From: Pinkerman, Justin
To: Pinkerman, Justin
Cc: Reuss, Alex
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 10-26-22
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AG VALLEY CO-OP

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Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Oct 2022	7.55	70.00	07:50
Corn	Dec 2022	7.55	70.00	07:50
Milo	Oct 2022	6.85	0.00	07:50
Milo	Oct 2023	5.50	-75.00	07:48
Soybeans	Oct 2022	13.34	-60.00	07:45
Soybeans	Oct 2023	12.85	-80.00	07:46
Wheat	Oct 2022	8.61	-70.00	07:48
Wheat	Jul 2023	8.43	-80.00	07:45

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WOWT: Nebraska National Guard to build new readiness center in Bellevue
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AP: Protest ban at Florida university after anti-Sasse rally

Nebraska Examiner: State Environmental Trust gets earful about high number of disqualified grants

LINCOLN — A state board that hands out grants for environmental projects asked for comments on Tuesday and got an earful of criticism.

A trio of testifiers at a "listening session" lambasted the Nebraska Environmental Trust for

disqualifying a larger-than-normal number of grant applicants and, in general, for straying from its mission to "conserve, enhance and restore the natural environments of Nebraska."

The agency, created 30 years ago, funds environmental, recycling and conservation projects using about $20 million a year in State Lottery proceeds.

"The promise made to the people of Nebraska was to help the environment," said Lincoln attorney Lorrie Benson. "But there appears to be hostility to funding environmental projects or even the environment in general."

'It's sad'

"It's sad," Benson added.

Karl Elmsmaeuser, the executive director of the Trust, said Tuesday's session was intended to gather ideas on whether the rules and regulations that govern the agency, known as Title 137, should be changed. He said it was not intended to provide responses to comments or criticism.

Phone and email messages left with Mark Quandahl, an Omaha attorney who chairs the Environmental Trust Board, went unanswered Tuesday afternoon.

One member of the 14-member Trust board attended the session. Jeff Kanger of Lincoln asked whether "public access" was an important issue when the Trust considered whether to grant funds for conservation easements.

Easement for trout fishing

Benson said it can be, depending on the nature of the land preserved. She added that it was a "mystery to me" why the Trust rejected a recent grant for a conservation easement to preserve a ranch in the Pine Ridge, a project that included providing public access for trout fishing.

The complaints Tuesday appeared to be the latest grumbling about the Trust, which began two years ago when the board opted to defund a handful of grants for conservation projects and instead send $1.5 million to finance the installation of ethanol blender pumps at service stations.

A lawsuit and formation of a Trust watchdog group followed. More criticism came a year ago after several entities that had received Trust grants in the past, including recycling operations, were deemed ineligible.

Gov. Pete Ricketts, who appoints nine of the 14 members of the Trust Board and hires four of the five agency directors who sit on the board, has defended their actions, citing the importance of ethanol to the state's economy. Critics maintain that grant decisions are now guided by politics and benefits to farm groups rather than environmental benefits.

46% rejection rate

Among the complaints lodged by the three testifiers Tuesday:

- The Trust is disqualifying an unusually high number of grant applications, even before they are scored on several criteria, including environmental and public benefits, for approval. This year, 40 of 87 grant applications were recommended for disqualification by a Grant Review Committee, including, the Examiner learned, grants for recycling programs and preserving marshes for waterfowl. Last year, 36 out of 118 grant applications were deemed ineligible, a 30% rejection rate compared to a 46% rejection rate this year. Prior to 2021, fewer than a handful of grants were rejected as ineligible each year. "That strikes me as really strange," said Anne DeVries of Cortland. DeVries, a mechanical engineer, has worked as a volunteer technical reviewer of grant applications — to determine whether a project is feasible — for the Trust for the past 15 years. She said she found one grant application poorly written this year, but it was the first time in a decade.
- "Climate change" isn't among the criteria considered when awarding grants. "It's the critical environmental issue of our time," Benson said, suggesting that a project should be graded higher if it addresses the problem.
- The Trust is no longer awarding all of the about $20 million a year it gets from the State Lottery, holding back about $3 million last year. In the past, less than $200,000 a year was left

unawarded. Rob Schubach of Lincoln said he questioned whether the Trust was "rat-holing" funds for a huge project down the road, such as the proposed, 4,000-acre recreation lake between Omaha and Lincoln. He called the lake "a farce" and "lake booze cruise."
- The public received only a couple of days' notice for the first listening session in Lincoln. The short notice — the Examiner received a press release Friday — led to suspicions that public input wasn't really important.

Public hearing required

Six people showed up for the listening session Tuesday in Lincoln and three testified. Three other listening sessions are scheduled: Nov. 9 in Omaha, Nov. 15 in Kearney and a "zoom" session Dec. 5.

Trust officials emphasized that if rule changes are recommended by the Trust Board, they will be the subject of a public hearing, and people will have another chance to testify.

Elmshaeuser said the comments provided Tuesday, as well at the other listening sessions, will be considered by the Trust Board when determining whether changes in Title 137 are needed.

The consideration of possible changes began in May, when the Trust board appointed a committee to look at amendments.

At the time, the board listed 11 concerns about the clarity of current regulations, including the meaning of grant eligibility requirements pertaining to cost-benefits, environmental and economic impact and "private benefits."

By Paul Hammel

LJS: Barger, Dungan offer stark contrasts in race for northeast Lincoln's District 26 seat

The two candidates seeking to replace Sen. Matt Hansen as northeast Lincoln's representative in the Legislature have both identified public safety as a top issue that should define the race in District 26.

That's essentially where the similarities between Russ Barger and George Dungan III end.

And even on matters of public safety, the two men — Barger, a 50-year-old Republican attorney and entrepreneur, and Dungan, a 34-year-old Democrat and former public defender — have fundamentally different views.

For Dungan, who finished 292 votes behind Barger in second place in May's four-way primary race, the issue is nuanced and intertwined with the availability of accessible health care, including mental health care and substance-use programs.

"We need safe neighborhoods," said Dungan, who worked in the Lancaster County Public Defender's Office for eight years after earning an undergraduate degree from the University of Kansas and a law degree from American University.

"And I think a way that you ensure safe neighborhoods is by giving access to health care that is that primary intervention, right? Working with substance-use disorder and mental health issues before they become a problem and potentially lead to issues that make communities less safe."

For Barger, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate who has worked in Nebraska's Attorney General's Office and for the state's Department of Labor, the issue seems more black-and-white.

"Our local law enforcement has been undermanned and underfunded for years, and it's now showing with our record crime numbers in 2022," he said in a written response to questions after declining an in-person or phone interview, citing time constraints.

As of Oct. 16, reports of all crime in Lincoln had increased 7.3% over the 2021 year-to-date total, an uptick that has been driven by significant increases in vandalism, shoplifting, car break-ins and thefts, according to police data. Violent crime dropped 8% in the same period and the city's violent crime rate is near its 30-year low, according to the data.

The candidates' differing views on public safety issues are only a snapshot of the tenor of the race in northeast Lincoln, where the political newcomers represent two starkly different choices to represent District 26.

Nowhere is their differences more apparent than in their stances on abortion, which in April was the subject of a bitter filibuster in the Legislature over a bill that would have immediately banned abortion in the state when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in June.

The measure fell two votes short of the 33 required to end the filibuster and the bill stalled. Abortion remains legal in Nebraska through the 20th week of pregnancy. But the issue has been top-of-mind for some voters in the wake of the Dobbs decision.

"There could not be a clearer contrast between Russ Barger and I when it comes to the issue of whether or not somebody has access to reproductive health care," said Dungan, who does not support further limitations on abortion in Nebraska and who touts an endorsement from Planned Parenthood Advocates of Nebraska.

"I think (Barger) has been incredibly clear that he is for extreme bans," Dungan said.

Barger has not been ambiguous in his stance on the matter. In his responses to a Right to Life survey of candidates seeking office in Nebraska, he indicated abortion should only be legal in cases when the mother's life is threatened. He does not support exceptions for rape, incest or "fetal anomalies."

"Twenty weeks is too high of an abortion access limit," he wrote the Journal Star in response to questions about whether he'd support further limitations on abortion in Nebraska. "By the time most women know they are pregnant, the baby's heart has already started beating."

A McCook native who has lived in northeast Lincoln for more than two decades, Barger has built much of his legislative bid on a mix of kitchen-table economic issues, as well as abortion, guns, "election accountability" and the pandemic.

Barger, who has previously said he entered the race after prodding from Gov. Pete Ricketts, wrote that he was also called to the election over coronavirus-related divisions.

"The politicization of COVID-19 may have pushed me into this. Using overstated fear to manipulate people is wrong. I still see people wearing a mask in their car, by themselves," he wrote, taking aim at Lincoln's previous directed health measures that required masking in certain settings as recently as early 2022.

A state attorney who has pointed to his experience in state government as a qualification in his bid for the legislature, Barger has promised to reduce property taxes — a longtime concern of Lincoln voters — while fighting inflation, limits on the Second Amendment and taking on issues he sees within public schools.

Barger, a devout attendee of a Catholic church, said he does not "support schools promoting comprehensive sexual education and transgenderism to impressionable youth."

"My positions on abortion, transgenderism, mandates, public safety, constitutional rights and taxes more closely reflect the attitudes of northeast Lincoln than (Dungan's)," wrote Barger, who has received endorsements from the Nebraska Farm Bureau PAC, Lincoln Independent Business Association PAC and Fraternal Order of Police.

Ricketts has personally donated $10,000 to Barger's campaign, according to the latest Accountability and Disclosure Commission filings.

Barger raised $58,121 in the latest campaign financing period, which started in mid-June and ended Oct. 4, when the candidate had $26,664 in his account, according to the filing.

Of that funding, $33,669 came from organizations, political action committees and other campaign accounts, while the rest — $24,452 — came from mostly high-dollar donors.

Dungan's fundraising — $98,110 in the latest period — has outpaced Barger in the months since he finished second in the primary. Roughly two-thirds of those funds have come from organizations, including $9,000 from the Nebraska Association of Trial Attorneys' PAC, which has contributed $14,000 to Dungan's campaign this year.

He ended the latest finance period with $70,687 in his campaign's war chest.

Dungan is seeking the seat with hopes of being a "bridge builder" and has focused his campaign on economic growth in northeast Lincoln, mental and reproductive health care access and protecting the public education system, a position he acknowledged can seem difficult to square with property tax reduction.

"We have a really exceptional school system here, and people want to keep those schools strong," said Dungan, a graduate of Lincoln Southwest High School, where he was a classmate of Hansen, the senator he's vying to replace.

"I think people struggle, sometimes, because our property taxes are really high, and we need to focus on property tax relief. And they see that Lincoln Public Schools are a major component of that property tax they pay," he added, calling for the state to pay its "fair share" to fund schools.

A Lincoln native with a Nebraska-shaped tattoo on his right forearm, Dungan said he joined the public defender's office — and, now, politics — out of "an obligation to make things better for other people."

"That's very much what I've frankly dedicated my entire life to," he said. "My entire professional career has been spent trying to be an advocate on behalf of folks who oftentimes get overlooked by the system."

Dungan, who touts endorsements from the Lincoln Fire Fighters Association, the Lincoln Central Labor Union, Hansen and Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird, has faced attacks from Barger over his recent arrival in District 26, which Barger claims Dungan moved to "to run for the Legislature."

He first moved to the district in January 2021 but was removed in last year's redistricting process. Dungan then bought a house in University Place in September 2021 and moved back into District 26, where he had already announced his intention to run for the Legislature.

"I guess I don't understand that, given that I'm born and raised here in Lincoln, and he was born and raised in McCook," Dungan said of Barger.

After the 2021 redistricting process, District 26 is now bounded by 84th Street on the east and O Street on the south. The district stretches as far west as 27th Street before zig-zagging its way through the Hartley, East Campus and University Place neighborhoods. The Murdock Trail forms much of the district's northernmost border between 44th and 70th streets before it juts north to Cornhusker Highway.

While avoiding the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, District 26 includes Nebraska Wesleyan University, the Havelock neighborhood, and the business corridor on the north side of O Street, including Gateway Mall.

District voters overwhelming supported Hansen in his reelection bid in 2018, when he won 72.3% of ballots cast with 9,046 votes.

Last year's redistricting trimmed the total number of registered voters living in District 26, according to voter registration statistics.

In October 2020, there were 10,159 Republicans, 10,326 Democrats and 6,579 nonpartisan voters registered in the district. At the start of this month, the Republican total had dropped to 8,404, the Democratic count to 9,125 and 6,094 nonpartisan voters remained registered.

By Andrew Wegley

OWH: National Guard breaks ground on new $36 million facility near Offutt

At long last, the Nebraska National Guard's newest and biggest armory is under construction.
Senior Guard and political leaders turned ceremonial shovels of dirt Tuesday afternoon for the Bellevue Readiness Center, the future home of five Guard units and about 380 soldiers and airmen.
U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, who worked with U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer to secure federal funds for the project, called the groundbreaking an "important milestone." It is expected to open in 2024.
"Once it's built, it'll make a difference in the lives of thousands and thousands of National Guard members, for decades and decades to come," he said.
The new center is west of Offutt Air Force Base, on South 25th Street, adjacent to the Willow Lakes Golf Course. The 40-acre site is owned by the Air Force, with a sweeping view across the Papillion Creek watershed.
"It's literally a beacon on a hill," said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska's adjutant general.
The project has been planned since 2008. Originally it was to be built in Mead, but when Bohac took over the state's top military post in 2013 he gave orders to move it to Bellevue.
"We need to be building readiness centers in the communities, not in the cornfields," Bohac said Tuesday.
With their slots on the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, Fischer and Bacon got $29 million for the project in fiscal year 2020.
But all the bids came in far above the budgeted price, said Col. Brent Flachsbart, the Nebraska National Guard's construction facilities and management officer.
They tried again the following year, with the same result. He blamed the higher costs on supply chain issues fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic.
"Unfortunately, our timing couldn't have been worse," Flachsbart said. "We had to reduce the size and the scope."
Guard officials went back to the drawing board. They eliminated a second floor, cutting the square footage by 20%, to 103,000 square feet. And with support from Gov. Pete Ricketts, the Nebraska Legislature approved an additional $7.6 million.
The $36.3 million price tag is just a shade less than the inflation-adjusted cost ($37.4 million) of the Nebraska National Guard headquarters in Lincoln, which opened in 2012.
The readiness center will include office space, a drill floor, a large kitchen, maintenance bays for National Guard vehicles and classrooms. Its exterior look will be modern and comparable to the U.S. Strategic Command headquarters about 1 mile to the southeast, opened in 2019.
"I know this is going to be a world-class facility," Ricketts said.
The Bellevue Readiness Center will replace an armory that closed in Fremont.
The center will be the headquarters for five units:
72nd Civil Support Team, currently based in Lincoln
189th Truck Company, Omaha
Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment, Lincoln
623rd Engineer Company, Wahoo
192nd Military Police Company detachment, North Omaha
Fischer said the facility will boost a growing partnership between the Nebraska Guard and the Air Force at Offutt. Just last month, Guard officials announced that Nebraska Air National Guard's 170th Group, which supports the 55th Wing at Offutt, would double in size to provide new services.

“We’re seeing dirt moved, and we hope to see a ribbon-cutting in 24 months,” Fischer said. “I’m so excited to see progress being made.”
By Steve Liewer

OWH: Top Omaha election official has "100% confidence"' in staff and processes

In a sign of the times, Douglas County Election Commissioner Brian Kruse summed up his routine pre-Election Day report to the County Board Tuesday with a message about election security.
“Voters in Douglas County should be assured and reassured that elections are safe,” Kruse said Tuesday. “They’re secure. We have 100% confidence in our people, our procedures, our products. And when voters cast their vote, their voice is heard.”
Kruse reiterated what he and Nebraska state election officials have said multiple times about recent elections in Omaha and across the state, including the 2020 presidential vote. They’ve been fair and accurate, with no evidence of significant fraud, and the officials are confident about the next election.
Kruse, a Republican appointed by Gov. Pete Ricketts, and Chief Deputy Douglas County Election Commissioner Chris Carithers provided the update to the board about the Nov. 8 general election.
Kruse routinely uses the platform to give local voters news they can use as Election Day nears:
Friday at 6 p.m. is the deadline to register to vote in Nebraska. Voters can still register by going in person to the Douglas County Election Commission office, 12220 West Center Road, in the Bel Air Plaza in Omaha.
Douglas County residents can go to www.votedouglascounty.com, type in their home address and see a sample ballot of exactly what they’re voting on, plus details about their polling place.
As of Oct. 3, Douglas County had 358,398 registered voters: 135,105 Democrats, 127,383 Republicans, 88,834 nonpartisans, 5,842 Libertarians and 1,234 Legal Marijuana NOW voters.
People can vote in one of three ways: by mail or drop box, early voting in person at the election commission office, or at their polling place on Election Day.
Early ballots have to be returned — with voters’ signatures in the appropriate places — by 8 p.m. on Election Day. Postmarks don’t count. It’s not recommended to put a ballot in the mail after Nov. 1.
The election commission has 13 secure drop boxes around Douglas County. For locations, check the map on the commission’s website.
Kruse encouraged early voters to use the drop boxes. They’re the most direct way to return ballots. Teams of election commission workers from two political parties empty the boxes daily.
The election commission office normally is open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays but has extended hours on some days. It will be open 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 1, and Thursday, Nov. 3. It also will be open 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the next two Saturdays — Oct. 29 and Nov. 5.
But very little is routine about American elections these days, and questions always come back to election security and accuracy.
County Board Member Jim Cavanaugh, a Democrat, asked Kruse if any fraud had been found locally in the 2020 election. Kruse said no. He elaborated on some of the measures his office takes.
“We have lots of checks and balances in place,” Kruse said. “We check signatures. We do an extensive canvass or audit process after the fact. We do tests before we use the machines and then we do hand counts on certain precincts and races that the secretary of state instructs us to do randomly.”
An Omahan who frequently comments at local public meetings, Larry Storer, told the County Board

Tuesday that he believes the 2020 election was stolen and that his faith in government, including locally, has been severely damaged.
That drew a strong reaction from Douglas County Board Chair Mary Ann Borgeson, a Republican and one of several board members from both parties who expressed their confidence in American elections.
"This really frustrates the heck out of me," Borgeson said. "There are very, very good people across this country ... that their sole job, like Brian's job, is to make sure that their communities', their counties' elections are safe and sound. This whole politics by fear, by conspiracy, by whatever you want to call it, has got to stop."
There are, Borgeson continued, "good people working for the good of the American people."
She said she appreciated Kruse's report to the board about how elections are run safely and securely in Douglas County.
"And I really do, I mean every day I hope that we can get back to being the kind of country that we were before all this nonsense," Borgeson said.
By Christopher Burbach

Lexington CH: Open Sky Policy Institute urges caution with tax receipts, school funding

LEXINGTON — The OpenSky Policy Institute recommends caution when it comes to Nebraska's September tax receipts and models being proposed on how to fund public education.
OpenSky's executive, Rebecca Firestone and deputy director, Chuck Brown, visited with the Lexington Clipper-Herald on Thursday, Oct. 20 about several issues concerning the state and spending.
Governor Pete Ricketts recently announced that the state's net revenue receipts for September 2022 topped projections by $110 million for the month. He also highlighted the "historic tax relief," that was delivered in the 2022 session.
OpenSky has questioned the tax relief, Firestone wrote, "When it came to getting money into the hands of everyday Nebraskans who need it coming out of the pandemic, the Legislature's actions this session didn't match the rhetoric espoused by many."
"But rather than invest in a broad array of proposals that would have immediately helped everyday Nebraskans, including measures to provide direct payments to residents and lower taxes for middle-income earners, the Legislature prioritized a bill that promises major future tax breaks for the wealthy, property owners and out-of-state corporations," Firestone wrote.
She also noted that policymakers left $275 million in surplus dollars sitting on the table that could have been used to provide relief for Nebraskans now.
As for the surplus of funds the state has access to, OpenSky notes that much of this is federal dollars that came in the form of relief due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This money was a short term boost for the state but will not be available in the future.
When looking ahead to the new legislative session, due to the economic uncertainty, Open Sky advocates for extending SNAP access and child care subsidies that are set to sunset in 2023.
Firestone said due to inflation, Nebraskans are forced to spend more on everyday items and letting aid end when it comes to food and child care could negatively impact many people.
This being an election year, there has been much discussion and proposals about funding public education in the state. Some ideas include a shift to a per-student funding system, but Open Sky suggests this could hurt students.

“Assuming the $1.07 billion in state school aid – including the nearly $900 million Nebraska provides in equalization aid – was divided equally among the roughly 310,000 students who attend Nebraska public schools, each student in the state would get about $3,450,” OpenSky states.
“Districts that currently receive equalization aid, which educate 78% of our state’s students including many with high needs, would lose about $270 million a year, OpenSky analysis shows. These districts would have to rely more on property taxes or make service cuts that could negatively affect student outcomes to offset the funding reductions,” OpenSky stated.
“Given that many equalized districts are already near their levy limits, these districts would likely have to ask voters to approve levy overrides to avoid damaging service cuts. The average levy override would need to be 41 cents in order to make up for the losses in state aid by providing aid on a per-student basis,” OpenSky analysis shows.
Firestone and Brown said that student’s education across the state is highly variable and introducing one-size-fits all approach could harm some students.
“It’s important that the state works to address its high reliance on property taxes to fund K-12 education. It’s also vital, however, that education funding reform discussions focus on the outcomes we want for students and how we can fund achieving these goals in an equitable way,” OpenSky states.
OpenSky Policy Institute
OpenSky is a non-partisan organization that advocates for a strong Nebraska through clear fiscal research and analysis.
By Brian Neben

GII: Friesen addresses Quandt's license plates concerns

A statewide aluminum shortage means Hall County residents getting new license plates starting in January may not get their same plate numbers again.
Sen. Curt Friesen was invited to Tuesday’s Hall County Board of Commissioners meeting by Commissioner Gary Quandt to address this issue, which will affect 13 counties.
Friesen, D-34, is chair of the Nebraska Legislature’s Transportation & Telecommunications Committee.
Quandt shared the concerns of his constituents who want to keep their plate numbers, such as Larry Rauert, who Quandt had also invited to Tuesday’s meeting.
Friesen called it “an unforeseen issue” and explained to Quandt that the situation is out of the state’s hands.
“It’s unfortunate that these counties have this problem. I recognize that. But there’s really nothing legislatively that can be done, even if they wanted to,” he said. “I just don’t see a path unless we really want to pony up a lot of dollars to try to fix this, but I don’t see it happening.”
Quandt made a motion that a letter be sent to Gov. Pete Ricketts “letting the governor know our concerns, as far as license plates and that we have people concerned that they’re not going to get their same license plate number.”
The motion did not receive a second and died.
Commissioner Scott Sorensen called it “a waste of county resources” and argued such a letter would “more than likely fall on deaf ears.”
Commissioner Jane Richardson argued that it could result in everyone going to alpha-numeric plates, as mandated in Douglas County and Lancaster County.

Friesen refuted the idea that people could get a personalized license plate, costing $40, with their current license plate number on it.
"You can order personalized license plates but you cannot choose the same number you would have gotten otherwise," he said. "Because if you could do that, I could suddenly choose to have a personalized plate with your number on it and that's not possible."
For Nebraska's alpha-numeric counties, license plates are printed in advance of January, explained Friesen.
"They take the number of registered vehicles in a county, they add 2% to it, and that's how many plates they print," he said. "They started printing those obviously because there's not much change there."
Hall County Treasurer Alaina Verplank told the board Tuesday that 20,700 plates for the first quarter of 2023 have been ordered, and 10,100 passenger plates.
"Right now, I have under 1,700 passenger plates left," she said. "When I run out of those, the state isn't going to keep making the (2017) series plates for me to issue next year, they're only going to make the 2023 series."
Verplank, who addressed the shortage at the board's Oct. 11 meeting, offered some optimism.
"Who is to say that next week we don't get our full supply of aluminum at the state and we get our full order that we need?" she said. "That would be amazing, and we may not. It may only affect a few people. It's not going to affect everybody. We will try the best that we can to accommodate everyone."
Commissioner Butch Hurst asked if a swap could be done.
"We used to be able to reissue plates. If your mom passed away and you wanted her plates, we could pass it down to you. In 2017, that stopped, so we can't reissue plates to new owners of vehicles. We would not be able to do that," said Verplank.
Quandt's guest, Larry Rauert, told the board how his family has had the same plate number for "almost 100 years."
Nebraska has been issuing license plates since 1915.
"It may not be a state law that I'm guaranteed these plates," he said, "however, when you have something that's been in your family for 100 years, as the story is ... That's a lot of history. It would be very disappointing."
He added, "I appreciate your efforts. I appreciate the senator's comments. I just hope there's some resolution that happens."
Commissioner Pam Lancaster said it is "not a big issue unless it affects you."
"Some people did treat their license plate like a personal license plate because our treasurers have been so tremendously wonderful about doing that deed for their constituents," she said. "It isn't always easy to teach 'mature' dogs new tricks. So I'll have to memorize a new plate, no doubt."
By Brandon Summers

AP: Nebraska struggling to OK ban despite anti-abortion history

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Republicans are expected to dominate as usual at the polls in November and retain control of the officially nonpartisan Legislature. They face a far tougher challenge flipping enough seats to push through a statewide abortion ban.
The Supreme Court decision overturning the constitutional right to abortion has injected a degree of uncertainty into elections, even in some of the nation's most reliably red states. Abortion opponents

in Nebraska are hoping to avoid a repeat of what happened this summer in neighboring Kansas, where voters overwhelming rejected a ballot measure that would have paved the way for an abortion ban there.

"Whether we like it or not, Nebraska is now a destination state for abortion," said David Zebolsky, chairman of Nebraskans Embracing Life. "We're supporting strong pro-life legislative candidates in the November election to change that."

Even with Republicans considered a lock to maintain control of Nebraska's unique one-chamber Legislature, they need to gain at least two seats to end the state's status as the nation's most unlikely harborage for abortion services. Under legislative rules, some measures — including an abortion ban — can be blocked by the minority if supporters don't get at least 33 votes in the 49-member Senate.

The Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade enabled other conservative states to quickly outlaw most abortions, but the Nebraska ban received only 31 votes — two short of the number needed to avoid a filibuster.

Nebraska Republicans' hopes to outlaw abortions were thwarted again weeks later, when Gov. Pete Ricketts opted not to call a special session to enact a ban because backers were, at that time, three votes short.

Such setbacks are odd given Nebraska's history as a leader in abortion restrictions. It enacted the country's first law banning abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy based on the disputed theory that a fetus at that point can feel pain.

The upcoming election could give supporters the votes they need for a ban, or it could leave Nebraska as a rare state where Republicans control nearly all aspects of government but allow abortions to continue.

Nebraska's tug-of-war over abortion comes at a time when the issue has roiled politics across the country. Besides Kansas, voters in Kentucky will decide next month the fate of a proposed constitutional amendment that would eliminate the right to abortion in the state. The red state of Montana will have a "born alive" measure on the ballot there, requiring health care providers to take "all medically appropriate and reasonable actions to preserve the life" of an infant born alive, including after an attempted abortion. Doctors have warned that the measure would force them to prolong the suffering of infants born with fatal deformities.

And in Georgia, which could decide control of the U.S. Senate, abortion has taken an outsized role in the neck-and-neck race between Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock and his Republican challenger, former football star Herschel Walker. Walker, a staunch anti-abortion proponent, has been plagued by recent claims that he paid for a woman's 2009 abortion and later fathered a child with her.

Republicans who have historically championed anti-abortion causes appeared to be caught flat-footed in the the wake of the judicial branch overturning Roe, a move that was unpopular with a majority of Americans according to polls taken ahead of the decision. An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll conducted after the ruling revealed a majority of Americans want Congress to pass a law guaranteeing access to legal abortion nationwide.

That polling has led Republican candidates who would normally tout their anti-abortion credentials to back away from the issue this election cycle. In Nebraska, some Republican candidates in and around Omaha and Lincoln, which are less conservative than the state's more rural reaches, are tailoring their messages on abortion with that in mind. Conversely, Democrats who would normally avoid the issue of abortion so as not to rile voters in a conservative state are now putting the issue front-and-center of their campaigns.

President Joe Biden promised during a speech last week in Washington to push a bill that codifies Roe v. Wade if Democrats control enough seats in Congress to pass it.
Omaha state Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh, one of the most vocal opponents of a failed "trigger bill" backed by Republicans last session that would have outlawed nearly all abortions, has placed her support for abortion access at the top of her campaign website. She cited an ACLU-commissioned poll in March that showed Nebraskans opposed to a total abortion ban by a 20-point margin.
Her opponent, Christian Mirch, had until recently been just as vocal about his support for banning abortion. He has attended anti-abortion rallies and stated in the Nebraska Catholic Voter Guide his support for an abortion ban "from the moment of conception." But he seems to have backpedaled on that stance in the wake of blowback from the the overturning of Roe.
"We've gotten away from that representative form of government in recent years," he said. "We can't be constituencies of one."
Asked about polling that shows most Americans opposing the overturning of Roe, Mirch countered that "we haven't done that polling in this district."
Cavanaugh said Mirch has been knocking on doors in the district and telling some voters that he and Cavanaugh have essentially the same views on abortion. Mirch said he simply has assured voters that he would not do anything that would endanger invitro fertilization treatments.
Cavanaugh isn't buying it.
"You don't lie about your position unless you know it's going to cost you votes," she said.
Of the 15 Nebraska lawmakers who voted to block the abortion ban bill, eight are facing reelection challenges or not running.
University of Nebraska-Lincoln political science professor John Hibbing said he expects Nebraska Republicans will pick up the seats they need to ban abortions, but he notes the Supreme Court ruling "has put pressure on Republicans that they haven't felt before."
Since the ruling, Planned Parenthood clinics in Lincoln and Omaha — two of the three in Nebraska that provide abortion services — have seen an increase in the number of people from outside the state seeking them. Andi Curry Grubb, the executive director of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Nebraska, said many of the women the clinics are seeing have few resources to allow them to travel hundreds of miles from their homes.
"I know we had one patient who drove a U-Haul from Texas to Nebraska to get to one of our clinics, because it was the only vehicle they could rent within a reasonable price range," Grubb said. "You get that sense that the burden in on people who need access to care the most."
By Margery A. Beck

OWH: Overtime at three Nebraska agencies costs state millions

LINCOLN — Three state agencies racked up some $28 million worth of overtime hours during the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2020, according to a legislative watchdog committee.
That's on top of the $28 million and $23 million overtime totals that the Departments of Correctional Services, Health and Human Services and Transportation accumulated during the two prior years.
The Nebraska Legislature's Performance Audit Committee issued a report this week looking at overtime trends in the three agencies with the largest amount of overtime spending. The report was released without comments or recommendations from the committee.
However, it showed the agencies' dependence on overtime to compensate for vacant positions and

employee absences or to meet peak workload demands. Overtime spending accounted for up to 10% of the agencies' personnel budgets.
The Performance Audit Committee requested a follow-up study looking at how raises negotiated last year have affected the trends. The raises targeted several front-line positions in corrections and HHS, which struggled with staffing even before the pandemic-driven labor shortages.
The Corrections Department, which operates nine prisons in five communities across Nebraska, relied the most heavily on overtime by most of the measures studied in the report.
Corrections spent more than twice as much on overtime each year than either of the two other agencies, with amounts increasing from $13 million in fiscal year 2017-18, the first year studied, up to $15.5 million in fiscal year 2019-20, the last year. Overtime accounted for about 10% of the agency's personnel budget.
The report also showed that 80% of the 2,300 corrections employees worked some overtime hours. Front-line workers, particularly corporals, unit caseworkers, officers, sergeants and unit case managers, accounted for the bulk of the time.
In corrections, three-quarters of employees added less than $10,000 to their paychecks through overtime. But 15 workers bulked up their salaries by $50,000 or more in at least one of the three years. The top earner, a unit case manager, collected $91,199 in overtime pay during the 2017-18 fiscal year.
HHS, the largest state agency, operates seven 24-hour facilities, including psychiatric hospitals, facilities for juvenile offenders and a center for people with developmental disabilities. Those facilities accounted for the bulk of the agency's overtime spending.
The agency's overtime grew from $5 million in the first year studied to $7.4 million two years later and amounted to 2% to 3% of the personnel budget, the report showed.
HHS had the largest number of employees — more than 2,200 — working overtime in two of the years studied. But it also had the smallest percentages. Between 32% and 40% of the agency's 4,600 employees worked overtime, with most holding jobs on the front line in institutions.
While 93% of HHS employees earned less than $10,000 from overtime, four made about $50,000 or more. The top earner, a mental health security specialist, pulled in $69,217 in fiscal year 2019-20.
Transportation employees, who plan, build and maintain state roads and bridges, accumulated overtime largely because of seasonal work demands, such as construction projects, snow removal and responding to weather-related damage to the state's highway system.
The agency's overtime spending was highest in the middle year — $6.6 million — and lowest in the first year — $4.9 million. It ranged from 5% to 6% of the personnel budget.
Between 61% and 70% of the agency's 2,000 employees worked overtime in the years studied, but 93% earned less than $10,000 from those hours. The top earner, a highway construction technician, brought in $39,688 from overtime in fiscal year 2018-19.
By Martha Stoddard

LJS: Courts dismiss Title IX lawsuit alleging UNL acted with 'deliberate indifference'

A federal judge last month dismissed a lawsuit against the University of Nebraska-Lincoln alleging deliberate indifference in how university officials investigated a report of sexual misconduct on campus.
Chief U.S. District Judge Robert Rossiter Jr. ruled in September that a 2020 lawsuit failed to provide sufficient evidence showing action or inaction by UNL denied a student the benefits of an education,

guaranteed by Title IX.
The deadline for the unidentified woman, who reported a sexual assault and stalking, to appeal Rossiter's ruling passed earlier this month.
According to the lawsuit, the woman who was formerly enrolled at the UNL College of Law said she was possibly drugged before being sexually assaulted at the apartment of a male student in September 2018.
The woman said she was later stalked by the man — who was not charged with a crime and is not being named — at friends' apartments or at the College of Law, where he was also a student.
In October 2018, the woman told another student about the alleged stalking, and that student relayed the report to Marc Pearce, an assistant dean for student affairs at the College of Law.
Pearce, according to the lawsuit, spoke directly to the male student and offered the woman links to various resources on campus. He also reported the allegations to UNL's Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance, which is charged with investigating sexual misconduct on campus.
A few months later, in early 2019, Pearce met with the woman, and she told him about the alleged stalking she experienced, but she did not mention the alleged sexual assault, according to the lawsuit.
Pearce referred the woman to UNL's Title IX office, where an investigation was initiated, but the woman did not ask for any accommodations at that time, her complaint indicated, believing action would be taken.
The woman left UNL in March 2019 and did not return for the fall semester. She reportedly told friends she felt uncomfortable with the male student knowing where she lived as well as her academic schedule.
An investigation by UNL's Title IX office concluded in August 2019. In a 53-page report, senior investigator Meagan Counley informed both the woman and the man that "there was insufficient evidence" to determine the woman had been drugged.
Counley also informed both parties "the greater weight of the evidence supported" the woman was not incapacitated when she engaged in sexual activity with the man, finding there was insufficient evidence to hold the man liable.
The woman appealed the decision to Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Jake Johnson, who affirmed Counley's decision.
Rossiter, in his ruling, said the university did not remain idle after receiving a report of the alleged assault and stalking.
While the process wasn't flawless — Rossiter noted Pearce failed to immediately forward the accusations on to UNL's Title IX office, but pointed out an investigation was launched immediately after he did so — the judge said it did not rise to the level of "deliberate indifference."
UNL made reasonable accommodations to the woman, Rossiter added, even as it did not grant her everything she requested, such as removing the male student from the university, which he said "presented a risk of violating (his) constitutional or statutory rights."
Rossiter granted summary judgment to UNL and dismissed the case.
UNL has faced several accusations in recent years from female students who have alleged systemic failures in how the university investigated sexual misconduct on campus.
The women have criticized UNL for using an investigatory process that placed blame on victims and said investigators were too deferential to alleged perpetrators.
Most of the claims filed in those lawsuits have been dismissed, however.
Earlier this year, Rossiter tossed a majority of the Title IX claims made against UNL by nine women,

including a former Husker volleyball player, who said the university failed to take action because the reported accusers were male student-athletes.
Although that case drew a rare filing from the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, which accused UNL of misapplying Title IX case law in its investigations, only two women's complaints were allowed to move forward.
In another case, filed in 2021, U.S. District Court Judge John Gerrard tossed a Title IX complaint against UNL but allowed other civil rights claims to move forward in a lawsuit filed by a former Ph.D. student who reported being sexually harassed by her adviser.
Both cases remain open in U.S. District Court.
By Chris Dunker

LJS: COVID-19 cases tick back up in Lincoln

COVID-19 cases rose last week locally for the first time in nearly two months.
The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department reported 205 cases for the week ending Saturday, up from 169 the previous week. It was the first weekly increase since the week ending Aug. 27. The department also said it saw a slight increase in the number of virus particles detected in wastewater this week compared with last week.
The seven-day average of hospitalizations for COVID-19 also increased from 31 to 34.
Despite the increases in cases and hospitalizations, the Health Department kept its COVID-19 risk dial in the low-yellow range for the second week in a row.
The local case numbers are similar to those statewide.
The number of COVID-19 cases in Nebraska rose last week to 1,140, an 8% increase from 1,052 the previous week, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That ended a six-week streak of declining case numbers.
Nebraska's COVID-19 hospitalization numbers remained flat, with an average of 130 Nebraskans hospitalized daily with the virus. The state also recorded seven new deaths last week.
Even though COVID-19 hospitalizations have stayed stable for months, hospital usage is still high. More than 80% of intensive-care beds in Lancaster County have been occupied on a daily basis for more than a week.
There has already been an early season uptick in both flu and RSV cases locally and statewide, and health experts are worried that an increase in COVID-19 cases on top of that could put a severe strain on hospitals.
That's why local officials have been encouraging people to get flu shots and a COVID-19 booster shot.
"Respiratory viruses spread more easily this time of year, and we expect to have both COVID-19 and flu in our community at the same time," Health Director Pat Lopez said in a news release. "Staying up to date on COVID-19 vaccines, including boosters, and getting our yearly flu vaccine are actions we can take to help keep us active and healthy now and throughout the holiday season."
By Matt Olberding

LJS: Wildfire that burned parts of Gage, Lancaster counties was accidental, investigators say

The wildfire that started in Gage County and burned its way to the Olive Creek State Recreation Area

on Sunday afternoon was an accident, according to the State Fire Marshal Agency.
The fire — which forced evacuations, injured two Crete volunteer firefighters and destroyed three homes in southern Lancaster County — resulted from a person shredding on a Gage County acreage, said Adam Matzner, the Fire Marshal's chief fire investigator.
A farmer had been operating a shredder near Southwest 86th Street and West Apple Road in Gage County on Sunday when weeds or grass being shredded ignited from a spark, starting the destructive blaze, Matzner said.
The fire then spread north into Lancaster County, where it burned parts of a 6-square-mile area between Southwest 86th and Southwest 100th streets from Gage Road to Panama Road, sheriff's Capt. Mike Scriven said.
At least two of the three houses destroyed were in the same stretch of West Wendelin Road, just off Southwest 100th Street.
The two firefighters were injured after the wind shifted and a strong gust blew the flames toward them as they fought the Olive Creek fire, Crete Fire Chief Tod Allen said Monday evening.
Firefighter Brad Elder suffered burns on 20% of his body — mainly his legs and lower back — and remained hospitalized Monday evening, Allen said. The department has organized an online fundraiser to help Elder with medical expenses.
The fire was fueled by exceptionally dry conditions, unseasonably warm temperatures and a ceaseless wind.
A red flag warning had been in effect for central and eastern Nebraska, including Lancaster County, on Sunday. The National Weather Service said winds from the south gusted as high as 55 mph.
Though the full extent of the damage caused by the fire remained unclear Monday, officials emphasized that the quick actions of scores of firefighters and area farmers prevented further devastation.
"Farmers in the area did a great job of, on their own, getting into tractors, getting their discs out and creating firebreaks around residences in that area," Sheriff Terry Wagner said at a Monday morning news conference.
Olive Creek State Recreation Area and Olive Creek Wildlife Management Area will remain open, officials with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission said Tuesday. The boat ramp and campgrounds were not damaged in the fire, but visitors are encouraged to use caution.
By Andrew Wegley

OWH: Omaha tourism rebounded to near pre-pandemic levels in '21

Tourism numbers in 2021 bounced back to near pre-pandemic levels in the Omaha area, the Omaha Convention & Visitors Bureau announced Tuesday.
Last year, 12.7 million visitors came to the city and Douglas County. That total represents a 95% rebound to the record level of 2019 — the last full year before the COVID-19 pandemic hit — when 13.4 million visitors came to the city.
Nearly 2 million more visitors came to Omaha in 2021 than in 2020.
Not surprisingly, the rebound in visitor traffic also led to more tourism spending. In 2021, tourists in the area spent about $1.25 billion. That's slightly below the approximately $1.35 billion tourists spent in 2019 but significantly up from the $947 million that was spent in 2020.
"When you consider that 2019 was a record-breaking year for Omaha tourism, both in visitor volume and visitor spending, to see numbers reflect this level of recovery is a testament to our city and

county's resolve and resilience," said Deborah Ward, the executive director of the convention and visitors bureau, also known as Visit Omaha.
Lodging and recreation were two of the biggest industries that rebounded from tough years in 2020. Tourists collectively spent more than $252 million on lodging in 2021. That was 94% more money than they spent on lodging in 2020 and just 5% below 2019 levels.
Tourists spent $191 million on recreation in 2021. That marked a 40% increase compared to 2020. Ward credited a plethora of events that returned to Omaha in 2021, including youth sports, the U.S. Olympic Swim Trials and the College World Series, for getting tourists to visit.
"In addition to pent-up demand, I think people just wanted to get out of the house in 2021," she said. "We had a lot of sports."
The increased number of tourists and tourism spending also led to an increase in the number of jobs in the community. The number of jobs at hotels, restaurants, retailers and attractions increased by 1,100 for a total of 10,450 as a direct result of visitor spending in 2021.
The job total represents just 80% of what the city and county enjoyed before the pandemic. The convention and visitors bureau said employers struggled to fill positions in 2021.
By Dan Crisler

OWH: Non-existent problem

Gail Rule (Pulse, Sept. 30) responded to my Pulse letter titled "Unintended Consequences", regarding the Voter ID initiative on the Nov. 8 ballot. Ms. Rule supports this proposed amendment to our constitution. I do not.
Governor Ricketts' mother donated over $300,000 to get this initiative on the ballot. Vanguard Field Strategies, a political consulting firm, provided training and vetting of petitioners. Vanguard also pays petitioners $5 a signature, $200 per day up to $1,000 a week. Check their website. Rule stated she was a volunteer gathering signatures.
Rule stated 35 states have Voter ID laws. This is true. The states have various rules and regulations. Some strict and others not so strict.
There have been and are lawsuits in these various states against these laws. Some parts of laws have been thrown out. The Justice Department is suing Arizona, stating the law is a textbook violation of the National Voter Registration Act. Just this last week, Montana courts threw out three laws as being unconstitutional. You can track lawsuits using the Brennan Center for Justice Voter Rights Litigation Tracker. Do we Nebraskans really want the inevitable lawsuits? I don't.
Rule thinks this initiative will provide more security to our system. Go to your election commission for the multiple layers of security we already have in Nebraska. Or check Civic Nebraska's site.
We do not have an appreciable fraud problem. Do you really think many people will risk getting a Class 4 felony to commit voter fraud? Do you really want a law that our legislature will decide the rules after the initiative is passed? How will it affect you? We don't know.
This is a proposed solution to a non existent problem. Please vote against this initiative.
Jean Reiner, Omaha

LJS Editorial, 10/26: Violent crime stats useful only in context

Is Lincoln safe?
It's a simple question. The answer, though, is complicated.

It's complicated by definitions. It's complicated by the very statistics used to measure it. And it's complicated by a debate where public safety can take a back seat to politics.
Ten homicides by mid-October of this year puts Lincoln in jeopardy of meeting or exceeding the 11 homicides recorded in 2016, Lincoln's worst year for them. And homicides, by the nature of their severity and rarity, still make headlines. Thankfully, because their numbers are still relatively small, one more or one fewer looks like a lot in terms of percentages or rate per 100,000 people.
But as Journal Star reporter Andrew Wegley reported Sunday ("Despite deadly summer, violent crime on decline"), despite some minor fluctuations, the number of violent crimes reported in Lincoln has been steady even as the city added roughly 100,000 residents. That means the violent crime rate has gone down.
Wegley noted the violent crime rate in 1995 was 626 incidents reported per 100,000 residents versus 372 last year.
Statistically, that's a dramatic improvement. But a clustering of high-profile crimes — particularly homicides — may give residents a very different impression today. On top of that, fatal car accidents — while not violent crime — add to a sense of danger some may feel.
In some ways, Lincoln is caught in a demographic no man's land. The city has grown to where there is a large enough sample size of some crimes to draw meaningful conclusions. But it's small enough that for the most serious crimes, it's still hard to see any meaningful trend from year to year.
In addition, shifting methods of tracking crime and recording data can make the numbers harder to compare.
So, let's get back to the original question: Is Lincoln safe?
There are causes for concern — gun violence and gang activity to name two — that police discussed with the Journal Star.
But crime — particularly violent crime — remains rare enough in our community that it still makes headlines. That's why it makes a mark in our minds. By a fair accounting, though, it's actually down. And it's important to keep that in perspective.
We need to measure crime. We need to talk about crime, honestly, constructively and without fear-mongering. And we need to act — not because we have an enormous problem but to keep the problem from eroding our quality of life.

LJS Local View: Journey starts at a library

As young girls, we both sat among the library stacks to read stories of "Heidi" and "Anne of Green Gables" — lingered over tales that made us daydream — blasted off on adventures — battled monsters — puzzled through mysteries.
It was in the library that we first encountered the faraway worlds of "A Wrinkle in Time" and "Charlotte's Web" — found life lessons in "The Secret Garden" and "The Little Prince" — sobbed over "Old Yeller" and "The Call of the Wild."
It was in the library that we found magic, a place anyone in our community could come — can still come — open up a book and follow road maps to strange and faraway places, find answers to perplexing questions, meet marvelous characters who enchant us.
And part of the wonder, of course, is that anyone is trusted to borrow books from Lincoln City Libraries — for the most astonishing stretches of time. Libraries are like free bookstores where you can borrow the material and then return the product. You don't have to pay to come inside. You don't have to buy anything. You can study and work there. You can go just to think, or to be quiet.

In a town whose population is nearly 300,000, almost two-thirds of its people hold library cards: more than 213,000 registered borrowers. These library card holders make nearly 700,000 library visits and borrow more than 2.8 million books and other materials each year.

With gas, grocery and energy costs rising and many people stressed about the economy and inflation, it's almost unbelievable to know we can go to our local public library and leave with an armful of books — no charge, no toll, no co-pay, no price tag. Whether you're looking for books, a public computer terminal, Wi-Fi or help finding tax forms, when you enter a public library, it's all free.

In fact, of all its public institutions, perhaps America's most enduring are its libraries. From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. — the largest library in the country — to each neighborhood branch of Lincoln City Libraries, libraries are not just about four walls and a roof. They are powerful symbols of the value of shared civic space, the right to free thought and expression, and the collection and distribution of knowledge for the public good.

U.S. libraries arose out of the democratic beliefs in an informed public, social and intellectual advancement and participation in the democratic process.

Public access to books is not new. Almost every great civilization built libraries as repositories of knowledge. Some were so large and comprehensive that their legend lives on today, such as the Library of Alexandria in Egypt, which is one of the world's most famous libraries.

The first libraries in America were paid subscription libraries, which meant only the wealthy could access them. In 1833, Peterborough, New Hampshire, created the first town library funded by a municipality. And in 1848, Boston Public Library became the first free municipal library in a large city. These libraries were historical firsts and set the tone for the public libraries we know and love today.

Over the years, libraries across the country — including Lincoln's — discovered new programs to bring people together, such as book clubs, author visits, summer reading programs for kids and initiatives such as One Book — One Lincoln.

We remember the very first One Book — One Lincoln selection in 2002, "Plainsong," a story that eloquently encouraged adults throughout our community to read and discuss the same book at the same time. Over the past 20 years, many other powerful One Book winners have captured our hearts, such as "Bel Canto," "The Kite Runner" and "The Devil in the White City."

This year's winner, "The Lincoln Highway" by Amor Towles, brings our community together in a unique way. The book actually starts in Nebraska and weaves its way cross-country on a road trip to redemption.

Of course, all books take us on a road trip, of sorts, as they open doors into new worlds — and libraries are where those magical worlds are housed.

That magic is waiting for you. The Lincoln City Libraries touch almost every resident and permeate every corner of our city. We invite our community to join us, come in, and take an adventure with us.

Jackie Ostrowicki is a Lincoln City Libraries Board of Trustees member. Mary Kay Roth is a One Book-One Lincoln selection committee member.

AP: Protest ban at Florida university after anti-Sasse rally

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (AP) — The University of Florida is going to start enforcing a decades-old prohibition against indoor protests following a raucous demonstration earlier this month against the selection of U.S. Sen. Ben Sasse as a finalist for the school president's job.

Sasse, a Republican in his second Senate term, has drawn criticism from some at the school for his opposition to same-sex marriage.

The current university president, Kent Fuch, said Monday in a letter to the university community that a protest at a forum where Sasse was taking questions on Oct. 10 made it difficult to hear the Nebraska senator's responses as demonstrators were banging their fists on windows, walls and furniture.

Because of the demonstration involving 1,000 protesters, the discussion had to be moved online and shortened.

While the university supports the First Amendment right to free speech, "with this commitment comes an obligation to protect the rights of everyone in our community to speak and to hear," Fuchs said.

Paul Ortiz, president of the local faculty union at the university, said the student protesters were inaccurately characterized by university officials "in an unfair and demeaning manner."

"One either believes in the First Amendment or one does not," said Ortiz, a history professor. "Student, staff and faculty attempts to engage with Senator Sasse and the administration in a very important process were and are being rebuffed."

The regulation against protests inside campus buildings has been on the books for two decades, but it wasn't enforced in recent years because protesters "were respectful of others and their rights to speak and to hear," Fuchs said.

The policy will be enforced next week when the school's board of trustees meets to consider Sasse's candidacy, and students who violate it may be subject to discipline, Fuchs said.

Sasse called the U.S. Supreme Court's 2015 decision legalizing same-sex marriage "a disappointment to Nebraskans who understand that marriage brings a wife and husband together so their children can have a mom and dad."

He also declared as unnecessary a bill protecting same-sex marriage that cleared the U.S. House in July.

When asked at the University of Florida forum earlier this month whether he opposes same-sex marriage, Sasse noted that it is now national law as ruled upon by the Supreme Court and that his goal is to create a "place of respect and inclusion for all Gators," referring to the school's nickname.

Others question his qualifications to run such a sprawling school with more than 50,000 students, and the secretive selection process used in choosing Sasse. A new Florida law allows universities to conduct much of the process outside of the state's open meetings and public records laws.

Sasse, 50, was previously president of Midland University in Fremont, Nebraska, which has just over 1,600 students.