From: Shelburn, Andrew
To: Shelburn, Andrew
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Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Oct 2022	7.42	50.00	11:27
Corn	Dec 2022	7.46	54.00	11:27
Milo	Oct 2022	6.87	-5.00	11:27
Milo	Oct 2023	5.56	-75.00	11:27
Soybeans	Oct 2022	13.22	-65.00	11:27
Soybeans	Oct 2023	12.80	-80.00	11:27
Wheat	Oct 2022	8.92	-75.00	11:27
Wheat	Jul 2023	8.71	-80.00	11:27

TV and Radio

10/11: Despite contentious debate, research shows impacts of voter ID laws are minimal on both sides
KMTV: One political action committee is spending big on Nebraska elections, but you probably haven't heard of them
NTV: Gothenburg Public Schools debuts brand new $100,000 fitness center
KNOP: $100K fitness center awarded to Gothenburg elementary school (no video)
KCAU: Tyson CEO speaks with 2 Siouxland governors about company relocation
KLKN: Poll shows Pillen ahead of Blood in Nebraska gubernatorial race
KLKN: What should Nebraska do with $5.2 million in unspent COVID relief?
KETV: Lawmakers call for pay hikes to solve growing prison health care vacancies
NPM: In polling and money Pillen leads Blood. But race could be closer than expected (no video)

Governor

OWH: Ricketts gives $314K to new PAC targeting GOP lawmaker running for Nebraska regent
OWH: Ricketts' cabinet member to depart after more than 2 decades in Nebraska government
LJS: Key gubernatorial adviser leaving Nebraska government post
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LJS: Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana drops lawsuit to block petition signature requirement
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6. Blood support
7. Correlation is not causation
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LJS Editorial, 10/14: Races offer solid choices, real contrasts
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OWH: Ricketts gives $314K to new PAC targeting GOP lawmaker running for Nebraska regent

LINCOLN — A new political action committee has emerged in Nebraska with the backing of Gov. Pete

Ricketts, and its first move took aim at an outgoing GOP state lawmaker.
Ricketts last month gave $314,000 to the group, dubbed the Nebraska Future Action Fund, making him the PAC's first and only donor, according to the latest filings from the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission. The only expenditure the group documented in its filing was roughly $51,000 to oppose outgoing State Sen. Matt Williams' campaign for a seat on the University of Nebraska Board of Regents.
Little is known about this new PAC. Its website hasn't officially launched, and the group didn't respond to requests for comment. Neither did Ricketts. Both Williams and his opponent Kathy Wilmot said they knew nothing about the PAC's goals.
More than $51,000 is a lot to spend on a regents race. Wilmot herself has only brought in roughly $50,000 in contributions this year — $10,000 of which came as a direct donation from Ricketts, according to her latest campaign filings. Williams has gathered about $96,000 in the same period.
Wilmot, of Beaver City, has the support of several other big-name Nebraska politicians and political groups, including the state GOP, former Gov. Kay Orr and former Republican gubernatorial candidate Charles W. Herbster. Regents races are nonpartisan, though both candidates are registered Republicans.
Wilmot said she's earned this support by being a familiar face in Nebraska politics for about 30 years. She served on the State Board of Education for eight years, during which she said she developed a track record of voting to support conservative values. She said Williams doesn't have the same consistency in his voting record.
Williams, a banker from Gothenburg, claims the $51,000 was largely spent on radio attack ads that paint him as a "liberal RINO," which stands for "Republicans In Name Only." Williams said his history in the Nebraska Legislature proves he has supported conservative policies like tax relief, abortion restrictions and increasing gun access.
"And those are the real facts," Williams said.
Williams got crosswise with Ricketts over several issues during their overlapping time in office. Williams voted to override Ricketts' vetoes on bills raising the gas tax to fund highway construction, repealing the death penalty and granting driver's licenses and, later, professional and commercial licenses, to recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA. Voters reinstated the death penalty after a referendum petition funded in part by Ricketts put the issue on the ballot.
Williams said what he believed was best for his constituents sometimes differed from Ricketts' views, but Williams argued that he had the authority to make those decisions as a member of the policy-making branch of state government. He said it is "discouraging" to see attack ads become an increasingly common feature of Nebraska elections.
Ricketts routinely uses his wealth to influence political races in his home state. Earlier this year, he contributed nearly $1.28 million to Conservative Nebraska, a PAC that ran advertisements opposing Herbster and Sen. Brett Lindstrom — two Republican candidates for governor who challenged Ricketts' preferred candidate, and the eventual winner of the primary, Jim Pillen.
But he's not the only wealthy Nebraska political figure exerting financial force on the state's politics. Herbster announced he was forming the Nebraska First PAC back in August. The PAC's two main priorities are: opposing secret ballot voting to determine leadership roles in the Nebraska Legislature, and supporting permitless carry of concealed firearms, often called "constitutional carry."
Williams called this trend "disturbing," but acknowledged it was allowed under state law. He

encouraged voters to do their own research, and not believe all the claims made in attack ads from PACs.
By Erin Bamer

OWH: Ricketts' cabinet member to depart after more than 2 decades in Nebraska government

LINCOLN — A senior cabinet official whose service has spanned more than two decades and multiple administrations is leaving her post in Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts' office.
Ricketts announced in a Thursday press release that Lauren Hill Kintner, director of the governor's policy and research office, has taken another role outside of state government and is leaving after nearly 24 years in that job. Her position will be vacant as of Oct. 24, and Ricketts did not say whom he would appoint to replace her. He called her a valued adviser.
"I look forward to what's next for her," the governor said.
During her career, Kintner served as lead policy adviser and legal counsel to Ricketts, along with former governors Dave Heineman and Mike Johanns. Throughout that time, Kintner led efforts on tax relief, limiting state spending, expanding support for veterans and law enforcement, and cutting regulations for Nebraska businesses.
Prior to working in the Governor's Office, Kintner served as an assistant attorney in then-Attorney General Don Stenberg's administration for more than five years.
Ricketts, whose tenure as governor will end in January, said Kintner's contributions "will be felt for generations to come."
"It has been an immense honor and privilege to hold this position of public trust and responsibility," Kintner said in the press release. "I will always value the many special people with whom I've had the opportunity to work in the Nebraska State Capitol."
By Erin Bamer

LJS: Key gubernatorial adviser leaving Nebraska government post

Lauren Kintner, a key figure in the Ricketts administration who played a major role in legislative relations, will leave state government later this month after 24 years as a member of the governor's cabinet in Nebraska.
Kintner served as lead policy adviser and legal counsel to Gov. Pete Ricketts and his two predecessors, Govs. Dave Heineman and Mike Johanns, holding the position of director of the governor's policy research office.
In that role, Kintner has been a key figure in working with members of the Legislature on behalf of the governor.
"She has helped the executive branch advocate for sound policy through three administrations,"

Ricketts said, "and her contributions have left a positive impact in Nebraska that will be felt for generations to come."
"Lauren has been a valued adviser," the governor said.
Kintner led the advancement of key policy initiatives that have led to "ushering in tens of billions of dollars in tax relief," Ricketts said, while curbing state expenditures, expanding services and support for Nebraska veterans and law enforcement officers, and cutting regulation for Nebraska business owners and entrepreneurs.
Kintner's departure is effective Oct. 24.
By Don Walton

Nebraska Examiner: Legion members protest pardon for fellow veteran for 'heinous' sex assault

LINCOLN — A group of American Legion members are protesting the September pardon of a fellow Legion member, saying that John Arias didn't deserve a pardon for a violent, 1993 sex assault and that Arias used other Legion members to win the pardon.
On Sept. 19, the Nebraska Board of Pardons voted 2-1 to grant Arias a pardon, a formal act of forgiveness that allows his name to be removed from the state's Sex Offender Registry and restores his voting and gun rights.
The members of the Pardons Board, before they voted, noted the support shown by about 20 American Legion members who sat together at the meeting. They wore their signature Legion caps, to show their support of Arias, who sits on a state veteran affairs and rehabilitation committee.
Not a 'misunderstanding'
A former state Legion commander said that not all Legion members supported the pardon of a sex offender and that the Legion cap is only supposed to be worn at official or Legion-sponsored functions.
Beth Linn of Scottsbluff, who served as state Legion commander from 2016-17, also said that while Arias has claimed the sexual assault was a "misunderstanding," it was far from it.
"Raping your wife in front of her kids while she's tied to a bed is not a misunderstanding," Linn said.
A group of Legion members, including Linn, have planned a "peaceful protest" of the pardon on Oct. 28 at 10 a.m. at the Nebraska State Capitol.
Showed remorse, Ricketts said
Gov. Pete Ricketts, who chairs the Pardons Board and voted to pardon Arias, said in a statement that Arias has accepted responsibility for a crime committed nearly 30 years ago and "has shown to be remorseful."
"He has not had any offenses since serving his sentence and has since become an active member of the veteran community, helping others who suffer from PTSD," Ricketts said in a statement, noting the support by veterans at the Pardons Board hearing.
Attorney General Doug Peterson, who also voted for the Arias pardon, deferred comment to the governor. Secretary of State Bob Evnen voted "no."
When contacted by the Examiner, Don Suchy, the current state commander of the American Legion and one of those who attended the Pardons Board hearing in support of Arias, said that the Legion

does not condone violence but that Arias, since serving out his prison sentence, had been a "model citizen" and a mentor to other veterans to reform their lives.

At the same September meeting, Earnest Jackson, an Omaha man who has spent 22 years in prison for a murder he maintains he didn't commit — and one in which two co-defendants were deemed innocent because of self defense — was unanimously denied a pardon.

Now leading a 'law-abiding life'

"We support him in leading a productive and law-abiding life," Suchy said in an email. "Since his release, he has sought only to better himself to society."

While he said he wasn't fully aware of Arias' crime, Suchy questioned whether Arias was a victim of "overzealous prosecution" and whether it made a difference that he suffered from PTSD.

Concerning Legion caps, he said that they are typically worn only at official meetings but that "the wearing of a Legion cap only indicates the individual wearing the cap is in uniform."

"Nebraska Legionnaires showed up to support the individual's transformation," Suchy said, adding that they didn't have a "vote or voice" in the Pardon Board's decision.

Broke into home

Messages left seeking comment from Arias, 57, of Grand Island, were not returned.

He was convicted of first-degree sexual assault in 1994.

Court records indicate that he broke into the Ogallala home of his estranged wife, then terrorized her with a knife. He tied her to a bed and sexually assaulted while their children, ages 5 and 7, were in the home. Arias then took the children and fled to Texas, leaving his wife bound and gagged.

He was sentenced to 15-30 years in prison, a sentence he completed in 2008.

At the Pardons Board hearing, Arias, a former Marine who served in the Gulf War, noted that he has been active in supporting fellow veterans. He was quoted in a recent Grand Island Independent story about the launching of veterans treatment court in Adams County as an alternative to prison for veterans who commit crimes.

Contested his listing

A check of state court records indicate that Arias has not been charged with any criminal offenses since 1993. But he was very active in filing civil lawsuits while in prison and shortly afterwards. At least 15 times, he sued state prison officials and members of the Nebraska Parole Board.

In 2009, Arias, also legally contested the determination that he was a "dangerous" sex offender who warranted lifetime listing on the sex offender registry maintained by the Nebraska State Patrol.

Arias argued that prison psychologists deemed that he was not a threat to reoffend. Arias did acknowledge that he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, but he said that didn't represent a threat to society, either.

The sex offender registry, it should be noted, has been controversial in recent years, with several offenders contesting their listing, maintaining that very few reoffend and that the public listing is cruel, double punishment.

Assault was 'very heinous'

Linn, and a press release from a group of Legion members called "What About Us?" stated that they opposed pardons for sex offenders because it is against their "morals and ethical standards." Arias' crime, they added, was "very heinous."

The group, in its press release, asked, "What if it was your loved one?"

The group said that Legion caps should not have been worn at the Pardons Board hearing and that all Legion members should have been informed before such a demonstration of support was made.

'This was kept pretty quiet. It was not made public to the body of Legion members of Nebraska,"

Linn said.
She added that the pardon set a very bad precedent.
By Paul Hammel

Lexington CH: Gothenburg Public Schools cuts ribbon with Jake Steinfeld to open new "Don't Quit" fitness center

GOTHENBURG — Gothenburg Public Schools cut the ribbon for a new $100,000 fitness center with fitness icon Jake Steinfeld on Thursday, Oct. 13.
Gothenburg Public Schools was one of three schools in Nebraska that was selected to receive a new $100,000 "Don't Quit," fitness center from the National Foundation for Governors' Fitness Councils.
The chairman of the NFGFC is Jake Steinfeld, an actor, fitness personality and founder of "Body by Jake", author and entrepreneur.
Previously, he was Chairman of the California Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports under Governors Schwarzenegger and Brown.
The NFGFC has already dedicated fitness centers in 38 states. The NFGFC program's goal is make its way to all 50 states in the coming years.
"Each fitness center is financed through public and private partnerships with companies like The Coca-Cola Company, Healthy Blue's Affiliated Foundation, Wheels Up and Nike, and does not rely on taxpayer dollars or state funding. My Fitness Store Commercial provides all the fitness equipment. The NFGFC's goal is to build a nation of the fittest, healthiest kids in the world," per the NFCFC's website.
"I've always said that academics and fitness go hand-in-hand and by giving schools the tools, we can build strong bodies and minds while boosting confidence, self-esteem and focus in the classroom. I've dedicated fitness centers to states around the country and have witnessed firsthand what happens when a school receives a brand new fitness center," Steinfeld stated.
The ribbon cutting festivities began in the Gothenburg Public School auditorium where the students were told about the NFGFC program and that Gothenburg had been awarded the grant for the fitness center.
Steinfeld was introduced to the students who told them they had chosen to bring their fitness centers to Nebraska this year. He said he got in contact with Governor Pete Ricketts and said they were able to bring three $100,000 fitness centers to the state.
Governor Ricketts recently signed a proclamation declaring October as "Don't Quit! Fitness Month." During "Don't Quit! Fitness Month," families and communities are encouraged to renew their commitment to making physical activity and healthy eating part of their children's daily lives.
There were 155 schools across Nebraska that submitted videos to the NFCFC to show that they should be the recipient for one of the fitness centers.
Steinfeld said Gothenburg's video submission as, "very interesting," and quipped that, "the comedy was well…the comedy." He added, "You guys did a great job."
Members of the non-profit foundation, The Berg, worked with Gothenburg Public Schools to put the application video together. Several other residents offered their time and talents to create the video.
Steinfeld later held a video chat with the group comprised of community members, school staff and

students. Steinfeld asked everyone to be ready to take notes and after a long pause he revealed the real reason, Gothenburg had won.
The room exploded with cheers.
The students themselves erupted on Thursday with applause when Steinfeld said that Gothenburg was one of the recipients of the new fitness centers.
"Physical activity and exercise have been shown to help prevent and treat more than 40 chronic diseases, enhance individual health and quality of life and reduce health care costs. In schools, physical activity and exercise have been shown to improve academic achievement, increase confidence and self-esteem, reduce discipline problems, cut absenteeism and foster better interpersonal relationships," the NFGFC states and Steinfeld said the same to the students.
"I love three things," Steinfeld said, "health, hope and family,"
He said it's important for students to have hope, to know even on bad days, better days will come. He said that if someone has their health, they have their life available to them. Steinfeld said that family can come from blood relatives, their friend group or their school family; he said it's important that someone always has their back.
Steinfeld said exercise can be the means for students to earn more self-esteem and put them in a place where they can do well academically and succeed at what they set their minds to in life.
The ribbon cutting was held in front of the new fitness center in Gothenburg Elementary.
Allison Jonas, Superintendent, Gothenburg Public Schools said "This opportunity will allow our fourth through eighth grade students to use the fitness equipment and facilities that are geared toward their body size. This is very unique for them."
Bryson Mahlberg, Gothenburg Public School PE teacher said of the fitness center, "The cool thing about it is that you don't have to be one grade or doing sports to use it. It will really affect every kid in our elementary. The options are endless with it; we can be creative as much as possible. The kids are really excited to use it."
About The National Foundation for Governors' Fitness Councils
The National Foundation for Governors' Fitness Councils (NFGFC) seeks to encourage and reward innovation in the field of youth fitness by awarding fitness centers to schools that use new and unique methods to promote student physical activity and wellness. The NFGFC envisions a fitness center in every school in the U.S., helping to build a nation that—through innovation and a "DON'T QUIT!" attitude—boasts the fittest kids in the world.
By Brian Neben

NP Telegraph: NP Chamber members celebrate a memorable economic year

North Platte's many economic development milestones of 2022 were reflected throughout Thursday's North Platte Area Chamber & Development Corp. annual meeting.
The evening's awards and main speeches celebrated young and veteran community leaders alike, not to mention headliner projects as large as Sustainable Beef LLC and as compact as Venue 304, the meeting's host site.
Anthony Goins, director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, heaped praise on

North Platte for its ongoing economic progress while encouraging local leaders and chamber members not to let up.

"This is North Platte, epicenter of economic development for the entire state of Nebraska," he said. "You have the ability to influence east Nebraska, west Nebraska, north Nebraska and south Nebraska, because this is North Platte."

Chamber President and CEO Gary Person said North Platte has much to be proud of as it looks back at the year after Gov. Pete Ricketts named the city Nebraska's 2021 Showcase Community.

It included not just Sustainable Beef's formal construction launch last week but progress in setting up an industrial "rail park" outside Hershey, the continued transformation of North Platte's 1972 mall into District 177 and a rapid petition drive that put North Platte Recreation Complex upgrades before voters next month.

"We've got our work cut out for us, but many communities would be envious to be in our position," Person said while giving his annual report.

Brandon Jones, owner of Beveridge Well Drilling, handed over the chamber's board chairmanship to North Platte lawyer Bill Troshynski after handing out the 2022 chamber awards.

The last one, for the chamber's Economic Development Partner of the Year, went jointly to DED, the city of North Platte, Lincoln County and the Nebraska Legislature for their roles in helping the Sustainable Beef and rail-park projects become reality.

Goins, who accepted DED's award, used his keynote address to present his department's five statewide goals and urge North Platte to pursue them in building on its economic successes.

Nebraska can capitalize on its own post-COVID-19 economic strength by retaining and acquiring talent, expanding in-state firms, luring out-of-state firms that offer good-paying jobs, aggressively building more housing and upgrading broadband infrastructure, he said.

"As leaders, we must recognize talent deeper in the pipeline and get them engaged in our workforce so they stay here in North Platte and they don't go to other places," Goins said.

But he also urged North Platte leaders to remember the importance not just of leadership but also of "economic inclusion" of all Nebraskans, relationships, trust and finally kindness.

"Kindness matters, because you can be competitive, you can operate in a competitive environment, but you can still be kind to people," he said. "It's what happens here in our state."

Other chamber 2022 award winners recognized Thursday were:

Business Member of the Year: Venue 304, developed by Hirschfeld's partners Alan Hirschfeld and Abbie Pack in the former Sears building at East Fifth and Bailey streets.

New Business of the Year: North 40 Chophouse, owned and spearheaded by returning native Rex Hansen in the remodeled S&R Service Station building at Sixth and Jeffers streets.

Volunteer "Project" of the Year: North Platte Area Wellness & Recreation Alliance, led by co-chairs Leland Poppe and Megan McGown, for developing the current plan to renovate and expand the Rec Center and upgrade Cody Pool.

Community Impact Volunteer: North Platte lawyer Brock Wurl for spearheading the August petition drive that secured a place for a proposed half-cent sales tax for Rec Center improvements on the Nov. 8 ballot. Wurl was the only award winner who couldn't be present Thursday.

Entrepreneurs of the Year: The joint award recognized three local couples who were among Sustainable Beef's founders: Rusty and Rachael Kemp and their Pioneer Ranch in McPherson County; Kirk and Tracy Olson and their Olson Farms near Hershey; and Trey and Dayna Wasserburger and their TD Angus operation at the Rishel Ranch south of North Platte.

Young Professionals — Community Award: Eagle Radio and the Schmidt Foundation for their support

of North Platte Young Professionals and local economic development.
Professional of the Year: Retiring University of Nebraska Regent Bob Phares, whose North Platte public career began at age 28 with his 1968 election as mayor. He was Nebraska's youngest mayor to lead a first-class city.
Business CEO of the Year: North Platte native Pat Keenan, who joined his family's former Coca-Cola bottling business after college before transitioning into the hospitality industry as leader of Keenan Management.
By Todd von Kampen

Sioux City Journal: UPDATED: Tyson CEO met with Dakota Dunes employees Tuesday; spoke last week to Govs. Noem, Reynolds

DAKOTA DUNES -- As state and local leaders worked behind-the-scenes to try and convince Tyson Foods to reverse plans to transfer over 500 white-collar jobs from Siouxland to Arkansas, the head of the giant meat company took questions Tuesday from the employees who must decide whether to move or stay here.
President and CEO Donnie King hosted an all-staff meeting at the company's soon-to-be-shuttered Dakota Dunes offices Tuesday afternoon.
Some state and local officials sought to also meet with King, but Tyson turned down all the requests, including The Journal's request for an interview with the CEO.
King spoke to Noem and Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds last Wednesday and offered to speak to Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, a Tyson spokesman said.
Noem's office issued a statement about the company's plans.
"We were disappointed to learn about this news, but we will continue to work with Tyson on the jobs that remain in South Dakota and on future opportunities. South Dakota is the best state in America to do business; we're working with companies every day to build and grow in South Dakota. We will continue working with companies like Tyson to ensure that our nation's food supply is stable and diversified."
King's visit to Siouxland came a day after Sioux City Mayor Bob Scott called on the tri-state governors to work together to keep the Dakota Dunes office open.
"To lose 580 really good employees in this area is just really tough to swallow," Scott said at the council's weekly meeting Monday. "I would like to think that we have three governors whose communities are going to be terribly adversely affected by this that they would get together and go see the people at Tyson, write letters, do whatever."
Getting Noem, Reynolds and Ricketts involved is essential Scott said, because Tyson "isn't going to listen to local communities."
"I encouraged the (Siouxland) Chamber of Commerce to try to make that happen and, so far, they've not be as successful as we'd hoped," the mayor said.
Siouxland Chamber President Chris McGowan said Tuesday the Chamber staff, in conjunction with our board-level leadership, "have initiated conversations with elected officials at every level of our

government."
"Additionally, we have begun a dialogue with Tyson executives, employees, retirees, and others who have generously shared their insight and expertise with us," McGowan said. " While we will continue to respectfully request reconsideration of this announcement by Tyson, we will also pursue every possible avenue to respect and protect employment opportunities for our citizens in the tri-state region."
Tyson announced the Fortune 500 company plans to bring over 1,000 corporate staff at the Dunes and in Chicago to its world headquarters in Springdale, Arkansas. The relocations will be completed in phases, beginning next year.
There will be no layoffs as a result of the moves. All employees are eligible for assistance to relocate to Northwest Arkansas. Those who choose to stay will be eligible for severance, with packages determined on an individual basis.
The sprawling Tyson complex that anchors the Two Rivers Business Park in Dakota Dunes was built in 1997 as the world headquarters for IBP Inc., which moved from Dakota City to Dakota Dunes. Just four years later, IBP was acquired by Tyson in October 2001 for $3.2 billion in cash and stock, creating the world's largest processor and marketer of chicken, beef and pork.
Tyson will continue to operate its flagship Dakota City beef plant, which employs about 4,500 people, and its cold storage facility in Sioux City. The publicly-traded company is by far the metro area's largest employer.
By Dave Dreeszen

Nebraska Examiner: Bacon, Vargas debate in NE02 who is more extreme, who is moderate

OMAHA — U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., and his Democratic challenger, State Sen. Tony Vargas, spent much of their first debate Thursday describing themselves as more moderate than the record shows and painting their opponent as more extreme than he advertises.
Bacon and Vargas hit familiar themes from their race to represent the Omaha area in the state's freshly redrawn 2nd Congressional District, which now includes Saunders County. About 200 people attended the League of Women Voters-WOWT noon debate at the Omaha Press Club.
Taxes and spending
Bacon, who is seeking a fourth term, criticized Vargas' legislative proposal to raise income tax rates on Nebraska's highest earners and a vote while serving on the Omaha Public Schools board to let voters decide a $421 million bond issue for new and renovated schools.
Bacon said Vargas describes himself as a property tax cutter but has blocked several legislative proposals to ease people's tax burdens, including to offset property taxes and cut income taxes.
He said Vargas flipped to support this year's $950 million annual tax relief package. Gov. Pete Ricketts called that tax relief package the largest in state history.
"He opposed the tax bill twice," Bacon said of Vargas and the package the Legislature passed last session. "Then he tried to take credit in the end when he switched over. Our taxes are high today because of Tony Vargas."
Vargas, a former teacher and nonprofit employee, defended his record on taxes, saying he has

worked to control spending and balance the budget. He said Bacon is trying to miscast his record of helping the Legislature cut taxes on Social Security income, offset more than $1 billion in property taxes and reduce income taxes.

"I actually worked to make sure we can afford and do everything we can to control costs," said Vargas, a member of the Legislature's Appropriations Committee, which sets spending. "I stepped up to buck the Democratic Party and voted for tax relief."

Abortion

Vargas, who supports abortion rights, said Bacon has muddied his position on abortion recently. Bacon has said that while he opposes abortion, he supports exceptions for the health and life of the mother.

Vargas noted that Bacon co-sponsored H.R. 1011 in 2021. The proposed constitutional amendment, which would ban abortion, contains no such exceptions, though Bacon said it would have allowed states to carve out exceptions.

Bacon said he hasn't changed positions, pointing to the written version of his 2016 survey responses for Nebraska Right to Life, when he said he'd make exceptions for the health and life of the mother.

"Congressman Bacon, you are hiding your long-held position on this…," Vargas said. "This is a defining decision and difference between us."

Bacon reiterated his support for a national ban on abortion, one with exceptions, but he said he doesn't think Congress would pass it. Because he wants to move in that direction, he said, he would support U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham's proposal banning abortion after 15 weeks.

Bacon argued that Vargas' view on abortion is extreme because has said he would support abortion rights with no limits, what Bacon called "abortion until birth."

Vargas said during the debate that he did not support "abortion until birth." He said Bacon was misrepresenting his position but declined to say during or after the debate what restrictions, if any, he would support. He said he favored leaving the decision to women and their doctors.

"Look, I have a wife and I have a daughter," Vargas said. "I want to make sure their rights are intact."

Inflation and the economy

Bacon, a retired Air Force brigadier general, focused much of his fire on Democrats' handling of the economy. He said Vargas would continue the spending that fueled record inflation. A Thursday report showed the consumer price index has jumped 8.1% over September 2021.

Nebraskans, Bacon said, can't afford higher prices for gas, groceries and heating. He said he and the GOP would fight new spending by the Biden administration, though he touted his work to help fund work at Offutt Air Force Base and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

"When the average family has lost 5k in spending power, that is a problem," Bacon said. "We've got to stop the reckless spending and increase domestic production."

Vargas said Bacon could have done more to fight inflation by voting with Democrats to lower health costs, including on health insurance premiums and the cap on insulin prices for seniors on Medicare. Bacon supported an insulin price cap when it was a separate bill but voted nay when it passed as part of the Inflation Reduction Act.

"I want to make sure we're reducing costs and getting our spending under control," Vargas said.

Bacon said he would fight Democrats' "feckless energy policies." He backs an all-of-the-above approach on energy policy, including tax credits for wind and solar power and prioritizing domestic fossil fuels production, including more drilling for oil and natural gas.

Vargas said he, too, supports harnessing domestic energy supplies but said the country needs to

more aggressively address a changing climate, investing more in cleaner energy sources and working faster to improve how Americans use traditional, non-renewable fuel sources.

Student debt relief

On student debt, Bacon said Nebraska was doing the right thing in leading a multi-state lawsuit to challenge a plan by President Joe Biden and the Education Department to forgive tens of thousands in student loans without congressional approval.

A better approach, Bacon said, would be for Congress to work together to figure out a way to encourage or allow the refinancing of student loans at lower interest rates. Biden's plan, he said, undermines personal responsibility and accountability.

"This will be defeated in the courts, and I think the president knows that," Bacon said. "It was done for political messaging."

Vargas, who said he went to college using Pell Grants, disagreed with Biden's program allowing such a wide swath of people to excuse $10,000 to $20,000 in student debt. He said he would have targeted the debt relief at those who need it the most.

The state senator, who represents South Omaha, said he would like to see Congress work to update the Pell Grant program to include more two-year colleges and training programs to enter skilled trades. Bacon agreed on the need to modernize education policy to embrace more than four-year schools.

"My parents were union workers," Vargas said. "I was the first in my generation to go to college. … We need to make sure we're making higher education more affordable."

Immigration

On immigration, Bacon emphasized the need to stem the flow of people and drugs across the nation's southern border. He said the nation has to get serious about slowing down how many people try to cross the border illegally if it wants to deal with legal immigration.

Arrests of those trying to cross the border in 2022 eclipsed 2 million people in September, a record number, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Bacon said he disagreed with Republican governors on the border flying illegal immigrants to Democratic-led states.

But, he said, the Biden administration relocates people waiting on their court dates to other states without telling governors and mayors and local law enforcement, straining schools and institutions.

Vargas said public safety along the border has to be improved and said that means doing more than addressing just human trafficking and drugs. He said Americans need Congress to be more pragmatic. He said people who have lived in the U.S. for years need a pathway to citizenship.

"Send somebody to Congress who's not going to point and blame a party or division in this country," Vargas said. "Send somebody to solve it."

Moderate or not?

Both candidates presented themselves as the better choice for moderate voters. Bacon touted his record in Congress, including passing 13 bills. He said he helped write the House version of the bipartisan infrastructure bill paying for roads and broadband.

He also worked with the Nebraska delegation to secure billions in flood recovery funds and a new runway for Offutt Air Force Base.

Vargas pointed to his work to help the Omaha area receive federal coronavirus relief funds. He has said he would make sure all of the district has a voice in Congress.

He said he will work with Republicans, Democrats and independents to make sure small businesses get what they need to grow.

Vargas criticized Bacon for opposing the House Select Committee on January 6, 2021. Bacon said he

supported a 50-50 committee but called the select committee slanted. Bacon noted that he voted to certify the 2020 election results. Vargas said he would protect voting rights.
On voter ID, Bacon said he would vote to support it, while Vargas said he opposes it. Both candidates said they supported letting states legalize marijuana for medical purposes.
Their second and final debate is Sunday.
By Aaron Sanderford

Political Flare: FAMILY FEUD: First Lady to Nebraska's GOP Governor Endorses DEMOCRAT in Heated Congressional Race

Susanne Shore, the wife of Nebraska Republican Governor Pete Ricketts, is taking a decidedly non-Republican path by endorsing the Democrat who's running to represent the state's 1st congressional district in November's general election, The Omaha World-Herald reports.
And she voiced her endorsement of Democrat Patty Pansing Brooks by noting her own efforts to help Nebraska's children. It's important, she said, that "those who can't always advocate for themselves have a person in their corner fighting for them."
"During my time as first lady, one legislator has proven that she will always use her voice to fight for not only those kids and families, but all Nebraskans — that's Patty Pansing Brooks," Shore said in the video, which was posted by Pansing Brooks's campaign.
Shore is a registered Democrat, so her endorsement isn't all that surprising. Plus she previously endorsed Pansing Brooks during a June special election to fill the remainder of Rep. Jeff Fortenberry's term.
U.S. Rep. Mike Flood, a Republican, formerly a state lawmaker from Norfolk won that contest. So he and Pansing Brooks are battling it out to see who will serve a two-year term in Congress. The term begins in January.
Perhaps Shore and Ricketts are the James Carville and Mary Matalin of Nebraska because as I mentioned earlier, Shore is a Democrat while her husband is a Republican who supports Flood. Or maybe their marriage isn't made in heaven. I don't know. Either way, the two showed themselves to be polar opposites during the 2016 Presidential election when Shore supported Hillary Clinton while her husband backed Donald Trump.
Flood generally paints Pansing Brooks as too liberal for Nebraska's 1st District. This district covers a wide-ranging area of 12 Eastern Nebraska counties, including Lincoln, Bellevue, Norfolk, and Columbus. He's also a sharp critic of the Biden administration and the World-Herald said he continually cites House Speaker Nancy Pelosi when criticizing Pansing Brooks.
But Pansing Brooks, who's a state legislator from Lincoln, considers herself a consensus builder. She has criticized Flood for his anti-abortion views, including his past support of an abortion ban in the state.
I'm hoping Shore's endorsement will give Pansing Brooks what she needs to become Nebraska's next representative for Congress. We do not need another anti-abortion congressperson. They are a dime a dozen. So if women in Nebraska want to be able to make their own choices about their bodies,

they'd best get out the vote in November.
By Megan Hamilton

Nebraska Examiner: Nebraska officials reveal new hotline for human trafficking

OMAHA — Nebraska has a new local hotline for the public to report suspected cases of sex trafficking and labor trafficking.
The new line, available 24 hours a day, is 833-PLS-LOOK (833-757-5665).
Announced Thursday by Attorney General Doug Peterson and the Nebraska State Patrol, the hotline is designed to receive tips on possible human trafficking and quickly direct the information to local investigators. Reports, which can be made anonymously, go directly to the State Patrol's information analysis center.
"Public reports can be the key to saving victims, interrupting trafficking operations, and prosecuting offenders," said John Bolduc, superintendent of the Nebraska State Patrol. "We urge anyone who spots the signs of human trafficking to report it immediately."
He said the hotline is the result of a partnership between the State Patrol, Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force and the Attorney General's Office.
People seeking victim services are still urged to call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888.
The Attorney General's Office website offers additional information about the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force, including information on how to identify the signs of trafficking and how to get help.
By Cindy Gonzalez

OWH: Staffing shortages leave behavioral health services in Nebraska prisons 'at tipping point'

LINCOLN — It's acknowledged that a high percentage of the offenders who come into Nebraska's prison system are dogged by mental health and behavioral health problems.
Yet of 18 staff psychologist positions within the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, only six are currently filled. And all three clinical psychiatrist positions are also open.
"I think we're at a tipping point right now," one prison employee said in a recent opinion survey. "If we lost one more psychologist, things would really start to go downhill."
State senators said during a hearing Thursday that such behavioral health staffing shortfalls must be addressed if inmates are to be rehabilitated and the public protected. The lawmakers and others also offered a common refrain for how to close those gaps: offer more pay.
"We know the formula — it is raising pay," said Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha, chairman of the Legislature's Judiciary Committee. "The goal is rehabilitation, not storing people."

State corrections officials acknowledged the staffing shortfalls, but said they do take the health needs of inmates seriously.

"While our health care staff do a remarkable job of managing a multitude of situations around the clock, admittedly, staffing challenges are a concern," said Diane Sabatka-Rine, interim director of the corrections department.

She called recruiting people to work within the prison system "challenging." But she also said the state is providing "robust" medical assistance and clinical treatment.

The state is using a number of strategies to make sure the health needs of prisoners are met, she said, including contracting with outside providers and utilizing overtime.

The hearing came a month after a state watchdog agency cited critical health care staffing shortages within the state's prison system.

The Office of Inspector General of the Nebraska Correctional System said addressing the shortfalls is critical not only for the welfare of the prisoners, but the safety of correctional staff and the public, too.

Now the inspector general has initiated an investigation to determine whether the corrections department is meeting the required standard of care for inmates, said Zach Pluhacek, assistant inspector general. Prisoners are essentially entitled to the same level of care that would be provided to anyone else in the community.

Questions of whether the state is meeting that standard were raised earlier this week by an inspector general report on a 40-year-old inmate who died of cervical cancer. She had been in custody for nearly 10 years before she received a Pap smear, a preventative screening that could have revealed her treatable cancer.

Sabatka-Rine, a longtime state prison administrator who took over as interim director just last weekend, said the corrections department is actively working to develop an electronic health records system. Just such a system — which could track needed health screenings — was required by the Legislature seven years ago.

Pluhacek also suggested it might be time for the state to have the University of Nebraska Medical Center conduct an assessment of the level of care provided within prison facilities. Lathrop agreed and said the Legislature next year should initiate such a review.

Sabatka-Rine said the staffing issues are largely rooted in nationwide shortfalls of health care providers.

She said the department has initiated targeted recruiting drives, offered hiring bonuses and increased pay in an effort to attract more workers.

A new labor contract last year increased pay for workers in some health classifications by 30%. The department also has some discretion to offer higher pay for certified positions like psychiatrists.

The inspector general said a survey it distributed last week also found morale issues among health care and behavioral health staff.

While most said they liked coming to work and felt safe, fewer than 10% felt strongly that they were supported by the corrections department's central administration. One worker suggested the central office was making clinical decisions without consulting the mental health team.

Another issue causing morale problems is the higher pay offered to the outside providers who are coming in to assist with care.

One nurse said the staffing agency nurses working beside her were being paid $65 to $75 an hour. The most recent state labor agreement with prison employees offers registered nurses base pay of $25 to $46 an hour.

Currently, only half the prison system's registered nursing positions are filled. The executive director of the state employees union said sometimes nurses even leave state employment to take the higher-paying jobs with the staffing agencies.
"It's a scam," said Justin Hubly of the Nebraska Association of Public Employees. "Let's fix it. ... Pay a fair wage and staff the facility."
Hubly noted the state has gone a long way toward eliminating shortages of security staff by offering pay increases of up to 40%. Now the same needs to happen in the medical and behavioral health fields.
"When we increase wages, it works," he said. "I have the receipts now."
While no one has an accurate figure of what percentage of prisoners have health needs, the state's chief justice has said as many as 80% of those in the court system have behavioral health or addiction problems. Those needs must be addressed, said ACLU lobbyist Spike Eickholt.
"We don't want them coming out worse than they went in," he said.
By Henry J. Cordes

Flatwater Free Press: Small-town Nebraska has a poverty problem. Three towns are trying to solve it.

From breakfast to dinner rush, Chara Pech stood behind the counter at Burger King. After moving to Hastings in 2021, she frequently worked 70-hour weeks as a supervisor at the fast food chain.
With four kids at home, she couldn't afford to work fewer shifts. Getting a higher paying job seemed like it would require too many hours back in school.
"I just felt like I'm always in this predicament," Pech said. "Just working and working and working."
Pech's predicament with poverty is familiar to many Americans – especially in rural counties. Since the 1960s, census data has shown higher rates of poverty in non-metro regions of the country.
Twenty Nebraska counties had a child poverty rate higher than the national average in 2020. All 20 counties have populations under 40,000, according to U.S. census data collected by The University of Omaha's Center for Public Affairs research.
Now, in some smaller Nebraska towns, local community leaders are fighting back, determined to shrink poverty in their hometowns. Since 2016, three separate initiatives in three different spots – Hastings, Nebraska City and Red Cloud – have tried to tackle the issue in different ways.
Bridging Forward launched in June with a lofty goal: Reduce poverty by 30% by 2030 in Hastings' Adams County and three neighboring rural counties.
It's the organization that gave Pech assistance in January 2022 after she got sober and decided to go back to school.
"It took them sitting me down and talking to them about it and showing me that I can do it," Pech said.
Today, Pech drives home from 8-hour shifts as a personal care assistant to help her kids with their homework. Then she stays up studying to earn her certified nursing assistant's license.
"As busy as it gets I get to remind myself that for the last eight years I was busy doing nothing," Pech said.
Bridging Forward has the goal of alleviating poverty, not just managing it. That goal that sets it apart

from previous programs in the area, said Brady Rhodes of the Community Impact Network, a partner of Bridging Forward. Program recipients work with staff to plan toward high earning careers with openings in the area, Rhodes said.

"We have these jobs that are open, that are possible for folks where they weren't possible for them in the past," Rhodes said. "We have a real opportunity to lift folks out of poverty with a little bit of support."

Pech was connected to a temporary job in a Hastings memory care facility. She's on her way to earning her CNA license, a job that will provide enough income for her to go to college for a degree in social work.

"I see my kids not being in poverty because I feel like in some ways I broke a chain," Pech said.

Pech is an early success of the program, but the goal of alleviating 30% of poverty in the area won't be an easy task.

"Rural poverty can be very deep and hidden," Rhodes said. "A lot of folks are maybe not used to asking for help and so finding the folks who need the help, who maybe have been in that situation for multiple generations, that's half the battle."

A heightened emphasis on work ethic and stigma around aid in small towns can add a barrier for those experiencing poverty in rural communities, said Jennifer Sherman, a sociology professor at Washington State University.

It's important for people to be recognized for the fact that they want to work and that they aren't just asking for help, even when they need it, Sherman said.

"It's one of the paradoxes that makes rural poverty difficult to fight," Sherman said.

Another difficulty of rural poverty is the loss of high paying jobs in small towns. People with the most resources are often encouraged to leave rural communities, Sherman said.

When Ashley Armstrong moved to the Red Cloud area from Kansas City in 2011, she quickly identified one reason families with resources might move away from her new hometown – the lack of childcare.

When she had her third child, the limited childcare options were almost full, Armstrong said. To fix the issue, Armstrong and several other residents began planning for the Valley Child Development Center, which opened its doors in 2018.

The center provides care to children from 6 weeks to twelve years, accepts families on child care subsidies and offers scholarships for qualifying families – making quality child care more possible for families of low income in the area, said Armstrong, vice president of the center's board of directors.

"We know that there are more families out there," Armstrong said. "That is always our goal, to continue to get families on subsidy and into our center."

Beyond access to childcare, the center has helped with recruitment for local businesses. Two nurses with young children told Armstrong they chose to work in Red Cloud versus other towns in the area because of childcare access.

In 2016 a similarly child-focused, anti-poverty initiative began in Nebraska City.

Despite the town's association with orchards and historic mansions, poverty is prevalent in the community.

When comparing the poverty rate of people 18-years-old and younger, Nebraska City's is 24% higher than Nebraska's average, according to The UNO's Center for Public Affairs research and the U.S. census.

"You will see this amazing historic home and you will see a home next door that is probably being discussed if it should be demolished," said Stacie Higgins the founder of EDGE Nebraska City.

Thanks to EDGE, every Nebraska City child has a personal library of at least 27 books by the time they start the third grade. The program's work doesn't stop with book donations. EDGE plans to reduce the poverty rate in its city by 2036.

"We cannot assume a book is going to take care of this," Higgins said. "You have to commit to the full process of here's the book, here's the relationship, here's the next step."

Twenty years after its founding, EDGE plans to erode decades-long poverty cycles. The program works to connect Nebraska City students with the community and local resources and encourage lifelong learning.

"One of our challenges is people might say, 'Oh, it's that book program,'" Higgins said. "We want to be more than that to people."

Adam DeBilzan teaches first grade in Nebraska City and serves as a member of EDGE's board of directors. He grew up in poverty, similar to the students he now tries to reach through the anti-poverty group.

"A program like EDGE could've gotten us out of that underdog story," DeBilzan said.

DeBilzan has felt the program's positive impact as a teacher.

"Their excitement to read has improved," DeBilzan said of his students. "They're proud of their books."

According to The Children's Reading Foundation, proficient reading skills by the end of the third grade is one of the strongest predictors of whether a student will graduate high school. Nebraska City's high school graduation rate is higher than the state average, but in 2020 only 20% of the population had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. The state average: 33%.

"We know that kids that read at grade level by third grade are more successful students," Higgins said. "It doesn't mean 4.0, it doesn't mean full ride scholarship, it means they're more confident students."

One of the best ways to promote early literacy is 20 minutes of at-home, daily reading, experts say. That goal previously seemed unachievable for some Nebraska City families with only a few books in the home.

Amy Callen's oldest son Connor was in one of the first kindergarten classes to get a "book bestie." Since participating in EDGE, Callen has seen Connor and his siblings grow more interested in reading.

"They not only come home with a book but they're excited about it as well," Callen said.

She hopes the excitement her kids have to read the EDGE books when they get back from school is happening in other homes across Nebraska City.

Connor is now a fourth grader and his book collection has been passed down to his younger siblings. He now participates in Citizen's EDGE which aims to connect students to their community.

While EDGE works toward the ultimate goal of reducing poverty, Higgins has already made an impact on Nebraska City students by fostering a love for reading and a love for the Nebraska City community, Callen said.

This work – in Nebraska City, in Hastings and in Red Cloud – is only beginning.

"I will know we've been successful when I run into a 25-year-old on the street and they can answer some simple questions like: 'I graduated from high school, I can provide for my family…, I'm actively engaged in my community and I'm still interested in learning,'" Higgins said.

By Addie Costello

LJS: Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana drops lawsuit to

block petition signature requirement

Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana dropped its lawsuit against Secretary of State Bob Evnen on Thursday, ending an effort to have Nebraska's multicounty signature-gathering requirement for initiative petitions deemed unconstitutional.

The dismissal, filed by the ACLU of Nebraska on behalf of Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana, comes after a panel of judges at the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals in August reversed a lower court's ruling blocking Evnen from enforcing the requirement.

Crista Eggers, statewide campaign coordinator for Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana, sued Evnen in federal court in May, arguing the requirement that petitions obtain the signatures of 5% of voters in 38 of the state's 93 counties violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

Under the requirement, put in place more than a century ago, a single voter who signed a petition in Arthur County had the same voting power as 1,000 residents of Douglas County who signed the same petition, Eggers' lawsuit argued.

U.S. District Court Judge John Gerard sided with Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana in June, writing the requirement was unconstitutional and granting a temporary injunction that prevented Evnen from enforcing it.

A majority of a three-judge panel from the 8th Circuit Court reversed Gerrard's ruling shortly before the July 7 deadline for submitting petitions.

With the multicounty requirement back in place, Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana failed to qualify a pair of petitions for the ballot, with both falling roughly 9,000 signatures short of the 86,766 needed to appear on the November general election ballot.

The first petition, which would have required the Legislature to enact laws protecting doctors who recommend and patients who use cannabis for medical reasons, included 77,843 valid signatures and qualified in just 26 counties.

The second, which called on lawmakers to pass legislation to legalize the production, supply and distribution of cannabis for medical use, had 77,119 valid signatures and qualified in 27 counties, according to the secretary of state.

In rejecting an appeal from Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana, two of the three judges on the 8th Circuit Court panel said the right to petition was created under state law and not the U.S. Constitution, finding that the group's rights had not been violated.

Earlier this month, the 8th Circuit also rejected a request for the entire court to rehear Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana's appeal.

Lincoln Sen. Anna Wishart and Sen. Jen Day of Omaha said they plan to introduce bills legalizing cannabis for medical use in the 2023 legislative session, which will begin in January.

By Chris Dunker

OWH: CHI Health's parent acknowledges ransomware attack

CommonSpirit Health, the parent company of CHI Health in Nebraska and western Iowa, confirmed in a statement that the "IT security incident" that has impacted the health system for more than a

week is a ransomware attack.
Officials with CHI Health confirmed previously that all of its Omaha facilities — including Lakeside Hospital, Creighton University Medical Center-Bergan Mercy and Immanuel Medical Center — have been affected.
In its statement, CommonSpirit officials said the health system took immediate steps to protect its systems, contain the incident, begin an investigation and ensure continuity of care.
The company's facilities, according to the statement, are following existing protocols for system outages, including taking certain systems offline. That includes electronic health records. The health system said it has "engaged leading cybersecurity specialists and notified law enforcement."
CHI Health officials have stressed that the system's clinics and hospitals remain open and that hospitals continue to accept trauma patients. However, they said, the health system has made some temporary adjustments, including rescheduling and delaying certain appointments or procedures on a case-by-case basis.
Health systems increasingly have become targets of such attacks in recent years. Cybersecurity provider Emsisoft has tracked at least 15 health care systems in the U.S., which manage more than 60 hospitals, affected by ransomware this year, the Associated Press reported.
Ransomware criminals increasingly are stealing data from their targets before encrypting networks, using it for extortion. They often sow the malware weeks before activating it, waiting for moments when they think they can extract the highest payments, the AP reported.
In September 2020, Nebraska Medicine was the target of a cyberattack that shut down computer systems for days. Patients were unable to access online medical and billing information, and nonurgent appointments were postponed.
But the CommonSpirit Health attack, which patients say has health care providers charting on paper, is proving frustrating to some patients, who report challenges in making appointments and obtaining prescriptions.
Edward Porter of Omaha, who has diabetes, said he has been unable to reorder sensors for his continuous glucose monitor because CHI Health's systems are offline.
Under his employer-provided insurance, the devices are considered durable medical equipment. He usually gets them at a CHI Health pharmacy that handles such devices. It would cost $75 or more each if he paid for them out of pocket, an expense for which he hasn't budgeted.
Meanwhile, he said, he's back to testing his blood sugar by using lancets to prick his fingers. Not only does it make his fingers hurt and feel cold afterward, the father of five, who works multiple jobs, doesn't have time for the frequent testing.
"It's nerve-racking, to say the (least)," Porter said.
When Connie Pfeifer of Omaha tried to get an appointment earlier this week for her mother, who had fallen and hurt her foot, she was told to take the 85-year-old to an urgent care or emergency room. With its systems down, staff at her mother's clinic didn't know what patients were coming in for appointments.
Fortunately, her mother's foot wasn't broken, Pfeifer said. But the process of getting a walker for her also has been delayed by the outage. Pfeifer said she was told Thursday that the clinic now can schedule appointments. The clinic also had faxed an order for a walker. Earlier, Pfeifer had to go to the office twice to get hand-written prescriptions for her mother because the clinic couldn't send them to a pharmacy.
A CHI Health spokeswoman said in an emailed statement that providers are following offline processes to manage prescription medications for their patients.

Patients who have a prescription on file with a pharmacy can continue to fill or refill their prescription. If a patient is out of refills for a medication, the patient should contact his or her pharmacy first and the pharmacy will contact the prescriber to obtain a new prescription with additional refills. CHI Health providers can write new prescriptions for patients who may require a new medicine.
Patients with specific questions, the spokeswoman wrote, are encouraged to call the CHI Health pharmacy location they use and speak with a pharmacist for assistance.
By Julie Anderson

OWH: Bacon and Vargas clash over abortion rights, student debt in first debate

In their first debate, Republican Rep. Don Bacon and Democratic State Sen. Tony Vargas clashed on Thursday over abortion rights, voter ID and student debt relief.
The two candidates for Nebraska's 2nd Congressional District kept arguing about abortion rights even when WOWT reporter and debate moderator Brian Mastre moved on to other subjects. Each candidate sought to portray the other as having the most extreme position on abortion.
The debate was held over the noon hour at the Omaha Press Club and sponsored by WOWT and the League of Women Voters. About 200 people attended.
The candidates were asked if abortion rights should be left to the states or if Congress should have a role. They were also asked if they support exceptions to a ban and who should make decisions about those exceptions.
"I am a Christian, I believe that God created us, we were created in his image, so I'm going to stand on principle of the defense of the unborn," Bacon said.
He said he would support a 15-week abortion ban because he believes that's what the majority of Americans support. He said such a ban would move the country "in the right direction."
Bacon tried to paint Vargas as extreme on the issue, saying the Democrat doesn't support any restrictions on abortion, a stand Bacon called "abortion on demand until birth."
Vargas said he doesn't support abortion up until birth, but what he does support is listening to women and letting them make decisions for themselves.
"I have a wife, I have a daughter, she's 3½ years old, I want to make sure that their rights are intact, I want to make sure we are protecting their decisions and government isn't doing this type of overreach," Vargas said. "That is important, not only because I'm not a doctor, but politicians shouldn't have a say over these decisions."
Vargas said Bacon supported one of the most aggressive proposed abortion bans in Congress, a constitutional amendment that would declare the right to life is guaranteed by the Constitution, including the moment of fertilization.
Bacon said nothing in that amendment, H.R. 1011, prohibits the state or federal government from making its own restrictions or exceptions and it also does not authorize the prosecution of any woman for the death of her unborn child.
On another issue, Bacon and Vargas were asked how they will vote on a ballot measure, Initiative 432, which would amend the Nebraska Constitution to require that future voters provide a valid

photo ID before casting their ballot.
Vargas said he doesn't support putting additional barriers on people's legal right to vote.
"What we should be working on is making sure that people can vote, who are legally able to vote that are citizens, are informed citizens," Vargas said. "That we're educating them and doing everything we can so they can make the best decision possible this Nov. 8."
Bacon said he supports the voter ID measure but will ultimately respect the voters' choices.
"We do need to make sure that those who have a hard time getting access, we have a way to help them get that voter ID," Bacon said. "By doing that, it makes it constitutional."
The candidates were asked about student debt forgiveness. Nebraska, along with five other states, filed a lawsuit challenging President Joe Biden's plan to forgive student loan debt for millions of Americans.
Vargas, a first-generation college student and Pell grant recipient, said he disagreed with some of the ways Biden approached providing debt relief.
"I would've targeted the relief to lower income families," Vargas said. "I would've tried to reform the systems that we currently have and the programs because we do have a higher education affordability problem."
Bacon said that what Biden did was unconstitutional and that action like forgiving student loans has to go through Congress. He said he is a supporter of allowing people to refinance their loans at a lower interest rate, Pell grants and encouraging young people to go into trades.
"This does undermine people's personal responsibility and accountability," Bacon said of Biden's debt forgiveness plan.
The two men, who will meet in a second and final debate Sunday, also argued about who has the better record of working across the aisle.
Bacon said he has delivered bipartisan results including 13 bills in Congress, money for Offutt Air Force Base to recover after the floods, money for the University of Nebraska Medical Center and several other projects.
"That's success," Bacon said.
Bacon said Vargas would be a rubber stamp for Biden and Democrats.
Vargas said he wanted to discuss solutions for solving problems, instead of casting blame on other people and political parties.
"Congressman Bacon has been talking about the administration or Democrats because it's easy," Vargas said. "Send somebody that's not going to act like a politician to Congress. Send somebody who's actually going to try to unite us more, rather than try to divide us when it's politically convenient."
The general election is on Nov. 8. The 2nd District includes all of Douglas County, including Omaha, as well as Saunders County and western Sarpy County.
By Emily Nitcher

LJS Editorial, 10/14: Races offer solid choices, real contrasts

For Lancaster County Attorney, the Journal Star editorial board endorses Adam Morfeld.
Voters are faced with a simple choice for County Attorney – continue the status quo with incumbent Republican Pat Condon or transform to face a changing community in a pivotal moment with

Democrat state Sen Adam Morfeld.
Condon, who has been a county prosecutor for 32 years, cities his courtroom experience, office management and work to create drug and veterans courts in his campaign to keep him on the job.
Morfeld, with management and legislative experience, would prioritize increasing use of problem solving courts, fairness in prosecution and sentencing, transparency and would use the office to investigate state issues in its jurisdiction because of state government's operations in the county and to press for legislative criminal justice and sentencing reform.
Condon has been an effective but very traditional conservative county attorney. Morfeld has earned the opportunity to make those operations more contemporary and responsive to the county's increasingly diverse population.
• • •
For Lancaster County Public Defender, the Journal Star editorial board endorses Kristi Egger.
Egger, a Democrat, quit her job as a 32-year deputy public defender to run for and bring new leadership to the office. That leadership would include hands-on work in the courtroom, reviewing case loads to better serve clients and county taxpayers by reducing the number of cases referred to outside attorneys, and expanding efforts to increase the use of problem-solving courts.
Republican Trevin Preble is aiming at changing the office's culture, too, increasing the use of problem solving courts and other tools to address any client's mental health and substance abuse issues and would bring his experience as a criminal defense attorney to the courtroom.
Egger's experience and career-long dedication to the office, however, earn her the endorsement.
• • •
For Lancaster County Clerk of the District Court, the Journal Star editorial board endorses Troy Hawk.
Incumbent Republican Hawk is seeking his third term as clerk of the district court and would continue the modernization efforts he has brought to the office, work to increase public access to the electronic management system and use his background as an attorney in running the office.
His opponent, Democrat Lin Quezner, would work to increase public access, diversity and equity in the office. But Hawk's track record earns him the endorsement.
• • •
For State Board of Education District, the Journal Star editorial board endorses Helen Raikes.
Raikes, a retired University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor of child, youth and family studies, will bring her lifetime of work on education and child development to the board.
Her opponent, incumbent Kirk Penner, who declined a meeting with the editorial board, was appointed by Gov. Pete Ricketts and has led efforts against proposed sex education standards.
Raikes, who is running to shield schools from culture war politics, is the better choice.
About our endorsements
As with all of our editorial board opinions, our election endorsements don't necessarily reflect the unanimous opinions of our members but rather a consensus. We arrive at them after candidate interviews, reviewing news stories and research. While we consider the board an advocate for the community, our endorsements, and all our opinions, are intended to initiate discussion.

LJS Local View: What 'detox' is, isn't

Prior to the 1970s, public intoxication was treated as a criminal offense. People were held in the

“drunk tanks” of local jails where they endured withdrawal with little or no medical intervention. Over time, advancements in medicine, the perception of addiction and social policy changed the way that individuals with substance use disorders were treated. Detoxification has also evolved as the drugs of use have changed. The increase of cocaine, heroin and other opioids have required providers to incorporate new treatment protocols.

Here in Lincoln, The Bridge Behavioral Health (formerly known as Cornhusker Place) served for nearly 40 years as a location for law enforcement to bring individuals who had been taken into custody under Nebraska Rev. Statute 53-1,121. Civil Protective Custody permits officers to take into custody someone who is “intoxicated and in the judgment of the officer dangerous to himself, herself, or others, or who is otherwise incapacitated, from any public or quasi-public property.”

While our community referred to this program as “detox,” this label is not accurate. Individuals brought to The Bridge under Civil Protective Custody were monitored by staff until a responsible party could pick them up or until they were no longer a danger to themselves. Typically individuals stayed less than 12 hours and never more than 24. That is not detoxification.

According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the leading authority in substance use and mental health, the detoxification process consists of three components – evaluation, stabilization and fostering patient readiness for and entry into treatment.

The Bridge operates an accredited detoxification program that includes these essential components. Patients are treated by a multidisciplinary team of healthcare providers, therapists, nurses and support staff, many who have lived the experience.

Patients typically stay three to five days, and medication is provided to assist them through withdrawal safely and as comfortably as possible. The Bridge assists over 800 individuals through the detoxification and withdrawal process every year.

Six months ago, The Bridge announced they would not renew contracts with law enforcement to provide Civil Protective Custody because of the nursing shortage and because the program, as it was operating, did not utilize evidenced-based practices. In fact, our accrediting agency, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities would not accredit the program, which impacted funding and licensing.

We sought ARPA funding from the city and county to remodel the space so that it would meet accreditation standards but our application was denied. While praised by local leaders for keeping people out of jail, less than 4% of the annual 2,200 admissions stayed for voluntary treatment. Some individuals were forced to go through withdrawal without medication and the cell-like rooms are not trauma-informed. The program certainly did not meet SAMHSA’s definition of detoxification.

Why is it important for our community and first responders to understand what detox is and isn’t? Because if we aren’t using the accurate word to describe services, it becomes a barrier for those who are seeking help.

While it will no longer provide Civil Protective Custody, The Bridge will continue to provide detoxification and withdrawal services. In fact, it is the only agency that provides detoxification in Lincoln and Lancaster County that accepts walk-in admissions 24/7 and serves individuals regardless of their ability to pay. The Bridge accepts clients who are using alcohol, opioids, benzos, fentanyl and meth.

In addition to detoxification and withdrawal, The Bridge provides substance use and mental health respite, residential treatment and outpatient services. Deeply rooted in the belief that recovery is possible for every person, The Bridge is committed to providing evidence-based, life-saving care and treatment to those battling substance use disorders.

Tammy Stevenson is executive director of The Bridge Behavioral Health.

AP: Quality of life concerns weigh heavily on rail contract vote

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The lack of some benefits most American workers can readily count on, like paid sick leave and regularly scheduled weekends, is driving some railroad workers to veto contracts that include hefty raises and $5,000 bonuses.

This week's vote by the third-largest railroad union against their contract raised the possibility that a crippling nationwide strike could still happen even though the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes Division union pledged to negotiate more before considering walking off the job.

All 12 railroad unions must approve the contract to avoid a strike. Six smaller railroad unions have now approved their agreements with the major freight railroads after the National Conference of Firemen & Oilers ratified their deal Thursday.

But the workers with the most concerns about demanding schedules that have them on call 24-7 — engineers and conductors, nearly one-third of rail workers — won't vote until next month.

Ultimately Congress may step in to block a strike and impose a contract if the two sides can't reach agreements.

The five-year deals include 24% raises, which are the biggest in more than four decades, and closely follow the recommendations of a special board of arbitrators appointed by President Joe Biden this summer. However, those recommendations generally don't resolve workers' scheduling and workload concerns, especially as the major railroads have eliminated nearly one-third of their workers over the past six years. Railroads have been reluctant to offer much more than that board recommended, although they did agree to give engineers and conductors three unpaid days off a year to tend to medical appointments as long as they give 30 days notice.

Conductors and engineers clearly have the worst schedules that can lack weekends because railroads cannot predict exactly when trains will be ready to leave, and because trains run around the clock. The electricians, mechanics, and other employees based in a set location have more regular schedules, but they say their work has also become more demanding.

Currently, rail employees can take days off for any reason, but those days are generally unpaid and workers might be docked under the railroad's attendance rules. And it's hard to get paid leave or vacation days approved unless workers plan far ahead and have the seniority to secure them, so that makes those kind of leave days nearly impossible to use for a sick day. That's why some workers question the value of the one additional paid leave day these contracts offer even though it would be the first improvement to that leave time since 1981.

"When I go to take them (personal leave days), every time without fail: 'Oh, the crew supply doesn't meet demand. We're denying it.' You've got to try to plan them in advance — ahead. So you can't use those for your sick days," said Paul Lindsey, a longtime Union Pacific engineer based in Pocatello, Idaho, who is active with the Railroad Workers United group that's campaigning against the proposed contracts.

Electrician Shelly Nunemaker wants to see BNSF ease the tight attendance rules engineers and conductors work under before those could get imposed on her job, and she says the railroad should

provide paid sick leave.
“They’re going to have to get a handle on this kind of thing before it gets worse and before it trickles down to us because eventually there won’t be anybody to fix those choo-choos that people need to drive around,” said Nunemaker, who wanted to vote “no” on the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers contract but said she never received a ballot. That has her questioning the validity of that vote because several coworkers also allegedly didn’t get ballots.
The strict attendance policies that some railroads use that dock certain employees points for missing work for almost any reason have been a key concern for the unions this year because workers can be disciplined after losing all their points. The railroads maintain those systems are needed to ensure they have enough crews available, and they say the systems give workers flexibility to take some days off as long as they manage their points.
The Association of American Railroads trade group notes that rail workers do have some sickness benefits that kick in after a waiting period of four or seven days, and unions actually traded away some paid sick days in the 1970s to get better short-term disability benefits. But the unions say the pandemic — when railroads temporarily offered paid leave for COVID absences — highlighted the need for paid sick time.
Track maintenance worker Matt Mortensen said that when his three boys were younger, he had to use nearly all his vacation time to take care of sick kids. Then if he did take vacation, it had to be unpaid time off.
“To me it’s weird working for a company that is so profitable and not have sick days,” said Mortensen, who has worked for BNSF for 17 years in the Kansas City area and voted no on the BMWED contract.
All the major railroads have been reporting sizeable profits and BNSF said it made just over $3 billion in the first half of this year.
Issues with scheduling and time off have increasingly become top negotiating concerns coming out of the pandemic, but rarely are the issues as glaring as they are on the railroads. Virginia Commonwealth University professor Victor Chen said the railroads’ intense focus on a lean operating model that relies on fewer, longer trains with fewer locomotives and employees has “made formerly good jobs atrociously bad.”
“Over the years, they’ve laid off workers in droves while expecting those who remain to do much more,” said Chen, a sociologist who studies labor issues. “They’ve imposed schedules that are wildly unpredictable because it means they can squeeze more out of each worker. They’ve put in place insane attendance policies that would never fly in white-collar workplaces.”
The working conditions on railroads have even attracted the attention of top policymakers. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi condemned all the job cuts when she spoke at the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen convention this week in Las Vegas.
“Railroad corporations are making obscene profits on the backs of its workers,” Pelosi said. “You shouldn’t get fired for staying home when you get sick.”
Lindsey, the Union Pacific engineer, said he doesn’t think the unions are asking for too much.
“We just want our pay to keep up with inflation and have the ability to take days off when we need them,” he said. “I think that’s totally reasonable.”

AP: Fighting food poisoning: Sweeping poultry changes

proposed

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The U.S. Department of Agriculture on Friday proposed sweeping changes in the way chicken and turkey meat is processed that are intended to reduce illnesses from food contamination but could require meat companies to make extensive changes to their operations.
Despite decades of efforts to try and reduce illnesses caused by salmonella in food, more than 1 million people are sickened every year and nearly a fourth of those cases come from turkey and chicken meat.
As it stands, consumers bear much of the responsibility for avoiding illness from raw poultry by handling it carefully in the kitchen — following the usual advice to not wash raw chicken or turkey (it spreads the bacteria), using separate utensils when preparing meat and cooking to 165 degrees. The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service wants to do something about it by starting with the farmers that raise the birds and following through the processing plant where the meat is made.
Their food poisoning target: Of the more than 2,500 salmonella serotypes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified three that cause a third of all human illnesses from chicken and turkey products. The agency proposes limiting the presence of these on poultry products.
In 1994, the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service took a similar step by declaring some strains of E. coli a contaminant in ground beef and launched a testing program for the pathogen which has significantly reduced illnesses from the meat.
In an effort to curtail salmonella outbreaks in poultry, the agency is proposing a regulatory framework that would include testing incoming flocks of chickens and turkeys for the bacterial disease that commonly affects the intestinal tract and affects 1.3 million people annually with symptoms that may include diarrhea, nausea and vomiting which could last for several days. Officials hope testing chickens and turkeys before they enter the slaughterhouse will encourage farmers to adopt practices that reduce the bacterial infection on the bird before they reach the point of meat processing.
A second measure would require enhanced monitoring for salmonella during processing by adopting sampling for the bacteria at multiple stages inside the processing facility. The third major change would be to establish a maximum level of bacterial contamination allowed and possibly limiting the three specific types of salmonella that can make people sick. Meat that would exceed the limits or that would contain the types of salmonella prohibited could be withheld from the market.
The FSIS will begin a lengthy process of proposing new rules by holding a public hearing on Nov. 3 to get input from the poultry industry and others. The government's goal is to come up with new rules and regulations that could be rolled out beginning next year and completed within two years.
The agency said it is taking its time to roll out these ideas and get input before establishing firm regulations. The agency hopes to begin rulemaking in mid-2023 and complete it in two years, said USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety Sandra Eskin.
"We know this is quite a pivot from where the agency has been historically and for that reason we're trying to be as transparent and deliberative and collaborative as possible," Eskin said.
Consumer advocates have pushed for such action on poultry products for years. Eskin said the administration of President Joe Biden is pushing to make the changes.
Seattle-based lawyer Bill Marler, one of the nation's leading lawyers to represent consumers sickened by food sources applauded the agency's action which recognizes that controlling salmonella on animals before they reach processing plants is crucial to reducing meat

contamination. He said FSIS should be bold and deem salmonella is a adulterant — a contaminant that can cause food-borne illness — in all meat as a starting point.

"What they've outlined is something that's really unique that they have not ever done before but it doesn't have a time line and doesn't have regulations attached that would show it's actually going to be accomplished. That's my criticism," he said.

The industry has been unable to meet government targets for reducing food-borne salmonella infections for a couple of decades. Meeting the new target set for 2030 of 11.5 infections per 100,000 people a year would require a 25% reduction, Eskin said.

Eskin said the industry has managed to reduce the number of chicken samples contaminated with salmonella by 50% from 2017 to 2021, but the rate of salmonella illnesses over the last two decades has not significantly declined. More than 23% of foodborne salmonella illnesses are attributable to poultry consumption with nearly 17% coming from chicken meat and more than 6% from turkey meat.

The North American Meat Institute, the trade association representing U.S. packers and processors of beef, pork, lamb, veal and turkey said efforts to combat salmonella are a high priority.

"We are encouraged to see FSIS is going through the regular rulemaking process. We look forward to reviewing the proposal and providing comment from the industry," said Julie Anna Potts, the group's president and CEO.

A spokeswoman for the National Chicken Council, which represents the companies that raise and process chickens for meat said they support efforts to reduce salmonella on chicken products.

"We are concerned that the proposed framework currently lacks industry input, research and data to support it," said Ashley Peterson, senior vice president of scientific and regulatory affairs for the group.

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