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Corn	May 2022	7.90	-15.00	07:45
Corn	Oct 2022	6.97	-45.00	07:45
Milo	May 2022	7.50	-55.00	07:45
Milo	Oct 2022	6.92	-50.00	07:45
Soybeans	May 2022	15.68	-103.00	07:45
Soybeans	Oct 2022	14.35	-70.00	07:45
Wheat	May 2022	10.13	-85.00	07:45
Wheat	Jul 2022	10.13	-85.00	07:45

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NPM: Ricketts Hails North Omaha Revitalization Bill
KETV: Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, community leaders celebrate $370 million investment in North, South Omaha
WOWT: Nebraska governor signs $335M Economic Recovery Act
KMTV: Omaha Recovery Act aims to make poverty in North Omaha 'the past tense'
KETV: 'The Good Life is Calling': Ad campaign aims to get people to move to Nebraska
KNOP: Compensation claim for first responders' families explained
NPM: Legislative Primaries to Narrow Field, Regardless of Party

KMTV: Herbster, Trump and other speakers gather in Greenwood for Save America rally
NCN: Trump hits Biden, disputes Herbster allegations; Herbster talks border, China
KPTM: A second woman comes forward by name with allegations against Charles Herbster (no video)
NPM: Second Woman Accusing Herbster of Assault Identifies Herself (no audio)
KETV: Second woman comes forward accusing Charles Herbster of sexual misconduct

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Nebraska Examiner: 'Real work' begins on $335 million investment to revive areas including North and South Omaha
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The Hill: Trump stumps for Nebraska candidate accused of groping: 'I defend people when I know they're good'
Washington Post: Trump makes closing pitch for Nebraska candidate accused of groping

Nebraska Examiner: A second woman steps forward by name to allege Charles Herbster groped her
OWH: Second woman accuses Herbster of 'groping' her at dinner event
NY Times: Nebraska Candidate for Governor Accused of Second Groping Incident at 2019 Dinner
The Hill: Second woman publicly accuses Trump-backed candidate of sexual misconduct

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OWH: Ricketts, lawmakers laud 'landmark' bill devoting $335 million to recovery in North and South Omaha

State Sen. Justin Wayne said he had fun working to pass Legislative Bill 1024 to fund recovery efforts in underserved areas of Omaha. Now that the bill has passed, he's a bit nervous.

"The real work begins now," Wayne said at a press conference Thursday.

The Omaha senator, along with Gov. Pete Ricketts, several other lawmakers and dozens of local officials, gathered at Metropolitan Community College's Fort Omaha campus to celebrate the passage of LB 1024. Ricketts described the bill as "landmark legislation" that will have a "generational impact" in the years to come.

The bill devotes $335 million to underserved areas of the state, particularly in North and South Omaha, but also to some low-income communities in Lincoln and rural Nebraska. Ricketts said some of the recovery efforts will include affordable housing, infrastructure investments, crime prevention, financial literacy and education.

Wayne said this is the first time in state history that North

and South Omaha have had this level of funding dedicated to them and now the pressure is on to produce results. “We’ll never get an opportunity like this again if we don’t use these dollars wisely,” Wayne said.

A committee of seven lawmakers has already formed to plan the recovery efforts. On the committee is Wayne, along with Sens. Mike Hilgers of Lincoln, Terrell McKinney of Omaha, Tony Vargas of Omaha, Mike McDonnell of Omaha, Brett Lindstrom of Omaha and Anna Wishart of Lincoln.

A legislative staffer confirmed the committee has already met once near the end of the legislative session, but they haven’t approved anything yet. First on the committee’s to-do list is to approve a request for proposal, or RFP, which will allocate about $135 million of the funding outlined in LB 1024, according to the staffer.

Although no specific projects have been solidified so far, Wayne previously said a top priority will be hiring a “master developer,” which will likely take the form of a contractor who oversees the major development projects in the area.

Adm. Osie Combs, president of the manufacturing company Pacific Engineering Inc., said he plans to contribute to the recovery efforts by expanding a business park in North Omaha to house a facility for his business. Pacific Engineering currently operates out of a 75,000-square-foot facility in Lincoln, with about 30 employees. Combs said he hopes to bring on 50 to 100 new employees through this expansion, primarily hiring people from the Omaha area. “We take it to the people,” Combs said.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Pacific Engineering built pods that served as temporary testing sites. Combs said those pods can be repurposed to serve different recovery effort needs , such emergency shelters or affordable housing.

By Erin Bamer

Nebraska Examiner: ‘Real work’ begins on $335 million investment to revive areas including North and South Omaha

OMAHA — With the heaviest legislative lifting behind them, key Nebraska lawmakers and Gov. Pete Ricketts gathered Thursday away from the State Capitol, on community turf where a $335 million recovery plan is to turn into action.
Meeting at a site in North Omaha, the public officials led a celebratory bill-signing event kicking off what Sen. Justin Wayne called the "real work" that will bring to life the Economic Recovery Act.
Also known as Legislative Bill 1024, the act initially focused on North Omaha, then added South Omaha and ultimately included other low-income census tracts in the state that were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

'Historic' legislation

Ricketts called the package "historic landmark legislation" and said Nebraska can't be healthy if certain ZIP codes aren't reaping the same success as others.
"That bill will have generational impact," said Ricketts. "It will invest in affordable housing, infrastructure, crime prevention, financial literacy, job training, education — all the things that go into making sure we are developing the full talent of all of our people here in the state of Nebraska."
Much of the $335 million — about $250 million — will come from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).
Wayne, who led the push for the legislation along with State Sen. Terrell McKinney, also of North Omaha, called Thursday a time to reflect on decades of neglect and also to recognize past leaders who paved the way.
He said that while historic, the occasion was "a little scary" because of the work ahead that could transform communities.
"The real work is just beginning," he said at the event held at Metropolitan Community College's Fort Omaha Campus.

Business park is one piece

State Sens. Tony Vargas and Mike McDonnell, both of South Omaha, also were recognized as co-sponsors of the legislation and were among the public officials greeting about 50 community representatives.
A special legislative committee soon will begin to seek proposals for efforts aimed at creating economic opportunities and improving the targeted census tracts, which largely are in North and South Omaha.
Also addressing the group was Osie Combs Jr., chief executive of Pacific Engineering, who plans to expand his Lincoln-area company on a future business park near

Eppley Airfield in North Omaha. The park is one economic development piece that is to receive a financial boost through the recovery act.
Combs, a retired Navy rear admiral, said he wants to work with local officials on an apprenticeship program to help build his workforce. He hopes to bring at least 50 jobs to the business park.
"We accept this baton to move forward," said Combs.
By Cindy Gonzalez

Kearney Hub: Gov. Ricketts expected Tuesday at Two Rivers open house

KEARNEY — Gov. Pete Ricketts will be on hand when the Two Rivers Public Health Department has an open house 1-3 p.m. Tuesday at its office at 516 W. 11th St. to celebrate its national accreditation status.
The public is invited to the 2 p.m. dedication ceremony, where Ricketts will speak, along with Pat Lopez, R.N., Dr. Brady Beecham and Dr. Ali Khan. Refreshments and cake will be provided.
Two Rivers expanded in late 2021, just 18 months after moving from Holdrege to its current office in Kearney. The COVID-19 pandemic required a larger staff and more space. It was able to lease a newly vacated office next door.
It added 1,700 square feet to its 3,569 square feet, with five new offices, an expanded lobby and reception area, a second conference room, a second restroom and more storage.
Duncan Theis Construction was awarded the $130,591 contract for the design, demolition and construction.
For Tuesday's event, RSVPs are requested by calling 308-233-3100, emailing orders@trphd.org, or contacting a Two Rivers staff member.

LJS: Nebraska legislative lobbying compensation exceeds $20 million

Compensation for lobbyists at the Nebraska Legislature in 2021 approached $21 million, Common Cause Nebraska reported Thursday in its annual survey of lobbying activity at the Capitol.

The 2021 figure of $20,789,181 in lobbying expenses to influence state government topped the 2020 figure by more than $2 million.

Common Cause titled its report as "The Pay to Play Express: Nebraska's Runaway Lobbying Train."

Compensated lobbyists with legislative clients totaled 366 in 2021, declining slightly to 336 this year, according to the report.

Once again, Mueller Robak led the way among lobbying firms with a $1,645,683 total compensation figure in 2021. Rounding out the top four: Radcliffe and Associates, $1,340,799; O'Hara Lindsay, $903,276; Peetz and Co., $827,100.

Among the largest spenders were Altria Client Services, the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce, the League of Nebraska Municipalities, the University of Nebraska, the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the Nebraska Bankers Association and the Nebraska County Officials Association.

The university topped the 2021 lobbying expense list at $180,065.

Omaha led the public school lobbying expenditure list at $97,700 with Lincoln listed at $21,600.

Common Cause said 16 former senators are listed as legislative lobbyists.

"When it comes to political campaign contributions, Nebraska is truly the Wild West," the report said.

"In 2012, when Nebraska's Campaign Finance Limitation Act was declared unconstitutional, we lost all control," Jack Gould, issues chair for Common Cause Nebraska, said.

"Nebraska has no contribution limits on PACs, corporations, principals, lobbyists, or even individuals.

"When Governor (Pete) Ricketts wants to support a candidate or oppose a ballot issue, he can contribute $10,000 or $25,000 or more without batting an eye."

In the 2018 election cycle, Gould said, "48 candidates spent $6,489,464 running for 24 unicameral seats that pay $12,000 per year."

"One has to wonder how important that $20 contribution from the average citizen really is to our state officials," Gould said.

By Don Walton

Norfolk DN: Flood discusses process to replace him if he's elected to Congress

State Sen. Mike Flood claims he isn't superstitious, but still, he doesn't like to take chances.

The Norfolk state senator was the featured speaker Wednesday during the Madison County Republicans' monthly luncheon at Black Cow Fat Pig. He also is running for the 1st Congressional District seat vacated by Jeff Fortenberry.

Following his talk to the Republicans, which included a recap of highlights of the past legislative session, Flood was asked in the event that he defeated fellow state Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln on Tuesday, June 28, in the 1st Congressional District special election, would he suggest to Gov. Pete Ricketts an appointment from the 19th District to take his seat?

Flood told the 75 people at the event that he doesn't have anyone in mind and would not offer any names to the governor.

"I feel like that's jinxing myself," Flood said. "It is an honor to represent Madison County and southern Pierce County in the Legislature and I want to make sure that my attention right now is on (the 1st Congressional District) race. It will be totally up to the governor."

Flood said if he is elected and Ricketts does make the appointment, that person would have to run in 2024 for the seat and would be limited to a little over six years.

"And I do believe this is especially important because if the U.S. Supreme Court decides that states do have the right to regulate abortion and that decision comes in June, knowing Pete Ricketts, there will be a special session to consider whether or not Nebraska should have abortion," Flood said. It would be possible that whoever is appointed would immediately have to vote on a bill that would give Nebraska the right to end abortion, Flood said.

When discussing the past session, Flood said the biggest story of the session was all the "meaningful tax cuts" that

were passed. He said his biggest disappointment was the Legislature falling three votes short to end abortion if the U.S. Supreme Court gives states that right later this year.
Flood said he also wanted to point out the work done by Steve Jessen of Norfolk, who helped to get the Nebraska Legislature to pass a bill calling for a Convention of States.
“He’s a warrior,” Flood said of Jessen.
Nebraska became the 17th state to call for a Convention of States to consider making changes to the U.S. Constitution if 34 states pass it.
Nebraska’s bill asks the convention to impose term limits, fiscal restraints on the federal government and limits on the federal government's power and jurisdiction.
“Steve Jessen, you put in as much time as I do on all issues,” Flood said. “I could look over the lobby and see that cowboy hat. He was absolutely out working over the crowd.”
Flood said he also appreciated the work of fellow state Sen. Brett Lindstrom and former state Sen. Theresa Thibodeau, who also attended the event.
By Jerry Guenther

LJS: Don Walton: Fluid Nebraska GOP governor race enters final days

And now there are just nine days to go in what has developed into a fluid and unpredictable Republican gubernatorial race.
"Capable of flowing and easily changing shape" is the dictionary definition of fluid.
Yep, that's the word.
Lots going on behind the scenes in campaign war rooms as this race appears to be tightening with three candidates moving within grasp of victory.
Polling results are strategically leaking or directed to news media and organizational skills at getting out the vote will begin to emerge as a big factor now.
And, of course, the fallout continues from the charge that Charles Herbster inappropriately touched or groped eight women at public events, a bombshell that exploded on the scene in April in a story written by Aaron Sanderford in the Nebraska Examiner.

Herbster denies the allegations, describing them as "totally false."

We've already had the surprising sight of Lt. Gov. Mike Foley independently parting company politically with Gov. Pete Ricketts, who twice chose him as his running mate, when Foley endorsed Herbster in opposition to the governor's strong support for University of Nebraska regent Jim Pillen.

What could be left now except for Donald Trump to parachute into this chaotic scene in a Nebraska version of his trip down the Trump Tower escalator five years ago?

So, of course, as if on cue, Trump prepared to drop into Nebraska and address a storm-rescheduled rally between Lincoln and Omaha on Sunday to support Herbster.

And there could be more drama ahead.

What does the governor do if Herbster, a man whom Ricketts has said would be "a terrible governor," wins the Republican nomination?

Does Ricketts just take a walk or would there be any consideration of an alternative petition candidate to challenge Herbster and the Democratic nominee on the November general election ballot?

But wouldn't that in turn open the possibility that the Democratic nominee, almost certainly Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue, could be elected governor with 40% of the vote, or less, in a three-candidate race?

In his loss to Ricketts in 2014, when the governor was first elected, Democratic nominee Chuck Hassebrook snared roughly 40% of the general election vote.

More likely than an alternative candidate in November is an explosive final 10 days ahead with Pillen, state Sen. Brett Lindstrom and Herbster all in the hunt and momentum in the driver's seat.

If Herbster ultimately wins the Republican nomination, we could expect a flood of Democratic TV ads during the general election campaign depicting Ricketts and Herbster and weaponizing the governor's words: "He would be a terrible governor."

Put on your helmets and flak jackets. This isn't going to be pretty.

* * *

"Never underestimate Justin Wayne," Ricketts said during a ceremony at Metro Community College celebrating enactment of legislation that will pump $336 million, most of it in the form of federal coronavirus pandemic recovery

funds, into North Omaha and South Omaha for development of affordable housing and new employment opportunities while revitalizing neighborhoods.

Wayne, with assistance from Sens. Terrell McKinney, Tony Vargas and Mike McDonnell, drove what the governor described as "a team effort" to win enactment of the plan after adjusting the original proposal to include other parts of the state and thereby gain widespread legislative support.

Lincoln is included in the compromise package with federal funding for development of affordable housing and support for the Lancaster Event Center.

It's a big step forward for Black and Latino communities in Omaha and, even though it took federal funds to accomplish it, also a step forward for the state.

Wayne described the ceremony as "a celebration of hope."

* * *

Looking ahead, there's the potential for an unprecedented movement of state senators into higher office this year.

It's all speculative now except for the guarantee that Nebraska will have a current state senator sitting in the 1st District seat in the House of Representatives after a June 28 special election.

Either Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln or Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk will join former Sen. Adrian Smith of Gering in the House. With former Sen. Deb Fischer of Valentine now a member of the U.S. Senate, that will give former state senators a majority in Nebraska's five-member congressional delegation.

And Sen. Tony Vargas of Omaha is attempting to make it four with his Democratic candidacy for Republican Rep. Don Bacon's 2nd District seat in the House.

In addition to all of that, Lindstrom, of Omaha, and Blood, of Bellevue, are bidding for their party's nomination for the governorship and conceivably could meet in the general election.

Nebraska has not elected a current or former state senator to be governor in the last seven decades.

Finishing up

* What's with that long table, President Putin? Royalty; COVID; shuffleboard; Brutus?

* Qualified Nebraska students with family incomes of $65,000 or less can attend the University of Nebraska tuition-free, NU President Ted Carter notes in a Journal Star "local view" column. That's remarkable, strategic and smart

as Nebraska's political and business leaders center their attention and support on community colleges and their instant production of a workforce.
* Here's KU's Bill Self, talking about the transfer portal (and in my opinion the gradual demise of the amateur, pure appeal of college sports): "Kids should be able to move in theory, but it's out of control now because the reason they're moving is because I can get a bigger NIL deal somewhere else" by marketing their name, image and likeness.
* It's May; slow the calendar down now.
By Don Walton

Nebraska Examiner: New Pillen poll shows still shows a tight, three-way race for GOP nomination

LINCOLN — New polling indicates that negative political advertising and negative publicity may be having an impact in the red-hot, three-way race for the Republican nomination for governor.
It also indicated that 24% of respondents were still undecided on how they might vote in the May 10 primary.
A telephone poll of 505 Republican voters was done earlier this week on behalf of the Jim Pillen campaign.
The results indicated a race still too close to tell who's leading, with 24% of respondents saying they'd vote for Pillen, a former Nebraska football player and University of Nebraska regent. Conklin Co. CEO Charles Herbster got 23% support. And State Sen. Brett Lindstrom, a financial advisor, polled at 20%.
The results fall within the poll's margin of error of plus or minus 4.4%. The poll was conducted Tuesday through Thursday by WPA Intelligence.
Seven percent of respondents supported former State Sen. Theresa Thibodeau.
In a statement, Pillen campaign manager Kenny Zoeller said "Nebraskans recognize he is the most conservative candidate in the race."
A spokeswoman for the Herbster campaign, Ellen Keast, said his campaign had not seen any polling numbers that

agree with Pillen's. She said Herbster voters are "mobilized and energized" to turn out on May 10.

Lindstrom campaign spokesman Pat Trueman said his takeaway was that the race is still a "dead heat" and that Pillen has been unable to grow the percentage of his supporters. They see Lindstrom's support continuing to grow.

Pollsters with Washington, D.C.-based WPA Intelligence said that support for Lindstrom dropped 3% in the past week and that there had been a dramatic shift in how Republicans perceived Lindstrom and Herbster in the past three weeks.

Lindstrom's "favorables" have dropped 16 percentage points from an April 3-5 survey to the most current poll, from 51% favorable to 35%, the pollsters reported. Herbster's favorables declined by 12%. By contrast, Pillen's favorables dropped 5% during that period.

That all coincides with an onslaught of negative ads aimed at Lindstrom, after he had climbed into contention with Pillen and Herbster, and since revelations from eight women, including State Sen. Julie Slama, that they had been groped by Herbster.

Herbster, 67, has denied the allegations and filed a defamation lawsuit last week against Slama, maintaining he was a "victim of a politically motivated and groundless attack."

His lawsuit prompted the 25-year-old senator and law student to file a countersuit. In it, she alleged that she was "shocked, mortified, and traumatized" after the candidate reached up her dress and groped her inappropriately at a 2019 GOP event.

Lindstrom has rejected claims in attack ads aimed at him that he is a "liberal." He pointed to his success in getting tax cuts passed for seniors and corporations and to his pro-life votes in the Nebraska Legislature.

Pillen has also been the subject of negative advertising, which claim that he and Gov. Pete Ricketts — a major Pillen backer — are behind the groping allegations against Herbster. Other ads attack Pillen's hog farms, claiming they are polluting waterways.

In recent weeks, polling has indicated a three-way race for the GOP nomination between Pillen, Herbster and Lindstrom.

By Paul Hammel

AP: Trump endorsement divides Republicans in deep-red Nebraska

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — In one of the nation's most overwhelmingly Republican states, the party is entering the final stretch of a bruising primary campaign deeply divided over who should become the nominee for governor.

Nearly all of Nebraska's GOP establishment leaders are lining up behind businessman Jim Pillen, believing he would be the easy favorite to win in November. But no endorsement matters quite like that of former President Donald Trump, who is backing his longtime friend Charles Herbster. And in a twist, a third candidate, state Sen. Brett Lindstrom, is emerging as a strong contender in part because of an endorsement from the mayor of Omaha, the state's biggest city.

Whoever comes out on top in the state's May 10 primary will enter the general election in a strong position against Democratic state Sen. Carol Blood. But the fractures that have surfaced during the primary campaign, particularly in the wake of groping accusations from multiple women against Herbster, have frustrated GOP leaders in Nebraska.

"It's unfortunate," said state Sen. Steve Halloran, a conservative Republican and longtime party activist. "What we're seeing here is creating a lot of tension within the party."

There has been little polling in the nine-person primary race to succeed two-term Republican Gov. Pete Ricketts, who can't seek reelection because of term limits. Herbster was seen as a strong front-runner through much of the race but is now fighting accusations that he groped at least eight young women at public events.

Herbster has denied the allegations and has even filed a lawsuit against state Sen. Julie Slama, the only accuser to be identified by name. Slama, who has endorsed Pillen, has counter-sued, accusing Herbster of trying to silence a sexual assault victim.

The allegations have roiled the race, with Herbster airing an ad that accuses Ricketts and Pillen of orchestrating the allegations. The spot points to Slama's ties to Ricketts as a former campaign spokeswoman and one of his legislative appointees. Her attorney called the ad a "vicious new political advertisement" and the lawsuit "a frivolous and

bad faith attempt to bully a sexual assault victim into silence."

On Tuesday, four other female Republican state lawmakers said they were setting up a legal fund to help others who have accused Herbster.

"He is a predator," said Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Omaha.

Trump defied much of Nebraska's GOP establishment when he endorsed Herbster, rewarding a longtime supporter and ignoring Ricketts' request that he stay out of the race. After Trump's endorsement, Ricketts released a scathing statement about Herbster and then endorsed Pillen, who also has been backed by a host of Nebraska luminaries, including former Gov. Kay Orr, the influential Nebraska Farm Bureau, and renowned former University of Nebraska football coach and congressman Tom Osborne.

The allegations didn't stop Trump from planning a rally with Herbster this weekend. The event was initially scheduled for Friday, but was rescheduled for Sunday because of severe weather.

Trump remains popular in Republican-dominated Nebraska, but some campaign experts question whether his blessing will be enough to offset Pillen's support from top Nebraska Republicans or Lindstrom's recent surge.

"Without question, the Trump endorsement has value," said Chris Peterson, a Nebraska Republican campaign strategist and lobbyist who isn't affiliated with any of the candidates for governor. "But what we've seen over the last few months is that most Republican primary voters already associate Herbster with Trump, so that's largely factored into their calculus."

As he waded into this year's contentious primary races, Trump has ignored a long list of allegations leveled against candidates he supported. He endorsed football great Herschel Walker for an open Senate seat in Georgia, despite allegations that Walker repeatedly threatened to kill his ex-wife and her new boyfriend and exaggerated claims of business success, among others.

He backed one of his former aides, Max Miller, for an Ohio congressional seat even though Miller's ex-girlfriend, former White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham — who also served as a top aide to former first lady Melania Trump — had accused Miller of growing abusive as their relationship deteriorated. Miller has denied the charges.

Some endorsements have come back to sting Trump. Trump originally threw his support behind Sean Parnell, an

Army veteran, in Pennsylvania's competitive Senate race. But Parnell eventually chose to drop his bid amid allegations of abuse by his estranged wife that he has denied.

Ryan Horn, an Omaha-based political strategist, said Trump's endorsement of Herbster may be a turnoff for many of the same suburban Omaha Republicans who were skeptical of Trump in 2020. Horn said he doesn't think Pillen has made much headway with them, either, despite the Ricketts endorsement.

"There's just something about both of those guys that left voters unsatisfied," Horn said.

Horn said that could give an edge to Lindstrom, an Omaha financial adviser who has focused his campaign on cutting taxes.

With no clear front-runner, the vote could be tight. The last time Nebraska Republicans were running for an open governor's seat in 2014, Ricketts won a heated six-man race by less than 2,400 votes and claimed less than 27% of the total Republican primary vote.

Other GOP candidates running are former state Sen. Theresa Thibodeau, who had been Hebster's running mate but left the campaign; Breland Ridenour, an Omaha information technology manager; and other lesser-known names.

By Grant Schulte

CNN: May primaries set to test Trump's touch as GOP kingmaker

Former President Donald Trump's ability to pick winning candidates will be put to the test as the primary calendar kicks into high gear this month with a series of contentious contests starting Tuesday in Ohio.

Most of this month's GOP candidates have tried to appeal to Trump during their campaigns, which is already a victory for the former President. But clearing the field and sailing toward a potential 2024 White House bid will hinge in part on his capacity to prove that he remains the unrivaled kingmaker of the GOP.

The Ohio GOP Senate contest is a prime example of how genuflection to the former President is driving the debate

in many Republican primaries throughout the country. Trump upended what was already a topsy-turvy race by backing J.D. Vance, the "Hillbilly Elegy" author and onetime Trump critic, who has since recanted. But even after Trump threw his weight behind Vance – describing him as "a warrior" against what the former President falsely calls the "rigged and stolen presidential election" – several of Vance's Republican rivals have clamored to prove they are more aligned with Trump's values.

That's been a common dynamic throughout many of the contests holding primaries this month. Fealty to Trump will play a major role in a US House race in West Virginia the following week when the Trump-backed candidate, Rep. Alex Mooney, will face GOP Rep. David McKinley in the first incumbent-versus-incumbent primary of the cycle. Mooney endeared himself to Trump by objecting to the Pennsylvania electoral count as Congress was certifying Joe Biden's general election victory. McKinley voted to certify Biden's win and backed the formation of an independent commission to investigate the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol – an effort killed in the Senate.

One of this year's most expensive Senate showdowns will unfold in Pennsylvania on May 17. Trump's candidate, celebrity surgeon Mehmet Oz, is in a heated race against, among others, David McCormick, a former hedge fund chief executive who has pounded Oz for the ideological inconsistencies he displayed throughout his television career.

Finally on May 24, Trump will get his opportunity to avenge Republican Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp for rebuffing his 2020 election schemes. The President lured former Sen. David Perdue into the race against the sitting governor, spawning an internal party brawl that many in the GOP saw no point in having.

The May contests encapsulate the long shadow that Trump's personal grievances continue to cast over his party and the extent to which he has trapped his GOP loyalists in a time warp as he encourages them to keep pushing his baseless claims of 2020 voter fraud at a time when many Americans have more pressing concerns.

Voters are struggling with soaring gas and grocery prices as inflationary pressures shows no sign of abating. There are new indications that the economy could be headed toward a recession. And the President's approval rating registered at a 41% in CNN's latest average of recent

national polls – a predicament that has historically led to steep losses in the House for the party in the White House. But Trump has never shown much concern about the way his personal ambitions have derailed his party's most effective messaging opportunities – and 2022 has given him a chance to hand-pick candidates who are as relentless as he is about continuing to sow doubt about the 2020 results, even though there is no evidence of widespread voter fraud.

The drive to please him and his base has contributed to the gravitational pull of GOP primary candidates farther to the right, a vulnerability that Democrats plan to capitalize on this fall as they seek to hold onto the suburban and moderate voters that Trump alienated.

"These primaries are really crucial because it's the first test we have of Trump's endorsement and whether some potentially weaker candidates that he has backed could end up as the nominee," said Jessica Taylor, the Senate and governors editor for the Cook Political Report with Amy Walter.

"He's the one driving the narrative. In that way, he's already won. All of these candidates, regardless of whether they've gotten Trump's endorsement or not, are feverishly trying to make themselves into the MAGA mold."

May 3: Heated Ohio Senate primary

Democratic Rep. Tim Ryan has largely consolidated his party's support behind his quest for the nomination to fill the seat of retiring GOP Sen. Rob Portman.

That has meant most of the drama has been in the crowded Republican Senate primary, centering in the final days on whether Vance deserved Trump's imprimatur. While the former President was willing to look beyond Vance's past critiques, the political arm of the Club for Growth is wielding those statements as a weapon as it tries to boost former state treasurer Josh Mandel – even though those moves have angered Trump.

One ad from Club for Growth Action in the final week featured an old clip of Vance referring to himself as a "never Trump guy" as an incredulous viewer asks, "Has Trump seen this?" and asserts that the former President is "getting it wrong" with his endorsement. (Vance has made a point of addressing his conversion on the campaign trail, asking voters to give him credit for admitting a mistake).

Before Trump weighed in on the race, Mandel, who served in the Marine Corps Reserve, and Mike Gibbons, a wealthy

self-funding businessman, had appeared poised to lead the field – their own rivalry becoming so heated that they appeared on the verge of blows at one debate. Mandel has repeatedly made the false claim that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump, telling reporters Friday that "we should audit (the election results of) every single state in the nation, including those that Trump won."

But he is leaning on other conservative figures to help carry his campaign across the finish line, including Texas Sen. Ted Cruz. Campaigning with Mandel in Ohio this weekend, Cruz mocked candidates who "have Donald Trump tattooed on my rear end" and said voters should instead consider the consistency of the candidates' records as conservatives.

In the race for governor, incumbent Mike DeWine leads his Republican primary opponents, according to recent polling, even though he has been a frequent target of the pro-Trump wing of his party. The more restrictive approach that DeWine adopted to Covid-19 precautions, as compared with other GOP governors, triggered some conservatives and Trump, who blasted DeWine in a recent rally in the state as "terrible." But Trump has not endorsed in the race.

Former Rep. Jim Renacci, who lost to Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown in the 2018 Senate race, and farmer Joe Blystone, who has railed against Covid mask and vaccine mandates as well as what he views as DeWine's government overreach, appear to be splintering the faction of GOP voters opposed to DeWine.

May 10: A controversial Trump endorsement in Nebraska

Trump has a track record of endorsing problematic candidates who have created headaches for his party – a dynamic at play in the Nebraska gubernatorial primary on May 10.

Trump has endorsed Charles Herbster, a rancher and businessman, and has stood by him even after the Nebraska Examiner reported in mid-April seven women, including Republican state Sen. Julie Slama, had accused Herbster of groping them at political events or beauty pageants, with an additional woman accusing him of kissing her forcibly. In six cases, at least one eyewitness corroborated the women's allegations, the publication reported. Herbster has denied the allegations, calling them "100% false."

Republican Gov. Pete Ricketts, who had urged Trump to stay out of the race, endorsed one of Herbster's GOP rivals, Jim Pillen, a hog farmer and veterinarian who serves on the

University of Nebraska Board of Regents. Ricketts described the allegations as “beyond horrible” and said Herbster should “seek treatment.”

At a rally for Herbster Sunday night, Trump claimed that Herbster was being “badly maligned.”

“I defend people when I know they are good; he’s a good man,” Trump said, hewing to his long-standing pattern of dismissing sexual harassment and assault allegations, including those that were lodged against him in his 2016 campaign when he said they were “all false stuff” and claimed he was “a victim.”

May 17: Tight races for Trump’s candidates in Pennsylvania and North Carolina

The race to replace retiring GOP Sen. Pat Toomey in Pennsylvania is on track to become one of the most expensive in the country as the commonwealth’s perennial swing state status makes that seat among the most likely to flip from Republican to Democratic control.

The bulk of the spending is on the GOP side. As Oz and McCormick and their outside allies have poured their resources into television ads, the race blew past the $100 million mark in late April. Trump is slated to appear on Oz’s behalf at a rally next weekend. And in a remarkable display of the thrall he holds over his party, most of the GOP candidates said at a recent debate it was too soon for their party to move on from the 2020 election.

McCormick hired a roster of former Trump aides and aggressively pursued his endorsement, lavishing praise on Trump-era policies as he and his allies have portrayed Oz as a RINO, or “Republican in name only.” One of McCormick’s recent ads argues that the former President endorsed the wrong guy by backing a celebrity doctor who has praised figures reviled by conservatives, including former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Dr. Anthony Fauci, one of Biden’s top medical advisers.

Democrats have a competitive race of their own among Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, Rep. Conor Lamb and state Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta. Fetterman has emerged as the candidate to beat by virtue of his fundraising and state-wide name recognition. Lamb, a centrist who has argued that his past victories in Republican-leaning districts demonstrate his ability to win statewide, has said that Fetterman’s more progressive profile would make him too much of a risk in the general election. Despite those attacks, Fetterman told CNN he sees no need to moderate

his stances, which include advocacy for more gun control, abortion access and universal health care – especially at a time when Republicans in Congress have shown no interest in compromise.

The other marquee Senate contest on May 17 is the race to replace retiring Sen. Richard Burr in North Carolina, where Trump endorsed Rep. Ted Budd, who backed the former President's 2020 election maneuvers by voting to toss out the electoral results in Arizona and Pennsylvania in January 2021.

Trump's endorsement nearly a year ago failed to clear the field for Budd, who has been boosted by Club for Growth Action running ads critical of former Gov. Pat McCrory. McCrory, in turn, has accused Budd of being "reckless" with his words, putting out a misleading ad focused on Budd's comments about Russian President Vladimir Putin and attempting to tie him in a recent digital ad to GOP Rep. Madison Cawthorn, a polarizing figure in North Carolina politics.

Cheri Beasley, the first Black woman to lead the North Carolina Supreme Court as chief justice, is heavily favored on the Democratic side.

Across the country, Trump also weighed into the May 17 intra-party fight in the Idaho governor's race, backing Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin in her primary challenge to Gov. Brad Little. Showing a penchant for Trump-style theatrics, McGeachin briefly captured the national spotlight last year by using Little's absence from the state to issue an executive order barring mask mandates. (Little later repealed the order, calling it "a self-serving political stunt.") In October, Little accused McGeachin of attempting to deploy the state National Guard to the US-Mexico border while he was in the Lone Star State visiting the border. Despite Trump's "complete and total endorsement," McGeachin does not appear to have gained much traction.

May 24: Trump tries to avenge his Georgia loss

Trump's defeat in Georgia has fueled his involvement in the Peach State – specifically his zeal to topple Kemp and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who refused Trump's request that he "find" more than 11,000 votes to overturn Biden's victory in the state. Trump has backed GOP Rep. Jody Hice, who embraced his election conspiracies, against him.

Georgia became the first state where the Trump-affiliated

Make America Great Again, Again! PAC extended its efforts to the airwaves, according to AdImpact data. Its ad touted both Perdue, Trump's choice for governor, and former NFL star Herschel Walker, who is backed by both Trump and Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell for the GOP to take on Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock.

While Trump's commitment to Walker helped keep other top Republicans out of the Senate race, it's not clear that his backing of Perdue has had the intended effect. The former senator's efforts to fire up Trump loyalists by arguing Kemp could have done more to challenge the election results so far has not proved to be a winning strategy.

Kemp, who has won critical conservative victories on legislation restricting abortion and making it legal for most Georgians to carry a concealed firearm without a license, has been bolstered by groups like the Republican Governors Association, which aired ads touting him as a "proven conservative leader." As a former secretary of state, he has rebutted Perdue's attacks by arguing that he did not have the authority to alter the election results. Kemp noted in a late April debate that he would not "be lectured by someone who lost his last election," referring to Perdue's loss to Democrat Jon Ossoff in a January 2021 runoff.

Voters in Alabama also goes to the polls on May 24, but Trump is no longer directly involved in the GOP Senate primary there after he rescinded his endorsement of GOP Rep. Mo Brooks, once one of his most loyal lieutenants on Capitol Hill, irked both by the congressman's flailing campaign and his assertion that voters should put the 2020 election behind them.

Two of Brooks' rivals to replace retiring GOP Sen. Richard Shelby – former Shelby aide Katie Britt and Mike Durant, a veteran and aerospace executive – have led the GOP field.

Trump's endorsement record

Many of the Republicans running in May primaries have styled themselves as Trump candidates, but this month's contests will be the first test of whether Trump's endorsement gambles pay off with victories.

But Scott Jennings, a Republican strategist and CNN contributor, said that even if the former President ends up with a mixed record, he is likely to adopt what he called Trump's traditional stance that "everything good that happens, I'm responsible for, and everything bad that

happens is someone else's fault."
As the general election contests take shape, Jennings predicted that the focus on Trump's 2020 election obsessions will begin to fade as connecting with voters' economic concerns becomes the paramount objective for the GOP.
"My personal view is that if you're not talking about inflation and gas prices, the economy, crime and schools in the fall – you're an idiot," he said. "It's obvious what people are worried about. … Make the race a referendum on Biden on those issues."
By Maeve Reston

LJS: Herbster points to conservative principles, Christian values

Charles Herbster, the wealthy Falls City agribusinessman whose self-funded early campaign start and insider association with former President Donald Trump vaulted him into an instant front-runner along with political target, says he'd be a governor focused on conservative principles, Christian values and the state's economic future.
That means protection of agriculture, attraction of business investment, job creation and development of a skilled workforce, he said.
"I am absolutely not a career politician," Herbster said. Instead, he said, he has been "in the direct-selling business for 45 years with the opportunity to work with hundreds of small, independent business people in Nebraska."
And that experience, he said, uniquely prepares him to be governor and lead the way to job creation and economic growth in the state.
"I know we can do better," Herbster said. "I would market the hell out of our state. I am a job creator.
"And I think people are ready for a new leader."
Nebraskans are "asking for the opportunity to have a seat at the table," he said, and he would provide that as a governor who listens to their ambitions and concerns.
"People just want to be heard (and) I'll be open-access," Herbster said during a telephone interview from his campaign vehicle as he headed west into heavily Republican territory on his way to Oshkosh with stops in

Sidney and Ogallala on the agenda for the following day.
During a lengthy interview over coffee in Lincoln at the beginning of his campaign a year ago, Herbster said he would focus on tax and school funding reform, including additional property tax relief, while promising conservative government if he is elected governor.
And during a walk to his car afterward he said his campaign strength is likely to be that he's a lifelong salesman.
Herbster, self-funding his campaign with millions of his own dollars, has been the acknowledged front-runner for nearly a year, with polling results confirming his position at the head of the pack.
But he ran into a buzz-saw in mid-April that has scrambled a Republican race that was already tightening when the online Nebraska Examiner reported that eight women had accused him of inappropriately touching or groping them at public events.
Herbster has categorically denied the allegations, stating in a Zoom conference hookup with members of the news media, including CNN, that "all those accusations are totally false" and that he is the victim of a politically motivated "personal smear campaign."
State Sen. Julie Slama of Sterling, one of the accusers, is now engaged in a battle of lawsuits with Herbster.
Another woman, Elizabeth Todsen, came forward and was named in a Nebraska Examiner story that was published Saturday. Todsen said she was groped by Herbster during an Elephant Remembers fundraiser for the Douglas County Republican Party in 2019, when she was a 23-year-old employee of state Sen. Dave Murman.
Gov. Pete Ricketts, who originally appointed Slama to the Legislature in 2019, said he believes the women and he has urged Herbster to withdraw from the race.
Ricketts is supporting Jim Pillen of Columbus in what has become a three-man race for the GOP nomination as measured by recent polls.
Also riding into contention now is state Sen. Brett Lindstrom of Omaha, according to polling results that suggest he may be making the most recent gains.
Trump is scheduled to visit Nebraska on Sunday evening to energize support for Herbster, who was chairman of the former president's agriculture and rural advisory committee and became an insider at White House events.
Herbster was in the room at Trump International Hotel in Washington with Trump's sons and advisers on the night

before the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol last year and attended the president's rally on the following morning, but left for Florida before the storming of the Capitol.
Herbster, a cattle producer and businessman who is owner and CEO of Carico Farms and Herbster Angus Farms in Falls City and the owner and CEO of Conklin Co., a manufacturing and distribution company based in Kansas City, Missouri, usually campaigns wearing a cowboy hat and opens events with a prayer.
This is his second bid for the governorship; he withdrew from his first campaign in 2014, citing his wife's health challenges. She died of a heart attack in 2017.
"It is time for a Nebraska farmer and rancher to lead our great state toward successful solutions," Herbster states on his campaign website.
"Property and income taxes are crushing small businesses, creating undue burden on farmers and ranchers, and promoting large government in Nebraska."
Herbster, who identifies himself as a man focused on "faith, family and freedom," says he is pro-life and determined to protect the 2nd Amendment and its constitutional guarantee to keep and bear arms.
His pro-life convictions won him the endorsement of Lt. Gov. Mike Foley in a surprising political split with Ricketts, who chose Foley as his running mate in 2014 and 2018.
By Don Walton

OWH: Herbster ad cancellations raise questions about campaign strategy, finances

In an unusual late-campaign move, ads for Charles W. Herbster temporarily went dark on broadcast and cable TV this week.
The campaign blames an error with wiring money, but political observers say the incident and explanation raise questions.
Herbster’s campaign for governor altered TV ad buys across Nebraska on Tuesday. Then, Wednesday, an agency that shares political ad news tweeted that the campaign had gone completely off broadcast and cable TV.

The Herbster campaign said Tuesday that it hadn't canceled anything and placed blame on a money-wiring problem. Wednesday, spokesperson Emily Novotny said that the ads went dark because of a time lapse after the issue was addressed. Rod Edwards, Herbster's deputy campaign manager, declined to offer any more detail on what happened.

"We're up on advertising," Edwards said. "We're going to be up on advertising for the rest of the campaign. We're not going to discuss internal financial transactions or decisions."

With less than two weeks until the gubernatorial primary and mailed ballots already in many voters' hands, experienced political consultants were puzzled by the rare pause.

"In a big, contested race like this — you want to avoid leaving the airwaves open to your opponents uncontested … you want to do everything you can to avoid that," said Ryan Horn, president of Omaha-based Bullhorn Communications and a Republican media strategist.

In analyzing Federal Communications Commission filings for about a dozen TV stations across Nebraska, The World-Herald found that the Herbster campaign revised its buys at many of the stations Tuesday.

At Omaha TV station KETV, for example, the campaign canceled spots planned for Wednesday-Saturday, which dropped a roughly $98,000 buy to about $42,000. The next day, it bought more than $7,000 worth of ad time for Thursday-Saturday.

At KOLN in Lincoln, the campaign canceled Wednesday-Saturday spots, dropping a roughly $58,000 buy to about $23,000. Then, Wednesday, it bought just over $5,000 worth in ad time.

A buy at Kearney-based KHGI-TV was revised and went from $15,000 to $6,000, then the campaign bought about $2,000 in ad time the next day.

The World-Herald asked the campaign if money saved from such moves was shifted elsewhere, but Edwards did not give an answer.

"It's an indication that it is a campaign that is making very quick changes, trying to find their footing, trying to change their message," Horn said. "It's not a campaign that's closing this campaign the way they would have liked to have planned, that's for sure."

Tuesday, the Herbster campaign launched an ad aimed at

GOP candidate and University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen, prominent Pillen supporter Gov. Pete Ricketts, and State Sen. Julie Slama, who has accused Herbster of touching her inappropriately at a 2019 political event. Herbster has maintained that the allegations from Slama and seven unidentified women, reported by the Nebraska Examiner, are a political hit job designed by Pillen and Ricketts. His new ad focuses on that.

Medium Buying tweeted Tuesday about the Herbster campaign canceling ads for Wednesday through Saturday, and then the next day about the campaign going dark on broadcast and cable. (An employee of Medium Buying is listed as State Sen. Brett Lindstrom's gubernatorial campaign's buyer on FCC filings.)

What the pause indicates, political consultant Chris Peterson said, is a "good question." Peterson said he could think of only one other time it has happened in the last two decades.

"The answer would have to be an error or a campaign reassessing how to deploy … finite resources in the closing days of the campaign," he said.

Herbster has largely self-funded his campaign, donating a total of $8.9 million from his own pocket through April 5, the last date included in the latest public report.

Herbster, a Republican megadonor and Conklin Co. CEO, was slated to be a "special guest" on Friday at a rally hosted by former President Donald Trump in Greenwood. The rally was postponed until Sunday due to severe weather, Trump's Save America organization announced Friday afternoon. Herbster has described himself as the "host" of the event to The World-Herald.

Edwards said he didn't know anything about the financing for the rally, but he said it had nothing to do with the wire transfer issue.

Sam Fischer, a retired Nebraska-based Republican political consultant who worked on 11 gubernatorial races in seven states, said a wiring issue at this point in the race "would be colossal malpractice."

But he did say there's a scenario where the wiring issue is believable: If Herbster were unable to free up enough capital in time for a deadline. Fischer isn't working with any campaign, but he is supporting Lindstrom and has donated money to his campaign.

Asked whether Herbster has enough money available to sustain the campaign's spending habits, Edwards rejected

the idea that funding may be running low: “The campaign is fully funded through the end of the election,” he said, adding, “Our message will be getting to Nebraskans loud and clear.”
By Sara Gentzler

LJS: Trump, allies to campaign for Herbster at I-80 Speedway

A rally planned for Friday night in Greenwood in support of Charles Herbster’s bid to become Nebraska’s next governor will feature former President Donald Trump and several of his close allies.
Trump announced the lineup in an email on Thursday.
Friday’s event is being held at the I-80 Speedway, approximately halfway between Lincoln and Omaha.
Herbster was an early supporter of Trump and later chaired his Agriculture and Rural Advisory Committee and served as an adviser.
Herbster, the CEO of Conklin Co., was in Washington, D.C., in the final days of Trump's presidency before he announced a run for governor.
The event will feature Kellyanne Conway, Trump’s 2016 campaign manager and longtime counselor; David Bossie, president of Citizens United; Matt Schlapp, chairman of the Conservative Political Action Conference; and Mike Lindell, CEO of MyPillow.
According to a rally organizer, parking will be available at the venue beginning at 8 a.m., with on-site ADA parking spots available on a first-come, first-served basis.
Attendees will be asked to enter I-80 Speedway from 238th Street to the southeast of the venue. Parking will be near the entrance, to the northeast of the racetrack, as well as on the track’s infield.
Once parked, guests will be asked to walk to the event entry on the southwestern corner of the property. Doors open at 3 p.m., with entertainment, special guest speakers, food and beverages available throughout the day.
The Secret Service will screen all rallygoers upon entry. A prohibited list of items includes alcoholic beverages; large backpacks, bags or suitcases; chairs; coolers; firearms; noisemakers; umbrellas; weapons; and “any other items

that may pose a threat to the security of the event as determined by and at the discretion of the security screeners."

An email from the event organizer says those attending are encouraged to wear masks and face coverings during the entry and screening process — areas where 6 feet of social distancing is not possible.

The program is scheduled to begin at 5 p.m. Trump is expected to take the stage at 8 to deliver remarks.

The timing could put speakers on stage at about the same time meteorologists predict a line of storms could sweep through the area. The National Weather Service puts the chance of rain on Friday evening at 70%.

An event organizer did not respond on Thursday to a question from the Journal Star about the rally's plans for inclement weather.

The former president's appearance in Nebraska comes a week and a half before the May 10 primary election in which Herbster is locked in a three-way battle for the Republican nomination for governor.

Other frontrunners in the race include Jim Pillen, a hog farmer from Columbus and member of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents, as well as Omaha state Sen. Brett Lindstrom.

The rally also comes after Herbster has been accused of sexual assault and groping by eight women, including state Sen. Julie Slama.

He has denied the accusations and labeled them a "political hit piece," likening himself to U.S. Supreme Court Justices Clarence Thomas and Brett Kavanaugh, who also were accused of sexual assault and misconduct.

In a television ad that hit airwaves earlier this week, Herbster's campaign said — without evidence — the accusations were organized by Gov. Pete Ricketts, a political ally of both Slama and Pillen.

Ricketts, who allied himself with Trump, has said he believes Herbster would be a "terrible governor" and has called on the agribusinessman to drop out of the race.

Others told the Nebraska Examiner, which broke the story, they witnessed the alleged assaults, and earlier this week, four state senators set up a fund to support the women who have accused Herbster.

During a Zoom call with reporters last week, Herbster said he did not plan to address the accusations on stage Friday.

The rally, which will draw vendors that follow Trump at his

appearances across the country, was not organized in concert with the Nebraska GOP.
Racing was canceled Friday at the I-80 Speedway and will be made up at a future date, the track said on its website.
By Chris Dunker

LJS: Trump defends, endorses Herbster at rescheduled Nebraska rally

GREENWOOD — Railing against the political establishment in front of a crowd of more than 3,000 people on Sunday, Charles Herbster cast himself as an outsider running with the blessing of former President Donald Trump.
In a wide-ranging speech that lasted about 25 minutes, Herbster said he was ready to "take back Nebraska" from elites entrenched in the state's political leadership.
"The establishment has taken control of the state of Nebraska and the Nebraska Republican Party and they are trying to scare me out of this race," Herbster said, without mentioning any names specifically.
"It's not going to happen."
Eight women, including a sitting state senator and former legislative staff member, have accused Herbster of groping them or forcing himself onto them at political events going back to 2019.
The allegations, first reported by the Nebraska Examiner, were corroborated by several witnesses or other people who were told about the misconduct soon after. Herbster has denied all the accusations.
While Herbster did not address the accusations on Sunday, two other speakers — including the former president — came to his defense.
Jack Brewer, a former professional football player and ardent supporter of Trump, said the accusations were part of a spiritual battle being waged for the soul of the country, and accused the women of lying about Herbster.
Asking the crowd to pray with him, Brewer asked for "the weapons that are formed against Charles Herbster be cast out."
"All those lies, all those people who came with a last-ditch

effort for power, for money — we cast them out right now in the name of Jesus," Brewer said.

Trump, who was also accused of sexual misconduct during his 2016 campaign and after, and could be heard referencing grabbing women's genitals on tape, called the allegations against Herbster "malicious charges" meant to derail his campaign.

"It's a shame," Trump said. "That's why I came out here. I defend people when I know they're good. He's a good man. He was with us from the beginning ... he's an innocent human being."

Mischaracterizing the allegations as Herbster simply talking to women, Trump said Herbster asked that he appear in Nebraska after the story broke.

"It's a disgrace what they've done and that's why I'm with you," Trump said. "I could have got out of this one really easy. I could have played golf. I'm here with you, Charles W. Herbster."

Although he didn't name the two women who have gone public with their accusations against Herbster, Trump took aim at two Nebraska Republicans he said have sided against him.

Over the course of nearly two hours, Trump took aim at Sen. Ben Sasse — "he's an embarrassment to the people of Nebraska" — and Rep. Don Bacon, who represents the 2nd Congressional District -- "he's been there a long time, but he's not good."

Neither Trump, nor Herbster, referred to Gov. Pete Ricketts or Jim Pillen, a Columbus hog farmer and member of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents, who is also running on the Republican ticket for governor. Herbster has suggested the allegations made against him were concocted by Ricketts and Pillen.

Regarding Sasse, Trump said Nebraska's junior senator questioned him about his plan to revoke the Affordable Care Act shortly after taking office in 2017.

"This little Ben Sasse, he's a lightweight," Trump said. "He started off so nasty to me, this little wise guy. I said 'who's that little guy back there? He's a fresh son of a bitch.' Isn't he though? He's like grilling me. I said 'you're a nasty guy.'"

Trump also said he reluctantly endorsed Sasse in 2020 at the behest of several GOP leaders in the Senate, even after someone — he didn't say who — in the Nebraska GOP offered to put up a challenger against him.

The former president also asked people to vote for Steve

Kuehl, a Republican running in the primary against Bacon, even though he didn't know the candidate: "Good luck Steve, whoever the hell you are!" he said.

Former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, who resigned after he was convicted of three felonies, including lying to the FBI for accepting campaign contributions from a foreign source, got Trump's sympathy, however.

Trump said Fortenberry — whom he didn't name — had been treated unfairly and was prosecuted "over a very small amount." Fortenberry accepted more than $30,000 in illegal campaign contributions.

"I know nothing about it, but it looked like a very, very unfair prosecution," Trump said.

Herbster, who spoke before Trump and briefly appeared on stage with him, hit on several similar issues as the former president, which were well received by the crowd.

He talked about banning critical race theory — a legal theory taught at the graduate level that examines how race and racism are embedded within systems of power — in all educational settings, including higher education.

Herbster also said he would push for school choice and to bring prayer back into schools.

"We're going to give parents and grandparents a choice of where they educate their children, whether it's home school, private school or public school," he said. "We're going to quit funding the unions and we're going to put the money with every single child where it belongs."

The Conklin CEO also said he would crack down on immigration -- an issue typically handled by the federal government -- and recited many of Trump's positions on the issue.

In addition to saying he favored a closed border, Herbster also said he would implement a test for any immigrant seeking to come to Nebraska.

"If you want to come in you need to honor God, you need to honor our flag, and you need to learn to speak English," he said.

Repeating a claim he made earlier in the campaign, Herbster, who said he sleeps four hours a night, said he would accompany the Nebraska State Patrol on drug busts across the state to ask them "who are you and why are you here?"

"They'll never see me coming," he said. "We're going to drive up in my white pickup with Trump plates on. They'll never know what hit them."

Despite being postponed due to severe weather on Friday, several speakers on the program returned to offer their support on Sunday.

Those who couldn't — Kellyanne Conway, Trump's 2016 campaign manager and a close adviser during his time in the White House, and Mercedes Schlapp, wife of National Conservative Political Action Committee Chairman Matt Schlapp — filmed videos that played to the crowd.

Conway said Herbster, like Trump, would upend the political establishment, which is why he drew opposition from "the old boys and new boys network trying to hang onto their power and hang onto their privilege."

State Sen. Steve Erdman of Bayard, one of a handful of legislators who have endorsed Herbster, said he believed in Herbster's plans, and dismissed the criticism against him as coming from people who were trying to maintain the status quo.

Matt Schlapp said the allegations made against Herbster were part of a war being waged by "socialists" against those at the I-80 Speedway to support Trump and Herbster.

It summarized many of the culture war themes that resonated most with crowd.

"When they go after Charles W. Herbster, when they go after Donald Trump, who are they really going after?" Schlapp asked the crowd. "You."

By Chris Dunker

Nebraska Examiner: Trump rallies for Herbster, defends Fortenberry and attacks Bacon, Sasse

GREENWOOD, Nebraska — Former President Donald Trump and more than 3,000 of his fans brought his 2020-focused road show to Nebraska on Sunday, where Trump defended GOP gubernatorial candidate Charles Herbster from groping allegations by eight women.

Trump is supporting Herbster in Nebraska’s Republican governor’s primary race. Herbster, the Conklin Co. CEO, is in a tight, three-way race with University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen and State Sen. Brett Lindstrom leading up to the May 10 primary election.

Trump called Herbster "a good man" who's been "maligned." But he spent the bulk of his one hour and 40 minute speech re-litigating his own loss to President Joe Biden, including repeating debunked conspiracy theories. He also lashed out at two Republican elected officials from Nebraska.

Trump called U.S. Sen. Ben Sasse a "gnat" who was good to him for two years, when Sasse needed an endorsement to win re-election, but he said Sasse showed his true self afterward. Trump called 2nd District Rep. Don Bacon "bad news" and asked Nebraskans not to vote for him again. He did not say why. Bacon was mildly critical of Trump after Jan. 6, 2021, saying the then-president bore some responsibility for what happened when rioters stormed the U.S. Capitol.

"Bacon's been there a long time," Trump said of the three-term Republican representing the Omaha area. "He's not good. … I think Bacon's a bad guy."

Trump, who has bashed Bacon before for voting for a bipartisan infrastructure bill, said Bacon's little-known GOP opponent, Steve Kuehl, "loves Nebraska." "I think Steve will do well," Trump said, stopping short of an endorsement. "Good luck, Steve, whoever the hell you are."

Bacon, reached Sunday, pointed out that in winning his 2020 re-election, he received 17,000 votes more than Trump did in the 2nd District. Trump lost the 2nd District. Bacon said he is "grateful to our constituents for their faith, and I work for them, not him. We are focused on 2022 and not backwards." He had endorsed Trump in 2019.

Sasse's staff did not return messages Sunday seeking comment.

Trump, Herbster and My Pillow CEO Mike Lindell criticized the Nebraska political establishment generally, without naming anyone specifically.

"The establishment has taken over … the Nebraska Republican Party," Herbster said. "They're trying to scare me out of the race. It's not going to work."

Herbster said his opponents might beat him, but "they sure as hell ain't gonna win the war."

Trump tried to give Herbster cover against the allegations of groping. Herbster is "the last person to do any of this stuff," Trump said.

"What did they say he's done?" Trump asked. "Did he talk to someone?"

Eight women alleged in an April 14 Nebraska Examiner

article that Herbster groped them.
Trump said that Herbster is “innocent of these despicable charges,” and that Herbster has no time to defend himself before the election.
Herbster has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing. He sued State Sen. Julie Slama for defamation. She was the first of the eight women to speak on the record about being groped. Herbster also paid for a campaign ad attacking Slama, who has counter-sued him, alleging sexual battery.

A second woman who alleged that Herbster groped her, and three people who said they witnessed a groping incident have since spoken on the record.
Slama’s lawyer, Dave Lopez, said Herbster has a chance to tell his side of what happened, under oath, at depositions that have been scheduled this week in Slama’s lawsuit.
“Mr. Herbster is legally required to appear and testify Friday morning at the Johnson County (Nebraska) Courthouse,” Lopez said.
Herbster tried at times to focus the rally on himself, calling it “my show.” He talked about cutting taxes and outlawing the teaching of critical race theory and sex education. But Trump and other speakers kept steering the event in different directions:
Lindell at one point attacked Omaha-based Election Systems & Software, saying he hoped they would sue him. Lindell has attacked voting machines as inaccurate and flawed.
Former NFL player Jack Brewer, who introduced Herbster, echoed a theme of Herbster’s campaign about bringing God back into the public square. He called on God to cast out Herbster’s accusers, saying, “I cast that out in the name of Jesus!” He described opponents of Herbster and Trump as satanic forces.
Trump at one point defended former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, the former 1st District congressman who is scheduled to be sentenced in June for three felonies. Trump said it was “very unfair” that Fortenberry might end up “in jail for a tiny amount of money.”
Fortenberry’s campaign accepted more than $30,000 in foreign money, which is against the law. He was charged with lying to the FBI about it and trying to conceal what he knew. Fortenberry resigned his seat after being convicted. His attorneys asked the court last week to throw out his convictions.

After the rally, Nebraska Democratic Party chairwoman Jane Kleeb said Nebraska voters should be turned off by "the cabal of shame." "Trump looked desperate, invoking all his old one-liners, as he tries to cling to relevancy," Kleeb said. "The Republican Party is deeply divided as they head into the primary."

She called on voters to consider State Sen. Carol Blood, a Democrat, and break up the state's "corrupt, one-party rule."

Herbster's national campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway did not speak in person on Sunday but said in a video message that Nebraska Republicans have a simple choice: Support Herbster because Trump does.

For Baylie Nielsen and Kelly Robinson of Bellevue, that endorsement could be enough. Both said they plan to vote for Herbster because Trump endorsed him. They came to see Trump on Friday, and when storms postponed the first rally, they came back Sunday.

"We wouldn't have missed it," Nielsen said of Trump's delayed appearance.

Traveling minister Kathy Brueggemann of Beatrice said she travels with Herbster and came to support him. He's a good man, she said, "better than people say."

Omaha resident Dale Leeper said he came to hear Trump talk about helping the country recover from the damage he said Biden has done. He said he might vote for Herbster because he believes Gov. Pete Ricketts is "dirty tricking" him.

Herbster and his campaign have claimed the women's allegations are part of a conspiracy involving Ricketts and Pillen, which they have denied.

By Aaron Sanderford

The Hill: Trump stumps for Nebraska candidate accused of groping: 'I defend people when I know they're good'

Former President Trump stumped on Sunday for Nebraska gubernatorial candidate Charles Herbster, who has been accused by multiple women of sexual misconduct.

Trump doubled down on his support of the candidate after the allegations emerged last week, and offered a spirited defense of Herbster on Sunday.

"He's been badly maligned, and it's a shame. That's why I came out here," the former president said of Herbster. "I defend people when I know they're good. He's a good man."

"I have to defend my friends. I have to defend people that are good," Trump also said. "He's been my friend for 30 years. He's the most innocent human being. He's the last person to do any of this stuff and even the stuff they're accusing him of. What'd they say? He talked to somebody. He talked. It's a disgrace what they've done."

During the rally, Trump invited Herbster to join him on stage, calling him someone who has been unfairly "put through a grinder."

The candidate spoke briefly, praising Trump's work while in office, including his Supreme Court appointments and moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

"The primary as you know is on May 10, and I think Charles is going to do very well," Trump said after Herbster departed the stage.

Herbster is a businessman who previously contributed to Trump's campaigns and advised the former president on agriculture.

Nebraska's outgoing Gov. Pete Ricketts (R) has called the allegations against Herbster "beyond horrible" and is backing University of Nebraska regent Jim Pillen in the primary.

Eight women have accused Herbster of sexual misconduct, including state Sen. Julie Slama (R), who said he reached up her skirt and touched her inappropriately in 2019, according to The Nebraska Examiner.

Since the publication of the allegations, one of Herbster's other alleged victims, Elizabeth Todsen, went public about her claims after first being included as an anonymous accuser in the report.

"For years I have struggled with an experience I had with Charles W. Herbster. At a political event in 2019, Herbster sexually groped me while greeting my table. This was the same night that Herbster aggressively grabbed Senator Julie Slama," Todsen said, adding that coming forward was an "extremely difficult" decision for fear of repercussions.

"But after thinking about this for years now, I know that it is time that Nebraskans know about the horrible actions

made by Charles W. Herbster," she added.
The gubernatorial candidate has denied the allegations and called the report about him a "ridiculous, unfounded dirty political trick."
Meanwhile, Trump has faced his own allegations of sexual misconduct, including from writer E. Jean Carroll, who accused him of assaulting her in a department store dressing room. He has also been accused of sexual misconduct by beauty pageant contestants, journalists and a contestant on The Apprentice.
By Monique Beals

Washington Post: Trump makes closing pitch for Nebraska candidate accused of groping

NEBRASKA CITY, Neb. - Former president Donald Trump made a closing pitch Sunday for a Republican gubernatorial candidate who has been accused of sexually assaulting multiple women, stepping deeper into a primary that has divided Republicans in this staunchly conservative state.
Trump appeared at rally in Greenwood with Charles Herbster, a businessman who has advised the former president on agricultural policy and has donated to his campaigns. The visit came after a recent Nebraska Examiner report in which eight women, including a state senator speaking on the record, accused Herbster of touching them inappropriately. Last week, another one of the eight women alleged on the record that Herbster had groped her. He has denied the accusations.
According to state Sen. Julie Slama, R, Herbster reached up her skirt without her consent and touched her inappropriately as she walked by during a local Republican fundraiser in a crowded ballroom in 2019. Elizabeth Todsen, a former aide to a state senator, said Herbster grabbed her buttocks after stopping to greet her table at the same event. Multiple women told the Nebraska Examiner that Herbster touched them inappropriately when they greeted him or posed for a photo.
Both Trump and Herbster sought to dismiss the allegations on Sunday, taking a defiant posture without discussing the

accusations in specific terms. The former president called Herbster a "very good man" who had been "maligned." Trump said Herbster was "innocent" of what he called "despicable charges."

"I defend people when I know they're good," Trump said. "A lot of people, they look at you and say: You don't have to do it, sir. I defend my friends."

The former president invited Herbster onstage during his remarks. The gubernatorial candidate used his time to talk about being one of Trump's earliest supporters in 2016.

Trump, who has faced and denied multiple allegations ranging from sexual harassment to rape, has backed other candidates who have been accused of sexual misconduct or domestic violence and denied the allegations.

They include Herschel Walker, a U.S. Senate candidate in Georgia who has been accused of threatening the lives of two women, as well as Sean Parnell, who ended his U.S. Senate campaign in Pennsylvania last year amid domestic abuse allegations, and Roy Moore, a 2017 candidate for U.S. Senate in Alabama who was accused by two women of initiating unwanted sexual encounters when Moore was in his 30s and they were 16 and 14.

Speaking onstage before Trump spoke, Herbster briefly and obliquely addressed the allegations, saying that the "political establishment" didn't want him to win. "They are trying to scare me out of this race, and it's not going to happen," Herbster said. "We are going to take back Nebraska."

He compared his vision for "making Nebraska great again" to Trump's approach to the presidency, rolling up his sleeves to take on illegal immigration and defend religious freedom. "This is my show," Herbster added.

Trump's presence in the Nebraska race has pitted him against outgoing Gov. Pete Ricketts, R, who has said that Herbster would be a "terrible governor" and supports a rival candidate, University of Nebraska regent Jim Pillen.

The sexual assault allegations against Herbster have become a contentious topic in the primary. Herbster has suggested that Ricketts was behind them, which the governor has denied. Taking a stance similar to Trump, Herbster has argued that both of them were falsely accused for political reasons.

"It's a playbook from the past," Herbster told former Trump adviser Steve Bannon on his "War Room" podcast. "Look what they did to Clarence Thomas. Look what they did to

Donald J. Trump. Look what they did to Brett M. Kavanaugh. Now, it's Charles W. Herbster."

Trump hinted at a personal reason for campaigning with Herbster - trying to prove, once again, that the candidates he endorsed were winners. He mentioned his preferred candidates in other states including Ohio, which is holding a closely-watched Republican Senate primary Tuesday.

Trump recently endorsed author and venture capitalist J.D. Vance but on Sunday appeared to momentarily conflate his name with Josh Mandel, a rival Republican candidate.

"We've endorsed J.P., right? J.D. Mandel," said Trump, who in the same rally mocked President Joe Biden for stumbling over his words.

After telling the crowd about how many of his preferred candidates had won their primaries, Trump pointed to slides produced by his pollster, McLaughlin & Associates, lingering on numbers that showed more than 60% of his voters "strongly" supported him.

Herbster tapped former top Trump White House official Kellyanne Conway to help with his campaign last year, along with former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski. In December, he parted ways with Lewandowski, when the adviser was accused of sexual harassment.

Trump had been scheduled to rally with Herbster on Friday but the outdoor event was delayed due to heavy wind and rain. The Sunday rally included two conservative activists who have falsely claimed that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump: MyPillow chief executive Mike Lindell and Republican activist David Bossie, the producer of a new documentary titled "Rigged."

Trump endorsed Herbster last year, stoking tensions among local Republicans, starting with Ricketts, who had urged the former president not to get behind the candidate. In January, the governor endorsed Pillen. "I respect many accomplishments President Trump had," Ricketts said. "But on this issue we're going to disagree."

The allegations against Herbster threw more uncertainty into what pollsters see as a three-way race between him, Pillen, and state Sen. Brett Lindstrom, R, with state Sen. Theresa Thibodeau, R, not far behind. While Trump won Nebraska by 19 points in 2020, and remained overwhelmingly popular with Republicans in the state, some primary voters said that they were not sold on supporting Herbster.

The Herbster campaign, which did not respond to a request for comment, has had other problems. Last July, his initial running mate, Thibodeau, quit the ticket, saying that the candidate was "chaotic and disorganized" and not ready for the top state job.

"I never saw that there was any real desire to learn Nebraska or learn Nebraska policy," Thibodeau, who went on to enter the gubernatorial primary, said in an interview. "Those leadership characteristics just aren't there."

Herbster, who has spent $5 million of his own wealth on his campaign, was seen to be leading a tight race when Slama accused him of groping her in 2019. Herbster sued for defamation, saying that the "false accusations and attacks on my character" had been "part of a greater scheme" to defeat him.

"We will show this lawsuit for what it is: a frivolous and bad faith attempt to bully a sexual assault victim into silence," an attorney for Slama said in a statement provided to The Washington Post.

At a parade here in Nebraska City on Saturday, celebrating the 150th annual Arbor Day, Herbster raced back and forth across the route, shaking hands and telling one family not to "believe all the crap" they were hearing.

Some voters grabbed signs for the Herbster campaign, with the words "Trump endorsed" under his name. Many were skeptical of the allegations Herbster is facing.

"He's the best suited for the job," said Terry Coen, 36. "I don't really think it matters. I don't think there's any body to it." His wife Summer, 43, said, "People are going to say whatever they're going to say, no matter who it is."

Republican opponents have not called on Herbster to quit the race, but they have criticized his response to the allegations. In a brief interview, Pillen dismissed his rival's suggestion that he is simply the latest in a line of conservatives to face false accusations. "Since I'm a veterinarian and pig farmer," said Pillen, "I'd call that hogwash."

Lindstrom said that he did not believe in a "rush to judgment" but was "disgusted" by the accusations. He knew and trusted the two identified accusers, Slama and Todsen, he added.

"When I look at the people who've come out, I tend to take their word for it," he said after speaking to supporters on Saturday. "Personally, having daughters and being in the political world, it's a little disheartening to hear that

someone who's running for governor would, or could have, engaged in that kind of activity."

The rival candidates are not alone in questioning his defense or explanations. When the allegations were first reported, all 13 women in the Nebraska Senate signed a letter that called the allegations "disqualifying" and "completely unacceptable."

"Sexual assault is despicable and damaging," they wrote, including state Sen. Carol Blood, D, who is running unopposed for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. "This is not a question of politics. It is an issue of character and basic human decency."

Herbster has released a television ad both denying the accusations and noting that Slama once worked for Ricketts. In a news conference this week, Herbster explained that he had "taken the route of attorneys to protect my name and my reputation."

"I respect all women, all females across this land," Herbster said. "The number of calls and text messages and prayers coming in to me has been absolutely overwhelming."

On Tuesday, four Republican state senators, all women, launched a Herbster Victim Witness Legal Defense Fund. In a joint statement, they accused Herbster of trying to "wield the judicial system as a weapon to silence his victims" and avoid accountability, adding that "survivors of sexual assault and witnesses should be free to come forward and tell the truth." Two said they received letters from Herbster's legal representatives.

Arlene Osantowski, 81, had traveled nearly two hours to attend the Trump rally on Friday. When it was postponed, she and her sister-in-law headed to a Thibodeau rally nearby, both saying that they planned to support her.

Herbster had business interests outside the state, there were questions about his taxes, and they were uncomfortably replacing the wealthy Ricketts with another multimillionaire governor, they said.

At Sunday's rally, Trump sought to convince voters that his backing could propel his endorsed candidates to victory. After bringing Herbster onstage, Trump showed the crowd slides produced by his pollster and lingered on data that showed a majority of Republicans "strongly" support him. "Strongly support means you can do almost anything, and they'll support you," Trump said.

By David Weigel

Nebraska Examiner: A second woman steps forward by name to allege Charles Herbster groped her

OMAHA — A second woman who alleged in a Nebraska Examiner article earlier this month that Nebraska gubernatorial candidate Charles Herbster had groped her came forward Friday and allowed her name to be used.
Elizabeth Todsen was a 23-year-old employee of State Sen. Dave Murman when she attended the 2019 Elephant Remembers fundraiser for the Douglas County Republican Party. A former state chair of the College Republicans, she was excited to be starting her career. One minute, she said, she was enjoying chatting with friends at the Omaha dinner.
Then moments later, Todsen said, she was staring into space, struggling to process having just been groped in public by Herbster, who was then a major GOP donor. A friend said he had seen what happened and asked if she wanted him to confront Herbster. She said no because she didn't want to make a scene.
"It was just all a blur after that happened, because it was all I could think about," Todsen said. "I just remember sitting there, and we were listening to the speakers … thinking, 'How do you support this man?'"
Todsen and State Sen. Julie Slama were two of eight women alleging in an April 14 Examiner article that Herbster had groped them. All eight accounts were corroborated either by witnesses or people the women told what happened immediately afterward.
Herbster continues to deny doing anything wrong.
"We are going to stick by our statement that Charles 100 percent denies these allegations," Emily Novotny, Herbster's campaign spokeswoman, said Friday.
Herbster filed a defamation lawsuit against Slama a week ago. Slama counter-sued him Monday for sexual battery.
Herbster has spent days trying to discredit Slama in media interviews and in a campaign television ad. He has said, without offering evidence, that Slama is somehow part of a conspiracy crafted by Gov. Pete Ricketts and his favored candidate in the governor's race, University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen.

Todsen said that she had been reluctant to come forward but that she could no longer watch Herbster and his campaign team attack Slama's credibility.

"It just made me so mad," Todsen said. "Seeing her be out there by herself, and ultimately just being bullied and discounted, I said, 'It's time to do what's right.'"

Part of what made her decision easier, she said, was when four Republican state senators announced Tuesday they were creating a new legal defense fund for anyone with a credible allegation against Herbster. The group is funding her legal bills.

Todsen said reading the Examiner's reporting also changed her perspective. She said she believed the other women "100 percent." She said she no longer felt alone.

"I wasn't the only one who was going through this," Todsen said. "I wasn't the only one that was having to deal with it. Maybe they were going through the same thing, hearing that he was running for governor.

"I just wanted to give them all hugs, even though I don't know them."

Slama expressed relief when informed of Todsen's decision. "I am so grateful for Elizabeth's bravery in coming forward, even in the face of unimaginable threats and pressure from Charles Herbster and his supporters to remain silent," Slama said. "Charles Herbster is a predator, and I stand with all of his victims, known and unknown."

Herbster has denied Slama's allegation that he reached up the skirt of her dress and touched her inappropriately at the same dinner.

Slama had previously told the Examiner that she saw Herbster grope a woman at the dinner. That woman was Todsen. After the Examiner's initial article was published, combat veteran Edward Boone spoke out on the record to say he had seen what happened to Todsen. He had previously confirmed Todsen's account, on condition that his name be withheld, saying he feared retaliation, too.

That night in 2019, Todsen was one of several young Republicans from Lincoln who attended the dinner. They were sitting with friends from Omaha. They all knew that Herbster had paid for their table.

Todsen's description of what happened next meshed with what others have described. Herbster stopped by to greet the group at the table. He shook hands with the men. Todsen said she then extended her hand. She said Herbster shook hands with her and then "pulled me into an

aggressive" embrace.
"It was more than a hug," Todsen said. "His hand went to my butt. It was a grab. At that point, I tried to push away, but I couldn't. It was like he knew that I couldn't say anything," she said, as if he thought "he had sponsored this table, so why would I say anything?"
She says she has dealt with anxiety, fear and continual reminders since then. Todsen, a political fundraiser, is more wary now when dealing with men in the workplace. She said she keeps her guard up.
She finally told her parents this week about what happened, which was a relief, she said. She had a message for any other woman considering speaking out publicly.
"It's going to be really, really hard to come out and share your story," Todsen said. "But there will be people who believe you, support you and will help you heal.
"It's not just going to be the bad people who discount you, and it's going to be OK."
Victims of sexual violence can contact the Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence to access a statewide network of service providers online, or by calling the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network's survivor hotline toll-free at (800) 656-4673.
By Aaron Sanderford

OWH: Second woman accuses Herbster of 'groping' her at dinner event

A second woman has come forward publicly with allegations that Nebraska gubernatorial candidate Charles W. Herbster groped her.
Elizabeth Todsen alleges that Herbster "sexually groped" her while greeting her table during the Douglas County Republican Party's 2019 Elephant Remembers dinner, according to a statement released by her attorney. She claims the incident occurred the same night that State Sen. Julie Slama accuses Herbster of groping her at the event.
Todsen, a former legislative assistant to State Sen. Dave Murman, was one of the eight women who accused Herbster of groping them in a Nebraska

Examiner report released April 14. At the time, Slama was the only named accuser.

Herbster alleges the accusations are part of a "smear attack." He has sought to tie Slama's claims to her political connections to Gov. Pete Ricketts and endorsement of Herbster's primary opponent Jim Pillen, a Columbus hog producer and University of Nebraska regent. Herbster denied Todsen's allegations in a statement released by his campaign office Saturday.

In her statement, Todsen said it was a difficult decision to come forward by name with the allegations.

"After thinking about this for years now, I know that it is time that Nebraskans know about the horrible actions made by Charles W. Herbster," the statement says.

Todsen also said she is "proud" of Slama for coming forward with her accusations.

She declined to provide further comment on Saturday.

On April 22, Herbster filed a defamation lawsuit against Slama following the publication of her and the seven other women's allegations by the Nebraska Examiner.

Slama filed a countersuit on Monday alleging sexual battery by Herbster.

On Tuesday, four Republican female state senators announced they were launching a legal fund to support the women accusing Herbster. One of the four, Sen. Lou Ann Linehan, said the women wanted to show their support for Slama and the other women who have made accusations.

"We realized that it would be helpful for these other women if they knew that we would support them if they came forward," Linehan said.

Herbster's campaign said he plans to take additional legal action.

"He will not stop fighting until his name is cleared and he is vindicated," the statement read.

By Luna Stephens

NY Times: Nebraska Candidate for Governor Accused of Second Groping Incident at 2019 Dinner

A second woman has publicly accused Charles W. Herbster,

the Republican candidate for governor in Nebraska endorsed by former President Donald J. Trump, of groping her at a 2019 Republican fund-raising dinner.

Elizabeth Todsen said Mr. Herbster grabbed her at the dinner in Omaha and said details of the incident reported earlier this month by the Nebraska Examiner were correct.

"For years I have struggled with an experience I had with Charles W. Herbster," she said in a statement issued by her lawyer. "At a political event in 2019, Herbster sexually groped me while greeting my table."

The allegations against Mr. Herbster, a millionaire agribusiness executive who is largely self-funding his campaign, have roiled the often polite world of Nebraska politics ahead of the state's May 10 primary. The longtime Trump ally has adopted the former president's playbook in responding to the allegations, forcefully denying them, suing his first public accuser, a state senator, and tying her to his political rivals.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Herbster's campaign, Emily Novotny, said Mr. Herbster "absolutely and unequivocally denies all allegations." She said he "will be taking legal action" against Ms. Todsen.

Mr. Herbster is a bitter political rival of Gov. Pete Ricketts, a term-limited Republican who like Mr. Herbster has long been a major donor to Nebraska Republicans. Mr. Ricketts is supporting Jim Pillen, a member of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents. Limited public polling of the race shows Mr. Herbster and Mr. Pillen locked in a virtual three-way tie with Brett Lindstrom, a state senator who has attracted support from moderate Republicans and from some Democrats who have changed their party affiliation to vote in the primary.

The account from Ms. Todsen follows an accusation earlier this month from Julie Slama, a Nebraska state senator who said Mr. Herbster also grabbed her at the same event.

Ms. Todsen, 26, is a former political aide to Nebraska state legislators who now works for a fund-raising company in Washington. She did not respond to messages on Saturday and her lawyer, Tara Tesmer Paulson of Lincoln, Neb., said she would make no additional comments.

Mr. Herbster denied Ms. Slama's account and has since aired television ads tying her to his political rivals in the governor's race while comparing himself to Supreme Court Justices Clarence Thomas and Brett Kavanaugh, who both faced charges of improper behavior during their

confirmation hearings. Mr. Herbster's TV ad claims Ms. Slama kept in contact with him after the incident and "even invited Herbster to her destination wedding."
Ms. Slama said on Twitter on Saturday that she was "grateful for Elizabeth's bravery in coming forward."
Mr. Herbster and Mr. Trump are scheduled to appear together at a rally on Sunday in Greenwood, Neb. The event was originally planned for Friday night but Mr. Trump moved it, he said, because of storms forecast for the area.
By Reid J. Epstein

The Hill: Second woman publicly accuses Trump-backed candidate of sexual misconduct

A second woman is publicly accusing Trump-endorsed Nebraska gubernatorial candidate Charles Herbster (R) of sexual misconduct after a Republican state senator alleged earlier this month that she had been touched inappropriately by Herbster.
Elizabeth Todsen, in a statement provided through her attorney, alleged that she had been sexually groped by Herbster in 2019 and said her experience had been "thoroughly described" in previous reporting by the Nebraska Examiner.
"For years I have struggled with an experience I had with Charles W. Herbster. At a political event in 2019, Herbster sexually groped me while greeting my table. This was the same night that Herbster aggressively grabbed Senator Julie Slama," Todsen said.
"This decision to come forward with my story has been extremely difficult due to my fear of repercussions from Charles W. Herbster, a powerful voice in Nebraska politics. But after thinking about this for years now, I know that it is time that Nebraskans know about the horrible actions made by Charles W. Herbster," she added.
Todsen called Nebraska state Sen. Julie Slama (R) "brave" and a "strong role model for all women" after Slama earlier this month confirmed to the Examiner that she had been touched inappropriately by the Nebraska gubernatorial candidate.

According to the news outlet, the 2019 incident took place during a Republican fundraiser. Todsen told the Examiner that her and other friends had been sitting at a table, which they knew had been paid for by Herbster.

When the Republican donor greeted the table, she recounted to the news outlet that "his hand went to my butt. It was a grab. At that point, I tried to push away, but I couldn't. It was like he knew that I couldn't say anything."

Herbster's campaign claimed that Todsen's allegations were a part of a "smear attack" against him and said he denied the accusations.

"Just 10 days before the Republican Primary for Governor, Charles W. Herbster's political opponents with ties to Governor Ricketts have launched this disgusting smear attack on him. These are the desperate tactics of a failing political campaign meant to compensate for the uninspiring and liberal candidate, Jim Pillen," his campaign said in a statement.

"Charles W. Herbster has already filed legal action against one of the people named in reports and will be taking legal action against others. He will not stop fighting until his name is cleared and he is vindicated," it added.

Earlier this month, eight women accused Herbster of sexual misconduct while speaking to the Examiner. The report led a bipartisan group of state senators to call for Herbster to drop out of the race.

Slama confirmed to the Examiner at the time that Herbster had touched her inappropriately at the same 2019 fundraiser after reaching up her skirt without her consent as she was walking by. Herbster's campaign manager told the news outlet that the candidate denied those accusations.

Former President Trump is slated to stump for Herbster at a rally in Nebraska on Sunday, following a postponement due to inclement weather.

By Caroline Vakil

OWH: UNMC researchers, collaborators no strangers to test-to-treat program now available for COVID-19

During his State of the Union speech in March, President Joe Biden announced a test-to-treat program that allows people who suspect they have COVID-19 to get tested at certain pharmacies and, if positive, obtain a prescription for one of the new oral COVID medications on the spot, without a separate trip to a doctor's office.

None of that, however, was new to Donald Klepser and his colleagues at the University of Nebraska Medical Center's College of Pharmacy.

For years, UNMC and its collaborator, Ferris State University in Michigan, have been training and certifying community pharmacists to conduct test-to-treat, which initially involved influenza and strep throat.

Klepser, the pharmacy college's associate dean for academic affairs, said the collaborators as of a year ago had trained more than 5,000 pharmacists and pharmacy students in the protocols.

"This is the kind of thing that today's pharmacist wants to be doing," he said.

The idea grew out of the last pandemic, the H1N1 flu of 2009. Klepser and his brother, Michael Klepser, a professor of pharmacy at Ferris State, wondered what pharmacies could do to prepare for the next outbreak. Their first thought involved stockpiling antiviral medications. But they decided it would make more sense if they could find a way to test people and quickly treat those who were ill.

"Really, it was about increasing surge capacity and increasing access," Klepser said.

The collaborators held their first training in 2012. At the time, there was little legal clarity or consistency around testing or treating, Klepser said.

The federal government authorized licensed pharmacists to order and administer FDA-approved COVID tests several months after the pandemic began. Earlier this year, federal health officials authorized pharmacists to administer covered COVID-19 treatments. Pharmacists don't write the prescriptions themselves but work under protocols set by prescribing physicians under state laws.

The two oral antiviral pills now are available to treat COVID-19 through the test-to-treat program, Paxlovid and Lagevrio, or molnupiravir, both can prevent severe illness and hospitalization and are recommended for vulnerable people.

As with flu medications, however, the COVID treatments

are most effective if they're given within a few days of symptom onset. If a person has to wait several days to get tested and then a couple more to see a physician, the treatments are less effective.

Currently, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness lists 10 pharmacies in Nebraska offering the test-to-treat option.

The Biden administration announced plans earlier this week to double the number of locations that carry the antiviral pills. Some consumers, the Washington Post reported, have told of having difficulty finding a doctor to prescribe the medications or a pharmacy that carries them.

As for whether the federal program is directly based on the UNMC program, Klepser said it's difficult to say for sure. But the collaborators were the first to publish papers on the process. And it's almost certain whomever advised federal officials on the COVID test-to-treat program has read those manuscripts and seen what the researchers have done. The researchers have been working with large pharmacy chains for a decade or more.

For now, some barriers remain to pharmacies being able to offer the service, which is why not all pharmacies can offer test-to-treat for COVID.

"We hope this is a place where pharmacies knock it out of the park and we can get rid of all those barriers," Klepser said.

By Julie Anderson

Outbreak News Today: How states handled the COVID-19 crisis? New analysis shows Utah, Nebraska, and Vermont were best with Montana and Florida right behind

The Committee To Unleash Prosperity (CUP) has released the most comprehensive analysis to date on how states handled the COVID-19 crisis. These results have also been published by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

The Report Card on the States measures and

compares state performance on three metrics:
the economy, education, and mortality from the virus. It answers the question: how did states do in balancing the health of their citizens, allowing their economies to remain operational and keeping job losses low, and keeping their schools open so that school-aged children did not suffer long term educational setbacks.
Each of these three metrics were equally weighted. The states that received an F grade were New Jersey, New York, California, Illinois and Washington, D.C. These states performed poorly on every measure. They had high age-adjusted death rates; they had high unemployment and significant GDP losses, and they kept their schools shutdown much longer than almost all other states.
The top performers were Utah, Nebraska, and Vermont with Montana and Florida right behind.
The study verifies other studies which have found that locking down businesses, stores, churches, schools, and restaurants had almost no impact on health outcomes across states. States with strict lockdowns had virtually no better performance in Covid death rates than states that remained mostly open for business.
The study also found that keeping schools closed had almost no impact on the death rates of children or adults, but it did severe damage to the educational progress of students.
Read more at CUP

OWH: Wildfires cause extensive agricultural losses in Nebraska

Ranchers and farmers, the foundation of Nebraska's economy, are reeling from an onslaught of problems caused by drought and fire.
The total extent of the losses is still unknown, and so are the consequences — weather will be the key.
Ground cover and pasture land has burned off, top soil is eroding, fences and center pivot irrigation systems have been destroyed, some livestock have been lost and others have been scattered.
"There's not a good answer for the drought conditions until we get some relief from Mother Nature and the rains

come," said Steve Wellman, director, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. He added that it's too early to estimate the extent of losses.

Talk to anyone whose livelihood has been affected by the twin disasters of fire and drought and you'll soon appreciate their dizzying world. Inflation, supply problems and global uncertainty have made smart decisions tough to come by.

"We went through a really horrific drought in 2012, which was just 10 years ago, and we didn't think it can get any worse than that," said Brenda Masek, president of the Nebraska Cattlemen. "And right now I'm afraid we're going to wish we had the 2012 drought back."

Nebraska's costliest, hottest, driest year on record, 2012, was also the state's worst fire year. According to federal disaster estimates, the state suffered more than $4 billion in losses.

Rains late last week brought temporary relief to parts of the state, but they weren't enough to ease concerns about drought.

Todd Whitney, a cropping systems educator with University of Nebraska Extension in southwest Nebraska, Masek and others walked The World-Herald through some of the problems facing Nebraska's ag community.

The soil

Top soil is blowing away at a rate some farmers and ranchers haven't seen in years.

Farmers spend a lifetime building up the health of their soils with a practice known as no-till or minimum-till, and these fires have undone years of work, said John Berge, executive director of the Nebraska office of the USDA Farm Services Agency.

Minimal tilling of the ground leaves residue from each previous year's crop in place to enrich the soil. The soil holds moisture and nutrients better, and it creates healthier microbial activity, leading to a more productive crop.

The relatively snowless winter set the stage for soil loss by leaving the ground exposed to drying winds. The fires burned away the surface plant matter, leaving the soil naked.

"Where all that residue is gone, the soil is like fine powder, like flour," Berge said. "You're getting dust clouds and highways shutting down" and ditches are filling in.

"The top three to four inches of soil is sort of the money-

maker for producers," Berge said. "With that top soil goes a lot of productivity for row crops."

Even the Sandhills started to degrade over the winter, Masek said. "Decades of work to reclaim the land has been torn up," she said. "Nebraska was not made to have open winters. We need snow."

Also lost in the fires was some of the fertilizer and other soil treatments farmers had put on the ground, leading to lost investments and uncertainty about how much to do over.

Center pivot irrigation systems

Likely hundreds of center pivots have been damaged, Whitney said, and in some cases, it's not clear whether insurance will cover the losses.

For one thing, due to inflation, the insured value may be far below the current cost of a center pivot, which has nearly doubled in the last year or two, Whitney said. A center pivot cost can exceed the $70,000 to $100,000 replacement value, he said.

Additionally, there's the potential that insurance won't cover some of the losses that resulted when farmers tried to slow the fire by turning on their center pivots.

Temperatures dropped below freezing after the fires and froze water in some irrigation equipment, ultimately damaging it. Insurance may not cover freeze damage under certain conditions and this fire could be one of them, Whitney said.

Even if insurance does cover repairs or replacement, there's the question of being able to get the parts. Supply chain issues make that a problem, too.

With inflation, supply problems, drought and fire, a lesson from this year has been that farmers need to review insurance policies more often than they used to, Whitney said.

"We've never been in quite this situation before," he said.

With irrigation equipment uncertain and the drought projected to continue, farmers have a new decision to make: Do they plant a crop dependent upon irrigation? Or, something that may make less money, but won't require as much water?

Given all the uncertainty, some farmers have shifted to crops like oats as a cover crop, which require less investment and water, Whitney said. This would allow them to come back with a later, possibly reduced planting of corn varieties more tolerant of drought.

Loose and stray livestock

“Utter chaos” is how Whitney describes efforts to save livestock in the smoky, fast-moving fire.

In many cases, people were successful, but in others they weren’t. Horses and cattle both were lost to the fires. Damaged fences have allowed livestock to roam, requiring that they be rounded up and sorted out.

A feedlot, containing cattle from multiple ranches, had to release its cattle because of the approaching fire, Whitney said. Neighboring families and communities helped out by loading roaming cattle into livestock trailers, but that presented a new challenge of getting the animals back to their owners, Whitney said. And thus another lesson from the fires: Keep livestock inventory records up to date and identification tags/brands with each animal, he said.

“You don’t know who ended up with whose cattle, and if the lot burned up, how do you get them back?” he said. “It’s just going to take a while to sort out. We’ve never had anything like this.”

Destroyed fencing

Fences are crucial to good stewardship of the land, Masek said. The ability to control when and where cattle graze is key to developing healthy pastures. The fires have destroyed miles and miles of fencing. A single mile of four-wire fencing costs $13,000 to $19,000 to replace, she said. Ranchers are having the same supply problems with fencing that farmers have with irrigation equipment.

“Fencing supplies were almost nonexistent before, and now it’s terrible,” Masek said. “With the steel industry in the situation it is in, there’s not the wire, there’s not the posts, and when you do find them, the quality is really poor. It’s a very large problem.”

Some ranchers have turned to electric fences as a temporary solution, Whitney said, but the ground has been so dry, the fences can’t carry a current because they can’t get a good “ground.” Cattle walk right through them, he said.

Hay, feed and forage

The fires have burned pastureland and bales of hay and forage needed to keep herds healthy.

One of the lessons from this fire, Whitney said, has been for farmers to take additional steps to protect grain stored in large bags in the field. This includes reviewing insurance policies to be sure the grain is covered, ringing the bags with bare ground to make them more fire resilient and keeping extra fertilizer on hand to use as a fire retardant.

And it's not like ranchers can pick up the phone and order a supply from areas where fires haven't occurred.
"It's just not there," Masek said. "There isn't any hay to be found because of the sustained drought to the north and west of us. There is just not the feed available."
Nearly all of the lower 48 states, from Nebraska westward is in drought, according to the National Drought Mitigation Center, housed at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
And while the larger ag community has stepped in and and begun shipping hay into Nebraska, Masek said, there's an air of uncertainty.
"Everybody wants to help their neighbor and give what they can," Masek said. "But everybody's a little scared."

What's fair?

Ranchers often rent land for grazing, but the delicate condition of the land, just now sending up shoots of grass, raises the question of how much cattle a pasture can support, Whitney said.
In the wake of the fire, the best way to restore the land is to graze fewer cattle on it. So what does a landowner charge? Does a landowner charge their neighbor the standard rate per acre? Or less because fewer cattle are allowed in the pasture? Who absorbs the loss?

Trauma, loss and the future

Two valued members of local communities have died fighting the fires and 15 people have been injured. Homes have burned. Ranchers, farmers and their neighbors have worked for hours and days in frightening conditions to beat back the fires.
An outpouring of help has followed these fires. Financial donations are coming in, neighbor is helping neighbor and various organizations and all levels of government are spreading the word about assistance.
The Nebraska Cattlemen posted a detailed list of local affiliates, banks and other organizations offering direct help at nebraskacattlemen.org. The group has also set up a tax-deductible fund to facilitate donations for any fire designated a state disaster. As of Friday, only the early April fire had been so designated.
Some insurance money will come through, the federal government is offering financial assistance and the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and Department of Agriculture are helping connect those in need with aid.
"The good part is that it's bringing people together,"

Whitney said. “It’s through tough times that we grow together and relationships are built. That’s the good part. But there are some tough things we have to address.”
This year has been another reminder that drought resiliency needs more attention, Berge said.
Nebraska’s climate scientists and others have been warning for years that global warming will intensify drought, and that 2012’s flash drought, once described as a Black Swan event, will become routine.
This summer’s long-term outlook, according to the national Climate Prediction Center, favors hotter, drier-than-normal weather across much of the U.S., including Nebraska.
“The biggest thing we need to consider is how do we mitigate this for the future?” Berge said. “These are the discussions we need to be having today. How do we go about becoming a more resilient state into the future?”
“Unfortunately, this year may force some farmers and ranchers out of business, but we are a resilient lot,” Masek said.
Her family ranch, the Bestol and Masek ranch, hasn’t been immune.
Last week, she sold 161 heifers she had hoped to keep to continue growing her herd. With them went the genetic gains she’s worked years to develop. Masek says she is holding out hope that times will be good enough in the future to buy them back or restock.
“We don’t know when this is going to be over, when we’re going to be able to breathe,” Masek said.
By Nancy Gaarder

OWH: Avian flu is killing eagles feasting on sick or dead waterfowl in Nebraska

As avian influenza strikes across the state, Nebraska Game and Parks officials are keeping a close watch on the state’s raptors, especially eagles.
Wildlife division administrator Alicia Hardin said seven eagles, as well as two great horned owls, are known or suspected to have been victims of the deadly flu. A peregrine falcon that had been nesting at the

WoodmenLife Tower in Omaha also tested positive.
Forty-nine eagles across the United States have died from avian flu.
“What we have found is raptors seem to be very susceptible to avian influenza,” Hardin said. “Their diet consists of eating animals that are weak or dying on their own, so sometimes they are eating animals that have it and that’s how they get it.”
Hardin said influenza also has been found or suspected in several waterfowl. According to Game and Parks’ latest numbers, 292 Ross and snow geese, 50 Canada geese, five ducks and four pelicans have tested positive or were suspected to be positive.
While a large die-off is not expected, the flu has spread to every corner of the state and throughout the Central Flyway, Hardin said.
“The height of the migration is done,” she said. “We’re hoping things kind of slow down. We’re hoping hotter weather will dissipate some things, but it could be around for a while.”
She said past outbreaks weren’t usually as bad during the fall migration.
Anyone who finds dead waterfowl or raptors is asked to call their district Game and Parks office, and staff will pick up the bird. Although the threat to humans is very small, Hardin said, it’s best to be cautious about handling dead birds.
Even before the flu hit, Game and Parks has been keeping a close eye on the success of the state’s bald eagles, though they no longer are threatened or endangered.
In 2020, the Fish and Wildlife Services estimated there were 316,700 individuals and 71,467 occupied nests in the lower 48 states.
In Nebraska, the last estimate was in 2017, when there were 209 active nests. Indications are that number has grown, and Hardin said there could be upward of 300 active nests in the state.
Hardin said it’s too soon to know the impact the flu will have on that growing population.
“We’ll continue to keep vigilant on their status and what is going on,” she said.

Reward offered after eagle is shot

An eaglet found in a nest near where a female eagle was killed is doing well, a Nebraska Game and Parks official said.
The adult bird was shot near Garland in Seward County and

died from its wounds April 22 after Game and Parks arrived in an attempt to save it.
"It was in pretty bad shape," said Stacey Lewton, southeast district supervisor for the law enforcement division.
A reward is being offered through Wildlife Crimestoppers for information that would lead to an arrest. Lewton couldn't specify an amount. Game and Parks is investigating some leads in the case.
"If it leads to an arrest, the reward could be a nice amount," Lewton said.
Lewton said volunteers are watching the nest with the eaglet closely. Another eagle is caring for the youngster. Lewton said a male eagle can raise a chick.
"They are doing great," he said. "We're really watching this nest to make sure this chick is doing well, and right now it is."

Human bird flu case confirmed in Colorado

A Colorado prison inmate has tested positive for bird flu in the first recent confirmed case of a human infected with the disease, but federal officials say they see little threat to the general public. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the man who tested positive had been in a prerelease program and was helping remove chickens from an infected farm. The man reported fatigue for a few days but has since recovered. Other people involved in the bird removal operation have tested negative. — AP

By Marjie Ducey

Nebraska Examiner: Proposal to build state's largest feedlot hits snag, but now headed for another vote

LINCOLN — A proposal to build perhaps the state's largest cattle feedlot in a rural, southwest Nebraska county is getting a second chance after the Dundy County Board refused to approve the idea last month.
The proposal by Blackshirt Feeders LP to construct a $65-million feedlot, holding up to 100,000 cattle and consuming 10 million bushels of corn a year, has stirred controversy and filled meeting rooms over the past couple of months in

the southwest corner of the state.
Supporters wearing black shirts, packed a public hearing last month to back the idea as much needed economic development and jobs (an estimated 85), as well as a new customer for corn. The state senator who represents the area, Dan Hughes of Venango, was among the advocates.

Too large?

But it has also attracted concern as being too large for a small county of 1,913 residents that doesn't have abundant water resources or any other feedlots close to that size.
A decision on whether the project moves forward is now expected to be announced by the county board May 16.
On Thursday, the three Dundy County commissioners met in a closed, executive session in Benkelman to consider what to do after the board failed to approve the feedlot project at its April 5 meeting.
Dundy County Attorney Gary Burke had advised the commissioners after the April 5 vote that there were several "deficiencies and shortcomings" in their decision. So the board asked for an opinion from the self-insurance pool that covers the county.

No reason specified

Among the deficiencies, the county attorney wrote in an April 18 memo, were that commissioners did not specify the reason for rejecting the project, as required. There were also concerns that the feedlot project wasn't technically rejected or approved, as required — the only vote was to OK the project, which failed to pass.
Burke recommended holding another meeting on the project, and that's what came out of the closed-door meeting Thursday, according to the county attorney.
"They're going to come out with a public statement, 'here's what we're going to do,' " Burke said.
Because Friday was Arbor Day and Dundy County offices were closed, commissioners were unable to reconsider the feedlot project at its next scheduled meeting on Monday. The next county board meeting after that is May 16.
The manager of Blackshirt Feeders, Dr. Eric Behlke, a veterinarian and native of Benkelman who now works as a feedlot consultant for a Canadian company, said he's hopeful the project will get the OK.
Behlke said it's been his dream to put his experience working with feedlots from China to Kazakhstan into practice. He called Dundy County "the sweet spot" for cattle feeding due to the climate, the availability of feed

and proximity to meatpacking plants.
“We have a chance to capitalize on our two most important resources, corn and cattle,” he said.
Behlke, who has two other Canadian veterinarians as partners, said the 100,000-head Blackshirt project would be the first of its size in the U.S. to utilize a “roller compacted concrete” surface, rather than dirt. The more solid feedlot surface, he said, would eliminate mud and increase health and performance by the cattle, as well as reduce flies, dust and odor.

Existing feedlots much smaller

“We really believe this feedlot will be a showcase for southwest Nebraska and the state of Nebraska,” he said. “We want this to be the most environmentally friendly around.”
Currently, the largest feedlots in Dundy County are in the 10,000- to 12,000-head range. The largest feedlot in Nebraska is thought to be Adams Land & Cattle, south of Broken Bow, which has a capacity of at least 85,000.
The massive size, along with impacts on groundwater and county roads, emerged as the main concerns when the Dundy County Board considered the project April 5.
The project had won a unanimous recommendation from the county planning board. The OK came with 13 conditions, such as having a mitigation plan for dust and flies, working with the county on road maintenance and obtaining approval for water use.

Rather have smaller feedlots

Richard Bartholomew of Benkelman told the Examiner on Sunday that he would rather see proposals for five feedlots, holding 20,000-head of cattle each, instead of one for 100,000 head.
“I have difficulty here on a personal basis accepting that bigger is better,” Bartholomew said at the April 5 meeting, according to the Benkelman Post.
Bartholomew, on Sunday, also expressed empathy for residents just across the border in Chase County who are “going to get run over and swept away by the process.” The Blackshirt Feeder site is at the northern border of Dundy County, he said, and just across the county line, near the facility, is a home occupied by a young couple.
But Dundy County’s setback rules have no force across county lines, which Bartholomew said might be something the State Legislature needs to look at when such projects arise.

At the April 5 meeting, Commissioner Jerry Fries of Benkelman said the longtime trend in agriculture has been to “get bigger and get out,” according to the local newspaper.

Feedlots of that size are not unheard of, he added, and the Blackshirt project meets all of the county’s zoning requirements.

Bartholomew’s motion at the meeting to reject the feedlot proposal failed to get a second. Then, Fries’ motion to approve the feedlot fell short, on a 1-2 vote.

Concern about roads

Commissioner Scott A. Olson of Haigler joined Bartholomew in voting “no.” Olson expressed concern about the size of the project and increased costs for county roads, according to the Benkelman Post. Olson, the chairman of the board, did not return phone messages seeking comment.

Now a final decision is expected May 16.

Behlke said the Blackshirt Feeders project, in his opinion, meets all the county’s zoning requirements, which he called the most stringent in the state.

Dundy County is not listed among the 51 other rural counties that have passed a “livestock friendly” declaration, according to the Nebraska Department of Agriculture’s website, but Bartholomew and others said “livestock friendly” signs are posted at entrances to the county, whose economy is based on farming and ranching.

Behlke added that downsizing the project to fewer than 100,000 head of livestock isn’t feasible. The larger size provides economies of scale that a smaller feedlot would not, Behlke said.

Ready to build

As he planted corn Saturday on a Dundy County farm still owned by his family, Behlke said he has been working at least three years to make the Blackshirt Feeders project a reality.

Initially, the plan was to buy land from a state entity, the Nebraska Board of Educational Lands and Funds, which manages parcels of land set aside for schools way back in settlement days.

But a deal couldn’t be reached, which led him to a parcel in the northern part of Dundy County, along the Chase County line. Behlke said it is about 16 to 18 miles to the three nearest towns, Imperial, Wauneta and Benkelman.

The project still has some hurdles. It needs to obtain some

nearby irrigated farm ground and “retire” at least six center-pivot irrigation systems to obtain enough water to supply the feedlot. The Upper Republican Natural Resources District would have to approve such a water swap.

But Behlke said he doesn’t see that as a problem and reads the county’s zoning rules as saying the County Board “shall” approve the project if it meets all the zoning rules.

Bartholomew, when reached Sunday, didn’t dispute that.

“As I understand it, the (county) commissioners are really neutered on this thing. If all the boxes are checked, we have no option but to approve it,” he said.

By Paul Hammel

OWH: Railroad union criticizes BNSF working conditions

In his most recent annual letter to Berkshire Hathaway shareholders, Warren Buffett called BNSF Railway one of the conglomerate’s “Four Giants.”

With a record $6 billion in earnings and BNSF’s mileage and cargo hauls topping the American railroad industry, Buffett wrote that Berkshire shareholders “can be proud of your railroad.”

One group that’s not proud of how BNSF Railway is operating: The union representing BNSF railroad workers.

Dennis Pierce, president of the 33,000-member Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, said Friday at a press conference in Omaha that BNSF as well as Omaha-based Union Pacific Railroad are both “off the rails.”

Pierce said employees have worked long hours the last three years during the COVID-19 pandemic without raises.

Pierce said that negotiations on a new labor contract have been going on since January 2020.

“There’s nothing that these union-represented employees at these railroads have asked for that these railroads cannot afford to provide,” he said.

In separate emails, spokespeople for BNSF and Union Pacific said collective bargaining negotiations are ongoing.

BNSF spokesman Ben Wilemon the railroad has set aside money for pay raises in anticipation of an agreement.

“The sooner an agreement is reached, the sooner our

union-represented employees get pay increases and we can all focus on what we do best — running one of the largest freight rail networks in the world," he said.

Union Pacific spokeswoman Robynn Tysver said, "Union Pacific believes our hard-working workforce deserve compensation that will keep them among the best paid in the nation. We need national agreements that provide raises, but the bargaining issues are complex and need more work before an agreement is reached."

The union also takes issue with BNSF's new "HiViz" attendance policy. Pierce called that as well as UP's attendance policy "draconian."

"The attempt is to keep people from taking a day off, and it's working," Pierce said. "It's also driving people out of the industry."

Wilemon characterized BNSF's policy differently. He said the attendance policy, which has been in effect since February, was implemented to improve the consistency of crew availability with the goal of also improving schedule predictability.

"We understand that change is hard but, as with every other railroad and service business, delivering for our customers requires employees to be available to work their assigned shifts," he said.

Wilemon added there has been no change in how much time off an employee receives, and said the time off between each shift averages 24 hours. He also said that BNSF has more train crew employees now compared to a year ago and that 300 new employees are currently being trained.

Pierce said union employees ultimately could strike if they feel conditions don't improve and a contact they deem fair can't be reached. Striking, he said, would be a last resort.

"I got to be crystal clear: We're not here to hurt the supply chain," he said. "There are ways to resolve this without impact to the supply chain. The first one is a fair contract offer."

Meanwhile, Pierce said the union will continue a campaign that includes ads in The World-Herald and a mobile advertisement circling Omaha's streets during the Berkshire shareholders weekend. Locomotive engineers and family members also will picket and hand out leaflets outside the CHI Health Center during the shareholders' meeting Saturday.

By Dan Crisler

OWH Editorial: Fair cattle markets are needed to protect Nebraska producers and consumers

As grocery shoppers know, beef has been getting more expensive these days — up $1.34 per pound over the past four years.

But what you might not realize — unless you read an article last week by The World-Herald's Henry J. Cordes — is that only a tiny fraction of that increase has gone to farmers and ranchers.

Producers received less than 2 cents of that $1.34 rise in beef prices since 2017. Instead, retailers got about 32 cents and meatpackers got the lion's share of the increase: $1 or nearly three-fourths.

Cattle producers in Nebraska and elsewhere contend that what's happened to prices in recent years shows a fundamental problem: an overly concentrated meatpacking industry where the biggest companies have too much market power, hurting both producers and consumers.

Some 85% of the more than 30 million head of cattle raised for slaughter each year in the United States are processed by just four leading meatpackers.

Sen. Deb Fischer of Nebraska and a bipartisan group of other senators are pushing her bill that would require beef packers to buy more of their cattle in open, competitive markets. The Senate's agriculture committee held a hearing on the bill last week.

As Cordes wrote, packers argue there is nothing inherently wrong with cattle markets, attributing the price changes to natural supply and demand forces and market disruptions like the pandemic. And in fairness, producers did see an increase in cattle prices last year after three years of declines.

But Fischer said the overall trend is a problem, with meatpacking consolidation making it hard for markets to operate properly. Lawmakers have been talking about this long before COVID-19, she said.

"You can't blame the pandemic for everything," she said. "It's a result of 85% of meat going to four packers. It's the

result of continued consolidation."
And with those dominant packers often buying cattle from individual producers through private transactions, that prevents the cattle market from being open, competitive and fair.
Fischer's Cattle Market Transparency Act would require more public disclosure of what packers are paying for their cattle and also require the packers to buy more cattle through competitive cash markets.
Her legislation strikes us as a reasonable approach to ensure that the cattle market will operate fairly.
As we said in October: "It's in the interest not only of cattle producers but of the general public itself that the market operate fairly, transparently and efficiently. Otherwise, the market can be subject to distortion and possible manipulation, harming producers and consumers alike."
It's a good sign that Congress is taking a careful look at the issue. Fischer says she is pleased with the apparent momentum behind her bill, which now has a total of 19 co-sponsors in the Senate, including nine Republicans and 10 Democrats.
Cattle producers' shrinking share of the beef dollar compared to packers was the subject of a series of stories in The World-Herald last year. Fischer highlighted those stories at last week's hearing, and emphasized how important the issue is to Nebraska.
"It is the economic engine of my state," she said, noting that the livestock industry contributes $13.8 billion to Nebraska's economy annually.
It's important for Nebraska to have that sector of the economy succeed, and that won't happen if meatpackers are always in the driver's seat.
"Producers face a take it or leave it market," Fischer said. "That is the reality."

OWH Midlands Voices: We must carry on the American legacy of helping refugees

Last August, we watched Afghans running alongside planes in a desperate attempt to escape the Taliban. Since

February, we've seen Ukrainian refugees flee by train, bus and foot to escape the advancing Russian army. Forty-seven years ago, my mother was just like them: She was 18, running frantically through an airfield alongside her parents and siblings, desperate to escape Saigon.

After traveling many days by boat to the Philippines — and nearly starving — the family was eventually flown to Guam and then the U.S. They resettled in Lafayette, Indiana, where White Americans at a Baptist church sponsored them. Volunteers provided furniture, helped them set up their home, taught them how to navigate American life and, eventually, became their closest friends. It was in this fertile soil of love and hospitality that my mother's Christian faith sprouted and her new life began.

This kind of community support can be the difference between whether a refugee family struggles or thrives in America. And the need for it is more urgent than ever. America has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees, but our resettlement infrastructure was largely dismantled under the last administration.

The arrival of 65,000 new Afghan refugees — and likely more from Ukraine — is straining the system. We desperately need funding, programming and volunteers to help families who've been forced to restart their lives from scratch. It's why I'm calling on my fellow citizens and people of faith to step forward and help.

Many of the Afghans moving into our neighborhoods served alongside the U.S. military and protected our men and women in uniform. I wanted to help them, as they'd helped us. So in November 2021, I volunteered with Refugee Empowerment Center to help resettle Afghans here in Omaha. I was paired with two young families — married couples in their early 20s. The men are cousins who worked as security guards for the U.S. military in Afghanistan. Their wives had just finished high school and were hoping to start a family. They told me that they had to leave Kabul, because they feared retaliation from the Taliban.

Since I first met them last November, I've visited them every few weeks at the one-bedroom apartment they share in North Omaha. Every time I see them, the simple things have made my heart swell: how they first wrapped themselves in blankets against the cold and, later, how their eyes lit up in Target when they saw the bounty of puffy jackets and winter boots. In these moments, I often

think of God's faithfulness and provision for my own family when they found sanctuary in America.

I still remember the lunch when I introduced my husband and four children to the two young Afghan couples. They were sweet, asking my kids questions and regaling us with stories in their limited English. We laughed our way through the language barrier, which helped my children see how deeply knit humanity really is, despite the customs the cultures that separate us.

These couples are so young and when I look in their eyes, I sometimes see glimpses of my mother. She was a few years younger than them when she landed on U.S. soil, scared and so uncertain about her future. She didn't know that a few volunteers from the local church would change her life. Or that she'd go on to meet my dad, who fled communist China and would become a doctor for the U.S. Army.

She certainly didn't know that she would raise five happy, healthy American children who were also guided by their faith.

I hope the same for my Afghan friends and for the tens of thousands of refugees who are making their way here today. Our welcoming support can make these American dreams come true. So please join me in this work. Bring your families, your faith communities and your neighbors. We can make a difference together.

Jennifer Liu is a family physician at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

OWH Midlands Voices: Support for entrepreneurship is the solution to a vibrant Nebraska

The Nebraska economy runs on small businesses. Small business owners provide the critical day-to-day services that keep our communities vibrant: the local grocery store, the child care providers, the skilled trades shops, restaurants, retailers and health care. There are also those who you may not interact with every day, but who are crafting the world of tomorrow by developing innovative ideas and technologies that, in time, we will wonder how we ever lived without.

For example, Birds Eye Robotics owned by Scott Niewohner out of Herman, Nebraska, is developing robotics solutions that reduce labor needed on poultry farms while increasing animal welfare. Appsky, an Omaha creative technology firm owned by Taylor Korensky, provides the know-how for building software and apps for those with big ideas and creative solutions but who lack the technical skills to realize them.

And with 99% of businesses in Nebraska employing fewer than 20 people, it's hard to deny that Nebraska entrepreneurs and small business owners are the lifeblood of this state.

National Small Business Week, held this year from May 1-7, is a time to celebrate the resilience and spirit of Nebraska businesses. We invite you to join us this week in acknowledging the critical role small businesses play. Make a conscious effort to shop small, thank the owner of the spot you frequent for all they do for the community or find an opportunity to make a referral on social media. Because the reality is this: now, more than ever, entrepreneurs need your support.

Entrepreneurship in Nebraska, a 2022 joint report from the Center for Public Affairs Research at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Nebraska Business Development Center at UNO, studied the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the state. The findings showed real challenges.

First, Nebraska faces lower rates of entrepreneurship than other states in the Midwest. In 2020, 0.27% of the Nebraska population started a business. Compare that to our neighbors in South Dakota, who saw a slightly higher rate of 0.29%. Or, as a more dramatic comparison, to Missouri, which had a new business rate of 0.37% of their population. In fact, the report, authored by Dr. Jodie Schafer of CPAR, found that each state touching our border offered higher rates of entrepreneurship than ours.

And in terms of growth in entrepreneurship, the numbers aren't much better. Nebraska's highest rate of entrepreneurship was back in 1998, more than two decades ago. Until a substantial rebound in 2021, the number of new businesses was stagnant from 2017-2019, with a significant drop in 2020 due to COVID.

Entrepreneurship in Nebraska outlines several reasons for these numbers: challenges with building a talent pipeline, a culture of risk-aversion and a disconnected support system

within the entrepreneurship ecosystem are a few of the issues cited, among others. The pandemic has contributed to additional pressures that business owners are still seeing today: supply chain challenges, inflation and the rising cost of inputs and a low unemployment rate that makes it difficult to hire and retain staff.

But despite these challenges, entrepreneurs continue to drive our state forward. In 2021, Nebraskans opened and grew businesses in every sector and every region of the state. NBDC, which provides one-on-one business consulting services at no charge to Nebraskans, served 1,871 clients, leading to an economic impact of $524.4 million and 883 jobs created or saved.

According to the SBA, as of December 2021, over 99% of all businesses in the State of Nebraska were considered small businesses. They employ almost 50% of workers in our state. Most of these employers are in the 1-19 employee range. This allows them to be more flexible and able to react to challenges more easily when times get tough. To aid these entrepreneurs and small businesses, the SBA has engaged resource partners throughout the state to help as business start and grow. Assistance is provided through the Nebraska Business Development Centers, the Women's Business Centers, and SCORE just to name a few.

Nebraska can become a place where entrepreneurs thrive — a state that becomes a destination for those seeking to build something new. But it will take hard work, creative solutions, and constant vigilance against that ever-present enemy of "that's the way we've always done it." We will need to increase the talent pool by intentionally funding opportunities for a more diverse set of entrepreneurs than ever before. We will need to continue developing resources, improving outreach and strengthening ties between support organizations who provide critical guidance to would-be entrepreneurs. And we will need to widely support and celebrate entrepreneurship as the best avenue for solving some of the largest scientific, economic and technological challenges we face.

We ask for your continued support of small business and entrepreneurship, not just during National Small Business Week, but every day of the year. Through entrepreneurship, Nebraska will grow, thrive and offer a rich economy and vibrant communities for many generations to come.

Catherine Lang is the state director of the Nebraska

Business Development Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Tim Mittan is Nebraska district director at U.S. Small Business Administration. This article reflects the views of the authors and is not necessarily representative of the views of UNO.

OWH Midlands Voices: America the Beautiful initiative will benefit Nebraska wildlife, farms and ranchers

On April 22, Gov. Pete Ricketts hosted a conference sponsored by a group from Texas that is spreading misinformation about an important conservation plan that could greatly benefit Nebraska's wildlife, lands and waters, farmers and ranchers and rural communities.

Unfortunately, this out-of-state group is using misinformation and fear tactics to divide those of us who live, work and recreate in Nebraska.

But as recent polling demonstrates, most Nebraskans won't fall for the group's rhetoric. We cherish our wildlife, sweeping grasslands and rural way-of-life. We want to conserve our lands and waters so that they will thrive for generations to come.

The Biden Administration's America the Beautiful initiative is designed to help our wildlife by conserving and restoring 30% of our lands and waters. I'm a hunter, angler and a conservationist and I've seen firsthand how wildlife habitat has been degraded by poor land-water management, invasive species and human development. This fragmented habitat is one reason that our wildlife has declined so dramatically over the past 50 years. In fact, one-third of wildlife species are now at heightened risk of extinction.

The goal of the America the Beautiful initiative is to invest in locally driven initiatives to conserve critically important habitat, restore degraded lands, maintain working landscapes and offer incentives to private landowners to foster conservation. These are things that will protect not only wildlife, but our rural way of life. It's the right thing to do and Nebraskans know it.

A recent statewide poll showed that a whopping 83% of

Nebraskans think that more needs to be done to protect our land, water and wildlife. Broken down by political affiliation, 79% of Republicans, 84% of Independents and 83% of Democrats all agreed about the need for additional conservation.

One of the components of the America the Beautiful initiative is investment in conservation easements. These voluntary legal agreements are an essential tool for wildlife conservation in a state where 97% of the land is held in private ownership. Easements allow farmers and ranchers — the people who know these lands best — to make the best decisions about how to manage their lands going forward so that wildlife habitat and water resources are conserved.

And while conservation easements directly benefit the landowners by enabling them to make improvements on their land and help to transfer property to heirs, they also provide great benefits for our state as a whole. Over the years, landowners have voluntarily entered into conservation easements to expand recreation opportunities on portions of the Niobrara Scenic River and the Pine Ridge area. They've been used as a mitigation tool to protect grassland birds as a result of wind energy development and as a compensation tool for frequently flooded farm ground along Nebraska's major rivers. Conservation easements have also been used to help recover waterfowl and shorebird habitat in the Rainwater Basin.

For decades, conservation has been an issue that brings people together across the political spectrum and from all walks of life. It's one reason why the Great American Outdoors Act — which permanently funded the successful Land and Water Conservation Fund — was passed overwhelmingly by Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump two years ago. Don't be fooled by misinformation and fearmongering about the America the Beautiful initiative. We should all be coming together to support this initiative which will benefit our wildlife, our ranchers and farmers, our children and grandchildren and all who are lucky enough to call Nebraska their home.

George R. Cunningham is a board member and vice president of programs for the Nebraska Wildlife Federation.

OWH: Questions for Ricketts

I have a couple questions: Will the Cloisters on the Platte in Gretna, the Ricketts family's religious retreat center, directly benefit from the construction of the huge lake between Omaha and Lincoln that will be fed in part by the mega million-dollar canal diverting South Platte River water from Colorado to central Nebraska? Those are Gov. Ricketts' pet projects in his last year in office. Whose land will be taken by eminent domain, possibly, to complete these projects? Water and land are the big bones of contention in this century and manipulating them for profit or personal satisfaction is just plain wrong. The more food-producing land we drown or pave over, the less food production we have. Nebraskans need to ask more questions and get better answers.
Janet Bonet, Omaha

OWH: Who pays?

One question not addressed in the World-Herald article ("Ricketts event opposes conservation effort," April 21): Who is paying for Gov. Ricketts' conference to "Stop 30x30?" If my tax dollars are footing the bill for this meeting, I am outraged.
Charles Keene, Bellevue

OWH: What's their motivation?

It is difficult to follow the governor's logic when he cites his reasons to not apply for federal rental assistance (OWH, April 16) and to scale back food stamp assistance (OWH April 18). It sounds as if the governor thinks that if people have assistance to keep a roof over their head and food on the table, they will no longer be motivated to work. Does that same logic apply to individuals who are born into wealthy families, who do not have to be worried about their housing or their food supply to live on every day? Are they no longer motivated to work?
Mary Sullivan, Lincoln

OWH: Heartless move

Turning down federal funds for unemployment and food assistance is a heartless move on the part of Gov. Pete Ricketts. In a time of increasing costs of living, there is no other word for it. Families will go hungry and homeless because of this, and with no sensible justification. The money is simply there and ready to take, yet it will not be used to help Nebraskans.

The governor says that there aren't many people on unemployment anyway, and that he does not want Nebraska families to face a "cliff" when their benefits end. The latter isn't coherent, all he's done is bring that cliff forward, removing months that could be critical for paying debts, seeking better employment or reducing expenses.

To the former: just because there are less people on unemployment doesn't mean those individuals need any less help. Whether our unemployed number thousands or only tens, the fact remains that each one of those people will benefit from that assistance. That there are less people in need is no justification at all to deny them help.

Cynthia Pierce, Omaha

LJS Editorial, 4/29: Saving water now may save our future

More than 41,000 acres in northern Kansas, Red Willow, Furnas and Frontier counties have burned in the Road 402 fire, a blaze triggered by dry conditions and high winds that have broken power lines.

That has been the most visibly dramatic impact of the drought, which if abnormally dry conditions are included, now covers 99% of Nebraska. But the abnormally dry conditions and lack of rainfall have less visible impacts, some that will soon hit Lincoln.

With predictions of warmer temperatures and abnormally low precipitation through June, the drought is expected to continue well into the summer and reduce the amount of

water flowing in Nebraska's rivers, particularly the Platte, which supplies water for Lincoln, Omaha and Fremont.

To combat drought-triggered water supply issues, Lincoln city officials and the Lower Platte River Drought Consortium, a group of agencies that work together to sustain public water supplies in the lower Platte basin, are urging Lincolnites to conserve water now -- primarily by cutting back watering lawns.

Yard maintenance, aka lawn watering, can account for more than 50% of Lincoln's daily water use on hot summer days, an amount that can easily be reduced without damaging lawns and gardens.

Much of that water is wasted through overwatering, evaporation and faulty sprinkler systems. To offset the first two, residents should water only when needed, probably two or three times a week, and do so early in the mornings to prevent rapid evaporation

Officials also recommend avoiding watering on hot or windy days to reduce evaporation, minimizing grass fertilization and only cutting a third of grass height when mowing.

That program is, obviously, voluntary – a far better option than the mandatory restrictions that will come if the water supply drops as it has in previous droughts and residents continue to soak their lawns.

In 2019, restrictions imposed when flooding threatened the water supply mandated a 50% reduction in water use by residents and 30% cut by commercial users, necessitating specific watering days for designated areas.

If, as is likely, the drought continues and water use isn't cut, similar restrictions, which generated frustration and consternation on the part of homeowners three years ago, will almost certainly be imposed this summer.

So, as spring finally arrives and watering begins in earnest, it's time for Lincolnites to develop new watering habits, cutting their water use to "necessary" levels and only watering a few times a week.

Climate change models show that drought will be a constant in the central Plains for decades and, if the cuts don't become the norm, they'll be mandated, for years to come.

LJS Editorial, 5/1: Measured start is

the way to approach gaming

As it should be, Nebraska's first casinos will be built in connection with the state's six existing racetracks.
That decision to allow the "racinos" in Lincoln, Omaha, Grand Island, Columbus, South Sioux City and Hastings was appropriately made by the Legislature, rather than the Nebraska Gaming and Racing Commission, the agency charged with implementing casino gambling in the state.
Selecting the existing locations essentially determined which areas would receive the economic and development benefits of the casinos rather than opening the floodgates to allow new tracks and casinos, which have been proposed in Bellevue, North Platte, Ogallala, Gering and Kimball.
Instead, Albion Sen. Tom Briese's LB876, which was approved on a 38-3 vote, requires the commission to conduct market and socioeconomic studies for each proposed new track, completing them "as soon as possible" but no later than Jan. 1, 2025.
Taken as a group, those studies should determine the market for both racing and casino gambling in the state, answering questions from the simple ones – are there enough horses and racing days to have, say, 10 racinos operate in the state? – to more complicated analyses as to whether more than the initial six casinos will oversaturate the market in a lower-population state that is already surrounded by casinos.
Those studies can only take, at maximum, about 30 months from now. But there is no similar timetable for the commission to approve the casinos.
The Attorney General's Office approved the 67 pages of rules and regulations, which were submitted to them in January, on March 21, sending them back to the commission, which sent them back to Gov. Pete Ricketts, whose policy office is engaged in additional review.
That delay has led to speculation that Ricketts, who opposed the casino gambling initiative, is doing everything he can to delay the casinos, much as his administration slowed the implementation of voter-approved Medicare expansion for two years.
Once Peterson and Ricketts sign off on the rules and regulations, which is expected sometime this summer, the racetracks can apply for a state gaming license, establish temporary casinos near the tracks and begin construction

of the permanent casinos.
The temporary casinos will likely be up and running a few months after they are approved. But they will not have sports wagering, one of the biggest draws for casinos.
The construction of the proposed $220 million casino at the Lincoln Race Course near Highway 77 on West Denton Road will take about 20 months – which means, at best, the casino will not open until mid-2024.
Casinos at some of the other existing tracks, most notably South Sioux City, probably will open later than 2024.
But they will, within a few years, be open in locations that reflect the intent of the voters who gave the racino proposal 2 to 1 approval two years ago – the six existing tracks that have carried horse racing in Nebraska for decades.
Correction
This editorial has been updated to correct that the Attorney General's Office has approved the gambling rules and regulations. After their approval on March 21, they were sent back to the Racing and Gaming Commission, which then sent them to the governor's office for additional review.

LJS: Not as good as we think

Gov. Pete Ricketts smugly described Nebraska's soil and water on Earth Day saying, “We don’t need the federal government to tell us what to do. They don’t need to lecture us,” well ...
Why is more than half of Nebraska's topsoil gone? Why do our streams turn brown every time it rains? Why do NRDs monitor well water for nitrogen? Why is there a growing hypoxic zone in the Gulf?
Richard K. Sutton, Lincoln

LJS: Herbster would bring change

While I disagree with many of Charles Herbster’s policy positions, I will be voting for him in the primary. This is because it is not the political positions which should drive

our voting but the character of the candidate in question. One of Herbster's most scathing and controversial attacks has come from Sen. Julie Slama. Her allegations of sexual misconduct come too close to the election.

Slama has supported an effort to end the nonpartisan nature of our state Legislature. She is a steadfast ally to Gov. Pete Ricketts, a supporter of Jim Pillen and the GOP establishment.

If the GOP establishment gets its way and Pillen or Lindstrom are nominated, we are sure to see more attacks on Nebraska's political institutions. They want to tell you what to believe and who to vote for – all in a desperate attempt to hold on to political power.

I don't believe in being told what to believe or who to vote for, but that's exactly what the party establishment wants. It's bad business for the establishment if Herbster gets nominated, because he will shake things up and allow for a broader policy debate.

I am not voting for Herbster because I agree with him on everything. I am voting for Herbster because he will allow for a greater diversity of thought, more policy options to choose from and accountability for elected officials.

Join me in upholding our freedom to choose the government we want and our independence from political party crooks. Vote Herbster!

Nicholas Oviatt, Yutan

AP: 8 Midwest states seek permanent waiver to sell E15 gas

DES MOINES (AP) — Governors from eight Midwest states, including Nebraska, asked the Environmental Protection Agency this week for a permanent waiver that will allow each state to continue selling E15 ethanol-blended gas year-round without restriction.

The EPA's decision last week to suspend restrictions of summer sales of the lower-carbon, lower-cost E15 gasoline is temporary and applies only to the 2022 summer driving season.

E15 is usually prohibited between June 1 and Sept. 15 because of concerns that it adds to smog in high temperatures.

The bipartisan group of governors from Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin sent a joint letter to EPA Administrator Michael Reagan formally requesting the waiver.

"This letter sends the clear message that renewable fuels are the immediate solution to high gas prices, lower emissions, and restoring our energy independence, and we are proud to stand up and take this historic action," Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said.

The Renewable Fuels Association, which promotes use of ethanol, embraced the states' action.

This month, President Joe Biden traveled to corn-rich Iowa to announce that his administration will temporarily allow E15 gas, which is blended with 15% ethanol, to be sold this summer to help ease gas prices.

Biden administration officials said the action will save drivers an average of 10 cents per gallon based on current prices, but at just 2,300 gas stations out of the nation's more than 100,000. The affected stations are mostly in the Midwest and the South, including Texas, according to industry groups.

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