From: Kopsa, Ryan
To: Kopsa, Ryan
Cc: Pinkerman, Justin
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 7-22-20
Date: Wednesday, July 22, 2020 8:24:17 AM
Attachments: image001.png

Ag Valley Co-op
Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jul 2020	3.00	-24.00	07:44
Corn	Dec 2020	2.90	-41.00	07:44
Milo	Jul 2020	3.09	-15.00	07:44
Milo	Dec 2020	3.16	-15.00	07:44
Soybeans	Jul 2020	7.96	-95.00	07:44
Soybeans	Dec 2020	8.11	-80.00	07:44
Wheat	Jul 2020	4.00	-44.00	07:44
Wheat	Jul 2021	3.99	-80.00	07:42

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NET: Senators Vote To Delay, But Keep Alive, Proposed Military Retiree Tax Break
NET: Legislature Adds Abortion Restriction To Volatile Mix Of Issues

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OWH: Nebraska teachers union criticizes Gov. Ricketts for not mandating masks

The president of Nebraska's state teachers union on Tuesday accused Gov. Pete Ricketts of "dereliction of duty" for not mandating masks to stem the spread of COVID-19.
"We urgently ask you to reconsider your stance and support local health boards and local school boards when they require masks be worn to help ensure the health and safety of children, school staff and their communities," said Jenni Benson, president of the Nebraska State Education Association.
Ricketts on Tuesday reiterated his opposition to a mask mandate.
Commenting during a press conference on reopening higher-education campuses, Ricketts said he supports mask-wearing when appropriate but opposes "heavy-handed government telling us what to do."

He said he is opposed to making it a crime to not wear a mask.
“Is that really how you want your police spending their time, enforcing that?” he said.
He said schools in session are one of the most densely populated places in the community, with 20 to 30 people in a room, which makes social distancing difficult, he said. So wearing masks make a lot of sense, he said. He said that when people go to the store or are in a confined space, that’s a good opportunity to wear a mask.
He said he is still reviewing whether the Lincoln mayor had authority for a mask order.
Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird announced Friday that anyone frequenting public places in Lancaster County, including the City of Lincoln, will be required to wear a face mask through Aug. 31, when the city will reevaluate.
The requirement is in place for anyone age 5 or older in an indoor space, unless 6 feet of separation can be maintained.
Benson, in her letter, did not call for remote-only learning across the state, but she wrote that areas with high levels of COVID-19 community spread should not be compelled to reopen against the judgment of local experts.
She urged the governor to provide funding for personal protective equipment and materials for students and school staff.
Benson asked the governor to ensure that “free and rapid” testing is made available immediately upon discovery of a COVID-19 infection in a classroom.
And she urged the governor to support school districts that suspend contact sports and other extracurricular activities based on risk assessments.
By Joe Dejka

OWH: NU president says campus life — and sports — can be done safely

Takeout meals instead of buffet-style cafeteria food.
Masks and social distancing in classrooms, dorms and on campus, which will have measures in place to decrease the density of students.
Higher education officials in the University of Nebraska system are preparing for about 51,000 students to return to the Lincoln, Omaha and Kearney campuses in five weeks while also focusing on preventing the spread of the novel coronavirus.
“This will not be a normal year,” University of Nebraska President Ted Carter said. “We have to learn how to live in a COVID-19 world. And do this with mitigation.”
Carter said he wants to see fall sports happen.
“We think we can do it safely. We’re very bullish on sports here in the fall, but we’re not going to be foolish about it,” he said.
He said more information about sports will be coming shortly.
Carter generally explained plans to welcome students back while keeping them safe at a Tuesday press conference with Gov. Pete Ricketts, while also estimating the financial impact of changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Carter predicted that the number of tuition hours would stay about the same while tuition revenue would decrease because fewer out-of-state and international students will enroll. Since the April announcement of Nebraska Promise, which will provide free tuition for undergraduate Nebraska students whose families earn less than $60,000 a year, applications have been up 21%, Carter said.
Carter said that the Nebraska Promise and the commitment to freeze tuition rates for fiscal years 2022 and 2023 are a sound investment because otherwise the system could have experienced a 15% drop in enrollment, from which it would take 10 years to recover. But campuses face a total cut of $43 million

over three years because of the pandemic.
Even though universities swiftly moved to online instruction in the spring, Carter said in-person lessons and the college experience are vital for a young person and that's why it's important to return to campuses. But about 15% to 20% of students have requested full-time online courses, he said. Carter said that special accommodations are being made for faculty, staff or students who are older or have underlying conditions.
"The value of a post-secondary college education, especially at the undergraduate level … is so critical to their maturation. You cannot get the same level of education through a Zoom call," Carter said. "I'm talking about the emotional, the social, the intellectual and, yes, even the moral growth of our young students."
Officials won't officially know enrollment numbers until students show up on campuses, and they're not requiring that all students get tested before arriving. Other universities are trying that, and it's been a logistical nightmare, he said.
He expects that about 10,000 or more students might ask for and need a test — and TestNebraska, the state's testing initiative, could help in that effort.
But while strict policies and guidelines will be followed on campus, students could be participating in risky events off-campus that could spread the virus.
"We're going to spend a lot of time talking to our students so that they take care of themselves," Carter said. "Going out and being out on the town in large groups and parties, I think our students are going to find that that's going to be behavior that's going to put them in a bad place over time."
Students can use an app created by UNMC and UNO students to help monitor their symptoms and assess risk of exposure.
At community colleges across the state, students can get scholarships for training programs because of $16 million from the CARES Act.
Greg Adams, executive director of the Nebraska Community College Association, said people who have lost their jobs because of COVID-19 can find training to give them a new job path.
By Alia Conley

LJS: Carter says university ready for classes and fall sports

University of Nebraska President Ted Carter said Tuesday that the university will be ready to open safely for on-campus classes in five weeks and he is "very bullish" that there will be sports competition this fall.
"We want to see fall sports and we think we can do it safely," Carter said during a news conference with Gov. Pete Ricketts that focused on the state's educational response to the coronavirus pandemic.
Although Carter's remarks referred only indirectly to Husker football, he noted that "not every campus president sees it the way we do; (and) we have to have somebody to play."
While Ricketts ceded most of the time at his Capitol news conference to Carter, the governor announced a sharp increase in the COVID-19 testing capacity of Test Nebraska.
Processing of tests at the CHI Health lab in Lincoln is being expanded from 3,600 to 7,000 tests per day, he said.
Ricketts pointed to continued success in fulfilling his goal of "preserving the hospital system," as measured in terms of available beds, intensive care beds and ventilators, along with the state's number of coronavirus cases.
"Everything we have done to slow the spread of the virus has worked," he said.
Asked about the status of his challenge to Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird's order this week requiring the wearing of masks in most public indoor settings in Lincoln, the governor said "we're still reviewing

whether the mayor has the legal authority for that."
Ricketts said he will continue to encourage people to wear masks when they go to the store or in other crowded conditions, but will oppose "the heavy hand of government telling us what to do."
Nebraska recorded 343 new cases of COVID-19 — the most in a single day since late May — on Tuesday, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The agency now lists 23,190 confirmed cases and 310 deaths on its online dashboard, along with 17,389 recoveries.
Carter said the university is prepared to safely provide an on-campus education for college students, giving them the valuable experience of learning and growing within the classroom and in association with one another.
"You can't get the same level of education through Zoom" or other online sources, he said.
At stake is "the emotional, social, intellectual and even the moral growth of our young students (at) a key moment in their lives.
"Our hope is to help mature them, show them their path," he said.
"We have a mission to do and we should be doing it in person."
And, he said, "a great majority of the faculty want to be on campus."
However, Carter noted, "this will not be a normal year," and some elements of the educational experience will continue to be remote.
"Nearly 100% of 51,000 students will be taking some portion of their education remotely," he said.
"We will be utilizing masks in the classroom and on the campus," Carter said.
Students will be counseled and encouraged to "take care of yourself," he said. And that means avoiding large gatherings and parties so they can "help protect themselves and protect others."
Greg Adams, executive director of the Nebraska Community College Association, also joined the news briefing and said community colleges are ready to help retrain people to fill high-demand jobs throughout the state with the $16 million allocated to them by the federal coronavirus aid package.
"We will be working with the Department of Labor and the Department of Economic Development to make this happen," he said.
"They know what employers need; we will create the programs (and) cast the net to capture the students."
By Don Walton

AP: U. of Nebraska president: Campuses will be ready for virus

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The University of Nebraska's new president expressed confidence Tuesday that all four university campuses will be ready for in-person classes this fall despite the threat of the coronavirus.
Ted Carter said the campuses in Lincoln, Omaha and Kearney have already taken steps to welcome back students while minimizing the risk that the virus will spread.
Carter said students who arrive on campus for the fall semester will see smaller, spread-out classes, less crowded dorms, mandatory masks and buildings that are cleaned more frequently.
"We're not going into this with hope and a prayer," Carter said at a news conference with Gov. Pete Ricketts. "We're going into this with a bias for action."
University officials have left open the possibility that they will return to online learning if the pandemic worsens. But Carter said it's important for the university to offer in-person instruction. He said university surveys have shown that the vast majority of students and faculty members want to return for in-person classes, and extra precautions will taken for those who are at greater risk.
"You cannot get the same level of education through a Zoom call," Carter said.
Carter said the university is better-positioned than many other schools because each of its campuses is

spread out over large areas, making it easier to keep people at a safe distance. The university has roughly 51,000 students and 16,000 faculty and staff members at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska at Omaha, University of Nebraska at Kearney and the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.

In May, the university's flagship campus in Lincoln announced that it would start classes online for one week on Aug. 17 and then transition to in-person learning for the rest of the fall semester, starting Aug. 24. The semester will be shortened, and scheduled to end before Thanksgiving.

Carter was sworn in as the university's new president in January, just a few months before the pandemic forced widespread closures in Nebraska and the rest of the country. The university closed its campuses in April as the pandemic worsened.

The campuses also shifted to online classes during the spring semester to try to keep the virus from spreading.

Nebraska's community colleges are taking similar steps. For instance, Northeast Community College in Norfolk announced in June that it will offer a combination of small, socially distanced on-campus classes and online instruction.

They also expect to take a leading role in training people who lost their jobs because of the pandemic, said Greg Adams, executive director of the Nebraska Community College Association.

The state has set aside $16 million in federal coronavirus aid to help pay those educational costs. Ricketts said community colleges will administer the program and distribute the money in the form of scholarships for people going into high-demand jobs.

"We need to get (people who lost their jobs) back in the workforce as quickly as we can," Adams said.

By Grant Schulte

KMEG: University of Nebraska president discusses plans for fall reopening

LINCOLN, Neb. (FOX42 KPTM) — The University of Nebraska President, Ted Carter discussed plans for reopening its universities this fall.

During a Tuesday afternoon news conference with Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts, Carter said NU had to make a lot of "significant" changes.

"We have to learn how to live in a COVID-19 world and do this with the right mitigation," said Carter.

Carter says it is important to get campuses open because you can't get the same level of education remotely than being on campus.

"The value of a post-secondary college education at the undergraduate level is so critical to their maturation," said Carter.

Carter says the great majority of faculty surveyed want to be on campus.

Reopening plans will fundamentally include "de-densifying" classrooms and dorm rooms.

Carter says some elements of education will still be remote.

In preparing to return to Nebraska University campuses, every campus will have a unique set up. Carter says that chancellors will manage deep-cleaning on campuses and "everyone is aware that is a necessity for where we are".

While NU administration won't be testing all of the 51,000 students coming back to NU campuses, Carter says they anticipate about 10,000 or more students will need to test for COVID-19.

The University of Nebraska will use the One Test app to inform someone they need a test.

If a student tests positive for COVID-19, Carter says contact tracing and the One Test app will be utilized but every campus will have its own set of rules.

Carter says the university can control its sports arenas, classrooms, etc. but there will have to be a lot of discussion about culture.

"Going out and being out in town will put them in a bad place over time. We want to make sure we have the tools so we can continue with the in-person experience. We are trying to think through every single detail," said Carter.
Carter says that overall full-time online enrollment has increased from 7 to 12 percent from last year.
Carter says until classes start for fall on all NU campuses, he won't know the total number of online enrollments.
Carter did say there is a 21 percent increase in applications from Nebraskans, as well as an expected drop in freshman international student enrollment.
As far as fall sports are concerned, Carter says, "We are bullish on sports here in the fall, but we are not going to be foolish about it."
Carter says Chancellor Ronnie Green sits in on meetings related to the Big Ten Conference and has been exceptional in keeping him informed.
By Teia Goodwin

OWH: Senator moves to delay implementation of bill to provide tax break on military pensions

Gordon Sen. Tom Brewer said Tuesday that the fiscal uncertainty caused by COVID-19 forced him to seek a delay in his bill — introduced at the request of Gov. Ricketts — to provide a 50% state income tax break on military pension payments.
Legislative Bill 153 was expected to get final approval by state senators on Tuesday, but Brewer was granted authority to return his bill — long sought by veterans and economic developers — to second-round debate so its implementation date could be delayed a year, to 2022.
A handful of senators questioned why he was doing that, given that the cost of the bill was only about $12 million a year. Why, they also asked, can't you wait until a new forecast of future state tax revenue is issued on Thursday?
But Brewer said he was following a directive by the Speaker of the Legislature, Norfolk Sen. Jim Scheer, which was to postpone or pare back any bills with a fiscal impact.
Whether or not the delay in the popular tax break for veterans has an impact on the debates expected on Wednesday over property tax relief and tax incentives for business growth — which would have much larger fiscal impacts — remains to be seen.
Police oversight legislation
Sen. Justin Wayne of Omaha announced plans Tuesday to pursue legislation requiring cities that employ full-time police officers to set up citizen police oversight boards.
He has filed a motion for the Legislature to suspend its rules so he can introduce legislation later than the first 10 days of the session. The motion takes 33 votes to succeed.
Wayne said he believes such oversight boards are of paramount importance in response to calls for justice following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. He noted that, while Floyd's death has become a rallying cry, it is only the latest in a long line of deaths of African Americans at the hands of law enforcement.
TestNebraska capacity
Ricketts announced that the lab capacity to process COVID-19 tests done through the TestNebraska program will be ramped up from 3,600 a day to 7,000 a day. That would be four times the average number of tests, about 1,700 a day, being performed recently via the $27 million, no bid contract.
Ricketts, at a press conference Tuesday, said such an increase in lab capacity is anticipated to be needed when schools reopen this fall, for students as well as high school athletes. The governor also mentioned the need for increased testing at long-term care facilities.

“We want to make sure we’re focusing on getting people that test as quickly as possible,” Ricketts said.
The average turnaround time for TestNebraska from July 6 to 19 was 59.3 hours, which compares to a turnaround time of 31 hours earlier in July.
Taylor Gage, a spokesman for the Governor’s Office, said that the turnaround time slowed in recent weeks because of an increase in testing and an unannounced audit by the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.
Gage said that ramping up the lab capacity will cost the state an additional $2.45 million for equipment and support staff.
Gage also said that TestNebraska had exceeded 3,000 tests a day twice in the past two weeks.

School discipline

Nebraska lawmakers spent three hours debating — but not voting on — a hard-fought bill that would allow school staff to intervene physically against violent and disruptive students.
Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte, the Education Committee chairman, said he expects to get back to LB 147 yet this year and to have the votes needed to advance it. He expressed frustration that opponents would not let him get to a key amendment, which adds training requirements to the measure.
The Nebraska State Education Association, which represents teachers and other school personnel, has made the bill a major priority. The group argues that teachers need legal backing to protect themselves and other students from violence in the classroom. They also want legal backing for teachers to have students removed from class.
Groene said the bill would improve safety in schools and allow students the opportunity to learn without disruption. He also said that, by requiring school policies about removing students, ensures that students will be treated equally.
"It gives parents and students assurance that the teacher is in charge of the classroom," he said.
But Wayne said African American students and other students of color are more likely to be subjected to disciplinary measures already and would likely be the targets of physical interventions. He asked colleagues to look at LB 147 in light of the systemic racial bias brought out by recent events, which he said would be exacerbated by the bill.
"We got here from simple things like this," he said.
The bill also faces opposition from advocates for children with disabilities.
By Paul Hammel, Martha Stoddard and Alia Conley

OWH: Head of Douglas County GOP calls for censure of Chambers over remarks about Slama

LINCOLN — A Republican Party official on Tuesday called on the State Legislature to censure longtime State Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha for comments he made Monday about fellow Sen. Julie Slama of Peru.
Theresa Thibodeau, the chair of the Douglas County Republican Party and a former state senator, said that Chambers’ suggestion that Slama was appointed to the Legislature because of promised “favors of the flesh” were “sexist and outright disgusting” and an “insult to women.”
“I am calling on the Nebraska Legislature to stand up against this sexist behavior and censure Senator Chambers for these abhorrent remarks,” Thibodeau said in a press release.
On Monday, Chambers took to the floor of the Legislature to condemn a primary campaign mailer, sent to attack Slama’s opponent, that included a photograph of the black senator.
Chambers said that ad, funded by the Nebraska Republican Party and supported by Gov. Pete Ricketts, was an attempt to scare voters in Slama’s district into voting against her opponent, Janet Palmtag of Nebraska City. The ad read, in part, “Janet Palmtag sides with Lincoln liberals, atheists and radical

extremists."
Chambers called the flyer dirty politics Monday and called on Slama to respond to criticism of it and to apologize to Palmtag. Slama has not commented on the flyer since it began drawing criticism in June.
Chambers said that if Slama wanted to engage in dirty politics, she should not be surprised if people repeat rumors about why Slama, whom he called a young woman with little life experience, was appointed by Ricketts.
Sen. Anna Wishart of Lincoln spoke in defense of Slama and said that she knew those rumors were not true and that Chambers should not have repeated them. But she also called on Slama to address the flyer.
Former Gov. Dave Heineman and Bob Kerrey, a former governor and U.S. senator, are among those who have condemned the mailer as racist. Ricketts has defended the mailer as an appropriate effort to defeat a candidate he doesn't see as conservative.
Nebraska Republican Party Chairman Dan Welch in June said the state party made a mistake by targeting Palmtag in the flyer, which he said "was not in good taste" and "crossed the line." He defended the mailer against allegations of racism, but said the part he objected to was that it lumped Palmtag in with atheists.
Chambers, on Monday, mentioned the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and a black slave, Sally Hemings — who bore several of Jefferson's children — and then asked what if he used Slama in a similar way.
Some female senators objected to the comment, and Slama chastised Chambers. In a tweet later, Slama said his comments were "disgusting behavior that deserved to be called out."
Chambers, in comments on the floor Tuesday morning, made no apologies and said that his comments were being manipulated for political purposes.
"I love women more than anyone on this floor," he said.
Later, Chambers added, "We're going to have some rocky roads this session, and if you want to get up and tangle with me, I welcome it."
This is the last session for Chambers, 83, who is barred from seeking reelection this year because of term limits. He is the longest-serving state senator in Nebraska history, but his fiery speeches regularly stir controversy.
By Paul Hammel

LJS: Republican official calls for Chambers' expulsion

The Nebraska Republican Party on Tuesday called for the expulsion of Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers for remarks he made during a debate Monday about Sen. Julie Slama of Peru.
Republican Party Executive Director Ryan Hamilton said the statements by Chambers were disgusting and clearly out of bounds.
"He owes Senator Slama an apology, as does every senator who yielded time so he could continue his vile, misogynistic rant against Senator Slama. He should be censured and expelled immediately — there ought to be no place in Nebraska's Legislature for this abhorrent language and mistreatment."
In addition to responding to Chambers on the floor Monday, Slama posted about it on Facebook, saying his comments were vile and disgusting.
Former state Sen. Theresa Thibodeau, a Republican, sent a news release saying "Chambers' attack on one of the most prominent female members of the Legislature shows how far our politics has fallen. To suggest that women can only be successful based on performing sexual behaviors is sexist and an insult to women everywhere."
The Nebraska Federation of Young Republicans said in a news release Chambers' "attacks were

baseless, cowardly and cannot be tolerated in civil discourse.
"Senator Julie Slama is not only a great representative for her district," the organization said, "but she is also a beacon of leadership to our members, particularly young women, across this state. Julie embodies that no matter a person's age or previous political experience, they can get involved, effectuate change, and be a true conservative leader for our state."
Chambers, in his speeches Monday, was responding to a flyer sent out in District 1 on Slama's behalf that said her opponent, Janet Palmtag, also a Republican, "sides with Lincoln liberals, atheists and radical extremists." There are photos of Chambers and Palmtag on the flyer put side by side.
Chambers and others have said they believe the flyer to be racist. Some senators on Monday said Slama should have apologized for the flyer, which Gov. Pete Ricketts has said was appropriate. But Chambers said it was Palmtag who deserved the apology from Slama.
"Am I looking for an apology? Certainly not," Chambers said. "I'm a grown man. I've had worse things than that done toward and said to me."
Palmtag did not respond to calls for comment.
This is the full context of the Monday statements in question:
Chambers: "I feel sorry for that lady down there (Palmtag) among those cowardly racists. ... I had read nothing, heard nothing, about a scandalizing woman down there who's suddenly running for office. And then these low-down people that I've named, Senator Slama, Governor Ricketts, and all the Republicans have decided to try to destroy that woman's reputation, destroy her by using my name.
"I feel an obligation, how they will take to show how she and I are in league with each other, to lift her up in the minds of the people who live down there with her, who have known her, who have never, to my way of thinking and understanding, since we're playing dirty, said that she was given favors because favors of a fleshy nature were expected in return.
"Now I don't know if Senator Slama has heard what they are saying about her and why the governor picked a very young person with no life experiences. I didn't know they had traveled together. How would I know that if white people didn't tell me? They want to play dirty; well, let's get dirt out here on everybody.
"I feel more protective toward my daughter than some white men feel toward theirs. My daughter could not be put in a position where certain salacious things were suggested about her because of some older white man who was supposed to symbolize power and why he's putting her in that position when she has no credentials to justify it. Only one thing. And that's what's being said about Senator Slama. She knows it. You all know it around here because some of you have told me, but I'm not going to out you."
At another point in the afternoon, Chambers was talking about how Andrew Jackson was a slaveholder and treacherous toward "Black men who saved his bacon at the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812." Jackson promised Black men that if they would fight on the side of America they would be free, he said.
"Ha. Ha. Ha," Chambers said. "The lying, sniveling cowardly treacherous rat.
"You all see him as a hero. I don't. Suppose I had raped white women. Suppose I enslaved Senator Slama and used her the way that I wanted to? You think Thomas Jefferson was a great man? Do you realize he had a room in Monticello for Sally Hemings? And he had six children by that woman, in the house where his wife lived?
"He was a mere man, and he was not a good man. How can a man be good if he's a rapist? A child molester? A pedophile? And you all deify him and I'm supposed to go along with it?"
By JoAnne Young

LJS: Legislature authorizes endorsement contracts for college athletes

The Legislature on Tuesday gave final 37-6 approval to a bill that would allow college athletes in Nebraska to earn money through personal endorsement of products and use of their name, image or likeness.

The measure (LB962), sponsored by Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha, was modeled after legislation enacted by California lawmakers a year ago.

The proposal, part of a growing movement that would dramatically alter the traditional status of amateur college athletes, will head to Gov. Pete Ricketts' desk.

Hunt's Nebraska Fair Pay to Play Act would also allow athletes to make money by promoting sponsored content on social media and by giving private lessons or hosting camps.

Opponents of the change have argued that it will ignite a new kind of bidding war in the recruitment of college athletes in which donors or business leaders may play a leading role in offering the prospect of lucrative endorsement prospects or opportunities to recruits.

Supporters have argued that universities, TV sports networks and other businesses are enriched by the performance of college athletes while they receive no financial benefit beyond athletic scholarships and accompanying benefits provided by the universities they attend.

"With more than 25 states looking at this issue, Nebraska has an opportunity to be a leader in providing economic freedoms to college athletes," Hunt said in a statement following enactment of the bill.

"Nebraska is the third state in the nation to enact name, image and likeness rights legislation," she said.

"We are already leading on this issue, exemplified by the University of Nebraska, which is already at the forefront of providing a name, image and likeness program for all athletes," Hunt said.

"By restoring college athletes' rights, we're sending a clear message to students across the country: You're welcome in Nebraska."

University of Nebraska President Ted Carter said he was "very pleased" by enactment of the bill and praised Hunt for "working closely with the university" on the proposal.

In other action, senators amended a bill (LB153) that would exempt 50% of military retirement benefits from the state income tax by delaying implementation from 2021 to 2022.

The delay was prompted by the uncertainties of revenue flow triggered by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Sen. Tom Brewer of Gordon, sponsor of the bill, said he was reluctantly delaying implementation in order to gain passage of the measure this year.

Brewer said the fiscal impact of the proposal has been estimated at $12.6 million during the second year when it is fully implemented.

The legislation would affect more than 13,000 military retirees who live in the state.

Senators also gave final approval to a bill that would create a new class of Game and Parks Commission motor vehicle permits for disabled veterans who are residents of Nebraska while raising annual and temporary permit fees for nonresidents.

Disabled veterans who qualify would be allowed a permit free of charge under the provisions of LB770.

By Don Walton

AP: Nebraska emergency medical services bill wins final approval

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A bill that would prohibit Nebraska health care providers from charging patients higher, out-of-network rates for emergency services won final approval Tuesday in the Legislature.

Senators voted 47-0 to pass the measure through the last of three required votes. It now goes to Gov. Pete Ricketts.

Sen. Adam Morfeld, of Lincoln, proposed the bill to try to protect consumers from unexpected out-of-

network costs during a medical emergency. Morfeld has argued that unexpected medical bills are a leading cause of personal bankruptcies.

OWH: A virtual Day of Dance? It's coming to Nebraska courtesy of the American Midwest Ballet

American Midwest Ballet has been on its toes, planning for a regional Day of Dance. The event, scheduled Saturday, will be virtual, with free activities and classes celebrating all styles of dance for all ages of participants.

The day includes a gubernatorial proclamation, too, marking the 10th anniversary of the resident professional ballet company and academy.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts and Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds issued separate proclamations encouraging citizens to participate in the Day of Dance for its ability to promote health, fitness, confidence and self-expression, as well as for its recreational and community-building benefits.

"Our instructors are excited to share their expertise and genuine love of dance," said Susan Chowning, American Midwest Ballet School's director. "So make sure you don't miss this perfect opportunity to get up and move!"

The schedule features a total of 15 sessions in three virtual studios. There's creative movement for 3- and 4-year-olds; KinderDance for 5- and 6-year-olds and ballet, jazz, contemporary, lyrical, tap and hip hop for youth, teens and adults. Participants also can take a virtual tour of American Midwest Ballet's new state-of-the-art home at the Hoff Family Arts and Culture Center in Council Bluffs.

Pre-registration is required at amballet.org. The Day of Dance will run from 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m., and participation will be via Zoom. Everyone who registers will be entered into a drawing for free tickets to an American Midwest Ballet performance.

For questions, email school@amballet.org or call 712-890-5591.

By Chris Christen

Scottsbluff SH: Development district receives federal grant funding

As the nation continues its recovery from the damage caused by COVID-19, Panhandle Area Development District (PADD) has been awarded some federal funds to help in the effort.

PADD Executive Director Jeff Kelley said they just learned about a $257,128 grant through the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

"The grant is for COVID relief that was made available to all the development districts across the nation," Kelley said. "It's a non-competitive grant, so we just needed to submit an application with an explanation of what the funds will be used for."

Kelley said the funds will help PADD expand its capacity to help businesses across the Panhandle. Assistance would involve technical support training and grand writing services to help with their recovery from the pandemic.

"We'll be hiring another community planner/grant writer to help with grants for communities," Kelley said. "Brian Venable, our loan fund manager, will have about 25% of his time paid by the grant. He'll be working with businesses on providing them with financial advice on how to recover from the losses caused by the pandemic."

PADD will also be working with Western Nebraska Community College, offering technical assistance to identify what are the business needs across the Panhandle as they recover from the pandemic.

"We had planned to work with WNCC before the pandemic hit and everything came to halt," Kelley said. "Now we're getting back on track. Our ultimate goal is the help our communities and local

businesses recover. Because the crisis continues to change, so will our focus in what help we'll offer."
Kelley said the grant will need to be spent within the next two years. The new community planner/grant writer will be paid through those funds. He hopes that after two years, PADD will be able to keep the position active because there's always plenty of work to be done in other areas.
In a news conference last week, Gov. Pete Ricketts said the grant funds, awarded to several develop districts across the state, provide much-needed funds to address the economic impact of COVIS.
"The organizations were awarded these funds due to their track record of providing outstanding service to the people of Nebraska," Ricketts said. "They are playing an important role to strengthen our economy as we get Nebraska growing."
By Jerry Purvis

KMTV: Nebraska State Education Association writes letter to Gov. Ricketts urging PPE funding

LINCOLN, Neb. (KMTV) — The Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA) wrote to Governor Pete Ricketts on Tuesday asking him to take necessary steps to provide adequate funding for PPE for students and staff in the upcoming school year.
"Trying to open schools without adequately protecting students and staff from COVID-19 will backfire. It is putting livelihoods before lives. Platitudes and requests for compliance won't keep our students safe," said NSEA in the letter.
Additionally, the NSEA mentioned they are in complete agreement with the American Academy of Pediatrics that children older than 2 should wear masks in schools unless it worsens physical/mental health conditions.
The NSEA said that the governor's unwillingness to issue mask mandates or support the science of the mandate is "irresponsible and a dereliction of duty."
The association asked Gov. Ricketts to "do his part," suggesting the following actions:

- Children and teachers need you to strongly support mask requirements when local health or school boards deem them appropriate.
- We need you to provide funding for necessary PPE materials for students and school staff.
- Children, families and school staff need you to ensure free and rapid testing is made available immediately upon discovery of a COVID-19 infection in a classroom.
- We need you to strongly support a school district's decision to suspend contact sports and other extracurricular activities based on risk assessments.
- We need you to base such decisions on recommendations from health experts.

By Danielle Meadows

KLKN: 'Lives of children are at stake': NSEA addresses the Governor on schools reopening

Tuesday, the Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA) sent a letter addressing Governor Pete Ricketts about reopening schools amid the coronavirus pandemic. Saying "teachers across the state are eager to reconnect with their students. Yet, if we cannot do so with the appropriate health measures in place and enforced, the lives of students and all school staff are at risk."
NSEA continued to write that reopening schools too early is 'putting livelihood before lives' and will 'backfire'.
In addition, they state his lack of support for a mask mandate is 'irresponsible and a dereliction of duty': Sadly, the only mandate we are receiving from you and the U.S Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos is to 'open our schools'.Governor, schools in areas with high levels of Covid-19 community spread should not be compelled to reopen against the judgment of local experts. Our schools need your support in this.

How can it be safe for those schools to reopen with lower thresholds of safety than we currently have for restaurants or hair salons?
The NSEA then detailed the work they have done during the pandemic, from launching online classes to working with health officials to release school reopening guidelines.
"We will continue to do our part. We are asking that you, as our Governor, do your part," said the NSEA. "The lives of children, educators – and those of the family members they come home to – are at stake".
By Ashley Springman

KMTV: Coronavirus case updates: July 21

OMAHA, Neb. (KMTV) — As coronavirus cases come in throughout our area on Tuesday, KMTV will update this story with the latest numbers. Check back often for updates. The latest updates will be posted at the top. You can find our full coronavirus coverage here.
NEBRASKA
DOUGLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

- 108 new cases reported Tuesday
- 8,892 cases since the start of the outbreak
- One new COVID death reported on Tuesday
- 117 total deaths since the start of the outbreak
- 5,868 recoveries among county residents

LINCOLN-LANCASTER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

- 35 additional positive cases for a total of 2,517 cases
- Number of deaths remains at 14

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

- A staff member at the Nebraska State Penitentiary has tested positive
- This brings the number of NDCS staff diagnosed to 33
- 21 have recovered

By Danielle Meadows

Scottsbluff SH: Bulk of the Panhandle assessed at 'moderate' on COVID-19 risk dial

The Panhandle saw a slight decrease in its risk level for COVID-19 as reported by public health officials Tuesday.
Each Tuesday, Panhandle Public Health District is releasing information for its "risk dial" and other tools meant to illustrate for the public the risk level of coronavirus activity in the region, county and community,
The Panhandle remains in the "moderate" risk level of a dial used by PPHD, but that risk level is slightly down from the previous week. The tool was released earlier this month and is modeled after similar tools used by health districts across the state.
With a moderate risk level, people are still advised to take precautions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, such as wearing masks, social distancing and staying at home when possible. A full list of the guidance is available on the PPHD website, pphd.org.
On the county level, the bulk of the Panhandle's 12 counties covered by the health district remained at moderate levels. Grant and Garden counties remain listed as low risk counties.
Some communities in the Panhandle have seen a decrease from last week in their risk level. Minatare in Scotts Bluff County and Bayard and Bridgeport, both in Morrill County, had been reported at high risk. Those communities are now at moderate risk.

The dial and tools are not a current point-in-time survey, but indicates risk based on three weeks of data, with nine different areas evaluated.
Scotts Bluff Public Health Director Paulette Schnell reported one positive case for coronavirus: a Scotts Bluff County man in his 40s, who contracted the virus through community spread. The Panhandle does currently have 72 active cases of the coronavirus, with two people currently hospitalized. To date, the Panhandle has reported 388 positive cases, with 311 of those persons having recovered. However, the Panhandle has reported five deaths, all elderly individuals from Scotts Bluff County. With 6,901 tests conducted in the Panhandle, the health district reports a cumulative positivity rate of 5.6%.
The bulk of the cases have occurred in Scotts Bluff County, where 260 cases are reported and there are 60 active cases. Morrill County and Cheyenne County follow next in case loads, with 56 total cases reported in Morrill County and 22 total cases in Cheyenne County. Kimball County is the only other county in the Panhandle to be in double digits, with 17 total cases.
Schnell said she has been asked some questions about persons who are tested in Scotts Bluff County, but had traveled to Scotts Bluff County from elsewhere. Those persons, if they test positive, would be reported back to the health districts that they may hail from, such as California or Texas, for example.
Health officials discussed a common myth that children "can't carry, contract or be infected with COVID-19." Children can contract the coronavirus. The CDC and state officials have reported cases involving children, even infants, and the Panhandle has also reported cases involving children.
Jessica Davies, assistant director at PPHD, said that though the majority of cases are among adults, the Panhandle has seen about 17% of cases occur in children under 20 and Nebraska has seen 11.7% of cases in children under the age of 20. Just this week, PPHD reported a case involving a child under 10 years of age. To date, PPHD has reported nine cases to have occurred among children under age 9 and 57 cases among children under 19 years of age.
Testing remains available through TestNebraska at Chadron Community Hospital and now at Regional West Health Services. Officials advised that testing at Chadron occurs on Mondays and Fridays and testing is daily at Regional West. Persons can sign up for testing at both those sites through testnebraska.com. Community Action Health Center (CAPWN) in Gering tests on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and sign up is available at tinyurl.com/y7msahzq. These three sources offer free testing.
Morrill County Community Hospital is also offering testing on a daily basis, but insurance companies will be billed for testing or can pay for it on their own. Other local hospitals and clinics are also offering testing, but check with your facility to see if you qualify for testing.
By Maunette Loeks

Kearney Hub: Counties in Loup Basin Public Health Department first in state to move to Phase Four of reopening

LOUP CITY — With fewer active cases of COVID-19 detected in the past month, the Loup Basin Public Health Department will move to Phase IV directed health measures on Friday.
Counties include Blaine, Custer, Garfield, Greeley, Howard, Loup, Sherman, Valley and Wheeler.
Phase IV will allow bars, restaurants, hair salons, child care centers, churches and other public spaces to open up to 75% capacity. Outdoor facilities can have up to 100% capacity.
Restrictions remain in place only for events with more than 500 people.
"Our main goals have been to prevent our health care system from being overwhelmed and keep our community as safe and healthy as possible," Chuck Cone, director of LBPHD, said. "We have been aggressively managing COVID-19, and the level of activity in our jurisdiction has been fairly low."
Rather than waiting until COVID-19 disappears, Cone believes businesses can re-open now, but he urges

residents to maintain physical distance of 6 feet, wear masks when appropriate and stay in if symptoms develop.
Since record-keeping began March 20, LVPHD has had 108 cases of COVID-19 and eight deaths, including four in Custer County and four in Howard County. Of the district's 108 cases, 89 have been in those two counties.
Total cases in the nine counties are:
- Blaine — 0
- Custer — 40
- Garfield — 1
- Greeley — 4
- Howard — 49
- Loup — 0
- Sherman — 5
- Valley — 9
- Wheeler — 0

In related news, 14 new cases of COVID-19 were reported over the weekend by Two Rivers Public Health Department in its seven-county region. Eight cases are in Buffalo County, five are in Dawson County and one is in Phelps County.
For information on the Phase IV guidelines, visit dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/COVID-19-Directed-Health-Measures.aspx.
By Mary Jane Skala

LJS: Bryan, CHI Health experience COVID-19 testing supply chain issues

Area health care systems said they are starting to see hiccups in the supply chain for COVID-19 testing supplies.
CHI Health said it has suspended pre-op COVID-19 testing because of a lack of testing supplies.
The health system said Tuesday that Abbott Labs, the manufacturer that supplies the reagents essential for testing, cannot meet the current demand and has informed it the supply moving forward will be limited for the next four to five weeks.
Because of that, CHI Health said it has suspended its pre-procedural COVID-19 testing requirement to preserve its limited testing supplies.
CHI Health said it was one of very few health care systems in the area requiring a COVID-19 test before surgery. Fewer than 1% of its pre-surgical patients tested positive for the disease.
Bryan Health also on Tuesday said it was aware of a supply chain issue for pre-op tests.
"There are some different systems in this region of the country that are no longer accepting orders for pre-op testing at all," said Bob Ravenscroft, vice president of advancement for Bryan Health.
Ravenscroft said Bryan, which does not require pre-op COVID-19 testing, has enough of its various tests and is still receiving inventory.
But he said it's unclear what the effect will be going forward if the supply chain remains restricted.
"It's going to limit the ability, as current supplies stand, of doing something large scale (or) sweeping for a school system or college," Ravenscroft said, noting that Bryan has already turned down some area small colleges that wanted to do mass testing of their athletes.
By Matt Olberding

NTV: Vaccine trials show promise as participants needed in Grand Island

GRAND ISLAND, Neb — Patients headed to see their doctor at the Grand Island Clinic probably don't even notice the small office just off the front lobby. Inside, they may hold the key to the one thing everyone wants.
"We all get back to our lives quicker."
Dr. Adam Brosz is upfront in his assessment of why a vaccine is so important. Brosz is part of clinical trials with a vaccine that has shown promise in limited testing. Developed by Moderna, the first phase involved 45 people in Atlanta and Seattle.
"They all produced antibodies that were on par with people who had actually had the virus and gotten better," Brosz said.
They've enrolled about 400 people locally.
"They'll get a shot on day one, and a shot 28 days later," Brosz explained.
Half will get a placebo and the others will receive the real deal.
Brosz said, "This virus uses the body's own cells to mount an immune response without giving people the virus or a weakened virus."
The first phase showed some folks who received the highest dose did feel aches and chills, but the study finds most had only mild reactions like pain where the shot was given. It's one of several vaccines being tested.
"If ultimately this vaccine turns out not to be the one, we'll learn from it. Why was it not the one, how does it differ, make vaccines in the future," said Brosz.
He said there's no cost to participants and they do not bill insurance. In fact, there are financial incentives to take part. Omaha-based Meridian Clinical Research has set up shop to run day-to-day operations in Grand Island, a community that fits several criteria.
"We have a diverse population,w e have meatpacking plant with a lot of minorities, we're a rural community and I think there was interest in participating in the vaccine," Brosz said.
They're looking for people in three categories -- front line workers, adults with health conditions, and senior Nebraskans.
Brosz said, "I've some patients who are 'Sign me up, I'll do anything to help out.'"
As a doctor, he wants to see people avoid the virus that causes COVID-19. As a dad, he wants his kids to be able to play basketball and do gymnastics.
"We have to have a vaccine available. I want to be part of that," he said.
Brosz said they continue to enroll more for trials. Learn more at https://www.mcrmed.com/covid-19-vaccine-study/
By Steve White

OWH: Nebraska lawmakers to debate proposed abortion method ban

LINCOLN — Nebraska lawmakers voted Tuesday to pull a controversial abortion bill out of committee and put it up for debate this session.
Legislative Bill 814, introduced by State Sen. Suzanne Geist of Lincoln and named the top priority for abortion opponents, seeks to ban a common second-trimester abortion method in Nebraska.
If passed, Nebraska would become the latest state to attempt to prohibit the procedure known medically as dilation and evacuation. The procedure involves dilating a woman’s cervix and removing the fetus in pieces. Opponents call the procedure dismemberment abortion.
Geist said the proposed ban would protect the most vulnerable in society. She said the issue should be considered along with property tax relief, business tax incentives and other high-priority issues for the 15 remaining days of the session.
“I believe that discussion of human dignity belongs at the top of that list,” she said. “It’s more important

to me than tax credits."
But opponents vowed to use every means possible to stop the ban. Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha said there would be a filibuster taking up time at every stage of debate. If the bill passes, she said, it will be challenged in court.
"It's not a threat, it's a promise," she said. "In every state where it's been challenged, it's been struck down."
Courts have ruled that such bans create an unconstitutional undue burden to accessing abortion care during the second trimester of pregnancy. Only two of the dozen states that have passed such bans have the laws in effect. Neither of the two has abortion providers that perform second-trimester abortions.
On Tuesday, Nebraska senators voted 30-8 to get LB 814 out of the Judiciary Committee, which had been deadlocked on the measure. That's five more than was needed for the "pull" motion to succeed but short of the 33 votes needed to overcome a filibuster.
"I still have some work to do," Geist acknowledged, while noting: "It's apparent that the majority of the body agrees with this bill."
LB 814 would ban an abortion procedure used from week 13 through week 24 of a woman's pregnancy in which clamps, forceps or similar instruments are used to remove pieces of a living fetus. The ban would not apply if suction is used to remove pieces of a fetus. It also would not apply if the fetus was dead before being removed.
Under the bill it would be a Class IV felony, punishable by up to two years in prison and a $10,000 fine, for a doctor to perform such an abortion. The bill also would allow a doctor to be sued for performing the procedure. The woman having such an abortion could not be charged.
Geist said the measure would not reduce women's access to abortion in Nebraska but would do away with a "barbaric" method of abortion.
She cited statistics collected by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services showing that dilation and evacuation abortions account for a relatively small proportion of second-trimester abortions in the state. In 2018, there were 32 dilation and evacuation abortions reported in the state, or 18% of those done at 13 weeks or later.
The Nebraska numbers contrast with national studies that have found the method is used in 95% of second-trimester abortions.
At the hearing, opponents argued that the ban would expose women getting abortions to greater health risks and would potentially send them out of the state to end their pregnancies.
"A woman's health, not politics, should guide decisions at every point in a pregnancy," said Sen. Adam Morfeld of Lincoln.
Several opponents criticized the bill's backers for citing a concern about human life when supporting abortion restrictions but not when it comes to other issues. Hunt, for example, noted the number of senators who have not been wearing masks during the coronavirus pandemic.
For many, the debate Tuesday became emotional. Sen. John Lowe of Kearney used part of his speaking time for a moment of silence for "those babies" lost to abortion, while Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh of Omaha listed bills that would help mothers and children but have not gotten support.
By Martha Stoddard

LJS: Abortion bill successfully pulled from committee to reach debate

It was a passionate debate on both sides as Nebraska senators voted Tuesday night to pull an abortion-related bill from the Judiciary Committee to ensure it would be debated in the remaining 15 days of the session.

The bill (LB814), introduced by Lincoln Sen. Suzanne Geist, would prohibit fetal dismemberment abortion. It was pulled from committee on a 30-12 vote; 25 votes were needed to get the bill out of committee.
The bill was at an impasse in the committee, which could not get past a 4-4 split vote — not enough to kill it or to bring it to the floor for debate.
"I believe the citizens of Nebraska deserve to hear the details of my bill," Geist said, "and that the majority of its citizens will agree with its premise."
In the procedure, a medical provider dismembers the body of a living fetus and extracts one piece at a time from the uterus through the use of clamps, grasping forceps, tongs, scissors or similar instruments, according to the bill.
The bill would carry with it penalties for those performing a dismemberment abortion in the 12- to 24-week second trimester of pregnancy. Other than in the case of a medical emergency, a person who performs the procedure could be sued or charged with a Class IV felony, punishable by up to two years in prison and 12 months post-release supervision, a $10,000 fine, or both.
Geist said the bill is not designed to deny access to abortion. In 2019, there were six dismemberment abortions in Nebraska out of 181 second-trimester abortions.
Omaha Sen. Megan Hunt promised the bill would be filibustered.
"We have not done the basic things as a body to care for Nebraskans (during the COVID-19 crisis) in the way that they are now pleading for us to, and we're going to take 15, maybe plus, hours to talk about an abortion ban in the Legislature," Hunt said. "This is irresponsible."
A number of senators said there should be no question that the dismemberment bill should be debated and passed.
The debate got heated at times. Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte told Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks to "shut up" after she spoke on the bill.
Scout Richters, ACLU of Nebraska legal and policy counsel, said earlier in the day that months of the coronavirus pandemic should have shown state senators that health, not politics, should guide medical decisions.
“State senators should be focused on supporting people’s health and well-being, not forcing their personal beliefs on Nebraskans,” Richters said. “Like any deeply personal medical situation, decisions about abortion care belong to a patient and their physician, not politicians.”
Courts have stopped similar laws from going into effect in nine other states, Richters said, because this type of ban creates an undue burden to accessing abortion during the second trimester of pregnancy.
By JoAnne Young

LJS: Student discipline bill gets debate but no vote

A bill that would put into law that teachers and other school personnel may use reasonable physical intervention to safely manage the behavior of students got about three hours of debate Tuesday afternoon but no vote.
The bill (LB147), introduced by Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte, is the answer for teachers, parents and students to protect them from physical injury, he said.
"Education cannot occur without a safe and focused learning environment where all children can maximize their learning experience," he said.
The bill also would allow physical intervention to take property in a student's possession if it poses a threat of physical injury to another person.
The intervention could not be used to inflict harm as a penalty for a student's disapproved behavior.
Groene said teachers have communicated they wanted a safe working environment. School personnel

wanted training to know how to deescalate situations before they became violent, and that they would have community support, he said.
The amendment to the bill, prioritized by Sen. Dave Murman, will include Murman's bill (LB998) that would require school districts to provide behavioral training to all school employees.
"I have heard from school personnel that have been kicked, hit, bitten, spit upon, slapped, punched or worse," Murman said. "One teacher had a traumatic brain injury due to a student who assaulted her."
Sen. Justin Wayne, who opposed the bill, said it will destroy the relationship between parents and teachers, students and teachers, schools and their communities. And giving immunity to teachers creates a distrust, he said.
No teacher or personnel could be subject to professional or administrative discipline for the use of physical intervention if it was reasonable, according to the bill. The immunity would begin as soon as the bill is in effect, but the training would take place over four to five years, Wayne said.
There is a disparity in our education system, Wayne said.
"You can't recognize the problem and say we have to find a solution and then vote yes on this bill," he said. "You cannot say we need to start prison reform and then vote for this bill.
The bill will return to debate for another three hours if Groene can show he has the 33 votes to get the bill from filibuster to a vote.
By JoAnne Young

LJS: State Fair audit shows ex-employee made checks to company he owned

A state audit of the Nebraska State Fair's finances found that a company created by its former finance chief received payments of nearly $150,000 over the past year.
The audit showed two checks totaling $149,415.60 were made out to RKBB Enterprises Inc. during calendar year 2019, according to a letter from Mary Avery, special audits and finance manager. The letter, dated Tuesday, was sent to State Fair Board Chairwoman Beth Smith.
RKBB Enterprises was created in May 2019 by Brandon Kopke, the fair's former chief of finance and administration. Kopke resigned at the fair's November board meeting after telling the board the fair was headed for bankruptcy.
According to the state audit, there were no invoices for the two payments, and auditors could not tie the payments to services rendered to the fair.
The audit also found that it appeared Kopke used bank accounts set up for RKBB Enterprises for personal expenses, including more than $41,000 for a truck, trailer and ATV, $29,000 for the purchase of land and nearly $55,000 for personal credit card bills.
"Virtually all of the funds in the RKBB bank account have come from the State Fair — specifically, from the two State Fair checks discussed herein. Noteworthy also is the fact that all of the expenditures from that account appear to have been personal in nature," Avery's letter said.
The letter said the audit could find "no benefit received by the State Fair, in goods or services, for the $149,415.60 paid, through the two checks at issue, to RKBB."
The audit also found other irregularities related to payments and compensation to Kopke.
For example, he received a performance bonus of 20% of his salary for 2019. No other employee received a bonus of more than 10%.
The audit also noted that both Kopke and former fair Executive Director Lori Cox made questionable credit-card purchases related to meals, travel, fuel and other items.
The letter recommended that the State Fair "take immediate action to recover any funds that are found to have been disbursed improperly."
It said that because the audit's findings point to the possible violation of state laws, they are being

forwarded to the Nebraska Attorney General, the Nebraska State Patrol and the Hall County Attorney. The audit also recommended that the fair institute a number of changes, including better segregation of duties among staff, better adherence to its own administrative procedures and making sure all approved expenditures are supported by documentation.

In a statement, the fair board said it is working with its new executive director, Bill Ogg, to quickly and thoroughly assess and implement the auditor's recommendations, as well as those from a recent forensic investigation.

"The Nebraska State Fair Board is a proud community member and takes seriously any alleged financial concerns within the organization. In recent months, the board has initiated several steps to ensure accurate financial records and accountability, including initiating a financial audit, cooperating with the state auditor and local authorities, and instituting financially sound policies and procedures," Smith said in a news release. The board will continue to take steps to ensure our resources are spent wisely and for the benefit of the Nebraska State Fair."

The fair's finances became an issue last fall after a disastrous 2019 fair that was plagued by heavy rain and left the organization more than $1.5 million in the hole.

The board eventually laid off nearly half its staff and took out a $1.1 million line of credit with a local bank, moves that have put its finances back on much more solid ground.

In March, Smith said an internal review of the fair's finances found suspicious activity, and the board at the time alerted the Nebraska State Patrol and the Attorney General's Office. Neither of those agencies has commented about any potential investigations.

Cox stepped down later that month and the board hired Ogg, who started last month.

By Matt Olberding

AP: Nebraska among 31 states now on NY, CT, NJ quarantine list

ALBANY, N.Y. — Residents from 31 states must now quarantine for 14 days when arriving in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, as dozens of states experience rising positive COVID-19 rates.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo acknowledged Tuesday that the quarantine is “imperfect,” but said the quarantine could help protect the states against the risk of increased spread. The list of states no longer includes Minnesota, but now includes Alaska, Delaware, Indiana, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, Virginia and Washington.

"The infection rate across the country is getting worse, not better,” Cuomo said in a conference call with reporters.

New York, New Jersey and Connecticut last month issued a joint travel advisory that requires a 14-day quarantine period for travelers from a list that now includes 31 states, including Texas and Florida, where COVID-19 cases have spiked recently. The advisory includes states if their seven-day rolling average of positive tests exceeds 10%, or if the number of positive cases exceeds 10 per 100,000 residents.

Cuomo has tried to get more travelers to comply with the order by instituting a $2,000 fine for affected individuals who leave the airport without filling out a form that state officials plan to use to randomly track travelers and ensure they’re following quarantine restrictions. Airport travelers who fail to fill out the form face a hearing and an order requiring mandatory quarantine.

The governor initially said hotel clerks or business partners could alert officials about violations, and that police officers who pull over out-of-state individuals for traffic infractions could enforce quarantine rules. The Cuomo administration didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday about how it’s enforcing the quarantine, including how many travelers have faced fines.

The governor's office said 724 COVID-19 patients were hospitalized Monday — a figure that's plunged

since peaking in mid-April but has declined at a much slower rate since late June. The percentage of positive results has plateaued around 1% since mid-June, with 1.2% of 66,000 tests conducted Monday coming back positive.
Cuomo's administration reports 25,058 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 have died in New York hospitals and nursing homes, a figure that doesn't include 4,624 presumed deaths in New York City and an unknown number statewide. New York has reported an average of 10 people with COVID-19 dying each day over the past week.
By Marina Villenueve

OWH Editorial: Let's not hurt others while we cheer for our sports teams

One positive effect of our racial reckoning spurred by the killing of George Floyd under the knee of a police officer has been renewed attention toward treatment of Native Americans.
After years of resistance, the Washington Redskins will finally change their name, born of a denigrating stereotype tied to white mythology about the Old West.
Mutual of Omaha will remove its iconic chief logo, which it says it meant as a symbol of strength and respect.
“But we are still using a symbol from another culture that isn’t ours,” Mutual CEO James Blackledge told The World-Herald’s Henry Cordes. “We don’t want to or need to appropriate that symbol … we want to be part of the change that’s happening.”
He makes two really good points: Change is happening, and we don’t need that symbol. The latter is a terrific yardstick for assessing the use of native names and imagery. Is this necessary?
In pro sports, which have broad influence because of the teams’ high profile, the Cleveland Indians organization, which dropped its cartoonish Chief Wahoo logo in 2018, has indicated a name change is likely.
“We recognize our unique place in the community,” the team said, “and are committed to listening, learning and acting in the manner that can best unite and inspire our city.”
The Chicago Blackhawks and Atlanta Braves have said they are not considering a change. The Braves are examining the silly and stereotype-driven tomahawk chop, a chant also used by Kansas City Chiefs fans. The Super Bowl champion Chiefs, at the height of their popularity, have so far been silent.
Using Blackledge’s measure, we’re confident that Braves and Chiefs fans don’t need the chop. Both may face corporate pressure, as the Redskins did, to go beyond chopping the chop to examine their name.
White people cannot fairly evaluate the impact of stereotypes and caricatures that might, to them, seem either respectful or harmless.
We’ll let the National Congress of American Indians weigh in, from a 2014 statement:
“Born in an era when racism and bigotry were accepted by the dominant culture, ‘Indian’ sports brands have grown to become multimillion-dollar franchises.
“The intolerance and harm promoted by these ‘Indian’ sports mascots, logos or symbols have very real consequences for Native people … derogatory ‘Indian’ sports mascots have serious psychological, social and cultural consequences for Native Americans, especially Native youth.”
Whoops, chants, even waving wigs to mock Native Americans have been documented in sports events and hate crimes.
The legacy of George Floyd may be that the brazen disregard for his humanity as Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck has caused deep introspection about not only attitudes toward people of color, but of indifference toward others’ harmful attitudes.
If in cheering for a favorite team we have been indifferent to the pain caused by the team’s symbolism, could we not enjoy a victory just as much if it doesn’t hurt a group of our fellow American citizens?

OWH Editorial: Government has great power. It's good to identify the bounds of its authority

Government figures and agencies don't have unlimited power under our constitutional system. They must operate within the boundaries set by law. That's an enormously important principle. It sets appropriate limits on governmental power, provides clarity and promotes accountability to the public. Sometimes the proper bounds of authority aren't clear up front, though. In those cases, legal authorities must weigh in to explain what's allowed under the law. The U.S. Supreme Court does this regularly, deciding on the powers granted to regulatory agencies, Congress, state governments and the courts.

In Nebraska, the state Attorney General's Office recently provided important guidance in this way. It issued an opinion about whether Gov. Pete Ricketts has the legal authority to distribute the federal CARES Act money sent to the state to help address coronavirus-related needs.

State Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, requested the legal analysis, pointing to uncertainties in relevant clauses in state law and in the Nebraska Constitution. Lathrop was right to ask for clarity. The CARES Act funds to Nebraska total a huge sum — $1.1 billion. And even regardless of that large figure, it's important to know precisely what powers the law allows in distributing such funds.

This year, states have taken differing approaches in deciding which branches of government have authority to allocate the CARES Act money. In some cases, governors have taken the lead. That's been the case in Iowa and South Dakota. In Wyoming, the Legislature took on the task, holding a special session. North Dakota distributed the money via an emergency committee headed by the governor and including state lawmakers.

For Nebraska, a budget bill passed by the Legislature last year provides the central guidance, the Attorney General's Office said in its analysis. That legislation provides Ricketts the authority to distribute the money. Lathrop says he accepts that finding.

Nailing down the specific limits on authority is crucial to ensuring responsible government. The Nebraska Supreme Court declared in 2002, for example, that when state agencies create rules to implement a statute, the rules must be "in harmony with its spirit and expressed legislative intent." Nebraska state senators cited that finding in 2005 when they approved legislation to create a process so complaints can be filed with the Legislature over new regulations from agencies and commissions. The bill was to ensure that state agencies do not step beyond lawmakers' intentions, said the sponsor, then-State Sen. Patrick Bourne of Omaha, who chaired the Judiciary Committee. State regulators, he correctly told his colleagues, "make rules, not laws." The U.S. Supreme Court has underscored that same principle, saying federal regulations must be rooted in the statutory guidance provided by Congress.

In these many ways, Americans are well served by knowing how far government power, bound by the law, truly extends.

OWH Midlands Voices: Legislature must be careful not to harm schools with its tax decisions

Fennell is executive director of the Nebraska State Education Association; Dulaney, executive director of the Nebraska Council of School Administrators; Spatz, executive director of the Nebraska Association of School Boards. Six groups making up the Nebraska Education Collaboration signed this essay.

The challenge Nebraska's public schools face during COVID-19 is unprecedented, and it is impossible to

overstate the difficulty of the decisions we must make about when and how to bring children and staff back to school safely. What is clear is that schools need help. They need support to provide the personal protective equipment necessary to keep children, teachers and staff safe. They need technology for families who do not have Internet access or Wi-Fi- enabled devices. And they need additional pay for substitute teachers to ensure the existing substitute shortage doesn't turn into its own crisis.

What schools don't need is another threat to their funding.

State legislators will soon debate Legislative Bill 1106, a bill that would, within three years, slash funding to the school districts that educate more than 70% of Nebraska's children and significantly hamstring the ability of all school districts to manage their budgets. Even before COVID-19 closed school buildings and suspended the legislative session, LB 1106 had no dedicated funding source. Instead, it relied on a projected one-time state budget surplus. Before COVID-19, schools feared that under LB 1106, a recession resulting in state budget cuts would prevent districts from keeping up with basic costs. The recession schools feared has arrived, and LB 1106 should be considered a nonstarter.

There is a persistent misunderstanding by some policymakers and journalists that only large schools oppose LB 1106. This, despite the fact that districts across the state have opposed it all year — urban and rural, large and small —as have all state education associations representing teachers, school boards, school administrators and urban, suburban and rural school districts.

These same policymakers say schools have a spending problem. The truth is, the state has a funding problem. School spending has gone up more slowly than the state budget over the last 15 years, while the state has fully funded its own school funding formula in only three of the last 17 years. Schools already operate within strict state-mandated limits on how much property tax they can raise and on how much they can spend to educate their students. For this reason, any alternative property tax proposal that tightens local spending controls on schools is also a nonstarter.

A further misconception is that schools oppose property tax reform. Not true. Schools have supported proposals to lower property taxes without harming school budgets in recent years — all of them rejected by the Revenue and Education Committees. For years, schools have called for a study of the school funding formula with input from national experts and Nebraska stakeholders. When TEEOSA was adopted in 1990, it was the result of years of research, hard work, input and compromise. LB 1106 would make significant and long-lasting changes to how we fund our public schools without consulting experts, without gathering necessary input from stakeholders and districts.

Maybe some are reluctant to study school finance because they think they know the answer: Property taxes are too high. But it is the answer to the wrong question. The right question is: How do we lower property taxes while maintaining Nebraska's tradition of public school excellence and protecting local control of tax dollars? That's a question that can only be answered by conducting a thorough study of school finance for the first time in more than 30 years.

School districts and education associations stand ready to work with policymakers. We agree property tax reform is important and that it is also a complicated issue that won't be solved by a single policymaker without educators at the table. Amidst this global pandemic, educators need more support, not less, to ensure the safety and well-being of Nebraska's children. No issue is more important than that.

By Maddie Fennell, Mike Dulaney and John Spatz

LJS Editorial, 7/22: Lincoln mask mandate makes sense in many ways

Believe it or not, it is possible to agree with two seemingly opposite stances on face masks and their role in containing the spread of a runaway virus.

Agreement isn't mutually exclusive, but it becomes more difficult in these politically polarized times,

when party affiliation carries too much sway in coloring public opinion, while distorting what's best for the population.

Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird issued a mask mandate on Friday -- an aggressive attempt at suppressing the coronavirus' spread through the city. Her action was met with criticism from Gov. Pete Ricketts, whose approach to the virus has been mitigation to keep a health system from becoming overrun.

We don't disagree with either philosophy.

Ricketts says he believes face masks serve a purpose in curbing the spread of the coronavirus, but adds it is wrong to "bring the heavy hand of the government to tell people what to do."

That's a fair point, even if we overwhelmingly disagree with the suggestion of a potential lawsuit to stop the mandate. Political posturing has no place here, Mr. Governor.

His belief that Nebraskans will choose to do the right thing is fueled by their actions over the last four months when they did so -- without a mandate.

However, it's in the same vein that we can also agree with Gaylor Baird's mandate, which requires face coverings to be worn inside public buildings.

"Our fate is up to us, and the time to act is now," Gaylor Baird said Friday.

She's right. The people of Lincoln have made immense sacrifices this spring by socially distancing, sheltering in place and avoiding most forms of human interaction.

As businesses began to reopen in recent weeks -- slowly and as promised -- a small rise in the number of cases ensued. It wasn't a huge spike like we're seeing elsewhere, but it was enough for concern.

"No one wants Lincoln to become the next Miami, Houston or Phoenix," she said.

We've sacrificed too much over the last five months to throw it all away. If a mask can help contain the spread, then wearing one seems like a logical path.

Doing so is good for community health. It's good for the local economy and household budgets. Given the prolonged illness and hospitalizations we see with this disease, we all want to keep health insurance premiums down.

Small business owners fully understand what's at stake. Recent months of shutdown forced them to consider the future of their shops, plants, restaurants and bars. Their financial lives are hanging in the balance.

We trust that Ricketts and Gaylor Baird have them in mind as they move forward in leading Lincoln through this crisis.

Despite their political differences, they're not as far apart as they want you to believe. We urge them to what's best for the people, without the political noise.

We'll all be better off for it.

LJS Local View: Battling hunger and COVID

Whether it is the significant demand at the Food Bank of Lincoln or long lines at food pantries elsewhere in our state, the images of people struggling to put food on the table are alarming reminders of the vulnerability faced by millions of people across the U.S.

COVID-19 has upended the lives of millions of individuals and families already struggling to make ends meet and many more who find themselves asking for help for the first time. Given the overwhelming need, I embarked on a bipartisan effort to support a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and nonprofits like United Way Worldwide (UWW) that provide last mile delivery of critical food supplies to vulnerable Americans.

Hunger in America is skyrocketing. Feeding America estimates that 54 million people (one in six) could face hunger this year, including 18 million children (one in four).

According to research by the Brookings Institution, 40% of households with mothers and children under 12 have reported household food insecurity since the onset of COVID-19. In approximately one in five of such households, children are experiencing hunger “to an extent unprecedented in modern times.” Demand at food banks has increased by an average of 70% compared to the same time last year, with nearly 40% of customers having never used food banks before the pandemic.

Equally important is the fact that today’s food crisis is happening while there are ample food supplies in the United States. USDA recently projected wheat production to be up 2% this year. Production of eggs and milk is also expected to be higher than usual this year. Many Americans are going hungry not because of a lack of food, but because disruptions to the food system have made delivering food to those in need more challenging.

As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I believe that it is imperative that USDA help ensure that America’s food supply is accessible to those who need it the most.

This is why I support the Farmers to Families Food Program, which helps provide meat, dairy and produce from America’s farmers and ranchers who themselves have seen markets shift as a result of COVID-19. The difficultly is ensuring the prompt and safe delivery of these boxes of food to those who are food insecure, especially the elderly, the sick, people with disabilities, caretakers of children and low-income essential workers. This is also why nonprofit programs like the UWW Ride United program are so important.

Through the support of philanthropic organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation and corporate partners such as Albertson's and Safeway, UWW has expanded its Ride United program, which provides transportation solutions for vulnerable communities. UWW has also enlisted DoorDash to provide fast and safe food delivery to households by leveraging DoorDash’s data platform and fleet of delivery workers to transport food from food pantries and food banks to clients who cannot leave their homes. Thanks to this partnership, more than 330,000 meals have been delivered in eight U.S. cities. However, this is just the start, and we need to scale up solutions like Ride United beyond those eight initial cities.

Nebraska’s own former USDA Secretary Mike Johanns and former USDA Secretary Dan Glickman have endorsed the program. Their bipartisan advocacy in seeking funding for the Last Mile delivery program underscores the importance of this cause.

Delivering food boxes to Americans – whether they are quarantining, sick, elderly, or caring for children – is critical to ensuring access to healthy food.

No American should go hungry. During this time of crisis, it is important that Republicans and Democrats come together to find innovative ways to care for citizens in need.

U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer is Nebraska’s senior senator and a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee.

AP: Trump changes his opinion on masks, says they 'have an impact'

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump sought to paint a rosier picture of the coronavirus for the nation Tuesday but conceded that the pandemic is likely to get worse for a time as he revived his daily briefings with an eye to halting a campaign season erosion of support as new cases spike across the country.

"It will probably unfortunately get worse before it gets better," Trump said from the White House, but he also touted a reduction in deaths and progress on vaccines and treatments for COVID-19, which Trump referred to repeatedly as a the "China virus." He also continued his belated encouragement of Americans to wear masks when social distancing is not possible, "Whether you like the mask or not, they have an impact."

"I'm getting used to the mask," he said, pulling one out from his pocket, after months of suggesting that mask-wearing was a political statement against him.

Little more than three months out from Election Day, Trump is hoping that the podium spotlight will give him an edge against Democratic rival Joe Biden. He appeared at the White House solo, without the medical experts or government supply experts he previously relied on to explain his government's response to the public health emergency.
"The vaccines are coming, and they're coming a lot sooner than anybody thought possible," Trump promised anew.
As early as next week, the first possible U.S. vaccine is set to begin final-stage testing in a study of 30,000 people to see if it really is safe and effective. A few other vaccines have begun smaller latestage studies in other countries, and in the U.S. a series of huge studies are planned to start each month through fall in hopes of, eventually, having several vac- cines to use. Already, people can start signing up to volunteer for the different studies.
Health authorities warn that there's no guarantee - it's not unusual for vaccines to fail during this critical testing step. But vaccine makers and health officials are hopeful that at least one vaccine could prove to work by year'send.
Trump also acknowledged bipartisan criticism of delays in processing testing results, saying his administration was working on the problem.
"We'll be able to get those numbers down," Trump said, saying his administration was working to improve the availability of rapid, point-of-care tests like those used to protect him at the White House.
Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, told NPR Tuesday that he was glad Trump has begun to promote mask-wearing.
"If we, during those conferences, come out and have consistent, clear, noncontradictory messages, I believe it will be very helpful in getting people on the track of knowing the direction that we need to go to get this pandemic under control," he said.
Biden, for his part Tuesday, launched into criticism of Trump as he outlined the latest plank of his economic recovery plan, charging that Trump "failed his most important test as an American president: the duty to care for you, for all of us."
"He's quit on you, he's quit on this country," Biden said in a speech in Delaware.
There was no shortage of advice on how Trump should comport himself.
Earlier Tuesday, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, an occasional informal Trump adviser, said the president should wear a mask to the briefing.
"That's what's going to convince people that he's serious about this," Gingrich said.
Trump did tweet a photo of himself in a face mask Monday, calling it an act of patriotism, after months of resistance to being publicly seen in a face covering.
Trump's daily turns in the White House briefing room largely ended in late April after the president's widely derided suggestion that injecting toxic disinfectant could help treat the coronavirus. The comment prompted widespread medical warnings against the potentially deadly move.

Bloomberg: CDC estimates that infections greatly exceed reported cases

Far more people were infected with the novel coronavirus than previously reported in several corners of the U.S., according to data released Tuesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
The agency conducted a survey looking at antibodies to the virus in 10 U.S. regions. It found prevalence was highly variable from one region to the next, but far higher than the reported number of cases across the board. The presence of antibodies in the blood is evidence that a person's body had mounted an immune response to the coronavirus.
In the New York City metropolitan area, for example, the CDC estimated based on samples collected in March and April that 6.9% of the population had contracted the virus, a level that would be equivalent

to at least 12 times the number of reported cases. In the San Francisco Bay Area, samples collected in April showed a far smaller percentage of people contracted the virus, at 1%. But that was still nine times the reported case load in the region.

Assessing how many people have antibodies — what's known as seroprevalence — helps shed light on how many infected people either didn't show signs of the virus, or didn't have serious enough symptoms to seek medical care. The data can help determine not only how widespread the virus is, but also how deadly it is.

The CDC's study suggests the numbers of such people could be vast. But it also indicates that even the hardest-hit locales are nowhere near the 60% infection level needed to establish so-called herd immunity.

Many infected people don't develop symptoms, and the findings suggest a need for more testing to contain the virus's spread.

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