From: Kopsa, Ryan
To: Kopsa, Ryan
Cc: Pinkerman, Justin
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 7-9-20
Date: Thursday, July 9, 2020 8:19:43 AM
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Ag Valley Co-op
Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jul 2020	3.31	-21.00	08:07
Corn	Dec 2020	3.19	-41.00	08:07
Milo	Jul 2020	3.37	-15.00	08:07
Milo	Dec 2020	3.45	-15.00	08:07
Soybeans	Jul 2020	8.03	-98.00	08:06
Soybeans	Dec 2020	8.25	-80.00	08:07
Wheat	Jul 2020	4.17	-44.00	08:06
Wheat	Jul 2021	4.11	-80.00	07:59

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KSNB: Holdrege celebrates new rural workforce housing
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OWH: Has Ricketts overstepped his authority in allocating $1 billion of coronavirus relief?

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts has already outlined his plan for distributing $1 billion in emergency aid provided by the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to help struggling Nebraskans.
But did he have the authority to do that?
That's a question being raised around the State Capitol and it has prompted a request for a legal opinion from the Nebraska Attorney General's Office about whether the governor's decisions should be subject to approval by the Nebraska Legislature.
A spokesman for the governor said Ricketts does have the legal authority to make decisions on using the federal money.
But State Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha cited several conflicting clauses in state law and in the Nebraska Constitution in his request for the legal opinion. Others raising questions include James Goddard, a lawyer with the Lincoln-based Nebraska Appleseed, and University of Nebraska-Lincoln law professor Anthony Schutz.
Among the conflicting legal guidance being cited: The Nebraska Constitution requires that the Legislature approve any specific appropriations, but a budget bill passed last year gives the governor the authority to direct the spending of any federal dollars not specifically sent to a state agency.
"It's sort of a question about whether this is an animal, a plant or mineral," said Lathrop.
He said his motivation is not to second-guess how Ricketts has planned to mete out the funds, but to clarify whether state lawmakers have a legal role in deciding how the $1 billion will be spent. He asked for an opinion to be issued prior to July 20, when state lawmakers reconvene for the final 17 days of

their 2020 session."I don't think it's clear. That's why I asked for the opinion," said Lathrop, who is a trial attorney and heads the Legislature's Judiciary Committee. "We don't want to spend it one way and find ourselves in some sort of a lawsuit over whether the governor had the authority."

Ricketts' decisions regarding the CARES Act have already generated some controversy. He told counties that if they mandate the wearing of protective masks in courthouses and other county buildings, they won't get any CARES Act money from him, a decision that was picked up by media nationwide. Also, the governor disregarded federal guidance that at least $400 million in the CARES money should be allocated to COVID-19 expenses of local governments, saying that $100 million would cover their costs and that struggling businesses and livestock producers needed more help.

A spokesman for the governor cited not only the language in the budget bill that allows a governor to spend federal money, but also the state's Emergency Management Act, which allows the governor, during an emergency, to "suspend" state statutes so action can be taken immediately to address a crisis.

Taylor Gage, the governor's spokesman, said the Legislature has a standing practice of allowing governors to spend federal funds when lawmakers are not in session or during an emergency.

"Under the federal CARES Act, the U.S. Treasury allocated funds to Gov. Pete Ricketts as the authorized representative of the State of Nebraska for the limited purpose of responding to the coronavirus pandemic," he added.

Gering Sen. John Stinner, who heads the legislative committee that draws up the state budget, said he also believes that the governor has the power to spend the CARES Act money but that it's not a bad idea to get an attorney general's opinion based on the questions being raised.

Stinner added that he expects debate during the upcoming session about the portion of the CARES Act allocations that Ricketts has not specifically earmarked. The governor set aside $427 million for two purposes — to help replenish the state's unemployment insurance fund, which has been depleted by a record number of claims by laid-off and furloughed Nebraskans; and to possibly cover state tax revenue shortfalls, if Congress reverses course and allows CARES Act money to be used for that purpose.

Other allocations made by the governor include $85 million for community needs, such as food and housing, $230 million to stabilize small businesses and $100 million to provide aid to livestock producers. He has also set aside $40 million to improve broadband Internet service in rural areas.

Goddard, of Nebraska Appleseed, said the governor is clearly overreaching his authority in acting without seeking legislative approval and that his advocacy group wouldn't rule out taking legal action. State statutes, he said, never anticipated this huge pot of money being at the discretion of the governor alone.

"We have constitution requirements: The Legislature appropriates and the governor executes," Goddard said, adding that Appleseed, and several other groups, would like to testify at a public hearing on how the money should be spent.

Other states are all over the map in how they allocated their CARES Act money, which might reflect differing laws and constitutional clauses.

In Iowa and South Dakota, governors made the decision. But in Wyoming, a special session of the Legislature was called to approve how CARES Act money was handed out, and in North Dakota, an emergency committee, headed by the governor but including state lawmakers, made the call.

By Paul Hammel

NP Telegraph: State of Nebraska honors North Platte for continued leadership in economic development

Years of collaborative efforts to drive developments in health care, housing and downtown revitalization have earned the City of North Platte state recognition, according to a press release. This week, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development announced the City's ongoing membership in the

State's Economic Development Certified Community (EDCC) program. EDCC Program Coordinator and DED Business Development Consultant Ashley Rice-Gerlach and Governor Pete Ricketts' West-Central Director Brittany Hardin honored community leaders during a special presentation Tuesday.

North Platte is one of 40 Nebraska communities to earn EDCC status in the program, sponsored by the Nebraska Diplomats and administered by DED. State officials established the EDCC program in 2005 to recognize communities for preparedness to attract new industries and grow existing businesses. As part of the certification process, qualifying communities must identify a well-defined program that actively engages with the existing business community and offers a supportive environment for welcoming new economic development projects. This includes documenting available sites and buildings, local financing and incentive programs and a strategic plan for economic development. North Platte received original EDCC certification in 2010 and earned recertification in 2015 and 2020.

Over the past five years, collaborative efforts between local economic leaders, city officials and private industry partners contributed to development opportunities in downtown North Platte.

For example, a cooperative effort between the city, the Downtown Association and the North Platte Area Chamber and Development Corporation spearheaded an ongoing $4 million revitalization project in the community's soon-to-be designated "Canteen District." The façade restoration project allowed for the removal of outdoor steel awnings, which had canopied storefronts for nearly 50 years. The project also incentivized business owners to begin historic building restorations in the century-old downtown area. In addition to local economic development assistance, the City received Community Development Block Grant funding from DED for a portion of the project's planning and construction.

Following years of tax liens and tax debts encompassing the downtown's historic abandoned Pawnee Hotel, the Chamber and Development Corporation purchased the building's tax certificate to remove lien holders and sell property rights. Doing so paved the way for redevelopment of the 90-year-old hotel. Major renovations were also completed in the area's historic Fox Theater and Prairie Arts Center buildings, made possible by local investors, grants and volunteers.

"Downtown developments not only demonstrate the city of North Platte's preparedness for economic growth in the EDCC program, but also pay tribute to its rich history in a city known for its civic and community service," said Nebraska Diplomats President Dan Duncan. "Through these ongoing restorations, local leaders have an opportunity to honor past generations and provide current and future business owners with a platform for growth in the Canteen District."

A three-phase economic project in the Chamber and Development Corporation-owned Twin Rivers Business Park includes commercial developments on Halligan Drive, as well as a new warehouse district currently under construction. The multi-million-dollar project, led by Chief Industries/Prataria Ventures, will also include construction of a retirement village.

The Chamber and Development Corporation's working relationship with Union Pacific Railroad led to the establishment of a new proposed industrial rail park in Lincoln County. The park's establishment will serve as an additional tool to recruit new industries in the North Platte area, which will complement a number of additional business parks with highway and air transportation opportunities. A $100,000 environmental studies and master planning effort is currently underway through the Nebraska Public Power District's Site Ready Assistance Program, made possible by a $25,000 NPPD planning grant and a local $75,000 Quality Growth Fund grant.

An additional enhancement to air service was accomplished by the city of North Platte Airport Authority, with the recruitment of United Express Airlines/Sky West creating twice-daily direct flights in and out of Denver.

North Platte Area Chamber and Development President and CEO Gary Person says leaders' ongoing collaboration exemplifies the community's overall strategy for economic growth.

"I'm proud of our team for taking this process to heart and setting a standard of excellence in our

approach to economic development," Person said. "The North Platte area has a strong private-public partnership, and it works. When you have community leaders pulling in the same direction you can get things done, instead of fighting turf protection battles. We have laid some significant groundwork and came up with a five-year strategic action plan for 2020-2025, and we are excited to act upon each of those 29 specific goals. It will be critical to pass the renewal of the LB840 Quality Growth Fund in November to carry out many of these goals."

The Chamber and Development Corporation's "Shot in the Arm" housing incentive program continues to provide new living opportunities for local families. Since its inception, the program has established 60 new single-family speculative units and a 48-unit multifamily development project. Phase two of the project came to fruition through local and state partnerships totaling $1.2 million in incentives, including $383,400 in assistance from the State of Nebraska's Rural Workforce Housing Fund. The City of North Platte's LB840 fund, Chamber and Development Investment Partners, Union Pacific Railroad and Great Plains Health generated remaining investments for the project.

Successful efforts in establishing North Platte as a regional medical center were made possible by a $125 million new medical facility at GPH. Since the tower completion in 2015, GPH has been recognized regionally and nationally for innovative developments in the facility's medical services and hospital's patient services. Vetter Health Services' expansion of the facility's short and long-term service capabilities also positively impacted the medical community. GPH, Mid-Plains Community College and the University of Nebraska Medical Center were instrumental in implementing a new, certified four-year nursing program to compliment an existing two-year nursing program.

Career Academies established at North Platte Public Schools have increased student exposure to vocational and business training opportunities. The program has encouraged partnerships with 66 local businesses, engaging youth in internships, job shadowing and workforce development training.

Over the past five years, local investors established 121 businesses and nearly 900 jobs in North Platte. In addition, the community has been positively impacted by $142 million in capital investments. Since 2015, the costs of 27 commercial projects have exceeded $500,000 apiece.

"The Economic Development Certified Community status for North Platte is an important standard for us to achieve; it demonstrates our preparedness to meet the challenges of growing and developing our local economy," said North Platte Mayor Dwight Livingston. "This accomplishment also is a testament to the outstanding cooperation between our city, county and schools — all working together as a team with our local business community and its leadership. The preparation, hard work and dedication that was needed to achieve this certification also prepares us strategically to move forward over the next five years; I feel confident we are moving the community in a positive direction."

The Chamber and Development Corporation led recent efforts to assist local businesses in response to COVID-19 through the Quality Growth Fund. A technical assistance incentive program connected proprietors with financial institutions to apply for the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loans. The Chamber and Development Corporation provided additional help through a gift card business boost program, which offered up to $2,000 in gift card reimbursements for local merchants. The programs have aided 227 area businesses so far.

Chamber and Development Corporation Board Chairman Dr. Rich Raska said the community's vast leadership continues to drive growth in the area, and played a role in the City's most recent EDCC designation.

"This has been a direct result of the tireless efforts of our Board of Directors, committees, and our hard-working staff over the past five years," Raska said. "I commend the work of the countless hours of strategic planning and look forward to North Platte achieving economic success in the years to come."

For additional information on the Economic Development Certified Community Program, contact Ashley Rice-Gerlach at 308-655-0919 or ashley.gerlach@nebraska.gov; or

visit opportunity.nebraska.gov/program/economic-development-certified-community-edcc/.

LJS: BD partners with federal agency to invest $70M in Nebraska plants to make needles, syringes

BD announced Wednesday that it will be making $70 million in upgrades to its Nebraska manufacturing facilities to develop new manufacturing lines to ensure a steady supply of syringes and needles during the coronavirus pandemic.

The New Jersey-based company said it has formed a strategic public-private partnership with the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, which is part of the U.S. Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response.

As part of the alliance, BARDA will contribute $42 million of the $70 million cost of the improvements, which are expected to take a year to complete.

Once the new lines are up and running, they will produce hundreds of millions of syringes and needles annually to support current and future pandemic vaccination efforts, and BARDA will have priority access to the products.

BD did not say whether it will invest in all of its Nebraska facilities or just some of them. The company has four manufacturing plants in the state — two in Columbus and one each in Holdrege and Broken Bow — that employ more than 2,500 people combined. It also did not say if the expansion would add jobs.

Gov. Pete Ricketts lauded the company's plans.

“Right now, the entire world is focused on developing a vaccine, so we can win the war against coronavirus. From the beginning when Americans abroad came to Omaha and Ashland to quarantine, Nebraska has played an important role during the pandemic," he said in a statement. "Thank you to BD for choosing Nebraska for this investment, which will play a pivotal role in quickly delivering vaccines to the marketplace.”

BD also said Wednesday it finalized an initial pandemic order for 50 million needles and syringes to be delivered by the end of December to support the U.S. vaccination effort for COVID-19. The order will be fulfilled through BD's current manufacturing capacity.

"BD's commitment to produce 50 million vaccine injection devices by the end of this year to support the U.S. COVID-19 vaccination campaign is the latest effort in the company's multifaceted global response to this virus, and the new, strategic public-private partnership will help ensure the U.S. is prepared for future pandemic vaccination efforts," said Rick Byrd, president of Medication Delivery Solutions for BD.

"Over the past four years, BD has committed to invest more than $340 million in our Nebraska facilities. We are extremely proud of our talented and dedicated workforce in Nebraska and our longstanding partnership with the state, and we look forward to building on our strong presence and track record in Nebraska as we move forward."

Sen. Ben Sasse called the partnership "good news, because it will help us beat this nasty virus once we have a vaccine while making a big investment in Nebraska’s workers."

"This effort will take a heavy lift, and I’m grateful our state is going to play a big role,” he said.

By Matt Olberding

OWH: $70 million partnership to boost Nebraska operations, produce injection devices for COVID-19 vaccine

A company with manufacturing sites in Nebraska will play an important role in producing millions of needles and syringes needed to deliver vaccines for the coronavirus.

Medical technology company Becton Dickinson & Co. announced Wednesday that a partnership between the company and the federal government will pour $70 million into expanding operations and production lines at the company's Nebraska facilities to make injection devices — the syringes, needles, cannulas and other components used for vaccines and other shots.

Plans still are being finalized, but the expansion most likely will focus on the company's facilities in Columbus and Holdrege that already produce needles and syringes.

Becton Dickinson & Co., also known as BD, employs approximately 3,200 workers at its four facilities in Nebraska — the Holdrege facility, two campuses in Columbus and another in Broken Bow. The facilities produce a variety of medical supplies, including insulin syringes for diabetics, tubes for blood collection and saline flush products.

It's still unclear how many new jobs, if any, the expansion will create.

"We are extremely proud of our talented and dedicated workforce in Nebraska and our longstanding partnership with the state, and we look forward to building on our strong presence and track record in Nebraska as we move forward," Rick Byrd, the company's president of medication delivery solutions, said in a statement.

The arrangement will give the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), part of the U.S. Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, a direct and steady supply of the needles and syringes needed to carry out widespread vaccination programs.

BARDA will contribute $42 million to the expansion project, and Becton Dickinson & Co. will pick up the remaining tab of roughly $28 million.

"What that gets BARDA is access to those lines whenever they need them," said Troy Kirkpatrick, a Becton Dickinson spokesman. "If they need hundreds of millions of syringes within 12 months, they can say, 'We know where these are being manufactured.' ... Knowing that they have this capacity sort of at their fingertips is really the benefit for BARDA without having to build and run their own facility."

BARDA has entered into similar contracts with vaccine makers and other companies as part of Operation Warp Speed, a Trump administration initiative designed to ramp up the manufacturing and distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine, treatments and medical supplies.

Readying the new production lines is expected to take about a year. Depending on the successful development of a coronavirus vaccine and the status of the global pandemic, the supplies produced in Nebraska could be used during the current pandemic or to prepare for another emergent disease.

Early predictions suggest that two doses of a coronavirus vaccine may be needed, Kirkpatrick said — an initial shot and a booster several weeks later.

"We're potentially talking about two syringes for every person on the globe," he said.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts said the project is another example of how Nebraska is pitching in to fight the pandemic.

"Right now, the entire world is focused on developing a vaccine, so we can win the war against coronavirus," Ricketts said in a statement. "From the beginning, when Americans abroad came to Omaha and Ashland to quarantine, Nebraska has played an important role during the pandemic. Thank you to BD for choosing Nebraska for this investment, which will play a pivotal role in quickly delivering vaccines to the marketplace."

In addition to the injection devices, the company has been pumping out other supplies in response to the pandemic, including diagnostic tests, nasal swabs and catheters for patients in intensive care units.

Its facilities and workers haven't been immune from the virus: Kirkpatrick confirmed that some workers at BD's Nebraska facilities have tested positive for the coronavirus. Workers in close contact at manufacturing facilities — meatpacking plants in particular — have fallen ill with the disease caused by the virus in Nebraska and across the country.

BD took precautions early on, Kirkpatrick said, by checking workers' temperatures and spacing them out whenever possible.
Over the last several years, before the coronavirus hit, the company had announced plans to spend at least $340 million upgrading and expanding its Nebraska locations.
Becton Dickinson came to Columbus in 1949 when the federal government asked the company, which is based in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, to move its production inland because of the threat of Soviet Union bombers during the Cold War.
An aluminum plant in Columbus had closed after World War II, and officials from the community negotiated with Becton Dickinson to relocate.
By Erin Duffy

OWH: As Douglas County reports 100th COVID-19 victim, cases continue growing among young people

As the coronavirus pandemic claimed its 100th victim in Douglas County, the county's health director says new cases are growing among young people.
The Douglas County Health Department says it has tracked cases among three high school teams: One each in basketball, baseball and softball.
More adolescents are testing positive for COVID-19, although some are asymptomatic, said Adi Pour, Douglas County's health director.
Pour also expressed concern about transmission in bars packed with patrons.
Throughout the pandemic, 43% of the county's cases are from people in the under-34 age bracket, according to the county's latest numbers.
But more recently, 56% of cases are from people that age, Pour said.
Pour cited the trend in a wide-ranging press conference Wednesday with Mayor Jean Stothert. The two officials addressed the demographic trends four months into the pandemic, the benchmark death tally, clusters of cases, the state of testing in the community, the potential for a vaccine, the strain on city funding, the controversy over masks and the return to school.
Earlier Wednesday, the Health Department announced it received three additional death certificates for people who had COVID-19: A man in his 60s, and a man and a woman older than 70.
That raised the county's total to 100.
Pour said that number is higher than she anticipated for the pandemic.
"For me, every death is too much," she said.
Locally, the state of the pandemic, circa early July, is that Omaha and Nebraska are increasingly reopening businesses and activities — including bars and team sports — even as people get infected with COVID-19.
Nebraska's cases have fallen from an early May peak, but on Tuesday the state still added 155 new cases. Douglas County recorded another 102 new cases Wednesday.
Hospitalizations in the Omaha area have fallen from a high of 170 in late May to 86 in the most recent count.
On clusters: Pour said 40% of cases relate to a cluster of at least two cases. She said the county has recorded 315 different clusters, with 29 clusters and 1,370 individual cases stemming from the food processing industry and 35 clusters and 471 cases coming from long-term care facilities.
Pour said the county also has recorded 47 clusters in construction, most of which connect to just two or three people. She said many of the clusters are from the same company, and she generally cited cases involving a painter, electrician and plumber.
On recent testing difficulties: Pour said she believes everybody who wants to get tested should be able

to do so.
TestNebraska is now at the former Sears store at Crossroads Mall. The test site at 50th and G Streets that closed due to a supply shortage will start again this Sunday, Pour said.
If test results are delayed, Pour said people awaiting their results still should isolate themselves if they've been in contact with someone who has COVID-19.
"I know it's difficult," she said. "It's not easy. I understand that."
On a vaccine: Pour cited the possibility of mass vaccination happening next spring.
On city funding: Stothert said the City of Omaha still does not have a formal agreement with the State of Nebraska or Douglas County to provide federal pandemic recovery CARES Act funding to the city.
Stothert said the city calculated it has spent $66 million on expenses related to COVID-19, based on federal guidelines, or $38 million, based on the State of Nebraska's more stringent guidelines.
The city is receiving no direct federal funding through the CARES Act.
Stothert said the city has made all the budget cuts it can without laying off employees. But she said that "I need an answer right away" on shared funding from the state and county.
"To me, the clock is ticking," she said.
On masks: Both Stothert and Pour said it is outside their authority to require people in public to wear masks.
Stothert said she would support a mask mandate as a directed health measure from the governor, but said, "I don't have that authority to do it now.
On back to school: Stothert and Pour also both said they support the Omaha Public Schools' decision to bring students back on a split weekly schedule for in-school, in-person lessons.
By Jeffrey Robb

AP: Nebraska surpasses 20,000 positive cases of corornavirus

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — State figures released Wednesday show Nebraska has surpassed 20,000 confirmed cases of the coronavirus since the outbreak began earlier this year.
The state's online virus tracker shows 155 cases were reported on Tuesday, bringing the state total to 20,201. Of the total, nearly 15,000 have recovered from the virus. The total number of deaths attributed to COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, had reached 282 by the end of Tuesday.
While Nebraska is not experiencing the surge in cases being seen in other states, some Nebraska health care providers and testing sites are reporting a shortage of testing supplies and longer wait times for test results.
A drive-thru testing site in south Omaha temporarily closed over the weekend because of a shortage of testing supplies.
Despite the shortages, state figures show Nebraska still have a large amount of space in hospitals to treat new patients. State officials said 40% of Nebraska's hospital beds, 46% of the intensive care beds and 81 percent of the ventilators in the state remained available Tuesday.
For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness.

LJS: 38 new coronavirus cases detected in Lancaster County, health department says

Lancaster County confirmed 38 more cases of coronavirus Wednesday but reported no new deaths, according to the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department.
The number of local COVID-19 cases has risen to 1,947, and 714 residents have fully recovered from the

virus so far, the department said.
The health department has recorded 13 deaths from COVID-19.
Douglas County reported three new deaths Wednesday, bringing its total to 100.
More than one-third of all COVID-19 deaths in Nebraska have occurred in the state's largest county.
On Wednesday, the state reported 282 deaths and 20,425 cases, an increase of 224 from the previous day.
By Riley Johnson

Scottsbluff SH: Six new COVID-19 cases, 13 recoveries announced

Six new COVID-19 cases and 13 recoveries were announced on Wednesday during Panhandle Public Health District's daily briefing.
All of the cases, except a Cheyenne County woman in her 40s, were determined to be close contacts.
"The investigation is underway right now," Scotts Bluff County Health director Paulette Schnell said of the case.
The others include one male in his 20s from Box Butte County, a Morrill County man in his 30s and three Scotts Bluff County residents, a woman in her 20s, a man in his 30s and a man in his 40s.
"We have 13 new recoveries to announce today," Schnell said.
Six were in Scotts Bluff County, three from Morrill, two from Dawes and one each from Sheridan and Banner counties.
A total of 5,692 tests have been conducted with a cumulative positive rate of 6 percent. There have been 344 positive tests in the Panhandle Public Health District. Of those, 99 cases are active while 241 are recovered.
A total of 34 people have been hospitalized with one remaining in the hospital.
Health officials reminded the community about the importance of taking quarantine and isolation recommendations seriously. In order to be considered "recovered," a person must quarantine for a minimum of 10 days and be symptom free for three days in a row, Schnell said.
Close contacts are asked to quarantine for 14 days, as it can take that long for the disease to develop.
Testing opportunities are available across the district. Chadron Community Hospital is offering testing to those who sign up through testnebraska.com from 7-9 a.m. on Monday and Fridays.
Community Action Health Center in Gering offers testing Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7-8 a.m. Sign up is available online: https://tinyurl.com/y7msahzq.
Testing will take place in the Gordon Clinic parking lot from 3-4 p.m. on July 13 and July 16. There is no charge. For an appointment, call 308-282-6334 or 308-282-1442.
Morrill County Community Hospital is offering tests daily, as are many other local hospitals and clinics.
By Kamie Stephen

LJS: National Guard transitioning virus testing to civilian workers

The Nebraska National Guard is transitioning COVID-19 testing responsibilities over to civilian health care workers after deploying testing teams throughout the state since late March.
As of July 1, full National Guard testing teams are no longer activated to provide testing throughout Nebraska, the Guard announced Wednesday.
A small group of soldiers and airmen continue to be activated to provide training and knowledge to hospitals for the Test Nebraska campaign, and one small National Guard team is continuing to provide support in the Omaha area.
Several hundred Nebraska National Guard soldiers and airmen were activated in late March to support

testing teams that traveled across the state for weeks.
Tests were provided at nursing homes, corrections facilities, meat processing plants and in small towns and larger cities throughout the state.
Guard testing teams have helped collect more than 80,000 samples for testing during the pandemic, supporting 53 counties and all 19 health departments in the state.
"I couldn't be more proud of the team we have had on orders to provide the support and capabilities for such an important mission," said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general.
By Don Walton

OWH: Nebraska child care providers can get federal assistance to help stabilize income or reopen

LINCOLN — Nebraska child care providers that have struggled because of the coronavirus can get help from a pair of federally supported relief funds.
One targets providers that have stayed open but seen incomes drop as state directives limited the number of children in their care. The stabilization grants can make up for lost income, pay for extra cleaning supplies and cover other expenses. Family child care homes can get a one-time award of $3,500 and child care centers can get $5,550.
The second aims to encourage providers that closed because of the coronavirus to reopen. Priority for the grants will go to providers that commit to reopen within 30 days of getting the money, participate in state quality improvement initiatives and serve low-income families or children of essential and emergency workers. Family child care homes can get $2,000 and centers can get $3,000.
State officials are working with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation to process applications and provide payments. For more information, visit the foundation's website, nebraskachildren.org/childcare-providers-covid-19-information-and-resources.html.
By Martha Stoddard

LJS: Nebraska not planning to change guidance after threats from president to withhold fed dollars

Nebraska education officials Wednesday said they have no plans to change guidance for reopening schools after threats from President Donald Trump to withhold federal education funds to schools that don't fully reopen in the fall.
"The Nebraska Department of Education has been working with local school districts for several months to safely provide continuity of learning for all students in the state," said Nebraska Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt.
The state Department of Education has a website called Launch Nebraska that provides guidance for schools this summer and beyond, though officials plan to update the guidance soon to focus more specifically on fall.
Current guidance includes that students and staff wear face masks and social distance whenever possible, and stresses that school districts should work with local health departments to come up with a plan.
"The (Nebraska Department of Education) will continue to support thoughtful, local leadership as they develop their individual plans to safely return to school," Blomstedt said.
Lincoln Public Schools has said it plans to have all students in school this fall, but based on changing risk levels could reduce the number of high school students in school at one time to better maintain necessary physical distance.

Schools around the country have been trying to come up with plans for fall amid a spike in positive COVID-19 cases in several states, including Florida, Arizona and Texas.
White House officials have in recent days begun pressuring governors to reopen schools fully in the fall.
In a series of tweets Wednesday morning, Trump threatened to withhold federal funds from schools that don't fully reopen. He also criticized the CDC's guidelines as "tough and expensive."
Tuesday in an interview with Fox News' Tucker Carlson, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos said she is "seriously considering" withholding federal funds from schools that don't fully reopen.
It's unclear what federal funds they're talking about, and whether that would be possible. The CARES Act, which includes relief for schools, was approved by Congress. And allocation of other federal funds to help educate students in poverty or with special education needs are spelled out in the federal education act.
Nebraska will get about $65 million in CARES Act relief funds for schools.
LPS estimates it will get about $6 million of that, and it got about $26 million in federal funds for high-poverty schools and special-education students, among other things.
Some of the relief funds already have been earmarked. Omaha Public Schools, for instance, plan to use the $20 million-$24 million in CARES Act money to help pay for iPads with cellular data capability.
Bob Rauner, a doctor who's spent much of his career in public health and is now on the Lincoln Board of Education, said although LPS plans to have all students come back in the fall, the situation could change if cases spike like they have in other states.
When normalized for population size, Nebraska is about at the same point in positive cases as states like Florida and Texas were three weeks ago, he said.
He said he agrees that it would be best for schools to reopen with all students there — as the American Academy of Pediatrics recently advocated for in a statement — but there must be a balance between those concerns and the safety and health of the community.
The president, he said, is trying to blame schools, when the lack of a coordinated plan at the federal level to address the coronavirus led us to today.
"I think Trump misses the point," he said. "You can't open schools unless it's safe."
By Margaret Reist

LJS: 44-year-old State Pen inmate being treated for medical condition dies

Oddie Granger, a 44-year-old inmate at the Nebraska State Penitentiary, died there Wednesday shortly before 9:30 a.m., according to the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services.
In a news release, spokeswoman Laura Strimple said that while the cause of death has not been determined, Granger was being treated for a medical condition.
She said he started serving his sentence May 9, 2019. Granger was convicted in Lancaster County of three felony DUI charges and sentenced to five years and six months in prison.
As is the case whenever an inmate dies in custody, a grand jury will be convened to review the death.
By Lori Pilger

OWH: State Constitution makes remote voting, virtual sessions unlikely for Nebraska Legislature

LINCOLN — The Nebraska Constitution appears to stand in the way of state lawmakers meeting in virtual session or voting remotely, even in the midst of a pandemic.
Clerk of the Legislature Patrick O'Donnell said Wednesday that he believes having senators participate remotely in a legislative session would violate multiple sections of the constitution and could lead to

legal challenges of any action taken.
He also warned that meeting via technology, rather than in person, would alter the dynamics and practices of the nation's only one-house Legislature. Much of the talking, negotiating and coalition-building over legislation takes place away from the microphones and the formal debate.
"All I'm suggesting to you is to be careful," O'Donnell, an attorney, said during a briefing for members of the Legislature's Rules Committee.
The briefing, which took place over Zoom, examined some options for remote participation, as well as potential problems and pitfalls. It included a review of rules changes made in other states in light of the coronavirus pandemic and the social distancing measures taken to slow its spread.
State Sen. Sue Crawford of Bellevue, who chairs the committee, said she set up the briefing so committee members could be better informed in case they or other senators want to pursue rules changes allowing for remote participation. She said she does not know if anyone will make an attempt to do so.
"I think that the constitutional questions that were raised will make it more challenging to build support for remote voting," she said.
Those questions center around two sections of the constitution that refer to a quorum of legislators and a third that requires bills be signed "in the presence of the Legislature" after they have been passed.
O'Donnell said physical presence has always been part of the idea of a quorum. No legal rulings have determined yet whether that concept can encompass remote participants, although he said a lawsuit filed by Republicans in the House of Representatives against the majority Democrats this year could provide some answers.
The state constitution also requires that all votes be done "viva voce," or by voice. But a 1933 State Supreme Court case concluded that the then-newly installed electronic voting board complied with the intent of that requirement because all votes were public and could be recorded in the legislative journal if requested.
The issue of remote participation was raised earlier this year by Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln, who argued for meeting electronically to avoid the risk of having so many people gathered together in person.
She cited concerns about the health and safety of lawmakers, many of whom are over age 60 or have underlying health problems, such as heart disease, lung disease or diabetes. Since then, Sen. Mike Moser of Columbus has had COVID-19. He has recovered, but only after spending weeks in the hospital.
Crawford said Wednesday that rules changes passed now would not affect the current legislative session because it would take time for the technology to be set up. Lawmakers are slated to return to Lincoln on July 20 to finish the last 17 days of the session.
But the rules could be in place for the 2021 session, which O'Donnell predicted would still be affected by the coronavirus pandemic.
For now, Speaker of the Legislature Jim Scheer of Norfolk said, steps have been taken to make the legislative chamber as safe as possible. Clear plastic dividers have been installed between rows of desks, only a few staff members will be allowed into the chamber with lawmakers and other guidelines seek to limit possible exposures.
Scheer noted that no rules bar senators from participating in the session while sick. The east balcony has been reserved for lawmakers who show symptoms of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.
By Martha Stoddard

LJS: Linehan says property tax relief depends on package deal

It's going to be "something done for everybody," or nothing gets done when the Legislature reconvenes

later this month and confronts a trio of major issues, including proposed property tax relief, Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn said Wednesday.
The fate of three big bills will be at stake, Linehan said during a webinar hosted by the Platte Institute that featured a question-and-answer session with the chairwoman of the Legislature's Revenue Committee.
None of the three proposals can command the 33 votes that would be required to break the bill loose from the grip of a filibuster, she said, so the fate of each may depend now on a package deal.
"It's the way you get it done," Linehan said.
* LB1106 would provide $520 million in local property tax relief by lowering valuations and increasing state aid to schools.
* LB720 would enact a new business investment tax incentive program to replace the Nebraska Advantage Act, which expires at the end of the year.
* LB1084 would commit the state to provide $300 million in funding to help build a blockbuster $2.6 billion center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center to respond to national health threats and crises if the federal government chooses UNMC to perform that task.
Linehan said a group of 10 senators has been meeting quietly to seek a property tax compromise agreement.
"People are resistant to change," she said in discussing opposition to the current property tax relief proposal voiced by school representatives, much of which is directed at proposed school spending restraints.
Linehan acknowledged that she finds the somewhat unexpected opposition from small schools in rural areas to be "very frustrating."
"The tax burden on all Nebraskans is too high," she said, and property taxes are "way too high."
If the current property tax proposal is blocked by the Legislature during its concluding days, Linehan said, "I don't have a Plan B."
Linehan said she is "not a fan" of the state's property tax credit fund, which has served as the fallback vehicle for recent property tax reduction.
"It's not working," she said. "Property taxes go up faster than the credit."
Linehan said the state needs "a complete overhaul of our tax structure."
With a proposal to authorize casino gambling at Nebraska race tracks likely to be on the general election ballot in November, Linehan said, voters may be tempted to support the issue now because it would direct 70% of the proceeds from an accompanying gaming tax to the state's property tax credit fund.
"Many more conservative people today are ready to give in to gambling because they're tired of taxes," she said.
However, she noted, the expanded gambling proposal is going to run into opposition from "a very strong personality named Tom Osborne."
The gambling issue is awaiting certification for inclusion on the November ballot while the secretary of state's office determines whether petitions contain the required number of valid signatures.
By Don Walton

LJS: State senators consider remote meeting, voting options for this month's session

As the Nebraska Legislature approaches a July 20 restart to finish its last days of the 2020 session, six senators met virtually Wednesday to discuss remote meeting or voting options.
The COVID-19 pandemic caused the Legislature to call a halt to its session in March, except for three days of gathering to pass emergency COVID-19 funding for the state.
Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks earlier sent a memo to her colleagues saying the Legislature should

make accommodations for those senators who don't want to come to the Capitol when it meets again. One senator, Mike Moser of Columbus, was hospitalized for five weeks with COVID-19.

The state has recorded more than 20,200 cases of the virus, with the peak of confirmed cases in early May. Lancaster County has a positivity rate of 6.5%, and Douglas County's positivity rate was declining as of last week, but is starting to tick up again, at 10% so far this week.

The Legislature's Rules Committee, headed by Sen. Sue Crawford of Bellevue, got information on what some other states are doing to meet or vote remotely in reaction to the pandemic.

Mark Thomas, the Utah Senate's chief of staff, outlined the steps that state's legislature has taken to allow senators and representatives to meet virtually since March. The Utah Legislature has held four special sessions, either fully by Webex, or with the majority in the Capitol and some virtually present, with voice votes allowed on screen.

Some states have allowed proxy votes, enabling senators to have another member vote on their behalf. Nebraska Speaker Jim Scheer said at Wednesday's meeting he was not in favor of that.

"We were elected by a district to represent a district and the state, and (proxy voting) circumvents your district having its voice in the process," he said.

Legislative Clerk Patrick O'Donnell said his concerns about remote attendance and voting are related to constitutionality, especially as it applies to quorums.

"The notion of a physical presence has always been fundamentally part of the quorum establishment requirements," he said. "If you have 25 of your colleagues in the building or the chamber, I'm more comfortable."

While other states have experimented with some remote activities, he doesn't believe they have been full-blown operational sessions. Remote voting alone is more common.

He also has serious concerns about internet security issues, he said.

"I'd encourage you to think about how you've operated as a legislature," he told the senators, "in terms of the give-and-take of the process, being on the floor with each other, being able to discuss and cajole and argue and make your case or whatever proposition you're trying to articulate or get support for. That gets really complicated in a remote kind of environment."

Nebraska has the most democratic legislature in the country, O'Donnell said, with individual members having more power and authority and the ability to affect outcomes.

Other state legislatures tend to be more authoritarian.

The Rules Committee was told that this year, legislatures in at least 23 states changed their rules or statutes to allow for remote participation of some kind during the COVID-19 emergency. Those states included Colorado, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Wyoming.

Crawford said Wednesday's conversation was more about whether the Rules Committee should debate and discuss rules changes for January or future sessions. The speaker and clerk have worked hard to make this month's session safe, she said, although rules could be changed, if needed and feasible, she said.

"However, I don't think that we would be ready to activate it in these 17 days," she said. "If we made this rule change in these 17 days, that would likely be a part of the rules for the next session and would create the impetus for staff ... to prepare for possible remote proceedings or proxy voting for the next session."

If a member would test positive or have symptoms of the virus in these upcoming 17 days beginning July 20, Scheer said, they still could take part.

"I have no authority to prohibit anyone from being on the floor and voting. That's their constitutional right as an officeholder," he said.

By JoAnne Young

OWH: Parents have concerns about OPS's plans for returning to school

Kassia Ulffers wants her four kids back in school five days a week and thinks parents should be able to decide if they want their kids to wear masks.

"Freedom of voice and choice needs to be given to every parent," she said.

Brandi O'Malley wants to know if she can have her children continue with remote learning.

"I live paycheck to paycheck like everybody else," she told the Omaha Public Schools board at a recent meeting. "I'm going to have to figure out a way, but I feel like keeping my kids healthy is more important than just sending them to school for two days out of the week."

Parents and guardians have differing opinions, feelings and plenty of questions about OPS's back-to-school plans.

Last month, OPS officials announced that the district's 54,000 students would be divided into two groups, each of which would attend school in person part of the week.

Students whose names start with A through K would attend every Monday and Tuesday. Those whose names start with L through Z would attend every Thursday and Friday. The groups would attend on alternate Wednesdays.

On off days, students would be learning at home. District officials are calling it the Family 3/2 Model.

"Our planned return using the Family 3/2 Model is for the health and safety of our students and staff, to allow for the recommended distancing and limited groups," said Jeremy Maskel, spokesman for the district.

Maskel said the model will allow OPS to "best respond to health conditions as they continue to evolve."

Starting at 6 p.m. Thursday, OPS will host a town hall on its Facebook page to discuss the back-to-school plans. District officials said there should be time for questions and answers.

Superintendent Cheryl Logan has said that OPS has had crowded classrooms for many years, especially in South Omaha, and that to reopen schools in those crowded conditions would put too many people at risk.

Hispanics make up a large majority of the student body at some OPS schools, including nearly 83% at South High and about 68% at Bryan High.

While Hispanics make up about 11.2% of Nebraska's population, they account for nearly 60% of the coronavirus cases in the state for which ethnicity data was collected. Of the 233 Nebraskans whose deaths have been attributed to the virus and whose ethnicity is known, 26.6% — more than one in four — were Hispanic.

Since the plan was announced, some parents have questioned how effective the at-home learning component will be. And working parents are scrambling to figure out the logistics of keeping kids at home several days a week.

Some parents have said they are so unhappy with the plan that they're trying to enroll their children in neighboring school districts or will home-school their kids.

School districts such as Millard, Elkhorn, Westside and Bellevue all are planning to have all their students attend school every day. Many of those districts have backup plans that are similar to how OPS students will start the school year.

Other urban school districts are starting the school year in ways that are similar to OPS. They include the Des Moines Public Schools, Columbus City Schools in Ohio, Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia and the nation's largest school district in New York City.

Wednesday, President Donald Trump threatened to withhold federal funding if schools don't reopen in the fall. He did not immediately say what funding he would cut off or under what authority.

U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos on Tuesday slammed the Fairfax plan and has said families should be able to count on having their children in school five days a week.

OPS parent Jen Knight said she was pleased with the education the district provided her older children. They got good grades and high ACT scores. After they graduated from Burke High School, they got college scholarships.

But she's not happy with the plan her daughter, who will be a sophomore at Burke, will deal with in the fall.

"I feel the quality of education is going to drop incredibly," Knight said.

She doesn't blame teachers, who she said try their best.

"I think my child is going to get 50% of their education in school, face to face, and 50% is independent learning, on their own. And we know from spring semester, that did not work."

Maskel pointed to the district's purchase of iPads with Internet connectivity for every OPS student. District officials have said the iPads will be delivered in five waves. Elementary school students will not start the school year with iPads.

"Through our one-to-one technology initiative, curriculum planning and professional development focused on maximizing technology," Maskel said, "at-home learning for students will evolve significantly this fall when compared to the spring."

Another critic of the plan is Aleh Bobr, an assistant professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Bobr's specialty is clinical pathology, making sure the labs run properly and providing quality control.

"The intention of the plan is good," said Bobr, who will have two students in OPS elementary schools this fall. "It tries to achieve the education with decreasing the exposure to the virus. But unfortunately, it does not achieve either, either preventing the virus transmission or getting the education."

Studying at home for two or three days a week may work for older kids, Bobr said, if they are assigned a specific project such as a paper. But elementary students, he said, do not operate that way.

"It doesn't matter how many (computer) tablets you give them. It's not the education I expect from the school. This two days in school and three days at home, obviously education will be compromised."

Ulffers, the mom of four, said students in the district should be able to return to school like their peers in other metro area districts.

Ulffers, who works in health care, said her kids are young and are learning such fundamentals as reading. If OPS goes through with the plan, she said, she'll have to consider working nights and weekends so she can teach her kids during the day so they don't fall behind.

Ulffers said she felt blindsided by the district's announcement. She had filled out a survey for the district earlier in the summer, and it didn't mention the current plan as an option.

Kim Anderson is the mother of two OPS students. Her son, who will be a junior this year, will be taking calculus and chemistry. Anderson said she worries about him trying to learn those difficult subjects with limited time in the classroom.

Anderson watched district officials' presentation on the plan at last month's school board meeting. She said she still doesn't understand how the district intends to serve kids during at-home learning days.

"This has been going on since March," Anderson said. "I feel like they still don't really have a plan for distance learning."

The Trump administration and many Omaha parents have pointed to a recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics that American children should attend school in person in the fall.

The academy's doctors, in their guidance, said "the importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020."

The academy said lengthy time away from school and the supportive services that schools provide to children often results in social isolation. That would make it difficult for schools to identify and address important learning deficits as well as child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use,

depression and suicidal thoughts, they said.
By Emily Nitcher and Joe Dejka

LJS: 'They're out of control': Prairie dogs threatening western Nebraska towns, officials say

SIDNEY — Officials in Nebraska's Panhandle are asking the U.S. Department of Agriculture for help and are exploring other options to control what they say is an encroaching prairie dog problem in the region.
The Cheyenne County Board commissioners said Monday during a meeting that the animals are threatening to overrun the towns of Lodgepole, Sidney and Potter if more is not done to control their numbers, the Scottsbluff Star-Herald reported.
Commissioner Philip Sanders said the animals caused nearly $3,000 in damage last year to 2,600 acres in the county. The animals, he said, are already inside Lodgepole, a village of about 300 people.
"I'm willing to take any help that we can get at this point, because I feel like we've let Lodgepole down," Sanders said. "We're going to let other communities down. We can't do this any longer. ... I don't want to eradicate (prairie dogs). God put them here for a reason. I get it, but they're out of control."
There is only one USDA wildlife specialist to help control animal populations — including coyotes, porcupines and raccoons. The county wants the USDA to hire additional staff, but the agency says there's no money for it. Now, the county is looking at private-sector help and even volunteers from the community to help control the prairie dog population.
Prairie dogs are native to Nebraska and live in colonies that create vast underground tunnels. They are considered important to the region's ecological balance, but many people view them as pests that destroy valuable grassland and pose a danger to cattle that can step in prairie dog holes and break legs.

GII: Grand Island Public Schools releases models for reopening; will require face masks at buildings

Grand Island Public Schools expects to be open to students when school begins in August but will have three plans in place for reopening schools depending on the COVID-19 situation.
At a town hall meeting on Facebook Live on Wednesday evening, GIPS Superintendent Tawana Grover said the district plans on starting under the GIPS Reimagined plan. With Reimagined, the schools will be open with some restrictions and slight capacity guidelines.
Students will have the option to take classes online at the request of the parents and determined by district guidelines.
"This is the model that we hope to start school with Aug. 12," Grover said. "We will be in GIPS Reimagined with most of our students on-site and giving parents that option to enroll their students online if they feel it is best for their family."
If a parent wishes for their student to do e-learning, rather than in-person learning, GIPS said the parent needs to fill out a form at www.gips.org/fall2020 by July 17. Grover said that once a student opts into e-learning, they will be asked to continue with it through the end of the fall semester.
With the two other reopening plans, GIPS Select calls for capacity to be "heavily restricted" due to social distancing expectations. Under this plan, the district would determine which programs and services would need to be served on-site due to being the most in need of hands-on, in-person instruction and support.
In the final model, GIPS Remote, all students would be taught remotely via e-learning.
Details of Reimagined model
The GIPS Reimagined model calls for 6- to 10-foot social distancing to be in place whenever possible, while the GIPS Select model will enforce this social distancing rule. Grover said signage will be placed

through the school buildings to remind students and staff of social distancing rules and safety protocols. She said GIPS also will try to limit large gatherings outside of the schools.

"Students will have very specific assigned areas where they will need to report to," Grover said. "This is also going to allow us to keep traffic moving in one direction."

When GIPS reopens its facilities, face coverings that cover a person's mouth and nose will be required for all staff and students. Any person in these facilities also are required to wear a face covering.

Face coverings may only be removed for meals or at the request of the staff member. The first face covering will be provided by GIPS free of charge. GIPS said if a student comes in without one, they will be provided one, but expectations are that students only be provided one face covering by the district and use it daily.

'Extra layer of protection'

Chief Financial Officer Virgil Harden said GIPS has 80,000 face masks on hand and 20,000 more on the way free of charge from the state.

"When we are not able to achieve that 6 feet (of social distance), that face covering really comes in as an extra layer of protection for us," Grover said. "We do have a variety of those (face coverings). We have some of those that are clear due to the different needs of our students to be able to support them with that process."

With preschool classes, GIPS said it will take "extra precautions" and screen students daily until wearing face coverings "becomes routine."

Grover said two policies up for GIPS Board of Education approval at its meeting Thursday night lays out the expectations for both students and staff in regard to face coverings. She said the face covering requirement will be included in the student handbook.

"We want to approach this situation like we do with any learning opportunity," she said. "It is an opportunity for teachers to set up routines and procedures. With our student body, when the expectation is set, we teach them, coach them and support them; that is what we want to do with our students. The students have to be aware of the time we are living in."

All district teachers will be "using their professional judgment" throughout the day when it comes to face coverings, Grover said, and will work to meet the individual needs of students.

Health screenings

Grover said GIPS will be conducting daily health screenings and urged parents to help with the process by monitoring their children for COVID-19 symptoms such as coughing and/or sudden loss of taste or smell. She said if a student has a temperature more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit, they need to stay home until their fever ceases.

GIPS staff members will check temperatures of students at least once a day at school.

"All of our staff members across our district will have access to the thermometers, so they are able to check those temperatures," Grover said. It may be in the morning or midday — whenever works best for their schedule."

Grover said during the school day, students will be required to wash their hands with soap and water after using the restroom, and every two hours or during a transition between classes. If this is not practical to do, hand sanitizer may be used instead.

Students who test positive

During the virtual town hall, a parent asked what would happen if a student tests positive for COVID-19 and exposes the entire classroom. Teresa Anderson, health director for the Central District Health Department, said if a child tests positive for COVID-19 and was in the classroom, CDHD will do a case contact investigation.

"We are looking for anyone who was within 6 feet of that child for 15 minutes or more," she said. "Then, we would isolate, or remove, any of those people identified as close contacts from the classroom for 14

days unless they were wearing face coverings."
If students and the teacher were wearing face coverings, Anderson said, it changes the whole scenario. "What happens then is those individuals become low risk. We still go in and do an investigation, but in all likelihood, classes will be able to continue."
Grover said GIPS has established a COVID-19 symptom response team that includes GIPS Associate Superintendent Robin Dexter, campus principals and the district's head nurse that will be activated whenever a student or staff member has any symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19.
When activated, Grover said, the team will help GIPS make decisions and decide what steps it needs to take to address the situation.
By Austin Koeller

OWH Editorial: New UNO project a great example of boosting our national security

High-tech weaponry and well-trained combat personnel are important in keeping our country safe from terrorists. But something also is needed: We have to outsmart them. A key asset on that front is the brainpower of America's universities.
A newly announced initiative led by the University of Nebraska at Omaha provides an encouraging example. UNO will head a team of 17 universities to study, find, track and stop domestic and global terrorists. The 10-year, $36.5 million grant is the largest ever for an NU institution.
UNO's reputation for sophisticated, large-scale data analysis was a key factor in its selection by the Department of Homeland Security out of the 75 schools that submitted applications. UNO has been pioneering, in particular, in using data crunching and psychological analysis to study how terrorist organizations use online capabilities to spread propaganda and recruit followers.
The findings by UNO and other participating universities — including the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Stanford, Penn State, Michigan State and San Diego State — will strengthen the counterterrorism training and education for professionals with DHS and other national security organizations.
It's a credit to UNO that federal authorities have confidence in it to lead such a large-scale, multi-institutional initiative. The project's headquarters will be at the Omaha campus's Mammel Hall, which is in the midst of a $17 million expansion.
The counterterrorism project is the latest of dozens of defense-related NU projects, stemming from an important strategic investment NU made in 2012. That year, NU received permission to create the National Strategic Research Institute, to work directly with the Pentagon and other federal agencies on national security projects.
NU has a strong partnership with the U.S. Strategic Command, and in 2018 StratCom approved a five-year, $92 million contract with NU to continue the research institute's wide range of security-related projects.
Among the more than 80 research projects so far: Wide-ranging biosecurity work by the University of Nebraska Medical Center. A University of Nebraska-Lincoln project researching how to improve the metals used on military vehicles to boost performance in harsh conditions. A UNL project by physicists developing laser technology to detect hidden or camouflaged explosives.
These and other NU projects, says retired Lt. Gen. Robert Hinson, founding executive director of NU's national security institute, provide "research to meet — and ultimately anticipate — the needs of our DoD and agency partners who are on the front lines in defending the United States against those who would do us harm."
Nebraskans can be proud of how NU brainpower is contributing significantly to keeping our country safe.

LJS Local View: Family law still needs reform

There is growing awareness of the need for family law reform.
Children who grow up in father-limited environments are more likely to use drugs and alcohol, engage in juvenile delinquency, have long-term physical and mental health problems, have lower educational attainment and have lower life expectancies.
Judges are the single biggest cause of fatherlessness. Every year, defective child custody decisions hurt thousands of Nebraska children and cost Nebraska taxpayers more than $500 million in avoidable spending.
Research shows shared parenting generally provides the best child outcomes if parents aren't living together. Shared parenting occurs when children live with each parent as close to equal time as possible.
Our judges have shown some improvement in recent years. State data show shared parenting in divorce cases has steadily increased over the last few years. But while this trend is positive, shared parenting outcomes are still only half of where they should be.
Some judges still favor mothers in their decisions instead of deciding cases in an unbiased, evidence-based manner. In two recent cases, for example, the Court of Appeals affirmed troubling trial decisions. In the first, a mother was awarded primary physical custody after she moved 150 miles away from the family's longtime home. The trial decision was largely based on the discredited theory the mother had been the children's primary parent. In the second, a father received an every-other-weekend parenting time schedule (actually less in light of the conditions that were attached) despite research that shows these schedules harm children.
Our family law system too often fails children and families. Part of the problem is our trial judges have far too much discretion. Instead of deciding cases based on objective standards, they use an amorphous "best interests of the child" standard that is so vague the Nebraska Supreme Court concluded in a related context it's unconstitutional.
The system is also inconsistent. When custody issues arise in family court, trial judges apply the lowest evidentiary standard — preponderance of the evidence. However, when these same issues arise in juvenile court, trial judges use the higher "clear and convincing evidence" standard. Our judges have never explained why this inconsistency exists or why it should continue.
The appellate standard is also inconsistent. When decisions arise in family court, appellate judges review them using a very deferential "abuse of discretion" standard, where the appellate court upholds the trial decision, even if it disagrees with the outcome, unless the trial decision was "clearly untenable." However, when these same issues arise in juvenile court, appellate judges apply a much stricter "de novo" standard, which gives no deference to the trial judge. Again, our judges have never explained why this inconsistency exists or why it should continue.
These inconsistencies create a system in which good parents, whose cases are typically heard in family court, often have less legal protection than unfit parents, whose cases are typically heard in juvenile court. This makes no sense.
This is even harder to understand because the U.S. Supreme Court has held parents' rights to make decisions concerning the care, custody and control of their children is a fundamental Constitutional right. This means judicial decisions that affect these rights are subject to the highest standard of review — "strict scrutiny" — and will be upheld only if there was no less restrictive way to resolve the issue. Our judges have never explained why their family law practices fail to comply with this constitutional requirement.
A group of lawyers recently described how our family law system could be brought into constitutional compliance. "Constitutional compliance requires trial courts to start every case from a position of joint legal custody and equal parenting time. Clear and convincing evidence must justify a departure from this equality. Decisions cannot rest on personal preferences of the judge or on gender stereotypes. Any

deviations from joint legal custody and equal parenting time must be achieved by the least restrictive means available."

In addition to making our family law system constitutionally compliant, these changes would also help protect children and families from defective judicial decisions by reducing the discretion of trial judges. Some judges argue the Legislature must make these changes, but this isn't true. These issues were created by our judges and judges always have the inherent authority to correct their own mistakes. Moreover, judges have a legal duty to correct practices that fail to comply with the U.S. Constitution.

Ray Keiser is a farmer and crop insurance agent who lives near Fordyce.

AP: Justices side with White House in birth control case

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Wednesday sided with the Trump administration in its effort to allow employers who cite religious or moral objections to opt out of providing no-cost birth control to women as required by the Affordable Care Act.

The high court on Wednesday ruled 7-2 that the administration acted properly when it made the change, which lower courts had blocked.

"We hold today that the Departments had the statutory authority to craft that exemption, as well as the contemporaneously issued moral exemption. We further hold that the rules promulgating these exemptions are free from procedural defects," Justice Clarence Thomas wrote for a majority of the court.

The government had estimated that the rule changes would cause about 70,000 women, and at most 126,000 women, to lose contraception coverage in one year.

JOB DISCRIMINATION

Court gives Catholic schools that fired teachers a "huge win."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg cited those numbers in dissenting.

"In accommodating claims of religious freedom, this Court has taken a balanced approach, one that does not allow the religious beliefs of some to overwhelm the rights and interests of others who do not share those beliefs. Today, for the first time, the Court casts totally aside countervailing rights and interests in its zeal to secure religious rights to the nth degree," she wrote.

Birth control has been a topic of contention since the law was passed. Initially, churches, synagogues and mosques were exempt from the contraceptive coverage requirement. The Obama administration also created a way by which religiously affiliated organizations including hospitals, universities and charities could opt out of paying for contraception, but women on their health plans would still get no-cost birth control. Some groups complained the opt-out process itself violated their religious beliefs.

That opt-out process was the subject of a 2016 Supreme Court case, but the court, with only eight justices at the time because of the death of Justice Antonin Scalia, didn't decide the issue. It instead sent both sides back to see if they could work out a compromise.

After the Trump administration took over, officials announced a rule change that allows many companies and organizations with religious or moral objections to opt out of covering birth control without providing an alternate avenue for coverage. But the change was blocked by courts after New Jersey and Pennsylvania challenged it.

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