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Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Aug 2022	7.02	99.00	08:54
Corn	Oct 2022	5.71	-35.00	08:54
Milo	Aug 2022	5.78	-25.00	08:54
Milo	Oct 2022	5.36	-70.00	08:54
Soybeans	Aug 2022	14.28	15.00	08:54
Soybeans	Oct 2022	13.43	-70.00	08:54
Wheat	Aug 2022	7.85	-75.00	08:54
Wheat	Jul 2023	7.58	-100.00	08:54

TV and Radio

NPM: Once a bipartisan issue, conservation became controversial after Biden set a new goal (no video)

KMTV: Nebraska AG joins lawsuit opposing anti-discrimination regulations affecting LGBTQ students

Governor

Nebraska Examiner: Vietnamese trade group seeking new Nebraska partnerships is among guests expected at August summit

Nebraska Examiner: Voters in limbo: Who's in 1st? What's in 2nd? And, 3rd, I don't know which House member to call

Nebraska Examiner: Nascent Nebraska coalition looks to immigration-related solutions to help remedy labor shortage

LJS: Don Walton: It's time to listen to Abe Lincoln -- and get it right this time

CNN: These are the next states that could call special sessions to limit abortion rights

The Hill: Republicans race to stop Greitens in Missouri Senate primary

Agency

LJS: Grand jury clears state trooper of wrongdoing in fatal shooting of 27-year-old in Lincoln

Legislature

OWH: Nebraska now offering death benefit to first responders who die in the line of duty

Coronavirus

Kearney Hub: COVID cases fall in Two Rivers area, but risk zone still ''moderate'

LJS: LPS superintendent: Targeted masking approach appears to be 'new normal'

State, Local and Regional

LJS: Hailstorms, derechos becoming more frequent as climate changes in Nebraska
OWH: Nebraskans to benefit from $0 co-pays for insulin, emergency drugs
OWH: Western Nebraska firefighters battling wildfires south of Gering
OWH: Cleanup of Nox-Crete could begin next week
Nebraska Examiner: Charles Herbster can add to defamation lawsuit but can't muzzle Slama lawyer, judge rules

Opinion

OWH Public Pulse

1. Recidivism rate drop
2. Selfless service
3. Understanding the atmosphere
4. Protect electoral count

LJS Editorial, 7/31: New ag land valuation method a long-term fix

LJS Letters

1. Recidivism rate falls in state
2. Pro-life no matter when life starts

NY Times: These Republican Governors Are Delivering Results, and Many Voters Like Them for It

National/Federal

LJS: Pansing Brooks points to million-dollar House campaign funding support
OWH: Sasse, Fischer confident veteran benefit expansion bill will pass Senate

Nebraska Examiner: Vietnamese trade group seeking new Nebraska partnerships is among guests expected at August summit

NEBRASKA — A Vietnamese trade group is set to visit Nebraska in early August to try and forge new business partnerships and to attend Gov. Pete Ricketts' Agriculture and Economic Development Summit in Kearney.

The summit, Aug. 10, is touted as the state's key forum for discussing issues relevant to the state's agriculture and economic development sectors. This year's topics range from labor supply challenges to the financial impact of area flooding.

The keynote speaker at the summit, to be held at the Younes Conference Center, will be Daniel Kritenbrink, assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink (Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

The Vietnamese trade group includes heads of its provincial government and one of the largest corporations in Vietnam, Becamex.

The group will be in Nebraska Aug. 9-11 to meet with interested companies specializing in industries

such as manufacturing, agriculture, technology and fabricated metal products. The state economic development office said in a statement that Nebraska has had great success in exporting to Vietnam and the Southeast Asian region, and the group hopes to create new partnerships and increase Nebraska exports to Vietnam.

Ricketts said the summit will convene leaders from across the state to discuss job creation and attracting investment.

"Attending the Summit is a great way to make connections with fellow Nebraskans who play key roles in our state's growth," he said. "We look forward to hosting Assistant Secretary of State Kritenbrink and hearing his insights on opportunities to grow Nebraska through international trade."

Kritenbrink, who is to speak during lunch, grew up on a farm near Ashland and graduated from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He served as U.S. ambassador to Vietnam from 2017 to 2021 after being appointed by President Donald Trump. The summit officially kicks off Aug. 9 with a reception and banquet during which diplomats and Nebraska businesses will be recognized for their contributions to the state during the previous year.

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By Cindy Gonzalez

Nebraska Examiner: Voters in limbo: Who's in 1st? What's in 2nd? And, 3rd, I don't know which House member to call

WAHOO, Nebraska — Residents of this Saunders County town 45 miles west of Omaha and 30 miles north of Lincoln are living in something of a congressional limbo these days.

Until early next January, Congress considers them part of Nebraska's 1st Congressional District, as they have been since the 1960s. But they have had no say in who represents them in Congress from now until then.

Meanwhile, just to the east in Sarpy County, residents in Papillion and La Vista got to vote in the June 28 special election to choose the 1st District representative through the end of the year.

But Papillion and La Vista residents can't get help from newly elected U.S. Rep. Mike Flood with any federal issues, because a House rule considers them still part of the 2nd Congressional District.

Confused yet? You're not alone.

This congressional conundrum was created when the once-a-decade redrawing of election district boundaries butted up against the unexpected resignation of a Nebraska congressman this spring.

More than 75,000 Nebraskans got moved out of the state's 1st District, which includes the City of Lincoln, into either the Omaha-based 2nd District or Nebraska's sprawling, largely rural 3rd District.

Then there are the nearly 70,000 voters, primarily from Sarpy County, who were moved from the 2nd District into the 1st District.

Voters confused

The changes have confused many voters.

Wahoo Mayor Jerry Johnson, a former state senator, said he talked to a woman at a funeral in Cedar

Bluffs, another Saunders County town, who hadn't been able to find her polling place for the special election. She asked Johnson if the county had moved them. He told her that since they were no longer in the 1st District, they didn't get to vote in the election.
"She was embarrassed, but she had no reason to be," he said.
"It's been weird," said Nora Sandine, chair of the Sarpy Republican Party. "It's been confusing, and it's been kind of stressful for everyone. Not just for the people campaigning, but also for the voters."
Sandine and Charlene Ligon, chair of the Sarpy Democratic Party, both said they've advised people who need help from a member of Congress to call whichever office they like and ask who is allowed to help them.

Timing made things worse

Few could have foreseen the problems last fall, when the Legislature adopted new district boundaries for 2022. The changes went into effect beginning with this year's May primary and November general elections.
Then 1st District Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., was convicted of three felonies and resigned at the end of March. That triggered the need for a special election, which hadn't happened in Nebraska since 1951.
Fortenberry's resignation came too late to hold the special election as part of the May primary, because ballots had already been printed and sent out. But the resignation came too early, under state law, to wait for the November election to fill the seat for the rest of the year.
Nebraska law requires a special election within 90 days of a House resignation or death that occurs before Aug. 1. But Nebraska's redistricting law required election officials to use the new district maps without taking the possibility of a special election into account.
The combined result changed the House district boundaries in a way that left tens of thousands of voters in no-man's land, including residents in parts of Saunders, Sarpy, Burt, Otoe, Thurston, Dixon, Washington and Polk Counties.

Should lawmakers act?

MaryLee Moulton, president of the League of Women Voters of Nebraska, said the odds of another resignation or death during a redistricting year are low. She called it a "unicorn event."
But she said she and her members will reach out to state lawmakers about potential solutions.
"You feel terrible," Moulton said. "They certainly weren't trying to disenfranchise people. It was an anomaly."
State Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Omaha said Friday that the idea of a special election was not on lawmakers' radar when they drew the new maps in September 2021.
Few considered Fortenberry's seat in jeopardy, she said, nor did they have any hint that he might resign. Federal prosecutors charged Fortenberry in October, weeks after the maps became law.
Nebraska hadn't held a special election in decades.
"Nobody mentioned any of these possibilities," Linehan said. "It was never part of the discussion."
Moving forward, she said, she could see a state senator proposing a change that addresses special election boundaries when new districts are first being used.
"I could see somebody either in Sarpy County or Saunders County bringing a bill that said this shouldn't happen again," she said.
No matter how unusual the occurrence, the possibility exists that a member of Congress might quit, whether because of wrongdoing, family crises, a presidential appointment or the decision to take a private-sector job, Linehan said. Then there's the potential for accidents, illnesses and deaths.
The Legislature last addressed House vacancies after the 2004 resignation of longtime Rep. Doug

Bereuter, who was not replaced until the next general election. Lawmakers later adopted the current process, which clarifies if and when a special election should be held to replace a member who resigns or dies while in office.

House rules embrace old boundaries

The changes have also prompted confusion about which House member can provide constituent services in which areas. House rules only allow members to spend federal tax dollars on people who lived in their congressional district as configured during the most recent general election. In this case, that means the 2020 election.

Second District Rep. Don Bacon's office shared a letter with the Nebraska Examiner from House administrators stating, "The mere fact that a state may have taken action to implement new congressional districts does not disturb this rule."

Some Nebraska election experts argue that the 2020 district boundaries ceased to exist when Gov. Pete Ricketts signed the new redistricting law last September.

Bacon's and Flood's offices have both fielded calls from people trying to figure out who represents them. "Some constituents are rightfully confused as to where they should direct their requests," Flood's staff said. Callers are directed to the correct House office or to the offices of U.S. Sens. Deb Fischer or Ben Sasse.

Rep. Adrian Smith represents the 3rd District, which in recent decades has seen the largest geographic changes in redistricting. As the Omaha and Lincoln areas have grown in population, the 1st and 2nd Districts have shrunk geographically, while the 3rd has grown — now stretching like a Pac-Man from western Nebraska to northeast and southeast Nebraska, with space sliced out for the 1st District.

Smith's staff said his office has received calls from non-constituents for years "who are unsure of the best place to reach out for assistance."

"Given the current discrepancies between when the State of Nebraska recognizes the new congressional boundaries and when Congress does, the office is working closely with Senators Fischer and Sasse to ensure all Nebraskans are appropriately served," they said.

'Unconstitutional' or 'weird law?'

John Cartier, who until recently served as voting rights director for voter advocacy group Civic Nebraska, told CQ-Roll Call in early July he understood the difficulties of switching maps but said not letting people vote for their representatives is "unconstitutional."

University of Nebraska-Lincoln political scientist John Hibbing said redistricting is confusing enough for voters — without a special election thrown in. Nebraska's law governing when and how to hold special congressional elections makes it worse, he said.

Many other states, when faced with a vacancy late in the election cycle, leave such seats open until the next regularly scheduled election, Hibbing said.

"It's a weird law, and it should be changed," Hibbing said. "There's no reason to go through that rigamarole for a few months."

Election observers have also suggested another possible solution: upgrading election technology to let the state and counties more easily switch district boundaries back to the previous maps. Other states, including California and Texas, have held special elections using previous House district boundaries after having passed new maps in redistricting.

But Nebraska election officials have stressed the practical challenges of reprogramming the state's county-by-county voter files in time for a special election with the old maps after a primary has been held using the new ones. They say the process is manual, not automatic.

Campaigning confuses, too

Another factor confusing voters is that congressional candidates have been campaigning for months in the newly drawn districts, both before and after the special election.

For example, Bacon, a Republican, and his Democratic opponent in the 2nd District race this fall, State Sen. Tony Vargas, spent time last week at the Saunders County Fair.

In the 1st District race, Republican Flood and his opponent, Democrat Patty Pansing Brooks, have been holding campaign events in Sarpy County strongholds such as Papillion and La Vista.

Normalcy is coming

Theresa Klein, executive director of the Wahoo Chamber of Commerce, said, "A lot of people would've liked to vote" in the special election. For some, she said, "A redistricting like this is disconcerting."

Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen said the state expects to be "back to normal in the November election." Every Nebraskan is in a congressional district, he said, and every resident has someone representing them in Congress.

"This is the first special election for Congress that we've had in about 70 years," Evnen said. "Coincidentally, it occurred in the midst of redistricting, which takes place once in 10 years. So, the context of this special election was very, very rare."

Kate DeCoste, who owns a photo studio in Wahoo, said it was odd to "not be able to vote for someone who's representing you." She is looking forward to voting in a new House race in November.

"I can't do anything about what happened with the rezoning and that stuff," she said. "I'm looking forward instead of backward."

By Aaron Sanderford

Nebraska Examiner: Nascent Nebraska coalition looks to immigration-related solutions to help remedy labor shortage

Nebraskans don't have to go far to find one: a "Help Wanted" sign, say Kathleen Grant and Denise Bowyer of Omaha Together One Community.

"Everybody is painfully aware of our labor shortage," said Grant.

Meanwhile, she and Bowyer say they'd like to bring more awareness to a population that can help address workforce demands: immigrants with families, who want to live and work in the state yet have faced policy and legal barriers to jobs and overall stability.

OTOC is seeking to galvanize an assortment of people and groups to help change national immigration laws and influence state and local policies impacting foreign-born workers.

Getting started

"The overall goal is to change the narrative so people see that immigrants are a value, not a problem, and are central to addressing the labor shortage," said Bowyer.

They organized an initial gathering earlier this week at the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, which drew about 60 people from across the state. The group included employers and business leaders, representatives of labor unions, as well as faith-based and immigrant and refugee advocacy organizations.

Several immigrants spoke to the group about their Nebraska experiences. Some have been here for decades, riding a roller coaster of uncertain legal status.

While the Nebraska coalition is still developing, along with its goals, the OTOC volunteers see it aligning with the national and bipartisan Alliance for a New Immigration Consensus.

That wide-ranging group, which includes the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Business Roundtable, recently addressed a letter to Congress saying that at no other point in recent history has the need for immigration reform been greater.

Record low state unemployment rate

Describing its membership as from across the political spectrum, the national alliance cited concerns of persistent labor shortages and supply chain challenges, rising inflation and border security. It advocated for Congress and the White House to come together on reforms addressing "Dreamers," farm workers and immigrants with Temporary Protected Status.

Those are groups with members who have been granted temporary lawful status in the U.S. but who face legal uncertainty about remaining. The process required for current workers to renew stays, which can be every 18 months or two years, takes a financial and emotional toll, Grant said.

Bryan Slone, president of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was among those at the Lincoln meeting.

He said he has noticed a growing interest from a broad range of groups to find immigration-related and other solutions to workforce shortages.

"There is a real sense of urgency," he said. "We're down 50,000 to 80,000 jobs that we can't fill. We just don't have the people."

Slone said declining birth rates have contributed to the dearth. The state's unemployment rate has been at a record low for the state, 1.9%, for three months.

During the gathering, he heard speakers such as Itzel Lopez, a Nebraska recipient of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and Mario Vazquez, who has Temporary Protected Status that is offered (along with a work permit) to people from countries with ongoing armed conflict or disaster.

It is key, Slone added, to find a "practical" and more permanent legal status for contributing immigrants like them.

As of 2020, Nebraska, according to the American Immigration Council, was home to about 3,000 in the DACA program. Started in 2012 by President Barack Obama, the program shielded undocumented young people from deportation and offered legal work authorization — though offered no path to citizenship.

DACA has faced legal challenges that today put the program and participants in jeopardy of upheaval.

About 2,000 TPS recipients live in Nebraska, OTOC said. Also targeted by the Trump Administration, the program is in doubt pending legal appeals.

The OTOC representatives say the still-forming Nebraska coalition could lobby Nebraska congressional delegates for federal changes.

Rule of law

State barriers also could be addressed, they said, to create a more welcoming environment. For example, Nebraska is the only state where DACA and TPS recipients who are authorized to work here cannot access unemployment insurance, even though their employers pay into the state's unemployment pool, said Anna Deal of the Immigrant Legal Center of Omaha.

A legislative bill to change that situation died last year in the Legislature, and Gov. Pete Ricketts has said he opposes the measure.

Ricketts in 2016 also opposed a bill, though the Legislature ultimately overrode his veto, to allow DACA recipients access to professional and commercial licenses.
The governor says it was about the rule of law, and he argued that DACA immigrants were brought to the U.S. unlawfully and so it is unfair to give them the same privileges afforded those who entered the country legally.
Supporters said they saw the measure as a way to permit skilled, educated people to use their training while they have federal permission to remain in the country.
In her remarks to the group that met at the Lincoln chamber, Lopez said that without DACA she would not be the vice president of advancement at the Omaha-based AIM Institute, whose mission is to grow a diverse tech community.
Now 35, she has been in the U.S. more than two decades and today also is president of the Latino Economic Development Council, is a small business owner, and has a family. Yet, depending on the fate of DACA, she is at risk of being uprooted and sent to her birth place of Mexico.
“Immigration reform can be a solution to Nebraska’s labor shortage,” she said, and can “build future generations in this great state.”
By Cindy Gonzalez

LJS: Don Walton: It's time to listen to Abe Lincoln -- and get it right this time

This should set off alarm bells — and take your breath away.
One-third of Republicans, 20% of Democrats and 37% of gun-owners believe that "it may be necessary at some point soon for citizens to take up arms against the government," according to the results of a new University of Chicago Institute of Politics poll.
Incredible!
That's madness.
"This is the road to destruction and no one gets to leave" are the lyrics to the song.
The poison has been spread and it has taken hold and here we are just 246 years after 1776 on the verge of blowing it.
"We must not be enemies," Lincoln pleaded just before our Civil War erupted.
"Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.
"The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."
It's time to listen to Lincoln again — and get it right this time.

* * *

Public schools are on the defensive in Nebraska.
That's where most kids get their early basic education, where imaginations are triggered, stimulated and fueled, where lives and dreams begin to take shape in concert with the growth and encouragement and vital support that comes from home.
Some political detractors like to call them government schools because they are tax-supported. It's not a friendly term.
They are under attack in Nebraska and elsewhere in America -- and often struggling for political

support.
"Political battles are now a central feature of education, leaving school boards, educators and students in the crosshairs of culture warriors," a Washington Post article earlier in the year stated. "Schools are on the defensive about their pandemic decision-making, their curriculums, their policies regarding race and racial equity and even the contents of their libraries."
The Nebraska Board of Education came under fire a year ago and halted plans for new health education standards after criticism from some parents and conservative family-values groups that the content was sexually inappropriate.
It's certainly fair, and even vital, that families and taxpayers monitor public school performance. But, hopefully, the goal would be to seek and support quality public education rather than pursue political objectives.

* * *

Finishing up:
* Rep. Mike Flood's committee assignments as the newest member of the U.S. House of Representatives: the Small Business Committee and the Oversight and Reform Committee. The latter is the main investigative committee of the House.
* After noting that Nebraska's congressional delegation voted against the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) that pumped a billion dollars of federal economic recovery funding into Nebraska, Bob Kerrey ended a commentary article in the Nebraska Examiner with three words: "Thank you, Joe!"
* If Jim Pillen is elected in November, it looks like he would be the first Nebraska governor elected from the agricultural sector in almost a century, although Dwight Burney, a Hartington farmer, served as governor for four months following the death of Ralph Brooks in 1960 after moving up to the governorship from his post as lieutenant governor.
* And if Carol Blood wins the governorship, she would be the second woman elected to be Nebraska's governor following the election of Kay Orr in 1986 when voters chose between two women nominees. Former Lincoln Mayor Helen Boosalis carried the Democratic banner; Orr was the first Republican woman to be elected as a governor in the United States.
* The Russians stayed in Afghanistan for almost 10 years after their 1979 invasion before giving up and heading home.
* Early legislative maneuvering and speculation: Sen. John Arch of La Vista is still on course to be elected Speaker; Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn, chairwoman of the Revenue Committee, is emerging as an increasingly powerful legislative figure next year; a big decision is still unsettled as to who will chair the Appropriations Committee.
* The guess at the Capitol: No special session this year to attempt to enact a bill prohibiting abortions in Nebraska with few, if any, exceptions. If there aren't 33 votes locked down and guaranteed, Gov. Pete Ricketts isn't going to take the risk of finishing his governorship with an embarrassing political loss on a key Republican issue that would reverberate nationally.
* Zach Pluhacek tweet: "make the Haymarket pedestrian only."
By Don Walton

CNN: These are the next states that could call special sessions to limit abortion rights

The overturning of Roe v. Wade gives the green light to Republican-led states to pass stricter abortion laws, and several legislatures, rather than wait for the traditional legislative season to begin in the fall, are calling extraordinary sessions this summer to immediately take action.
Lawmakers in Indiana and West Virginia have met this week to debate new bills that would curtail the procedure, and other Republican leaders have publicly indicated that they will meet over the coming weeks. Several Democratic-led legislatures have also reconvened – in order to pass new protections for abortion rights that they now see under threat.
These states are potentially next to hold special sessions on abortion this summer.

Arkansas

Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson has already called for an extraordinary session the week of August 8 to address tax relief. Hutchinson told reporters earlier this month that abortion may be a potential topic for the session, according to local reports.
Arkansas bans providers from performing abortions "except to save the life of a pregnant woman in a medical emergency" and makes no exceptions for instances of rape or incest.
Ahead of the court's ruling, Hutchinson told CNN in May that Arkansas' near-total abortion ban he had signed in March 2021 should be "revisited" to provide exceptions for cases of rape or incest.

Nebraska

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, a Republican, told CNN in May that he would call a special session of his state's unicameral legislature to pass a total ban on abortion if the Supreme Court overturned Roe, which it did in June.
Abortion is allowed in Nebraska up to 20 weeks post-fertilization, with exceptions for saving the life of the mother or a "irreversible physical impairment of a major bodily function."
On the day the Supreme Court handed down its ruling, Ricketts said in a statement that he "will be working with our legislative leaders to determine what more we can do to protect our preborn babies."
Speaker Mike Hilgers said in statement that he anticipates that the legislature "will be in special session this summer to pass legislation to protect pre-born babies," WOWT reported.
"I will work with Governor Ricketts on the timing of a special session. And, after reviewing the Supreme Court's opinion in detail, I will work closely with the Governor and my legislative colleagues on the scope of such protections," Hilgers said.
CNN has reached out to Ricketts and Hilgers for updates as to a potential special session.

South Carolina

The state is likely to head into special session as state legislators are currently working on legislation that would ban most abortions.
South Carolina currently bans abortion once a "fetal heartbeat" is detected, which can be as early as six weeks of pregnancy, with exceptions for the life of the mother, rape or incest.
A special House committee held a public hearing earlier this month and put together a "working draft" of a bill that would ban abortion at every stage of pregnancy and eliminate the exception for cases of rape and incest. The bill would allow "any legitimate health care procedure necessary to prevent the death or serious bodily impairment of the mother," the committee chairman John McCravy said during a July 19 meeting.
The draft bill now heads to the House Judiciary Committee.
Lawmakers passed a resolution concluding their regular session that would allow the Senate president and House speaker to call them into a special session between July 1 and November 13 to

consider abortion legislation.

Blue states rush to add protections

Illinois is one of the few blue states that plans to hold a special session intended to pass legislation aimed at protecting abortion access.

The state, where Democrats hold power of the state legislature and the governorship, in 2019 enacted a sweeping abortion access protection bill.

In a joint statement on July 5, Illinois' Democratic leaders – Gov. J.B. Pritzker, Senate President Don Harmon and House Speaker Chris Welch – said they "plan to work closely together for the remainder of the summer to assess every possibility of what we can do and convene a special session in the coming months."

"As we build on Illinois' nation-leading abortion protections and access, it is essential to bring lawmakers and advocates into the room to continue to work together," they said. "In the coming weeks, as the ripples of the decision to overturn Roe are felt throughout the nation, we expect to get an acute sense of our needs and how Illinois can play an even more vital role in standing up for reproductive freedom."

Illinois would join New York and Wisconsin, which have already held special sessions related to abortion.

Ahead of the Supreme Court's ruling, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, called a special session on June 22 to repeal the state's 19th century abortion ban. Republican legislative leaders, however, started and immediately ended the special session without considering the governor's request.

After the Supreme Court handed down its decision, New York Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul brought state lawmakers back to Albany to begin the process of enshrining abortion rights.

The Democratic-led legislature on July 1 passed a constitutional amendment that, once passed, would enshrine the right to abortion in the state constitution. Lawmakers would need to pass the amendment again in next year's legislative session for it to be sent to voters.

By Veronica Stracqualursi

The Hill: Republicans race to stop Greitens in Missouri Senate primary

Republicans are making a final push to shut out former Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens in the state's closely watched GOP Senate primary, fearing that him clinching the GOP nomination on Tuesday could put an otherwise safe Republican seat at grave risk in November.

In the final days before the Aug. 2 primary, an anti-Greitens super PAC is running TV ads highlighting allegations of domestic violence against the disgraced former governor. Top Republican donors — including Pete Ricketts, the ultra-wealthy governor of Nebraska — are pouring money into the effort, hoping to deal one final blow to Greitens's campaign.

There are signs that the effort to weaken Greitens is working. Once seen as the front-runner in the race, the former governor has sunk into third place in recent polls and has been replaced at the front of the pack by Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt.

"What you've seen here is really a challenge of trying to beat [Greitens] down," one Republican

strategist involved in the Missouri Senate race said. “Equally to what we’ve seen with Greitens getting knocked down to around that 20 point range is the massive rise of Schmitt. And that combination is what’s really changed the outcome of the race so far.”

One survey released last week by The Hill and Emerson College showed Greitens running 17 points behind Schmitt and 5 points behind Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-Mo.) in the primary. That’s a staggering change from the same poll conducted in June that found Greitens leading Schmitt by 6 points.

Greitens, who resigned as governor amid scandal only 1 1/2 years into his first term, has brushed off his recent polling deficit, calling the surveys “fake” and accusing his opponents of pushing out inaccurate data in an effort to weaken him. He has also compared the attacks against him to those faced by former President Trump, calling the allegations false.

“Here’s what we’re hearing from a lot of people who’ve seen time and time again the way President Trump was falsely attacked, they’ve seen how I have been falsely attacked,” Greitens told reporters in Kansas City, Mo., on Monday. “A lot of these grassroots patriots are standing up and they’re that much more determined to fight for me.”

Of course, Greitens has been underestimated before. Polling in the lead-up to his 2016 win in the Missouri gubernatorial race showed a much tighter contest between him and former state Attorney General Chris Koster (D) than what actually played out on Election Day.

But Greitens, a onetime rising star in the GOP, has fallen from political grace in the years since he won the Missouri governor’s mansion.

Not long into his term as governor, he ran up against allegations that he carried on an affair with his hairdresser and threatened to blackmail her with nude photos he had taken of her if she revealed their relationship. Greitens has acknowledged the affair but has denied the blackmail allegations.

He later faced felony charges related to the alleged blackmail scheme, as well as for accusations that he improperly took a donor list from a nonprofit he had founded to use in his gubernatorial campaign.

Greitens resigned in June 2018 as GOP leaders in the state legislature met to consider whether to pursue his impeachment. The criminal charges against Greitens have been dropped, and he has repeatedly said he has been exonerated.

The latest blow to Greitens’s personal image came this spring when his ex-wife, Sheena Greitens, testified under oath that the former governor had assaulted her and their 3-year-old son. Those allegations have been among the hardest-hitting in the effort to weaken Greitens’s momentum in the Senate race.

Greitens’s personal and professional baggage has stirred deep worries among Republicans both in Missouri and in Washington, giving way to fears that his nomination to succeed retiring Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) would create an opening for Democrats to recapture the seat in a state that has otherwise moved firmly in the GOP’s direction over the years.

Senate Republicans also can’t afford to take any chances this year. While they’re targeting a handful of vulnerable Democratic incumbents in states like Arizona, Georgia and Nevada, Democrats also have opportunities to flip GOP-held Senate seats in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Ohio, among other states.

Whoever wins the Republican nomination next week will likely go on to face either Lucas Kunce, a former Marine running as a progressive, or Trudy Busch Valentine, a philanthropist and heiress to the Busch family beer fortune, in November.

Missouri Republicans have been burned before by controversial candidates.

The late former Rep. Todd Akin (R-Mo.) famously saw his political career collapse in 2012 after

claiming that women's bodies have a way of avoiding pregnancies in cases of "legitimate rape." That remark ultimately helped sink his bid to oust former Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) and left him isolated from many top Republicans.

Of course, there's still a wild card in the race: Trump. The former president hasn't endorsed in the primary, though earlier this month he ruled out supporting Hartzler, saying that she doesn't have "what it takes to take on the radical left Democrats."

Greitens has some influential allies on his side. Kimberly Guilfoyle, the fiancée of Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., is serving as a national co-chair of Greitens's Senate campaign, and the couple has continued to lobby Trump for his endorsement in the lead-up to the primary despite Greitens's recent drop in the polls.

But Greitens isn't the only candidate seeking Trump's endorsement. Each of his top rivals — Schmitt, Hartzler and Rep. Billy Long (R-Mo.) — have courted the former president, hoping to win his support in the primary. Schmitt is the only candidate to have held a fundraiser for his campaign at Mar-a-Lago, Trump's private club in Palm Beach, Fla.

One former Trump campaign aide, however, said that the former president isn't likely to endorse in the race before Tuesday.

"I think at this point, the primary is kind of all over the place," the former aide said. "The polling is changing, there are a lot of competing voices. The president doesn't want to get behind a losing horse, so I think he's probably fine to wait and see and endorse after Tuesday."

But Trump can be unpredictable in his political moves. In a July 9 interview with the conservative One America News Network, he left the door open to endorsing Greitens, even as he noted that Democrats would be eager to go up against such a controversial candidate.

"He's the one the Democrats legitimately want to run against," Trump said, later adding: "Eric is tough and he's smart. A little controversial, but I've endorsed controversial people before."

By Max Greenwood

LJS: Grand jury clears state trooper of wrongdoing in fatal shooting of 27-year-old in Lincoln

A grand jury has reviewed the fatal shooting of a Columbus man by a Nebraska State Patrol trooper in Lincoln and cleared the officer of any wrongdoing.

According to a recently filed transcript of a closed hearing earlier this summer, Deputy Lancaster County Attorney Dan Zieg told jurors the sole question was whether Trooper Adam Strode's decision to use deadly force against German Pedraza was justified under the law.

On Nov. 24, Strode and Lincoln Police Investigator Andrew Barksdale, both members of the Lincoln/Lancaster County Narcotics Task Force, had been driving through the area of 19th and G streets on the way to check out a Crime Stoppers call.

Nothing came of the Crime Stoppers tip. But on the way to it, Barksdale said he noticed a distinctive car, a white Chrysler 300 with a black driver's side quarter panel and 25-county plates, that they'd recently seen in a hotel parking lot known for drug dealing. He pointed it out to Strode.

While they were leaving the Crime Stoppers tip, they drove back past the apartment complex at 1905 G St.

There's no video of what happened next. Task force investigators don't wear body cameras.
Barksdale said he saw a man he didn't know, later identified as Pedraza, walk to the Chrysler with a woman and get in. Pedraza made a U-turn and turned into the apartment parking lot without signaling.
So the two officers, in plain clothes and in an unmarked pickup, pulled up behind the car, blocking them in, to talk to them about the traffic violation, Barksdale said.
He said when he and Strode got out with their badges on lanyards around their necks, Pedraza, who was getting out of the car, looked right at them.
"And he had like a very wide-eyed, shocked look to see that we were there," the LPD officer said.
He thought Pedraza was going to take off running, but instead he got right back in the car.
Barksdale can't remember if he said the word "police" but they were calling out directions and the two inside could see their badges. He said he went to the passenger door and pulled the woman, Cassie Navrkal, out.
But Pedraza stayed put, his left hand on the steering wheel or next to it.
Barksdale thought Pedraza was going to ram their truck to try to get away, which could be especially dangerous with both officers just outside the car's open doors.
So he reached in to the push-button ignition to try to turn off the car.
"Simultaneously, or maybe even as I was going inside the vehicle, I noted Mr. Pedraza was going for his right front pants pocket," the officer told the grand jury.
Barksdale said he saw a baggie that looked like meth fall out of Pedraza's pocket.
He said he struggled with Pedraza, trying to get him out, but Pedraza kept tugging on something. He thought he was going for a weapon, so he started striking him, yelling for him to get out of the car and to Strode that he was going for something in his pocket.
"At some point, his hand comes from his front right pants pocket up toward his waist," Barksdale said.
Pedraza hunched over the steering wheel and started turning toward the driver's door.
Barksdale went to get out of the passenger side. That's when he heard Strode yell, "Gun."
"And then I heard a single gunshot," he said.
Barksdale didn't know right away who fired. When he came around the car, Pedraza was lying on the ground, with a single gunshot wound to his neck, a silver pistol on the ground next to him.
He wasn't moving. Navrkal was screaming.
Barksdale cuffed her and called dispatch for an ambulance, running to the front of the building to see the address.
Strode, who had been on the driver's side, told the jurors he had opened the driver's door with the intent of removing Pedraza from the car and detaining him.
First, he had tried to break his grasp from the steering wheel. That's when he started digging in his pocket.
It turned into a struggle between Pedraza and the two officers that Strode said felt like quite some time but in reality lasted just seconds.
Their strikes weren't working, he said. So he tried to pull him out by his left arm.
When Pedraza brought his arm forward and leaned down, "It was at that moment ... I saw him with the gun in his hand," Strode said.
"I honestly thought I was going to be shot," the trooper said.
Strode yelled "Gun" and drew his handgun, placed the muzzle into Pedraza's back or upper neck area and kept yelling for him to stop and show him his hands.

"And did he ever stop or show you his hands?" Lancaster County Attorney Pat Condon asked him.
"No," Strode said.
It was too close quarters to use a Taser or pepper spray, even if they had them, both officers said.
When Pedraza planted his left foot out of the car, Strode said he got a clear view of the serrations on the side of the gun's slide and the black grip above his thumb.
He said his mind raced: What if it's a fake; what if it's unloaded?
"He was beginning to stand up and lean out of the vehicle. At that time, I decided to fire a round. And I squeezed the trigger and fired one round," Strode said. "He immediately dropped to the ground."
He said Pedraza still was grasping the gun in his right hand, so he leaned down and used two fingers to take it out of his hand.
It was loaded with two bullets.
Pedraza died in the hospital four days later.
Condon asked Strode if there was a reason he didn't try to fire into his leg or his arm to disable him.
"Yes, because we're trained to shoot center mass into vital organs to neutralize the threat," he said.
Plus, he said, he had to worry about the possibility of crossfire hitting Barksdale.
In the investigation that followed, Lancaster County Sheriff's investigators learned there was a warrant out for Pedraza's arrest for missing court for a high-speed chase Oct. 17 in Butler County that turned up more than a half pound of methamphetamine and two stolen guns.
He was facing seven felony drug and gun charges for it that would surely send him to prison if he ended up convicted.
Pedraza had just gotten out of prison in June 2020, after serving a 10- to 14-year sentence on burglary, theft and gun charges. And Navrkal said he'd told her he wasn't going back.
She wasn't called to testify before the grand jury, but she told an investigator she thought he was going for his gun when he reached in his pocket.
In separate reviews, the Lancaster County Sheriff's Office, Lincoln Police Department and Nebraska State Patrol all concluded the officers' actions and the use of deadly force that day were justified.
In the end, so, too, did the grand jury.
By Lori Pilger

OWH: Nebraska now offering death benefit to first responders who die in the line of duty

LINCOLN — Flames and smoke had turned the early April day to dark in southwest Nebraska when Elwood Volunteer Fire Chief Darren Krull hit the highway north of Arapahoe to help fight a wind-driven wildfire.
He and Phelps County Emergency Manager Justin Norris couldn't see the water truck headed straight for them. Krull, 54, died in the collision, leaving behind a wife, two daughters and eight grandchildren.
Not quite three months later, in the wee hours of the morning, Saunders County Deputy Sheriff Jeff Hermanson had just finished arresting a suspect in a car theft near Mead when he felt chest pains.
The 45-year-old drove himself to the hospital, where he collapsed and died. He was survived by his

wife and two teenage sons.
As is common when emergency personnel die on the job, friends, neighbors and fellow first responders turned out in force to honor the men and support their families.
Now, for the first time, their families could get support from the State of Nebraska as well.
A program created last year and expanded with legislation that took effect on July 21 offers a one-time, $250,000 death benefit to the families of first responders who die in the line of duty.
The line of duty payments are available for deaths starting this year of paid and volunteer firefighters, emergency medical service workers, ambulance squad members, law enforcement officers and correctional workers.
Karla Houfek of Lincoln, a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician, said the new benefit will be a major help for families dealing with a sudden loss and the accompanying financial burdens. She has worked with many families as a member of the Nebraska Serious Injury and Line of Duty Death Response Team.
"The families are elated when we tell them there is this benefit and they could possibly receive it," she said. "This is huge to these families. Their lives have crumpled."
She and others have advocated for the program for several years, noting that most other states already offered similar benefits.
State Sen. Matt Hansen of Lincoln introduced the idea three times before it finally passed last year. Legislative Bill 255 provided for $50,000 payments.
"I believe it is time for Nebraska to join our neighbors and make sure that those first responders know we value their work, their service and their lives," he said at the time.
Even then, there were opponents who argued that the state should not get involved with paying death benefits and that workers compensation or life insurance were better ways to take care of families.
This year, Sen. Adam Morfeld of Lincoln sponsored LB 717 to boost the benefit to $250,000. The increase passed before any benefits had been approved and applies to deaths this year. The amount will be increased by the inflation rate in future years.
Houfek said the number of first responder deaths varies from year to year. In February, she told lawmakers that Nebraska had one line-of-duty death in 2018, three in 2019, three in 2020 and six in 2021, which included deaths from COVID-19.
Three people have died so far this year, two firefighters and a law enforcement officer. All three families have filed for the new benefits, she said.
Based on news reports, the three are Krull, Hermanson and Lincoln Fire Inspector Don Gross, 57, who died of a cardiac arrest in January. John P. Trumble, who died in late April while helping with evacuation efforts and fire spotting in Red Willow County, was retired from the Cambridge Volunteer Fire Department.
Similar to other claims against the state, the line of duty claims have to be reviewed by the State Claims Board and be funded by the Legislature.
Hansen said he expects that, once the benefits are paid out, those first families' experiences will show the importance of the new program.
"I'm glad to hear that the families feel supported by the law," he said. "It did take a lot of effort to get the law passed, but it needed to be done."
Among other laws that took effect on July 21:
Immunity for sex assault reporting. Victims and witnesses of sexual assault won't get charged for minor drug and alcohol possession violations in certain cases under LB 519, introduced by Morfeld.

Individuals can get immunity if they report the assault to law enforcement or seek emergency medical attention and cooperate with law enforcement.

Animal mistreatment. Hitting, kicking or otherwise striking an animal has been added to the definition of abuse under LB 851, introduced by Sen. Anna Wishart of Lincoln. The law responds to a case last year in which a man was caught on video kicking a dog repeatedly and law enforcement did not file charges.

Stolen valor. People claiming to be military members or veterans to deceive or harm others or get a financial benefit can now be charged with "criminal impersonation by stolen valor," under LB 922. This law, proposed by Sen. Ben Hansen of Blair, also would apply to people who falsely claim to have a military medal or honor in order to gain something of value.

Trespassing with drones. Criminal trespassing charges can be filed against anyone using an electronic device, such as a drone, to spy on others in their home or property under LB 922. The charge applies if the drone enters into or above the property and is used to observe someone in a bathroom or other place where they expect privacy.

By Martha Stoddard

Kearney Hub: COVID cases fall in Two Rivers area, but risk zone still ''moderate'

KEARNEY- The COVID-19 risk dial remained in the yellow "moderate" level for the fifth consecutive week.

The dial, issued Friday by the Two Rivers Public Health Department, reflects a steady rate of new confirmed COVID cases and the frequency of COVID-related long-term effects.

It has sat in the moderate level since July 1, rising from the "low" level, where it had been since March 24.

In the past week, 127 new cases of COVID were detected in the seven Two Rivers counties: Buffalo, Dawson, Franklin, Gosper, Harlan, Kearney and Phelps. In the past four weeks, 607 new cases were confirmed.

However, new cases have dropped from 183 two weeks ago (July 7-15) and 147 last week (July 14-29.) New cases fell between 10 and 60 percent in the past week in Kearney, Lexington and Holdrege, Two Rivers said.

In the past week, 34% of all COVID tests conducted at hospitals and clinics have been positive, as well as 25% of tests conducted through public testing by Two Rivers or the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

COVID accounts for 30% of admissions to hospital intensive care units in the Two Rivers area.

The public can pick up free antigen tests in the Two Rivers office at 516 W. 11th St. and at locations throughout the district. Call 888-669-7154 for more information.

Two Rivers also offers COVID testing 9:30-10:30 a.m. at its office. Pre-registration is required at trphd.org.

Two Rivers strongly urges all unvaccinated vaccine-eligible residents to get COVID vaccination or booster shots through healthcare providers, pharmacies or Two Rivers.

By Mary Jane Skala

LJS: LPS superintendent: Targeted masking approach appears to be 'new normal'

Lincoln Public Schools is entering its fourth pandemic school year, but the playbook officials are using to navigate COVID-19 this fall reflects a district that has learned to live with the virus.
On Friday, new Superintendent Paul Gausman unveiled the district's return-to-school plan, which spells out its pandemic procedures for the upcoming school year.
Students return to the classroom Aug. 15.
Gausman on Tuesday previewed release of the outline, saying the district would move ahead with any masking requirements on a building, program or classroom level.
After a school year of revolving rules surrounding masking, the superintendent said Friday he sees the new "targeted approach" as the way forward.
"I do suspect that this is the new normal for us for the time being," he said.
LPS worked in consultation with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department to develop the new plan, which is relatively unchanged from the fourth quarter of last school year.
Other highlights include the way LPS notifies parents about COVID-19 cases in their child's schools. Previously, that information was emailed to families, but now it will be available as part of the district's online dashboard.
Staff and students will be asked to follow the same quarantine and isolation restrictions, which were loosened last winter just as a surge of cases driven by the omicron variant hit LPS particularly hard.
Those who test positive for COVID-19 are expected to stay home for five days from the date symptoms appear or the date the test was taken. Individuals who test positive can return on Day 6 if they're fever-free and symptoms have improved and wear a mask for five more days.
Students or staff identified as a close contact — someone who was within 6 feet of a positive case for 15 or more minutes — are expected to get tested and wear a mask for 10 days after the contact.
Gausman said the district does not have data on vaccinations to use in making masking decisions across the district should there be an outbreak. LPS does not ask for staff members' vaccination status, and parents are not required to report their child's COVID-19 vaccine status.
Universal masking, however, is not out of the question if conditions change, Gausman said.
"I wouldn't rule anything out at this time," he said. "If a strain comes forward that's a real change for us, we'll make the right decisions as counseled by the Health Department."
By Zach Hammack

LJS: Hailstorms, derechos becoming more frequent as climate changes in Nebraska

Until a couple of years ago, Mark Walz said he had never even heard the term "derecho."
That's impressive for an insurance company CEO, but it illustrates to some degree how the nature of

weather-related disasters in Nebraska has changed over the past few years.
When Nebraskans think of weather-generating headlines, they likely think of tornadoes that have caused significant damage to cities such as Grand Island, Omaha and Hallam.
But lately, it's been just as likely that hailstorms or derechos — the name for a long-lived, straight-line wind storm that's usually associated with fast-tracking thunderstorms — are responsible for big, expensive weather events.
Another notable change: Extreme weather events are happening more frequently in months when they wouldn't be expected.
For example, the derecho that tore through Nebraska in December spawned nearly two dozen tornadoes, more than four times as many as had been recorded in the month in the state's history.
"Both the frequency and the severity of weather-related disasters has absolutely increased in the state of Nebraska over the past decade, with the 2020, 2021 and 2022 storm seasons reflecting this phenomenon," said Walz, chairman, president and CEO of Farmers Mutual of Nebraska.
Prior to 2016, he said, the storm season in Nebraska typically began in mid-April and was done by Sept. 1.
"Since that time, we have experienced large storm events as early as March 13 and as late as Dec. 25, with the norm now appearing to be mid-March through mid-October," Walz said. "That represents a 75-day extension of our storm season. This is not an insignificant change."
That longer time span in which extreme weather events are occurring also translates to Nebraska seeing more of them.
According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Nebraska has been affected by 53 weather events since 1980 that have caused at least $1 billion in damage. However, 44 of the 53 have occurred since 2000, and 29 have occurred since 2010.
In the 20-year period from 1980-2000, the state averaged one billion-dollar disaster every two years, but from 2000-2020 it averaged 1.8 per year.
And if you look more recently, the pace is accelerating. From 2010-2020, the pace was 2.1 per year. In the last five years, ending in 2021, there was an average of 2.8 billion-dollar disasters per year.
And this year, there have already been four through mid-July, including a derecho that hit the state in May — the third in as many years — and a hailstorm in early June. On Wednesday, the Federal Emergency Management Agency announced that 20 counties in central and eastern Nebraska are now eligible for federal disaster assistance because of damage caused by the May derecho.
Combine those two events with another severe storm with hail in June and Walz said Farmers Mutual has seen the second-, third- and fifth-largest loss events in its 130-year history this year alone, totaling nearly $300 million. That amount doesn't include an estimated $40 million in losses from the December derecho.
The Nebraska numbers mirror a national trend. According to NOAA, the U.S. as a whole has averaged 7.7 billion-dollar weather disasters a year since 1980, but the rate has more than doubled, to 18.7, in just the past three years. The total cost of those disasters has nearly doubled in the past three years as well.
Nebraska State Climatologist Martha Shulski said climate change is not only playing a role in the frequency of weather disasters, but it also amplifies their effects.
"We do see an increasing trend in natural hazards that are occurring locally, nationally and globally," Shulski said.
"For us in Nebraska, these increasing trends of costly disasters will continue upward as climate change leads to more extreme events," she said. "We will have a greater risk for heat events, severe

storms, drought (and) flooding because their occurrence will generally increase in magnitude and frequency."
Walz agrees. He highlighted the fact that Nebraska has seen three derechos in the past three years after previously averaging about one per decade as "a clear indication that weather patterns are changing."
"While we cannot predict future weather disasters in the state of Nebraska with certainty, our experience suggests that we should expect an increased frequency and severity of these kinds of events in the future," he said.
Shulski said it's important for officials to make moves now to help mitigate the effects of those future weather events.
Among her suggestions: reviewing and updating the state drought plan, which was released more than 20 years ago, and incorporating amplified hazards into municipal planning documents such as emergency operations and hazard mitigation plans.
"Events such as worsening heat waves and intense, flooding rains should be viewed looking forward, not in the rearview mirror," she said. "We will be much better off to use our climate planning roadmap and not just our climate history."
By Matt Olberding

OWH: Nebraskans to benefit from $0 co-pays for insulin, emergency drugs

UnitedHealthcare says it will eliminate out-of-pocket costs for insulin and several drugs used in medical emergencies for some members as early as Jan. 1, 2023.
In addition to short- and long-acting preferred insulins, four emergency medications — epinephrine, including EpiPens (for severe allergic reactions), albuterol inhalers (for acute asthma attacks), naloxone (for opioid overdoses) and Glucagon (for hypoglycemia) — will be offered at $0 cost share to members of fully insured group plans, subject to any required regulatory approval.
UnitedHealthcare officials said the initiative is aimed at ensuring that people get the drugs they need and making health care more affordable. Nearly 8 million of the company's members are covered under fully insured plans. The insurer has just over 500,000 members in Nebraska.
"High prices are a significant barrier to prescription drugs for many people, so we are using our unique capabilities to deliver savings for consumers," Brian Thompson, UnitedHealthcare's CEO, said in a prepared statement. "We are doing what we can to shield people from the prices set by pharmaceutical companies and hope all stakeholders also will act to make prescription drugs more affordable."
The move comes as Senate Democrats seek to pass a measure that would give Medicare the power to negotiate prices on some of the costliest drugs.
Insulin would not be covered under the bill, the Washington Post reported, because the drugs will have generic competition. Also left out is a $35 proposed cap on the co-pay for insulin that had been included in early drug-pricing proposals. Democratic leaders reportedly are considering adding an insulin provision back into the reconciliation bill. More than 7 million Americans with diabetes need insulin to survive.

Fifteen states, starting with Colorado in 2015, have enacted their own caps on insulin costs in response to concerns that the high cost of the drug is causing people to skip doses or ration it.
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska began offering a $0 cost share for preferred insulins to members with diabetes who are covered under fully insured employer group health plans on Jan. 1.
Medica in 2021 began offering a $25 cap for a month's supply of insulin under its group plans in Nebraska and three counties in southwest Iowa — Pottawattamie, Mills and Harrison — and to individual plan members in Nebraska with coverage under the Affordable Care Act.
However, neither the $0 co-pays nor the caps address the underlying costs of insulin, which are rising. That has been a concern voiced by critics of attempts to enact a federal cap, in particular.
EpiPens, too, have been the subject of outcry about price increases. Generics first became available in late 2016.
UnitedHealthcare officials said the company, and subsidiary Optum, recognize their responsibility to encourage collaboration and cooperation to help make prescription drugs more affordable.
"We encourage other parts of the drug supply chain to follow our action today and join us in collaborative efforts that will make prescription drugs more affordable for patients," company officials said in a statement.
By Julie Anderson

OWH: Western Nebraska firefighters battling wildfires south of Gering

At least 35 fire departments battled multiple wildfires in western Nebraska over the weekend in the Cedar Canyon Wildlife Management Area south of Gering.
Gering Fire Chief and Incident Commander Nathan Flowers said Sunday that the fires have already burned at least 13,051 acres of land, and further burning is expected. Three homes were destroyed, and seven were damaged, according to Region 21 Emergency Management Director Tim Newman.
Newman told the Scottsbluff Star-Herald on Saturday that the fires may have been caused by lightning strikes. Flowers said Sunday that it is now "100% confirmed" that lightning was the cause.
"The lightning started three fires within a five-mile area, and two ended up combining into one large fire," Flowers said. "The third one, we were able to extinguish."
The combined fire was about 30% contained as of Sunday afternoon, Flowers said.
"We are anticipating for the fire to be fully contained around Aug. 8," he said.
The Nebraska State Patrol advised people to stay away from the area. Cody Thomas, a patrol spokesman, said earlier Sunday that troopers were assisting by blocking off roads into the area.
"There have been some evacuations, but the fires are mostly in canyon areas," Thomas said.
The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission announced Sunday that it was closing several areas in the Panhandle southwest of Gering to help firefighters. Cedar Canyon Wildlife Management Area, Montz Point Wildlife Management Area and Carter Canyon were closed so firefighters would not be hindered by vehicular traffic.
"The public is asked to stay away as area residents may be using the roads to evacuate personal belongings or move livestock to safety," the announcement said.
According to the Region 21 Emergency Management Facebook page, firefighters from Gering,

Scottsbluff, Minatare-Melba, Lyman, Banner, Bayard, Bridgeport, Sidney, Potter, Bushnell and Dix were among those responding to the emergency.
By Kevin Cole and Molly Ashford

OWH: Cleanup of Nox-Crete could begin next week

Cleanup of a burned-out chemical warehouse in midtown Omaha could begin as soon as next week now that a major hurdle has been cleared.
Late Thursday, Nox-Crete was told by its insurer that it no longer needed access to the site for its investigations. That's according to documents on file with the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy.
Speaking on behalf of Nox-Crete, Ann Pedersen said enough progress has been made to realistically estimate that cleanup could start next week. Pedersen is a vice president at OBI Creative, the Omaha public relations firm that has been retained by Nox-Crete to respond to media inquiries.
The company's warehouse near 20th Street and Woolworth Avenue was engulfed in flames May 30. A noxious black cloud of smoke and soot roiled over the neighborhood, prompting a voluntary evacuation. The fire, its emergency response, and the availability of information has been criticized by those affected.
There are still a few pieces that need to fall into place before cleanup can begin: results are pending from the last batch of environmental testing, as is state approval of the company's cleanup plan.
Cleanup will involve removal of all debris and all remnants of the building, according to documents on file with the state. This includes the concrete slab the warehouse sat on. Soil also will be removed, with future testing guiding the extent of the removal.
B2 Environmental, working on behalf of Nox-Crete, submitted the cleanup plan to the state Friday morning. In response, state environmental regulators said they would review the proposal as soon as possible "so as not to delay cleanup."
The site contains hazardous and nonhazardous waste, according to documents filed with the state. State officials said they will require that Nox-Crete follow all applicable hazardous waste regulations. This will include taking steps to lessen the risk of hazardous materials escaping the site during cleanup.
Per state regulations, a berm and rolls of absorbent are in place to slow and catch runoff from rain. The city will require that cleanup crews control for dust, said Jim Theiler, assistant public works director. This typically includes spraying down the site on dry, windy days. City inspectors also will monitor the cleanup, he said.
According to the cleanup plan, much of the debris will be taken to the Pheasant Point landfill in Douglas County. This includes petroleum-contaminated debris and what the company describes as a trace amount of asbestos roofing materials.
Material that can be recycled, such as metal and plastic, will be taken to a recycler. Some building debris will be taken to a construction landfill.
Some barrels remain within the burned-out warehouse. Materials in those barrels will be tested for volatile organic compounds and dealt with accordingly, based on whether they meet hazardous thresholds.
By Nancy Gaarder

Nebraska Examiner: Charles Herbster can add to defamation lawsuit but can't muzzle Slama lawyer, judge rules

OMAHA — Former Nebraska gubernatorial candidate Charles Herbster will be allowed to add more examples to his defamation lawsuit against State Sen. Julie Slama, a judge has ruled.
As a result, Slama's attorneys must wait until after Herbster updates his lawsuit before deposing him for Slama's counter-lawsuit.
Johnson County District Judge Rick Schreiner resolved those issues and more from a June hearing in a two-page ruling Thursday involving dueling lawsuits between Herbster and Slama. Herbster sued Slama after she and seven other women alleged that he groped them. Slama countersued, alleging that he had sexually battered and defamed her.
Schreiner also ruled that Herbster cannot muzzle Slama's attorney from defending her publicly.
Schreiner ruled that Herbster's deposition could wait for the amended lawsuit. One issue not resolved in Thursday's ruling is whether Herbster could be sanctioned for missing his first deposition date in May.
The judge did not grant a protection order that Herbster's attorneys had sought to silence one of Slama's lawyers, Dave Lopez, who spoke on her behalf before the Herbster lawsuit or counter-lawsuit were filed.
Schreiner said he would use an Aug. 15 hearing in Tecumseh to hear arguments involving the Slama legal team's effort to force Herbster's political team to turn over records sought in her lawsuit.
Herbster's legal team has filed motions seeking to limit the scope of Slama's subpoenas. Both sides have been negotiating, at the judge's urging, a narrower range of documents.
Herbster has denied wrongdoing. He argues that the allegations against him were political. Slama alleged that Herbster touched her inappropriately after reaching up her skirt during a 2019 fundraising dinner in Omaha. The Nebraska Examiner reported the allegation in an April 14 article.
By Aaron Sanderford

OWH: Recidivism rate drop

Reducing the number of people who return to prison is a key goal of any criminal justice system. In Nebraska, more than 70% of those discharged in 2019 have not returned to the custody of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) — a significant benchmark.
Recidivism is typically measured in three-year increments. Based on just released data, Nebraska's recidivism rate has dropped to 29.8%. This is the third year in a row that recidivism has trended downward in Nebraska. In comparison to publicly available data for surrounding states, Nebraska is the only one with a rate under 30%. We are in the top third nationally for low recidivism.
While many factors influence whether someone will return to prison, Nebraska's recidivism rate supports that reentry services are working. Opportunities offered through NDCS include clinical treatment, skills training and employment, prosocial activities, education, and more. The Vocational

Life Skills (VLS) Program, which provides grants to community providers, has been a particular success. In the last grant cycle (July 2020 — June 2022) participants completed nearly 4,800 programs.

NDCS takes the position that reentry begins at intake. Our focus on that goal is undeterred. We offer a robust platform of services and work in tandem with incarcerated individuals to address needs such as housing, medical and mental health, employment, education and transportation.

Of the 70.2% who have been out of prison for the past three years, they have an increased quality of life and are contributing members of families, employers and communities. An improvement in our recidivism rate means more transformed lives, which leads to our collective mission of keeping people safe.

Scott R. Frakes, Lincoln
NDCS Director

LJS Editorial, 7/31: New ag land valuation method a long-term fix

Farmland prices in Nebraska have hit record levels this year, increasing, by some estimates, more than 30% from the first half of 2021.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Nebraska Farm Real Estate Report found that overall farm prices in the state rose 16% this year, to an all-time record of $3,360 an acre. But that report is conservative, especially when the prices are examined regionally.

United Farm & Range Management says prices are up 20% to 25% in central and southeast Nebraska, where the most productive cropland is located

The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City estimated that Nebraska's fourth-quarter land prices were up 31% for non-irrigated cropland, 21% for irrigated land and 23% for ranchland compared with a year ago.

And the Omaha-based Farmers National Company reports that the average price paid for Nebraska farmland in the first half of 2022 was $11,500, a jump of more than 30% from 2021.

The Nebraska gains are the biggest of any of the 18 Grain Belt states in which Farmers National operates, all of which saw jumps in prices

The increased demand for farmland and the corresponding price jump is being driven by higher crop prices, economic instability, investor interest and, until recently, historically low interest rates.

Investors and those concerned about an economic downturn see farmland as a stable investment – USDA data shows that since 1970 farmland has averaged a 5.7% annual return – that will be less volatile than, say, the stock market.

That stability is fortified by the strong prices for the crops produced in the state, which are expected to remain at least at today's levels, even in a recessionary economy.

While they can be celebrated as a sign of a robust, stable agricultural economy, the rising farmland prices will, as re-evaluations of property are done by counties, exacerbate the state's property tax crisis.

The increased prices will lead to higher valuation for nearby land, which will increase the taxes collected on that property that go to pay for public education and local government.

The increasing valuations will trigger calls for school districts and local governments to reduce their levies and, in the Legislature, for even more "property tax relief" created by diverting state funds, collected from income and sales taxes, back to property owners.
The only lasting solution to that rising land price dilemma, however, would require a change in the way Nebraska values agricultural property, shifting from price based valuation, which will continue to increase, sometimes at very high rates, to a production-based model like that used in Iowa.
A production-based system operates on the estimated income that a parcel of land could create and would still respond to the economy as increasing commodity prices would be reflected in the valuation calculations.
But valuation increases would be more moderate than the market-based jumps and would, thereby, hold down property taxes charged to that land. That makes it a change that would benefit Nebraska's property owners, especially small farmers, for decades to come.

NY Times: These Republican Governors Are Delivering Results, and Many Voters Like Them for It

Republican flamethrowers and culture warriors like Donald Trump and Representatives Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene typically draw an outsize amount of media attention.
Americans may conclude from this that there is a striking, and perhaps unfortunate, relationship between extremism and political success.
But Republicans aren't hoping for a red wave in the midterms only because norm-thrashing or scandal sells. The truth is much more banal, yet also important for parties to internalize and better for politics generally: In states across the country, Republican governors are delivering real results for people they are physically more proximate to than federal officials.
Now, it's true that the party that controls the presidency nearly always gets whipped in midterm elections, and inflation would be a huge drag on any party in power. And it's also true that among those governors are culture warriors like Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida and Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas.
But people too often overlook the idea that actual results, especially ones related to pocketbook issues, can often be as important as rhetoric. Looked at that way, lots of Republicans — some with high public profiles, and some who fly below the radar — are excelling.
Start with the simplest measure: popularity. Across the country, 13 of the 15 most popular governors are Republicans. That list does not just include red states. In fact, blue-state Republican governors like Phil Scott of Vermont, Charlie Baker of Massachusetts and Larry Hogan of Maryland are among the most popular.
There are many reasons that G.O.P. governors seem to be succeeding. It's true that governors can't take credit for everything. Sometimes they just get lucky. But they do make policy choices, and those made by governors since the start of Covid have made a difference in particular.
For example, take a look at the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data on unemployment. In the 10 states with the lowest rates as of June, eight were led by Republican governors. Several governors who don't make frequent appearances in national news stand out, like Pete Ricketts of Nebraska, Chris Sununu of New Hampshire, Spencer Cox of Utah and Phil Scott of Vermont. Their states have

unemployment rates under 2.5 percent, and of the 20 states with the lowest unemployment rates, just four are led by Democrats.

States with Republican governors have also excelled in economic recovery since the start of the pandemic. Standouts in this measure include Mr. Abbott and Doug Ducey of Arizona.

These results reflect many things — some states have grown and others have shrunk, for example — but are at least in part a result of policy choices made by their elected leaders since the start of the pandemic. For example, governors like Kristi Noem in South Dakota often rejected lockdowns and economic closures.

Republican governors were also far more likely to get children back to in-person school, despite intense criticism.

Covid policy doesn't explain everything. Fiscal governance has also made a difference. The Cato Institute's Fiscal Report Card on America's governors for 2020 (the most recent edition available), which grades them on tax and spending records, gives high marks to many Republicans. Nearly all of the top-ranked states in this report have Republican governors, like Kim Reynolds of Iowa or Mr. Ricketts. (Some Democratic governors also ranked highly, including Steve Sisolak of Nevada and Roy Cooper of North Carolina.) Some have made their mark with employer-attracting tax cuts, others with spending controls, others with a mixture.

Most states mandate a balanced budget, so taxing and spending policies are important for fiscal stability. Low taxes tend to attract and keep employers and employees. Restrained budgets help ensure that taxes can be kept low without sacrificing bond ratings, which may matter if debt-financed spending is needed in a crisis or to try to stimulate businesses to hire more.

Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas has cut taxes for individuals, reduced the number of tax brackets and cut the corporate income tax rate. Mr. Sununu has restrained spending, vetoed a payroll tax proposal and cut business taxes. Brian Kemp of Georgia, by contrast, actually paused some tax cuts that had been scheduled — and focused almost exclusively on spending restraint, issuing a directive for state agencies to generate budget cuts and keeping 2020 general fund growth to a tiny 1 percent.

Even in blue Vermont, Mr. Scott — despite being an odd duck among governors because he is not constrained by a balanced-budget amendment — kept the increase in general fund spendingto an annual average of just 2.4 percent between 2017 and 2020, and he has also cut taxes. He signed a bill to ensure that the federal tax reform instituted under Mr. Trump and limiting state and local tax deductions wouldn't result in Vermonters getting hammered. He has also cut individual income tax rates, reduced the number of tax brackets and resisted new payroll taxes in favor of voluntary paid leave plans for private-sector employers.

Republicans who have a big impact on the day-to-day lives of many Americans — unlike, say, Representative Kevin McCarthy or certainly Mr. Trump, and in terms of the quality of state economies, local job markets and education — are delivering. In our federalist system, a lot of power still sits with states and not the federal government and determines much about citizens' lives.

This is a big reason that Republicans are well positioned heading into the midterms. It should be a warning to Joe Biden and Democrats — and to some of the culture warriors. Cable-news combat over whatever the outrage of the day is may deliver politicians the spotlight. But sound economic policy and focusing on the job, not theatrics, are delivering basic day-to-day results that Americans want, need and will reward.

Liz Mair (@LizMair), a strategist for campaigns by Scott Walker, Roy Blunt, Rand Paul, Carly Fiorina and Rick Perry, is the founder and president of Mair Strategies.

LJS: Pansing Brooks points to million-dollar House campaign funding support

Democratic congressional nominee Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln said her campaign has passed the million-dollar fundraising mark after her close battle with Republican Mike Flood of Norfolk in a June 28 special election that sent Flood to Congress to fill eastern Nebraska's 1st District House seat.
"People across District 1 are worried about the extremism taking place in Washington," Pansing Brooks said, pointing to the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision that negated the 1973 Roe v. Wade court ruling that guaranteed a woman's right to seek an abortion.
While Americans are struggling with inflation, Pansing Brooks said, "Washington politicians won't stop the grenade-launching" and focus on issues important to their constituents.
Pansing Brooks, who lost to Flood by 6,234 votes in the special election last month, said she has raised $1,040,172 in campaign funds as of July 18.
Latest campaign finance reports filed with the Federal Election Commission show Flood raised $1,369,791 during the same period.
Pansing Brooks reported $353,995 in cash on hand; Flood reported $47,434.
The special election last month filled the House seat vacated by the resignation of former Rep. Jeff Fortenberry following his conviction on charges that he lied to federal officials about illegal foreign campaign contributions to his 2016 reelection campaign.
The general election in November will determine who holds the House seat for the next two-year term, beginning in January.
Democrats have not held the 1st District House seat since Clair Callan of Odell won a single term in 1964.
By Don Walton

OWH: Sasse, Fischer confident veteran benefit expansion bill will pass Senate

Nebraska’s two U.S. senators expressed confidence that a bill expanding health benefits for veterans exposed to toxic burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan will make it across the finish line after they joined Republican colleagues earlier this week to delay the bill’s passage.
Sens. Deb Fischer and Ben Sasse were among the 41 Republicans in the Senate who moved to force debate on amendments that would reduce future mandatory spending in the bill. Both Nebraska senators were among the 84 who voted in favor of another version of the bill last month.
That legislation hit a snag due to a line on nontaxable benefits. The Constitution requires all bills with tax items to originate in the House. The House passed the bill on an overwhelming 342-88 vote earlier this month.
This time around some Republican senators said they wanted to take the opportunity to debate amendments to the legislation. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he will bring the bill back

to the floor next week, and that he will allow Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., to bring an amendment addressing mandatory spending to the floor for debate.

The Republican senators who changed their minds, including Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, did so shortly after West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin announced a deal with Schumer on a separate tax and spending bill that Republicans are united against.

The delay sparked an outcry from Democrats, some of whom were joined Thursday by comedian Jon Stewart, who has been an outspoken advocate for the legislation.

“They love to say they support the troops, but they don’t support the troops,” Stewart told reporters Thursday. “They support the war machine.”

But some Republican senators downplayed the delay as part of the normal process and expressed optimism about the ultimate fate of the bill.

A spokesperson for Fischer said the senator expects the legislation, known as the PACT Act, to make it across the finish line next week.

“Sen. Fischer remains committed to getting this bill done,” the spokesperson said.

A spokesman from Sasse’s office also said they expect the bill will become law, adding that “it’s unfortunate that Democrats are trying to score partisan points.”

“This is part of the legislative process: The Senate passed the bill two weeks ago with Senator Sasse’s support, the House made some changes so it came back to the Senate, and now the Senate should include an amendment from Senator Toomey to fix an accounting issue,” the spokesman said.

Toomey, one of the few senators to consistently vote against the bill, has said it creates a “slush fund” and would create “a huge explosion” in veterans’ funding in the future.

The version passed by the Senate last month would have expanded health care and disability benefits for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in response to concerns about their exposure to toxic burn pits. The military routinely used open burn pits set ablaze with jet fuel to dispose of tires, batteries, medical waste and other materials during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It was projected to increase federal spending by about $283 billion over 10 years and did not include offsetting spending cuts or tax increases to help pay for it.

“There are going to be veterans who die between now and when this bill passes,” Senate Veterans Affairs Chairman Jon Tester said following the delay in the Senate. “I apologize for the dysfunction, but if we’re able to step up, I think we can right this ship.”

Republican Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, who supported the legislation last month, told reporters he believes the bill will eventually pass, provided Republicans are allowed debate on their amendments. Democrats want to pass the bill before they break for the August recess.

The issue is personal for President Joe Biden, who lost his son Beau to brain cancer. Beau Biden served overseas near burn pits, and Biden has suggested that the toxins from the pits may have caused the disease. The president mentioned protections for veterans exposed to toxic burn pits in his first State of the Union address this year.

By Ryan Hoffman

Very Respectfully,

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