and two adults dead.
"Absolutely, yes," he said when asked whether an 18-year-old should have been allowed to purchase an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle.
"We ought not to focus on the gun, but on the person pulling the trigger," the governor said, and that points to "a mental health issue."
Some of the criticism now being aired represents "red herrings on how to restrict gun rights," Ricketts said.
By Don Walton

Nebraska Examiner: New license plate evokes creative use of Nebraska's natural resources

LINCOLN — A mosaic depicting a Roman chariot driver with flowing hair and ripped muscles was unveiled Tuesday as the background for the new state license plate, to be issued in 2023.
First Lady Susanne Shore, who led development of the new plate, joined her husband, Gov. Pete Ricketts, and others in saying the mosaic, which is the first one visitors see on tours of the State Capitol, will show Nebraska as more than cattle, windmills and sunsets — the traditional icons used on state plates.
"It's a great piece of Nebraska fine art," said Bob Ripley, the administrator of the State Capitol.
'Crown jewel' of Capitol artwork
"It's like the crown jewel of all the pieces" of art in the State Capitol, said Drew Davies, an Omaha brand and design consultant, who designed the plate.
The mosaic, entitled "The Genius of Creative Energy," is one of several on the second floor of the State Capitol done by artist Hildreth Meière in 1927 to depict the story of Nebraska.
By state law, the state license plate must be changed every six years. Ricketts said he selected his wife for the project because she had a "passion" for the project — and because she picks out the wall colors in their home.
While it's not a traditional design, the governor said it's "kind of a cool thing" that it will depict something different and showcase the kind of artwork found all over the State Capitol, a unique,

tower capitol building recognized for its architectural mastery.

‘Walking history book’

Ripley described the building as “a huge, three-dimensional, walking history book of Nebraska.”

The Genius of Creative Energy depicts the chariot driver harnessing the powers of wind, Earth, fire and water. Ricketts said it illustrates the creativity of Nebraskans in developing businesses and creating inventions such as the center-pivot irrigation system.

Shore acknowledged that criticizing the state license plate design is somewhat of a “state sport in every state,” including here and in her native Oklahoma.

“We have complete confidence in this design because it’s incredibly unique,” Shore said. “I’m willing to stand behind it.”

“I think time will show that this will become a very beloved license plate,” she added. “It is a winner.”

Reviews aren’t flattering

But most responses to a reporter’s tweet Tuesday of the new plate weren’t flattering, ranging from “ugh,” “ugly” and “boring,” to “the background makes no sense and is hidden.” Others suggested switching to one of the state’s many “speciality” license plates that feature mountain lions, a “chose life” mother and child, and bicycling and hiking.

“This is just a way to force us to spend more money on those speciality plates,” said one response.

A dozen designs considered

Shore said she consulted with several designers over 18 months, seeking a plate that represented the entire state and embodied the “spirit” of Nebraska. The “Genius” won out over about a dozen other proposals.

She said it was a much more complex task than she anticipated because there are so many rules involving colors, size of lettering, readability and placement of numbers and letters.

Blue was chosen for the color of the plate, Shore said, because the mosaic has a blue-gray color and because blue is a state color.

Rhonda Lahm, director of the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles, said the new plates will be issued beginning in January. About 3 million plates will be needed in 2023, she said, and about 9 million will eventually be produced.

State prison inmates, as required in state law, produce the license plates, Lahm said.

By Paul Hammel

Nebraska Examiner: Ricketts says ‘absolutely’ 18-year-olds in Nebraska should be able to buy AR-15s

LINCOLN, Neb. (Nebraska Examiner) — Should an 18-year-old be allowed to buy an AR-15?

“I would say that in the state of Nebraska, the answer is ‘absolutely yes,’” replied Gov. Pete Ricketts when asked at a Tuesday press conference.

Banning those under 21 from buying military-style rifles emerged as a major issue after a teenager in Texas, just after his 18th birthday, purchased two AR-15s. He used one of them to kill 21 people — 19 of them 4th graders — inside an elementary school last week in Uvalde, Texas.

‘Root cause’

Ricketts, a staunch supporter of gun rights who advocated this year for an end to Nebraska's concealed handgun carry training and registration requirements, told reporters Tuesday that the focus after such mass shootings should be on the person "pulling the trigger" and not the weapon used.

"That's where the real problem lies," he said, mentioning that the "root cause" is mental health care. A number of steps have been taken recently to address that cause, the Republican governor said, including the allocation of $40 million this year from the state's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for new mental health care facilities.

He added that a study last year by Stanford University found that 28 of 35 recent gunmen in mass shootings had some psychiatric diagnosis. That study looked only at assailants who survived.

"Most people in Nebraska are law-abiding citizens. And we ought not to focus on the gun but the person who is pulling the trigger."

– Gov. Pete Ricketts

AR-15s and their variants, which have been billed as "America's rifle" by the National Rifle Association, are lightweight, self-loading, semi-automatic rifles that gun control groups define as "assault weapons." They can be fitted with high-capacity ammunition magazines allowing them to fire more than 10 rounds before reloading.

"They are generally capable of firing far more bullets, far faster than manual-action hunting rifles," says the website for Everytown for Gun Safety, adding that the "muzzle energy" of an AR-15 can be four times greater than a handgun, thus inflicting more damage.

That national gun control group was formed after 20 schoolchildren and six teachers were gunned down in 2012 in Sandy Hook Elementary School in Everytown, Connecticut. It maintains that banning sales of such "excessively dangerous" weapons will prevent mass shooting injuries and deaths.

"Lawmakers should act urgently to prohibit these excessively dangerous firearms."

– Everytown for Gun Safety

Assault rifles, which were banned federally from public sale in the U.S. from 1994-2004, have accounted for 25% of the deaths and 76% of nonfatal injuries in mass shootings between 2009 and 2018, assault weapons, according to Everytown for Gun Safety.

USA Today reported that AR-15s, or variants of the gun, have been used in 11 mass shootings since 2012, including at Sandy Hook Elementary School, an Aurora, Colorado, theater and a Parkland, Florida, high school.

Ricketts, who often tweets about successful turkey, deer and goose hunts that he enjoys, used the more generic term "rifle" in answering the question about AR-15s.

Later, when asked if sales specifically of military-style weapons should be banned, Ricketts said it would be impossible to define what a "military-style" weapon is.

'Red herrings'

"What are the qualifications for that? … You can't tell what that is," he said. "The military buys handguns. Does that mean they're assault rifles now?"

"You throw up all these red herrings about how to restrict people's gun rights. But we actually have to focus on what is really the root cause," Ricketts said, "and that gets back to a person who was disturbed and does terrible things, like we saw down in Texas."

"We have to focus on, 'How do we have better interventions? How do we get to the people who need that help?'" he said.

He said that Cook County, Illinois, which includes the city of Chicago, has some of the most restrictive gun laws in the country, but also one of the nation's highest murder rates.

“Chicago has proven there’s no rationale” for additional gun laws, Ricketts said.
When asked if a “red-flag law” — which allows a judge to order the temporary confiscation of weapons from someone suffering a mental-health crisis — would help prevent someone with mental health issues from using a gun in a mass shooting, Ricketts disagreed.

Red-flag laws

He said that firearm possession is a constitutional right, which is “a high bar,” and that to take such a right away requires due process.
Nineteen states, as well as the District of Columbia, have enacted red-flag laws.
One was proposed in Nebraska in 2020 by State Sen Adam Morfeld of Lincoln. But it prompted a backlash from gun-rights advocates and a threat against Morfeld.
Ricketts did say Tuesday that he was supportive of an effort launched by State Sen. Lynne Walz of Fremont, after the Uvalde shootings, to form a committee to study how to make school more secure and safer for students.
Ricketts spoke at a National Rifle Association national convention in 2018. That same year, during his last re-election campaign, he received a $2,500 donation from the NRA and $5,000 from Hornady Industries of Grand Island, which makes ammunition.
The NRA gave Ricketts $1,000 in 2014, the first year he was elected governor.
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By Paul Hammel

Kearney Hub: Gov. Ricketts will highlight legislative successes at Lexington town hall

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts has announced that he will host town hall meetings in Lexington and Chadron on Wednesday to discuss historic accomplishments during the recently concluded 2022 Legislature.
According to his announcement, Ricketts worked with lawmakers to pass the largest tax relief package in Nebraska history, enhance public safety and strengthen Nebraska’s water resources.
Ricketts and others will give remarks before taking questions. The town hall events are open to the public.
The legislative wrapup town hall in Lexington will be at 3:30 p.m. Wednesday in the Lexington Public Library, 907 N. Washington St.
The Chadron session is planned earlier in the day Wednesday.

Scottsbluff SH: Gov. Ricketts to host “Legislative Wrap-Up" Town Hall in Chadron

LINCOLN — Governor Pete Ricketts announced that he will host a town hall in Chadron on Wednesday, June 8.
At the town halls, Ricketts will discuss the historic accomplishments of the 2022 Legislative Session. Among other successes, the governor worked with the Unicameral to pass the largest tax relief package in Nebraska history, enhance public safety, and strengthen Nebraska's water resources. Ricketts and others will give remarks before taking questions. The town hall event is open to the public.
The town hall will be held 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. in Chadron at the Bean Broker, 202 W. Second St.

Scottsbluff SH: SHS graduate Cade Horn recognized for perfect ACT score

Cade Horn, a 2022 Scottsbluff High School graduate, recently garnered recognition by Gov. Pete Ricketts and the Nebraska Department of Education as one of 22 Nebraskans in the high school graduating class of 2022 to score a perfect 36 on the ACT.
Over a year after achieving that perfect score, Horn received notice that he would be recognized in Lincoln. While Horn was unable to attend the ceremony in Lincoln on Monday, May 23, he said the recognition for his academic achievement is appreciated. "It made me pretty happy because throughout most of high school, up until that point, it's not that I had been unsuccessful necessarily, but I had always kind of been lurking in the shadows," he said. "I hadn't had anything big to be recognized for."
Horn took the ACT as a junior, receiving his score shortly after.
"I was pretty excited," he said. "I was expecting to get a pretty good score because I had done pretty good prep for it.
"I was expecting to probably get something in the high 30s, but not a 36 immediately."
The score put Horn into an elite group of seniors, something Ricketts said was an impressive feat.
"Achieving a top score on the ACT exam is an impressive feat," Ricketts said during the recognition ceremony. "These top-performing students have dedicated themselves to academic excellence, and their hard work has paid off. Thank you to the parents and teachers whose guidance has made their success possible. To the students — congratulations."
During the ceremony in Lincoln, NDE Commissioner Matt Blomstedt and ACT CEO Janet Godwin joined the governor in recognizing the students for their outstanding accomplishments.
"Congratulations to the remarkable Nebraska students who achieved a top score on the ACT," said Blomstedt. "These students are nothing short of incredible, working through extremely difficult circumstances and overcoming obstacles through hard work and dedication. All of Nebraska should be proud of their accomplishments and we wish them the best in the future."
Such success motivated Horn heading into his senior year to keep applying his learning.
"It was a big confidence boost," he said. "It made me feel like a lot of the stuff I had done wasn't for not. It felt like I had learned a lot and had succeeded."
Now a Scottsbluff High School graduate, Horn said it can be overwhelming at times.
"There's a lot to do and there's a lot to look forward to," he said. "I'm excited for all of it."

Horn will attend the University of Nebraska — Lincoln this fall where he will study computer science.
"Computer science is kind of funny for me because I ended up getting into it on a whim," Horn said. "I had pretty much convinced myself throughout my first two years of high school that I like engineering. But I ended up taking one programming class and I realized that computer science is my passion."
He took the class during his junior year and said he realized his affinity for programming when they began working on individual projects.
"There was a point, I want to say toward the end of the first semester, where we started to work on our first real independent projects," he said. "I realized how vast it can get and how much exploration there is, even though it's been explored for a couple of decades now."
He is looking at the field of cyber security.
As students read his story, Horn said he hopes it inspires them to keep going.
"The best thing I can say is to keep pushing forward and keep pushing forward for yourself," he said. "Make what you want to happen, happen."
By Lauren Brant

LJS: State asks judge to keep county requirements for petitions in place

Lawyers for the state have asked a federal judge to throw out a lawsuit challenging Nebraska's requirements for qualifying ballot initiatives, saying that doing so would "drastically change" the initiative process in the state.
In a 46-page brief filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court, attorneys representing Secretary of State Bob Evnen said the complaint filed by Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana and the ACLU of Nebraska lacked merit and would upend the initiative process outlined in the state's constitution.
The lawsuit, filed earlier this month by Crista Eggers, a statewide campaign coordinator for Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana's pair of petitions now being circulated, asserts the requirements for gathering signatures are unconstitutional.
The filing in U.S. District Court, which names Evnen, seeks a preliminary injunction on the requirement ahead of the July 7 deadline for submitting signatures.
Nebraska's state constitution requires petitions to obtain the signature of 5% of voters in 38 of the state's 93 counties, which Eggers' lawsuit alleges violates the equal protection and due process clauses of the 14th Amendment, and violates the First Amendment rights of voters.
Under the current method, Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana's lawsuit states, voters in rural counties, the vast majority of which have fewer than 10,000 residents, claim outsized power when it comes to qualifying initiatives compared to urban areas, where most of the state's population lives.
Plus, the lawsuit argues, organizers are forced to reallocate resources, which potentially strips voters of being able to have their voices heard through the petition process.
While Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana have suggested that the signatures be gathered from each of the state's three congressional districts, or 49 legislative districts — which are apportioned by population — the state said that plan would not work.
Replying on behalf of Evnen, the Nebraska Attorney General's Office said the signature-gathering

requirement was integral to the initiative process in the state, and that doing away with it would effectively cut rural Nebraskans out of the qualification process.
That, according to Solicitor General James Campbell, would effectively end the initiative process in the Cornhusker state.
“(T)he multicounty signature requirement is so integral to the initiative right in Nebraska — an indispensable part since its inception — that if this requirement falls, the entire initiative power must fall with it,” Campbell wrote.
The attorney general’s office argued the lawsuit fails to state a claim and lacks standing, and argues that it would be impossible to separate the signature requirement from the rest of the initiative process, which was included in the Nebraska Constitution in 1920.
“This constitutional text and its historical development show that, from the very beginning, the people envisioned an initiative process that guaranteed some measure of broad-based geographical support and involvement,” the state wrote in its brief.
“They did not want a process that operated exclusively in large cities,” it continues. “They demanded that citizens outside those urban centers be included. Allowing the initiative right to stand without the multi-county requirement would thus ‘do violence to the intent of the (people).’”
The state also said the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment did not apply because the constitutional right to vote is for candidates of “representative government” — not a ballot initiative created under state law.
“The Supreme Court has never extended the fundamental right to vote into the very different circumstance of this case — signing petitions to exercise one’s state-created right of initiative,” Campbell wrote.
Instead, the attorney general’s office argued the rules set up by the state ensured “a significant modicum” of statewide support for ballot initiatives, as well as one that reduced the possibility of local initiatives from advancing.
The current rules also promote participating in the initiative process throughout the state, the attorney general’s office said, and spread signature verification across several county offices, not just a handful of counties that could be overwhelmed.
Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana is circulating a pair of petitions to qualify for the November 2022 ballot.
The first would require the Legislature to enact statutes that protect doctors who recommend cannabis for their patients, and for patients who possess or use cannabis at the recommendation of their doctor.
The second would require state lawmakers to pass legislation protecting private entities that produce, supply or distribute cannabis for medical purposes in Nebraska.
By Chris Dunker

OWH: COVID-related hospitalizations tick up in Nebraska

Hospitalizations due to COVID-19 ticked up last week in Nebraska as omicron subvariants continue to fuel a spring virus rise.
An average of 86 people were hospitalized with COVID in Nebraska for the week ending Saturday, up 19% from 72 a week earlier, according to figures from the federal Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention.
Statewide case numbers were down slightly last week, according to the CDC, but that appeared to be due to a delay in reporting some positive test results over the Memorial Day weekend. Daily numbers earlier in the week suggest cases were up about 10% from the previous week, which would mark the seventh straight weekly increase in Nebraska.
The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' respiratory illness dashboard indicated that the state recorded 2,017 new COVID cases for the week ending May 28. That also represents an increase from the preceding week. The positivity rate of 11.6% also was up significantly from 5.1% at the end of April.
The dashboard is updated weekly on Tuesdays with data on COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, a department spokesman said in an email.
The dashboard does not include data on hospital capacity or the share of hospital beds used by COVID patients, as the agency has reported in the past.
The department, the spokesman wrote, is still tracking other data internally on a daily basis.
The monitoring of virus levels in wastewater in Douglas County and at most other sites across the state also confirms that COVID case numbers continued to climb last week.
On a per-capita basis, virus levels in Nebraska last week still ranked among the lowest in the country. Virus levels and hospitalizations also continue to be a small fraction of levels seen when the omicron variant peaked in Nebraska earlier this year.
The nation as a whole is averaging 110,000 new cases a day, according to the CDC. While cases appear to be leveling off in the Northeast, they have begun to pick up in parts of the West and South.
However, it's widely recognized that official case counts are undercounting the true number of infections. Many more people are using the now widely available at-home tests, which are not routinely included in official tallies. The Douglas County Health Department has a link to a form on its website where residents can report results from at-home tests, but those outcomes are not included in official counts.
Exactly how many cases are going under the radar isn't known. But researchers at the City University of New York estimated in a recent study that the true number of infections in New York City from April to May was 31 times higher than official case counts. The study has not been officially reviewed by other scientists.
Health officials continue to encourage people who haven't been vaccinated to get their shots. Those who have been vaccinated, they say, should get boosters. People ages 50 and older and those who are immune compromised are eligible for a fourth shot. The Food and Drug Administration recently approved a booster shot of the Pfizer vaccine for children ages 5 to 11.
In mid-June, an FDA advisory committee is slated to consider Pfizer's application for a three-dose series of shots for children under 5 and Moderna's request for a two-dose regimen for youngsters under 6.
Nebraska added 44 COVID deaths during the week, bringing the total of confirmed or probable deaths in the pandemic to 4,284. More than 480,000 Nebraskans have tested positive for COVID during the pandemic.
By Julie Anderson and Henry J. Cordes

LJS: Lincoln sees slight decline in COVID-19 cases

Local COVID-19 cases declined last week for the first time in nearly two months.
The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department reported 417 cases for the week that ended Saturday, down slightly from 422. That was the first decline in weekly cases since the week that ended April 2.
Hospitalization numbers also declined over the past week, with the seven-day average of COVID-19 patients dropping to 17 as of Monday, down from 19 on May 23. There were 23 patients in Lincoln hospitals as of Tuesday.
The Health Department said Tuesday that the local COVID-19 risk dial will stay in the mid-yellow range for the third week in a row, indicating a moderate risk of spread of the virus.
The decline in local cases last week does not appear to be the start of a longer-term trend, as other indicators show COVID-19 is still going strong.
The Health Department reported that local wastewater sampling showed an uptick in virus particles last week. Also, the COVID-19 test positivity rate in Lancaster County rose from 12.3% to 16.1% last week.
Statewide, COVID-19 cases increased slightly, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human services, which reported 2,017 cases for the week ending Saturday, up from 1,995 the previous week.
There also was an increase in the Nebraska test positivity rate, from 10.2% to 11.6%.
On a per-capita basis, virus levels in Nebraska last week still ranked among the lowest in the country, the Omaha World-Herald reported. Virus levels and hospitalizations also continue to be a small fraction of levels seen when the omicron variant peaked in Nebraska earlier this year.
The nation as a whole is averaging 110,000 new cases a day, according to the CDC. While cases appear to be leveling off in the Northeast, they have begun to pick up in parts of the West and South.
However, it's widely recognized that official case counts are undercounting the true number of infections. Many more people are using the now widely available at-home tests, which are not routinely included in official tallies.
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By Matt Olberding

OWH: Omaha city officials: Drinking water not impacted by runoff from chemical fire

The State of Nebraska will investigate chemical spills that flowed into the street and city sewers from a massive Monday night fire at an Omaha industrial plant, although city officials said the spills should have little or no impact on human health in Omaha.
The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy had a person en route Tuesday afternoon to

begin an on-site investigation, said Carla Felix, a spokesperson for the department. Nox-Crete Inc., a chemical plant where the three-alarm fire raged for hours, filed a notice of environmental concern with the department Tuesday morning.

The blaze, in a Nox-Crete warehouse complex at 1415 S. 20th St., sparked concerns about toxic runoff as black smoke filled the air and water carried materials into the city's sewer system, with fluid reportedly burning as it flowed toward fire trucks. It was unknown Tuesday exactly what chemicals spilled into the sewers. But the Nox-Crete notification to the state listed three liquid materials known to have been released: mineral spirits, acid and naphtha, a flammable petroleum product that often is used as an industrial solvent.

Any chemical runoff that flowed into the sewer system will end up at the city's Missouri River Water Resource Recovery Facility, where it will be treated before it's discharged into the Missouri River, according to a joint press release from the Mayor's Office and and the city's Public Works Department.

No unusual odors or discoloration of water flows were seen at the treatment facility as of Tuesday afternoon, city officials said.

Workers on Tuesday morning did detect a visible sheen in the flow, which would indicate the presence of oil, city officials said. But they said nothing had been observed that would potentially be harmful to human health or the environment.

Officials said the city's drinking water won't be affected by the fire because the drinking water comes from the Missouri River near Florence, which is in northern Omaha, or from wells located along the Platte River in Sarpy County, which is treated to federal standards.

The officials did not address how any chemicals that the City of Omaha released into the Missouri River will affect the river or people downstream, or whether cities downstream would be notified of the spill.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center sent a notice to Omaha-area emergency departments Monday night about the Nox-Crete plant fire. "It is unknown what chemicals were involved," the notice reads. "Some of the chemicals may contain hydrocarbons which can cause respiratory irritation if inhaled and possibly (central nervous system) depression."

So far, the notice read, the poison center had been contacted by one person with an indirect exposure who was experiencing dizziness. Emergency departments were asked to contact the poison center if they saw any affected patients.

By early Tuesday afternoon, the poison center had been contacted by one other person about symptoms, a center staffer said. People with concerns or questions can call the center 24 hours a day at 800-222-1222.

In February, Nox-Crete reported to the state that it had stored hundreds of pounds of multiple liquid chemicals, several of them flammable and some extremely hazardous, at its site, which straddles 20th Street near William Street. The fire tore through plant warehouses east of 20th Street, but Nox-Crete buildings on the west side of 20th Street appeared undamaged.

Douglas County's main air quality monitor near 41st and Pacific Streets didn't pick up the smoke Monday night because the wind was blowing the wrong way, a county official said Tuesday.

The Douglas County Health Department is not aware of any specific air quality concerns, but strongly recommends that anyone who was exposed to the smoke and is not feeling well seek medical attention, the press release said.

Firefighters responded to an automatic fire alarm at Nox-Crete shortly before 7 p.m. Monday. The building already had been evacuated, and the fire quickly accelerated to a three-alarm blaze.

By Jessica Wade and Christopher Burbach

OWH: Judge dismisses wrongful death lawsuit filed by parents of Jake Gardner

A federal judge has tossed a lawsuit filed by the parents of a bar owner who killed himself after being charged with manslaughter in the shooting death of a Black man during unrest in downtown Omaha in May 2020.

In a ruling filed two years and a day after protests sparked by the death of Minneapolis resident George Floyd under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, U.S. District Judge John Gerrard ruled that David and Glenda Sue Gardner had no basis for the lawsuit alleging their son, Jake Gardner, killed himself because authorities had violated his constitutional right to a fair trial.

Gerrard ruled the parents could not connect Gardner's suicide to any constitutional violation. And Gerrard rejected the notion that special prosecutor Fred Franklin, who guided the grand jury to charges in the case, somehow conspired with Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine, who elected not to charge Gardner before deferring to a grand jury.

Gerrard ruled that Franklin didn't say anything that shocked "the conscience" at a press conference announcing that the grand jury had charged Gardner, 38, with manslaughter in the May 30, 2020, death of James Scurlock, 22.

Gardner had confronted Scurlock outside his bar near 12th and Harney Streets after someone shattered a plate-glass window and Scurlock's friend hurled a sign at the window. Thinking the bar had been shot up, Gardner and his father, David, went out and down the street, and David Gardner pushed a bystander. Scurlock's friend ran and decked David Gardner. David Gardner got up and held a knife by his side.

Jake Gardner, a former Marine, then pulled a gun and held it by his side as he walked backward. A young woman tackled Gardner from behind. On his back in a puddle, Gardner fired what he described as a warning shot that caused her and Scurlock's friend to scramble away. Scurlock jumped on Gardner's back and wrapped one arm under his chin and appeared to be wrestling for control of the gun. Supporters have suggested Scurlock was trying to disarm an active shooter.

After an 18-second struggle in which Gardner yelled "get off me" several times, Gardner switched the gun to his left hand and fired over his shoulder, killing Scurlock.

A day later, Kleine ruled that Gardner acted in self-defense, noting that Gardner claimed Scurlock had him in a chokehold. Amid protests, Kleine agreed to allow a special prosecutor to be sought to present the case to a grand jury. A judge appointed Franklin, a former federal prosecutor, to guide a grand jury review of the case. Three months later, in September 2020, grand jurors charged Gardner.

Gardner, who had gone to the West Coast after he said he received threats, killed himself in Oregon on Sept. 20 rather than turn himself in to face trial.

John Pierce, a California attorney who has represented several Jan. 6 Capitol riot defendants and who once represented Kenosha, Wisconsin, gunman Kyle Rittenhouse, filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against Kleine and Franklin. Among the eyebrow-raising claims, Pierce alleged that Kleine and Franklin conspired to deprive Gardner of a fair trial.

In turn, Pierce alleged Gardner felt so hopeless and despondent that he killed himself. Gardner's parents pointed to a press conference Franklin gave after the indictment that, they said, cast Gardner as "a racist and a killer."
"Franklin's opinions about the government's evidence were nothing more than that," Gerrard wrote. "And Franklin's confidence in the government's evidence isn't shocking to the conscience.
"There is absolutely no legal basis to conclude that Franklin or anyone else is liable, under federal or state law, for Franklin's alleged braggadocio."
Nor is there any evidence that Kleine and Franklin conspired, the judge said. After Franklin's press conference, Kleine held an impromptu press conference criticizing Franklin for how he portrayed the case. Kleine made it clear he stood by his determination that Gardner had fired in self-defense.
Gerrard said Gardner would have had ample chance to receive a fair trial, despite Pierce's claims to the contrary. Prospective jurors often haven't heard much about even sensational cases; and jury selection allows attorneys to root out jurors who have biases.
"The Court is confident that an impartial Douglas County jury could have been selected regardless of Fred Franklin's press conference," Gerrard wrote. "(Pierce) insists that there would have been no way to mitigate the prejudice he claims was caused by Franklin's remarks. That legal conclusion is untenable."
"The right to an impartial jury doesn't require ignorance" by prospective jurors, Gerrard continued. It simply requires them to set aside previous knowledge of a case and rely only on evidence presented in court.
The judge also took issue with some of Pierce's legal arguments. At one point, the judge questioned whether two non sequitur sentences had been inserted mistakenly into a brief Pierce submitted. "There's no other explanation for their presence," the judge wrote. At another, the judge said, Pierce argued that Franklin violated the so-called Brady rule that requires prosecutors to turn over potentially exonerating evidence to defense attorneys.
Pierce "seems to be arguing that Franklin had a duty to disclose exculpatory evidence at the press conference in order to make the public aware of it," Gerrard wrote. "There is no such constitutional obligation. But whatever counsel is arguing, it's not a Brady violation."
Gerrard wrote that "the loss of a child is devastating under any circumstance."
"Gardner's parents are undoubtedly bereaved, and of course they have every right to be," Gerrard wrote. "The events that led to this case were tragic for Gardner's family and for Scurlock's.
"But not all tragic circumstances ultimately lead to legal liability. This is one of those instances."
By Todd Cooper

OWH: Nebraska girl survives grueling day at Scripps National Spelling Bee

Elkhorn student Ananya Rao Prassanna advanced to the quarterfinals of the Scripps National Spelling Bee after surviving a brutal preliminary Tuesday that bounced out more than half the spellers.
Spellers had to get through three words in one turn at the microphone to advance. First, they were given a word from a provided list of 4,000 — more than twice as many as in years past. Then, they had to answer a multiple-choice vocabulary question about a word on the same list. Finally, they had

to spell a word that could be found anywhere in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary.
During her turn at the microphone, she correctly spelled "darnel" and "asymptote," and accurately defined the vocabulary word: "louche."
When Ananya, 11, stepped to center stage, however, the odds weren't looking good.
Five of the last 10 spellers had misspelled a word or flubbed a definition — the kiss of death under bee rules.
But right away, Ananya, who attended fifth grade at Elkhorn's West Bay Elementary School this past year, gave the fans back home a good sign.
When pronouncer Jacques Bailly revealed her Round 1 word — darnel — Ananya confidently responded.
"Is this a type of grass?" she asked.
Yes, indeed, Bailly confirmed. Ananya spelled it correctly.
Ananya said she remembered the word from the 4,000-word list.
In Round 2, spellers were tested on vocabulary. Bailly asked her if someone or something is described as louche, would it be: a) sinister, b) perplexing, or c) overly informal.
Ananya looked a little less confident, but she got it right: sinister.
An expression of relief spread across her face. She smiled and said: "Thank you so much."
She had studied the word only once.
"I knew it had to do with something being bad, so I put sinister, but I was actually going for another option. So it was a bit nerve-wracking," she said.
Her Round 3 spelling word was asymptote, a geometry term. She asked for the definition and language of origin.
"Does this come from the Greek sym meaning together?" she asked.
Yes, Bailly said.
She spelled it correctly.
"My coach always tells me to ask roots and questions," she said. "Doing so can help me figure out the word."
This year, the 234 spellers entered the bee from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Department of Defense Schools in Europe. Spellers also represent the Bahamas, Canada, Germany and Ghana.
The champion receives a $50,000 cash prize from Scripps, a $2,500 cash prize and reference library from Merriam-Webster and $400 of reference materials from Encyclopaedia Britannica, plus a commemorative medal and trophy.
She earned her trip to the national bee by winning the Omaha Sports Commission Regional Spelling Bee for Nebraska and Southwest Iowa. Her father is Prassanna Rajgopal and mother Sindhuja Ramamoorthy.
According to bee records, Nebraska has produced two national bee winners. Virginia Hogan in 1929 won by correctly spelling the word luxuriance. Jennifer Reinke won in 1967. Her winning word was Chihuahua.
Both were sponsored by The World-Herald.
The quarterfinals Wednesday begin at 7 a.m. Central time.
By Joe Dejka

OWH: Political inaction

Republicans care more about embryos than 10-year-old children. It's more important to the likes of Pete Ricketts, Greg Abbott, Ted Cruz and their ilk that an 18-year-old can buy an assault rifle for his birthday present than the lives of children. I hope every night they go to bed, they see the faces of these innocent children because these deaths are on all of them.
Janice Mohs, Omaha

OWH: Guns welcome everywhere?

Would somebody please ask Gov. Ricketts if it is OK for me to bring my handgun and AK-47 to Wrigley Field when the Cubs play the Cardinals?
Theodore Dennis, Omaha

OWH: Political machine

Well, I see the shady political practices of the Ricketts' political machine does not stop with the junior or senior Ricketts. It even extends to the mom, Marlene Ricketts, who donated to the petition drive on the voter ID proposal. And to no one's surprise, it is being accused of fraud. ("Questions surface on voter ID drive," May 27). When are people in this state going to wake up? The Ricketts' political influence and personal agenda to promote their own interests is so obvious it is pathetic. This family does not represent Nebraska or Nebraska values. They need to be shown the exit.
Gary Glissman, Omaha

LJS Editorial, 6/1: A win and a warning for prison system

Late last month, Gov. Pete Ricketts and a host of Nebraska Department of Correctional Services officials celebrated the unveiling of the "reimagined" Reception and Treatment Center, just weeks after Ricketts and conservative Republican senators thwarted an initiative that would have brought true prison reform to Nebraska.
Built on the parking lot that separated the Lincoln Correctional Center and Diagnostic Evaluation Center on West Van Dorn Street, the Reception and Treatment Center effectively turned the two facilities into one, updating, remodeling and rehabbing the old facilities into what Correctional Services Director Scott Frakes called a "modern, highly functional prison."
The "crown jewel" of the $125 million project, according to Frakes, is a 384-bed maximum security wing that will begin to house incarcerated men later this summer. That wing, Frakes said, could get the nation's most overcrowded prison system "back down to operational level, operational capacity."

But given that Nebraska also has the fastest-growing prison population in the country, the luster will go off that jewel in, at most, months after it is opened.
In fact, the Reception and Treatment Center project vividly shows why Nebraska will not be able to build its way out of the corrections crisis. That project was a half decade in planning and took months of construction.
That would hold true for the new prison that Ricketts and the Corrections Department have proposed and the Legislature authorized, but didn't fund. Given the time it would take to build and staff a new prison, it would likely be nearly full on the day it begins operation.
But Ricketts, who initially supported the prison reform initiative, and the Legislature's conservatives, while celebrating the needed increase in beds and modernized center, scuttled the real reform.
That, notably, is directly opposite of the approach of the more than three dozen states that have implemented prison reform, most often a coupling of reductions in criminal penalties with treatment and enhanced supervision intended to help people succeed after release.
Those reforms have sent U.S. inmate numbers tumbling, including in Texas and other conservative states, where prison reform was embraced by Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, as the criminal justice vision for the 21st century.
But the backwards looking legislators and Ricketts opposed the reforms, arguing that the treatment and enhanced supervision should come first, but doing nothing to implement them and then attacking opponents and labeling sentencing reductions as "soft on crime."
As long as that recalcitrant view of the reforms that other states have shown to work is dominant, Nebraska's prisons will remain in crisis, overcrowded with insufficient staffing and programming.
We can only hope that the new governor, who will be elected in November, and the Legislature that will see a number of new senators in 2023, will change that view and adopt reforms that have worked in the majority of states.

LJS Local View: We can weep, but then we have to act

The nightly news left me in tears last Wednesday.
I wept for the lives lost in the 27th school shooting in this country – 27 so far this year.
And I wept for the loss of individual rights of American women as a court action looms that will very likely overturn the 1973 decision that gave them autonomy over their own bodies.
I wept for the children who loved to sing and play basketball and swim and dance to Guns 'N Roses, who made the honor roll and played softball and brought joy to their parents' lives every day – for Alexandria and Alithia and Amerie and Annabell. For Eliahana and Eliana and Jackie and Jailah and Jaycee. And Jose and Layla and Makenna and Maite and Miranda and Nevaeh and Rojelio and Tess and Uziyah and Xavier. For their teachers, Eva and Irma, who died trying to protect their precious charges on a late spring day in a small-town elementary school in the Texas hill country.
They died at the hands of a teenager who walked into a local gun store and bought a semiautomatic rifle and 375 rounds of ammunition -- legally -- a few days after he turned 18, then went back and bought a second assault rifle. I wept for his grandmother, who is recovering after he shot her in the face.
I weep for the children forever traumatized by what happened in that classroom, children who survived but will never, ever be the same.

I weep for the families of every single person affected by the 27 school shootings in this country so far this year. There will almost certainly be more.
I look ahead to yet another round of let's-do-something-right-now-about-these-senseless-killings turning into another round of but-we-can't-do-anything-because-Congress/the president/the gun lobby-won't take action. What will it take? How can this not be enough?
The shooting comes as the world continues to struggle with a deadly virus and the slaughter of thousands of civilians and thousands of soldiers in a senseless war in Ukraine.
And it comes on the heels of the news that this country seems ready to take a step back to a dark time when American women were not allowed to make healthcare decisions about their own bodies.
While we are assailed daily by ads for products to help men suffering from erectile dysfunction, women in Nebraska are getting ready to face a future in which a 14-year-old girl raped by her grandfather or an uncle or a stranger cannot legally terminate a resulting pregnancy. A future in which a 42-year-old woman cannot legally terminate a pregnancy after learning that the baby she is carrying – finally, after years of hoping and praying – has a catastrophic abnormality. A future in which an 18-year-old woman who might go on to invent life-saving or life-giving technology can't go to college because she is forced to carry an unwanted, unexpected pregnancy to term.
I work for political candidates who care as much about these things as I do. I vote. I go to the rallies and wave my sign. I share what I believe to be pertinent, factual information about issues on social media. I strike up conversations with friends and strangers about the state of our world and how strongly I believe we must fight.
And still, I feel like I am not doing enough. Like I must do more.
I feel like we all must do more if we want to live in a country where people care more about children than guns. A country where women are allowed to make their own decisions about their own health and their own bodies. A country where the people we elect to represent us in Washington, D.C., can get beyond hurling insults and threats at one another and do the work of the people.
So I ask this of each of you: Get up. Get out. March in the street, if you can. Make your voice heard. Volunteer. Do everything you can.
And vote.
Catharine Huddle lives in Lincoln and was a longtime assistant city editor at the Lincoln Journal and the Lincoln Journal Star.

AP: Biden running out of options to tame soaring gas prices

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden has vowed to do everything in his power to fight record-setting gasoline and diesel prices, but he's up against a stark reality: There are few options for taming the surge.
While Biden has unleashed an unprecedented amount of oil from the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve, other tools at the administration's disposal would come at the expense of environmental protection and have little effect on fuel costs stoked by strained crude supplies and a global shortage of refining capacity. And the one sure-fire fix — for Americans to stop driving so much — is largely outside his control.
"There's no silver bullet," said Benjamin Salisbury, director of research at Height Capital Markets.

"Anything they could do is going to have knock-on effects, and they're probably worse than the benefits."

To be sure, oil and its products are globally traded commodities that are largely dictated by complex supply and demand fundamentals. Still, Biden's inability to rein in high energy costs, coupled with soaring food inflation, puts his Democratic party's congressional majority at risk for midterm elections this fall.

Americans have already begun paring their driving in the face of gasoline prices that have set near-daily records for the last two weeks, but no one should expect Biden to encourage more of that conservation. It's politically perilous for presidents to ask Americans to reduce fuel use — as a cardigan-clad Jimmy Carter proved in 1977, when he soberly implored the country to crank down thermostats and slow driving to combat an energy crisis. He lost re-election three years later.

While Carter donned a cardigan, "Biden is in a blazer," and "trying to do business as usual," said Kevin Book, managing director of research firm ClearView Energy Partners LLC. "Trying to tell Americans they can't have energy when America is an energy super power and, more importantly, when Americans are accustomed to low-energy prices and widespread energy availability, is a risk very few politicians are going to want to take."

Short of Americans putting the brakes on their summer travel, here are some of Biden's options to help bring fuel prices down:

Find more refining capacity

Biden's massive release of as much as 180 million barrels of oil from emergency stockpiles over six months, on top of earlier drawdowns, may have limited crude price gains, but the bigger problem now is a lack of global refining capacity to transform oil into gasoline and diesel.

The U.S. lost more than 1 million barrels of refining capacity when fuelmakers shut some of their least profitable plants during the pandemic. The administration is exploring whether some shuttered capacity could come back online.

Expand sales of higher-ethanol gasoline

The Biden administration has already moved to allow wider summer sales of E15 gasoline that contains 15% ethanol by waiving it from fuel-volatility restrictions.

That could offer modest savings to motorists in the heartland, where E15 is more readily available and can sell at a 5-10 cent discount to conventional E10 gasoline, according to Gasbuddy. But the benefits aren't widespread.

Waive fuel from air pollution rules

The administration could go further by waiving conventional E10 gasoline from anti-smog rules that require low-volatility gasoline in the summer — a change that would allow fuel blenders to mix in lower-cost butane and other materials.

But in the summer, higher volatility fuels evaporate at a faster pace, meaning tanks would need to be filled more often. And less volatile winter-grade fuels typically run just a few cents per gallon cheaper than summer grades.

The move would invite a backlash from environmentalists.

Lower biofuel-blending mandates

The Biden administration is under pressure to lower biofuel-blending quotas and exempt some refineries from them altogether. Refiners have argued the measures could ease industry compliance costs that are passed on to motorists at the pump — currently about 20 cents per gallon.

But the move carries political consequences, especially in rural America, where the renewable fuel mandate is seen as critical to shoring up corn and soy demand. Biofuel producers say exemptions

would represent a betrayal of Biden's campaign pledge to support the policy.

Block gasoline exports

Some Democrats have urged the White House to throttle U.S. fuel exports in a bid to keep the country supplied with low-cost gasoline. But any move to ban or limit fuel exports could backfire by flooding the U.S. market with more fuel than it can use, prompting refiners to dial back production to protect margins.

It also would send a conflicting message to refiners that are maxing out production now.

Waive U.S. tanker requirements

The 1920 Jones Act, which requires the use of American-crewed, -built and -registered vessels to move goods between US ports, generally makes it too expensive to justify waterborne transportation of fuel around the country.

Waivers that allow foreign tankers to move gasoline, diesel and jet fuel between U.S. ports could help alleviate potential shortages on the East and West Coasts, regions most vulnerable to supply disruptions.

Suspend the federal gasoline tax

Some lawmakers have advanced plans to suspend the 18.4 cents-per-gallon federal gasoline tax. However, a gas tax holiday risks siphoning money from the Federal Highway Trust Fund that pays for road and transit systems. And administration officials and top congressional Democrats caution there's no guarantee the savings would be passed on to consumers.

Tap U.S. emergency fuel stockpiles

The Biden administration is considering withdrawing supplies from emergency stockpiles of fuel, going beyond raw crude reserves. While the move could help prevent or plug fuel outages in the Northeast, it would only be a short-term balm against high prices.

AP: Biden to meet with baby formula makers on easing shortage

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is set to meet with infant formula manufacturers as his administration works to ease nationwide shortages by importing foreign supplies and using the Defense Production Act to speed domestic production.

The White House said Biden would host a roundtable Wednesday with leaders of manufacturers ByHeart, Bubs Australia, Reckitt, Perrigo Co. and Gerber. The list is notable for who isn't on it: Abbott Nutrition, the company whose Michigan plant was shut down in February over safety concerns, sparking the shortage in the United States.

Biden will be joined by Heath and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra and Surgeon General Vivek Murthy. The meeting is expected to provide an update on what the administration has dubbed Operation Fly Formula to import formula from overseas into the U.S. and deploy the Korean War-era production law to require suppliers of the formula manufacturers to prioritize their orders in a bid to ease any production bottlenecks.

Those measures will help but won't immediately bring an end to formula supply shortages that have left people who depend on formula facing empty shelves or limits on purchases.

The Food and Drug Administration began honing in on Abbott's plant last fall while tracking several

bacterial infections in infants who had consumed formula from the facility. The four cases occurred between September and January, causing hospitalizations and two deaths.
After detecting positive samples of rare but dangerous bacteria in multiple parts of the plant, the FDA closed the facility and Abbott announced a massive recall of its formula on Feb. 17.
U.S. regulators and Abbott announced an agreement last month that would help pave the way for reopening the plant, though production has not restarted.
The White House did not respond to a request for comment on why Abbott was not included from Wednesday's meeting.

Nebraska Examiner: Gun control bills to be taken up by U.S. House panel in emergency meeting

WASHINGTON — Following mass shootings in New York and Texas, the U.S. House Judiciary Committee is holding an emergency meeting Thursday to mark up gun control legislation — though it's likely doomed.
The package includes eight gun-related bills, known as the "Protecting Our Kids Act," and they are expected to pass the Democratic-controlled House. But the legislation has little chance of making it through the evenly divided Senate, where 60 votes would be required for any bill to advance. Assuming every Democrat was in favor, they would need 10 Republicans to join.
The House package would raise the age of purchasing semiautomatic rifles from 18 to 21, create new requirements for storing guns in a home with children, prevent gun trafficking, require all firearms to be traceable and close the loophole on bump stocks, among other things.
The meeting was scheduled by Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler, a New York Democrat, after a white supremacist killed 10 Black people at a supermarket in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, on May 14. Ten days later, an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, was attacked by an 18-year-old man armed with a rifle, and 19 children and two teachers were killed.
Meanwhile, with both the House and Senate in recess this week, a small bipartisan group of senators is also holding virtual talks to see if it is possible to develop any legislation on guns.
Last week, hours after the Uvalde slaughter, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, did not commit to working on any gun control legislation with Democrats.
However, a few Senate Republicans seemed open to the idea of red flag laws, which allow the courts or law enforcement to remove a firearm temporarily from an individual who is distressed.
Over the Memorial Day weekend, Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who has worked for years to attempt to pass gun reform laws, tweeted that he has been talking with senators of both parties about putting together a bipartisan gun violence bill.
"Senator Schumer has given us just over a week to find a compromise," he wrote. "This time, failure cannot be an option."
Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said that if Republicans do not work with Democrats to come to an agreement, the Senate will still hold a vote on gun control legislation, even if it fails, when the chamber returns from recess.
After the Uvalde massacre, the nation's second-deadliest mass school shooting since Sandy Hook Elementary a decade ago, Schumer took a procedural step to begin debate on two background

check bills, with the possibility of calling for votes on them.
The House-passed bills are H.R. 8, which "establishes new background check requirements for firearm transfers between private parties," and H.R. 1446, which "increases the amount of time … that a federal firearms' licensee must wait to receive a completed background check prior to transferring a firearm to an unlicensed person."
On Sunday, President Joe Biden visited Uvalde and called on Congress to stand up against the gun lobby and send a bill to his desk.
Gun rights groups, such as the National Rifle Association and Gun Owners of America, spent a record of nearly $16 million in lobbying in 2021, campaign finance records show.
"I will meet with Congress on guns, I promise you," Biden told reporters Tuesday.
The Senate Judiciary Committee is set to hold a hearing June 15 on gun violence.
By Ariana Figueroa

Very Respectfully,

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