From: Goins, Anthony
To: Anthony Goins
Subject: Nebraska"s economy
Date: Tuesday, June 30, 2020 1:34:00 PM
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Anthony Goins "Tony"
Director

Nebraska Department of Economic Development
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509-4666
OFFICE 402-471-3125
anthony.goins@nebraska.gov
opportunity.nebraska.gov | **Facebook** | **Twitter**

From: Kopsa, Ryan <Ryan.Kopsa@nebraska.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, June 30, 2020 1:32 PM
To: Kopsa, Ryan <Ryan.Kopsa@nebraska.gov>
Cc: Pinkerman, Justin <Justin.Pinkerman@nebraska.gov>
Subject: Governor's Office Daily Update - 6-30-20

Ag Valley Co-op
Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Jun 2020	3.18	-23.00	N/A
Corn	Dec 2020	3.07	-43.00	13:19
Milo	Jul 2020	3.29	-12.00	13:19
Milo	Dec 2020	3.15	-35.00	13:19
Soybeans	Jul 2020	7.80	-98.00	13:19
Soybeans	Dec 2020	7.96	-85.00	13:19
Wheat	Jun 2020	3.83	-57.00	13:19
Wheat	Jul 2020	3.83	-57.00	13:19

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OWH: Coronavirus restrictions will loosen next Monday in final four Nebraska counties

The four Nebraska counties that remain under tougher coronavirus restrictions than the rest of the state will see their rules ease Monday.
Dakota, Hall, Hamilton and Merrick Counties will join the rest of the state under Phase 3 directed health measures, which means they'll be able to further open large gatherings, bars, restaurants, child care centers and a number of other places.
Specifically, bars and restaurants will be able to go up to 100% of capacity, and people will be allowed to sit at the bar.
Gyms, salons, barbershops and various parlors can go to 75% of occupancy.
Arenas, theaters, fairgrounds, festivals and stadiums can go up to 50% of rated occupancy indoors and 75% outdoors. Maximum attendance is not to exceed 10,000. Within that, groups can't have more than

eight people, and groups are suggested to be 6 feet apart.
Hospitals and other health centers can schedule surgeries as they see fit. Child care centers can expand, with limits.
Parades, carnivals, midways, dances, street dances and beer gardens remain prohibited.
Gov. Pete Ricketts has not determined when a move to Phase 4 of the health measures will begin, but the state has provided a description of what that stage will include so that counties can begin planning.
Bars, restaurants, child care centers, churches, weddings, funerals, sports and many other gatherings and businesses would be removed from the health measures, but recommendations would remain.
By Nancy Gaarder

Govn't Technology: Three States Renew COVID-19 Contracts, Despite Slow Ramp-up

When state governments began calling for private-sector help in the fight against coronavirus earlier this year, that call was met by a cadre of tech companies from Utah.
The affiliates of Silicon Slopes, a nonprofit that represents the state's tech start-up community, launched a new public-private partnership to assist governments as they tackled challenges like test deployment, virus-tracking and data collection.
The initiative was led by health-care vendor Nomi Health, marketing analytics firm Domo, and Qualtrics, an online survey software company. Together, the companies had all been in talks to provide what they called a unified "crisis response service" for state governments — a means for officials to augment and extend testing efforts.
Josh Walker, co-founder and COO of Nomi, told Government Technology that his company saw an opportunity to fill in the gaps where governments were struggling with the scale of COVID test deployment and virus tracking.
"A number of organizations in states were trying to determine what their response would be to [the] coming pandemic, and you had fears that hospitals would be overrun," Walker said. "As we raised our hand in Utah initially to help the state respond to the pandemic, it became very apparent that what was missing around the U.S. was a body to bring together all those disparate point solutions that were powerful in and of themselves but that needed to be knitted together to create a comprehensive strategy and solution."
The collaboration began in Utah, where the companies struck a deal with Gov. Gary Herbert's administration to help launch TestUtah. The program offered a number of services, including a symptom testing website and physical testing sites. While the services were initially offered for free, the companies eventually expanded their services, signing around $11 million in contracts with the state.
After this initial burst of success in Utah, the companies saw the opportunity to expand.
MORE STATES JOIN THE EFFORT
Advertising their services to other governments, the companies quickly garnered partnerships in Nebraska and Iowa. Beset by the unpredictable virus and facing anxious constituencies, the administrations in both states hurriedly used emergency buying powers to sign no-bid contracts amounting to $27 million and $26 million, respectively.
Under those contracts, the vendors promised to deliver an all-in-one solution to augment state and municipal testing efforts: Qualtrics would deliver an accessible symptom checking website; Domo would provide data sharing and analytics solutions to state officials; Nomi, meanwhile, would act as an overall coordinator for the organizations and processes at play providing materials for pop-up test sites and connecting vendors, state health agencies and public officials.
State administrations would staff and run the testing sites themselves. As Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts explained during a press conference, the companies would "deliver the test kits and really kind

of make it a turnkey delivery for us with regard to machines, the test kits and all that sort of thing. Though we will be here in the state of Nebraska managing that lab. It'll be Nebraskans that are running it. It'll be Nebraskans who are running the test sites and so forth."

"We became essentially what is the general contractor, the connective tissue, amongst a number of solutions coming together to [produce] a comprehensive ... statewide COVID testing response-as-a-service," said Walker, about Nomi's role in the projects.

The companies appear to have positioned themselves to develop similar contracts nationwide with Domo apparently registering similar website domains for all fifty states — TestFlorida.com and TestTexas.com, for example.

Yet, some say what followed in Utah, Iowa and Nebraska fell short of the ideal public-private partnership, pointing to trouble ramping up to meet testing demand and questions over test accuracy. Lawmakers in all three states asked administrations end the contracts.

Now the company contracted to conduct the actual tests, Co-Diagnostics, is being sued by one of its investors, which alleges that the company engaged in a "pump and dump" scheme to up their stock price through exaggerated claims.

The lawsuits claims that Co-Diagnostics announced in early May that its test was 100 percent accurate, but that those claims were not accurate. The company has said that it doesn't agree with the allegations in the lawsuit, providing a statement to Government Technology that says the company "stands behind the quality of our technology platform, and performance of our testing products. We intend to vigorously defend this matter."

A represenative for Nomi also defended the testing company, explaining in a statement that "despite political chatter from senators, health experts and the FDA are all confident in Co-Diagnostics tests, and there have now been more than four third-party validations of them. If the FDA were not, the test would not be used."

A LARGE-SCALE OPERATION

The ambitions of these public-private partnerships were immense: to stand up large-scale testing procedures in numerous communities across multiple states in a tight time frame, with immense public pressure in the background.

Adminstrations in Iowa and Nebraska have so far disregarded much of the criticism of the partnerships. Gov. Pete Ricketts' office in Nebraska could not be reached for comment for this article, but has consistently defended its program. The office of Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, meanwhile, said in an email to Government Technology that the program had significantly improved since its launch.

In Utah, where these partnerships began, the longterm future of the program isn't totally clear. Local news reports suggest that the partnership between the state and Nomi Health had been renewed as of mid-June, but a spokesperson for the governor's office said the agreement is under review.

"The contract is under review to assess the effectiveness before renewing it," said Brooke Scheffler, public information officer for the Utah Governor's Office, in a recent email.

In May, suspicions about test accuracy cropped up when it was reported that TestUtah was returning an unusually low rate of positive test results. This spurred various reviews of the program's testing process.

Meanwhile, in Iowa, rollout of TestIowa was criticized for being slow to scale to the goal of 3,000 tests per day that was established at the outset of the program.

Tricia Kitzmann, Community Health Division manager with Linn County Public Health, said in an email that as of June 9, a total of 1,043 county residents had been tested through TestIowa. The test site in Linn County, Iowa's second most populous county, has been operating since the beginning of May. Kitzmann also revealed that initially, many of the tests they received were inconclusive or showed inconsistencies, though Kitzmann said that in the past few weeks things have improved.

"The data we are receiving now is much cleaner and [involves] very little duplications and inconclusive

tests," she said.
Nomi's Walker said that the test materials for the sites were provided by the company, but that the sites were staffed and run by government agencies. The capacity to add 3,000 tests a day was a goal set by state governments themselves, which Nomi's infrastructure was provided to accomodate, he said.
"TestIowa is just one tool individuals can use to get a COVID-19 test," said Pat Garrett, spokesman for Gov. Reynolds' office, in regards to criticism of its rollout. "That being said, we have significantly ramped up testing and we now have TestIowa clinic sites, in addition to drive up sites."
In Nebraska, meanwhile, available testing options have irked disability rights groups for their lack of accessibility, something several local Democrats have swiftly criticized the Republican governor for. That particular criticism, however, also applies to many of the country's pop-up test sites, which require a car and do not appear to be designed with disabled people in mind.
"We've worked very hard to support the state in making sure that those who need and want access to the program can get access to it," Walker said. "Ultimate decisions around how that's done, how that's accomplished, is left up to the state, who is running and directing the program."
Indeed, all three states recently decided to renew contracts to continue the programs, with Utah extending through mid-July. The programs have definitively helped widen the scope of testing efforts; governments are still expanding these efforts, too. In May, Iowa was able to nearly double its testing capacity, going from some 1,400 tests per day to a little over 3,000. It's not totally clear how much of that was because of TestIowa, according to the Des Moines Register.
"The uniqueness of the solution has really been a convergence of taking technology and applying it in new ways to help states respond to a crisis," Walker said. "Through this process, the programs that we've been able to stand up are now available to 8.3 million people across the state. We've done more than a million assessments. We've tested through these programs more than 150,000 individuals. And our average turn around time is about 40 hours."
"From that perspective, it's been wonderful to be a part of the state's response efforts on a big level," he added.
By Lucas Ropek

Time: We Have a Cheap, Effective Way to Keep Ourselves Safer From COVID-19. Why Are We Fighting About It?

At long last, we have made a truly game-changing scientific breakthrough in preventing the spread of COVID-19. The impact of this breakthrough seems almost too good to be true.
We have found a disease control tool that, when used properly, can dramatically reduce the person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Studies have shown that this tool could reduce transmission by somewhere between 50% and 85%. The tool is cheap and remarkably low-tech. You can even make one at home. It has no significant side effects. And with each passing day, the scientific research showing the tool's effectiveness gets stronger and stronger.
If this tool were a vaccine or medicine, we'd be high-fiving each other and popping the champagne, knowing we'd discovered a crucial means to help prevent the spread of the pandemic.
I'm talking, of course, about face masks—cloth, surgical, or even a bandanna. Face masks block the spread of respiratory droplets that can carry the novel coronavirus. But just as with so many other aspects of the response to COVID-19—including mass testing, contact tracing, and the early use of stay-at-home orders—the U.S. is once again squandering this opportunity.
In many countries that have so far successfully controlled their COVID-19 epidemics, public health leaders, politicians, and the public have fully embraced the use of face masks with no hint of controversy. A recent study found that countries where masks were widely used soon after their COVID-

19 outbreak began were more likely to keep their death rates low and to have a shorter outbreak. Countries like Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam that quickly adopted masking, along with other control measures such as social distancing and track and trace, have reported fewer than 6 deaths per million residents as a result of COVID-19.

Yet in the U.S., where the death rate from COVID-19 is now 379 per million people, face masks have been weaponized for partisan purposes. Taking their cues from President Trump, who has refused to appear on camera wearing a face mask and has said that Americans who wear masks are doing so to show their disapproval of him, many of his supporters now see wearing a face mask as an affront to personal liberty. According to the Washington Post, Republican leaders "are less likely to mandate them, and Republican voters are more likely to forgo, and even scorn, them." Health officials who have promoted mask mandates have quit their jobs after receiving death threats.

As a result of this alarming polarization, only 18 states and the District of Columbia are mandating face masks in public across the whole state. Only two—Massachusetts and Maryland—have Republican governors. Meanwhile, many Republican-led states are actively trying to subvert local measures. Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts has gone so far as to say he will withhold federal coronavirus relief funds from local governments if they try and mandate mask use in their places of work.

Rejecting face masks inevitably means embracing more COVID-19 cases and deaths. One U.S. study found that states with a mandate had a more rapid decline in daily growth rates of COVID-19 and estimated that mask use prevented up to 450,000 cases of COVID-19 by May 22, 2020. And while researchers at the University of Washington now predict that the U.S. could reach 180,000 COVID-19 deaths by October, they say we could prevent 33,000 of these deaths—more than half of the new deaths the model projects—if at least 95% of people wear a mask.

That's right. We can avert the deaths of 33,000 of our parents, grandparents, siblings, co-workers, teachers, bus drivers, mail carriers, nurses and store and factory workers by just sticking a one-dollar piece of cloth over our noses and mouths.

So what's stopping us? One problem is the "me first" culture in the U.S., in which anti-maskers claim that their right to go around unmasked in public matters more than saving lives. What they don't seem to get is that while masks may protect the wearer, the more important reason for wearing them is to protect others. If you are infected but don't know it—because you have no symptoms ("asymptomatic infection") or the symptoms have not yet appeared ("pre-symptomatic infection")—a mask reduces the risk that you will spread the virus to others around you.

What's more, the higher the proportion of people who wear masks, the lower the risk that the coronavirus will spread through the community, akin to herd immunity after vaccination. Once a certain percentage of people, known as a "herd," is vaccinated (e.g. 95% in the case of measles vaccine), then the unvaccinated people also become protected. Similarly, mass masking provides benefits across a whole community.

This is why it is so important for governments to issue and enforce mask mandates. Not surprisingly, the rate of mask use is much higher in states with mandates. The highest rates of mask use (60%-70%) are in the Northeast—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, all of which have statewide mandates. The lowest rates (under 10%) are in Arizona, Indiana and Tennessee, none of which have state mandates.

COVID-19 cases are on the rise in again 31 states—and growing exponentially in crisis states like Arizona, Texas, and Florida that acted much too quickly to reopen businesses. The only way to control the dramatic rise in these "humanitarian catastrophe" states will be to reinstate full lockdowns and mandatory social distancing. Mass masking isn't the way to end a huge surge in COVID-19. Instead, it is one of the ways that we can help avoid repeated cycles of lockdown and release. There is plenty of evidence from countries around the world that widespread mask wearing—in combination with 2

meters of social distancing, handwashing, and track and trace testing—will allow us to more safely do the things we so desperately want and need to do: go back to work, reopen schools, see friends and family, and restart our economy.

But to have any success, we need to reframe and depoliticize the wearing of face masks. I have been encouraged to see some Republicans—including Mitch McConnell, Marco Rubio, Arnold Schwarzenegger and even Dick Cheney—publicly endorse the importance of wearing masks. That support needs to gain steam in state legislatures and governor's offices. Leaders further need to strongly and publicly condemn the fringe who are spreading misinformation about masks and openly flouting public health guidelines.

Wearing a face mask is not is sign of weakness. It is an act of solidarity, an expression that all of us—Democrats, Republicans and Independents—have a role to play in defeating one of the greatest public health challenges we have faced in our lifetimes.

By Gavin Yamey

AP: Nebraska reports 18,899 coronavirus cases, 267 deaths

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska health officials say the number of reported coronavirus cases in the state is approaching 19,000.

As of Monday, the state reported 18,899 cases of COVID-19, according to the Nebraska's online coronavirus tracker. That is an increase of 375 cases since Friday evening.

The number of deaths linked to the coronavirus outbreak in the state increased by 1 to 267 between Friday and Monday.

More than two-thirds of the coronavirus cases reported in the state are in five Nebraska counties: Douglas, Dakota, Lancaster, Hall and Sarpy counties. Each of those counties has reported more than 1,000 cases.

The state said that 41% of Nebraska's hospital beds, 49% of its intensive care beds and 79% of its ventilators remained available Monday.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness.

Out of the 18,899 cases of coronavirus in the state, 13,322 people have recovered.

Scottsbluff SH: 19 new cases, 15 recoveries announced

The Panhandle Public Health District added 19 COVID-19 cases to its total over the weekend.

During a Unified Command briefing on Monday, Scotts Bluff County Health Director Paulette Schnell said one new case was confirmed in Cheyenne County, two in Sheridan County, five in Scotts Bluff County and 11 in Morrill County.

Investigations are still underway in the cases of a Cheyenne County woman and a Sheridan County woman both in their 20s, as well as a woman in her 30s and one in her 40s in Morrill County. Two Morrill County cases, a man in his 60s and one in his 70s are also under investigation.

The remaining Sheridan County case, a woman in her 50s, was determined to be a close contact along with two Morrill County women in their 50s and a teen boy. Scotts Bluff County also had several cases that were determined to be close contacts, which means an individual was less than six feet away another person with COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more. Those cases include two women in their 20s, one in her 30s, and a man in his 40s.

The rest of the cases were community spread and included a woman in her 30s in Scotts Bluff County,

and, in Morrill County, a woman in her 50s and a man in his 20s, one in his 30s and one in his 40s.
PPHD director Kim Engel said there is concern about the rise in community spread cases, which can't be traced back to a specific person.
"I wasn't the one investigating the cases," Engel said of those in Morrill county. "I know some of them spread from an event. Many are community spread and we can't figure out the cause … we're puzzled with this one."
The Camp Clarke Stampede Rodeo, a Morrill County tradition, is still set to go ahead this week.
"We went through many different methods on how to have a safe event," Engel said. "Spectators will be asked to sit in groups of eight or less, and six feet apart."
There will be other changes, she said, but the rodeo is set to take place.
Three Morrill County cases and 12 from Scotts Bluff County were moved from active to recovered. A total of 298 positives have been reported in the Panhandle Public Health District since March 2. Of those, 185 have recovered and 110 remain active.
There have been a total of 33 hospitalizations, with four currently hospitalized. Three elderly Panhandle residents have died as a result of COVID-19.
During the briefing, members of Unified Command shared information about assistance available through the Community Cares Program, which offers direct assistance to charitable and provider organizations who have experienced loss or an increase in expenses.
Three grants are available. The first will be for 501c3 organizations and select provider organizations who are licensed in the state and will consist of a $12,000 onetime payment. The applications for this grant are open from now until July 6 and awardees will be notified by July 15.
The second grant will be a more traditional grant, and will include behavioral health regional authorities and other behavioral health entities. This is a competitive grant and awards will range between $50,000 and $2 million. Applications will be accepted from July 1-8 and will be evaluated by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Awards will be announced around July 15.
The third will be a one-time payment of $250 for in-home childcare providers, $500 for childcare centers and $500 for houses of worship to be used for PPE and cleaning supplies. Applications will be accepted July 6-12 and awards will be announced July 20.
Information and guidelines are available at https://bit.ly/NECOMCARES.
Officials are also reminding individuals and businesses to take precautions and follow quarantine guidelines. Anyone determined to be a close contact must quarantine for 14 days even if they test negative. This means monitoring symptoms, staying home and away from others, and contacting a health care provider.
The public is also encouraged to continue wearing masks and practicing social distancing.
"Until we get a vaccine, I think our lives will have to adjust to this new normal," Engel said.
By Kamie Stephen

LJS: 21 new coronavirus cases reported Monday in Lincoln

Lancaster County reported 21 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday, as concern grows over the increase in cases among people under 40 years old.
At the beginning of May, people under 40 accounted for 40% of confirmed coronavirus cases, said interim Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department Director Pat Lopez during a news conference Monday. The 40-and-under age group now accounts for 65% of all cases, she said.
Lancaster County has had a total of 1,718 cases. The number of recoveries is up from 547 on Friday to 599. The local death toll remained at 12.
Bryan Health continues to see a steady decline in the number of patients in its hospitals with COVID-19.

The health system said Monday that only four people with the virus were hospitalized, and only one patient was on a ventilator.
That's the lowest number of ventilated patients since April 13 and the lowest number of overall patients since April 19.
Lincoln has seen a steady decline in coronavirus cases, with only 87 last week, the first time in two months weekly cases were below 100.
People should strongly reconsider out-of-state summer travel plans, as many states, including California, Arizona, Texas and Florida, are seeing record highs of new cases, Lopez said.
As the Fourth of July approaches, people should avoid large gatherings, maintain social distancing and keep hand sanitizer on hand during any "pandemic celebrations," Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird said during the news conference.
"You can think about it this way," Gaylor Baird said. "You can best celebrate our nation on its birthday by protecting yourself and others."
Test Nebraska will be at North Star High School from 8 a.m. to noon and 1-5 p.m. on Wednesday and Thursday. Testing is open to all Lancaster County residents by appointment only.
By Sofia Saric

KLKN: More reported COVID-19 cases linked to bars than protests, officials say

More people who tested positive for COVID-19 in Lancaster County in the past month reported going to bars than attending protests, health officials said Monday.
Pat Lopez, Interim Director of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, said the surge in people under 40 testing positive in recent weeks is concerning.
Lopez reiterated statistics presented last Friday, which showed 293 of the 452 (about 65%) reported cases in June have been people in that age range. Last week, that number rose to 73%, with 25% of the cases being people under the age of 20, she said.
Channel 8 Eyewitness News asked if recent protests, which in some cases drew hundreds of people, contributed to the increased number.
Lopez said contact tracers have had few reports of people who said they attended protests.
“In general, people are pretty open about where they’ve been and where they’ve been exposed,” she said. “We haven’t had – very rarely – anyone who participated in a protest.”
Many of the cases have come from people who went to bars, social gatherings, camping or participated in team sports without masks, Lopez said. Bars have been the most common, she said.
Bars have been linked to increased case numbers in several states. In Texas, Gov. Greg Abbott’s announced that bars would again be shuttered, a day after the state reported a record high of nearly 6,000 confirmed cases. Some Iowa bars and other businesses are voluntarily closing their doors amid an increase in confirmed coronavirus cases. Florida banned alcohol consumption at its bars Friday as its daily confirmed coronavirus cases neared 9,000, a new record that is almost double the previous mark set just two days ago.
Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird announced 21 new cases on Monday, bringing the community total to 1,718.
Overall, the area has seen the average number weekly cases drop to an average of 17 new cases per day. The overall positivity rate dropped from 6.6% to 6.5% – well below the state rate of 10.8%.
Hospitalizations for COVID-19 also saw new lows, with only 12 patients (7 from Lancaster County) in Lincoln hospitals. Two of the patients were on ventilators.
Reported recoveries increased from 547 on Friday to 599 on Monday.
All Lancaster County residents, regardless of whether they have symptoms, can get tested through Test Nebraska.

Lopez stressed the importance of young people to get tested, even if they may not be experiencing symptoms or a serious reaction to the virus.
“It is critical especially as they’re out more and in large gatherings,” she said.
Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, shortness of breath, repeated shaking with chills, repeated muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell.
You can begin the process of getting tested with a free online risk assessment available at BryanHealth.com and CHIHealth.com. Testing is by appointment only. Bryan Health offers drive-through testing at LifePointe, 7501 S. 27th Street. CHI Health St. Elizabeth offers drive-through testing site at North Star High School, 5801 N. 33rd Street.
Test Nebraska will be at Lincoln at North Star High School, 5801 N. 33rd St., 8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, July 1-2. Testing is by appointment only. Begin the process with a free online risk assessment at TestNebraska.com.
LLCHD will host a free testing event from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, June 30 for minority residents and those for whom English is a second language. Testing will be done on the south side of the building in the parking lot next to Woods Park. Residents do not need to have symptoms to be tested. Registration is required and appointments can be made by calling 402-441-8006.
By Brent BonFleur

OWH: Frost says Nebraska football is 'elbows deep' into plan to manage its way through pandemic

LINCOLN — Adrian Martinez was supposed to fly back to Nebraska out of Los Angeles International Airport. But the medical experts being used by Nebraska’s football program suggested an airport with less traffic. So Martinez flew out from a different spot.
This was late March, near the first peak of the coronavirus pandemic, and while Martinez was voluntarily choosing to return to Lincoln and NU’s campus, the Husker brass — led by coach Scott Frost and his chief of staff, Gerrod Lambrecht — had already planned, and begun to enact, a way for Martinez to come back safely without putting himself, or the community, in danger.
Martinez flew in and was directed to move quickly through the airport — no bathroom break, touching nothing — to a waiting car that had already been equipped with a divider. From there, he was driven to his home, where Martinez waited until April 3, when Nebraska first administered COVID-19 tests to a core group. Other athletes flying in from out of state were taken to a suite-style dorm on campus and given a room number with a key taped to the door.
Since then, NU has tested more than 250 student-athletes and staff several times. Eight have tested positive, two of whom are in other sports.
Of the six connected to the football program, three — two players and a coach — tested positive upon their arrival. Just three players, over nearly three months, tested positive based on community spread after their arrival.
None of the football players, Frost said, have had symptoms beyond a sore throat, a one-day fever spike or a two-day loss of taste and smell. One player who tested positive, Frost said, was asymptomatic.
Frost said Nebraska had never made a firm decision not to release case numbers, and the decision to announce them Monday was not related to a World-Herald story last week covering their lack of release. Other schools such as Clemson, Kansas State, Oklahoma State and Iowa have been reporting positive tests, but roughly half of FBS schools, according to an Associated Press survey, have declined.
“We’ve been elbows deep in this situation for a long time,” Frost said in a scout room nestled on the second floor of Memorial Stadium. “As other schools decided to release that information, we’ve been talking for a month (about) doing an interview like this because we want Nebraskans to feel like we did

this in a safe way."
Nebraska's positive test cases are nowhere near the spikes seen at Clemson (37 positives) or Kansas State, which suspended voluntary workouts for 14 days after 14 players tested positive. While other schools brought back many of their players in a short time frame, Nebraska stretched out its return in waves, starting with the core group in late March. The final wave — mostly walk-ons — won't arrive until mid-July.
Frost credited Lambrecht, associate director of football operations Andrew Sims, nutrition guru Dave Ellis, strength coach Zach Duval, head trainer Mark Mayer, NU's administrative leaders and two University of Nebraska Medical Center experts — Dr. Steven Hinrichs and Dr. Scott Koepsell — for their help in administering the plan.
Lambrecht typed up a document full of suggestions, pointers and potential pitfalls that was distributed to the rest of the Big Ten. Nebraska doesn't know, to what extent, its plan has been followed by other schools.
Frost just knows the plan has been "efficient" for Nebraska. Lambrecht said it was "obvious" that most players would return to Nebraska at some point over the summer regardless of what they were told.
"So the idea that it was managed in a way that protected Nebraska and protected Lincoln was of paramount concern," Lambrecht said, adding that the safety of the players was equally important.
NU's staff talks to players repeatedly about their social behavior and the "best, safest, smartest way to conduct themselves," Lambrecht said. When players returned to the state, they were placed in categories of driving and flying back into the state. If players drove into Nebraska from the north, east or south, Lambrecht said, they were generally asked to fill up their gas tanks before reaching the state line. Driving in from the west, Colorado for instance, was the occasional exception because of the distance.
In their quarantine suites, players had a balcony for fresh air, but they were asked not to leave their rooms. Sims would load up his car with supplies at least once a day — food from Ellis' grab-and-go system, toiletries, disinfectant — and deliver them to the front doors of the suites for players to collect.
At the outset of the pandemic in March, tests from UNMC were in shorter supply and it took three or four days to receive results, which meant longer quarantines. The longest quarantine, Lambrecht said, was 27 days, involving a player who tested positive upon arrival. Nebraska coaches used FaceTime chats with players dealing with cabin fever.
This approach, spread over late spring and early summer, stands in contrast to most schools, including some in the Big Ten and Oklahoma, which will not bring back the bulk of its team until this week as coronavirus cases spike all over the South and West. Husker football players who live in states like Texas, Arizona, Georgia and Alabama — which combined for more than 10,000 positive tests on Monday — are by and large already back in Lincoln, which reported just 16 positive cases Monday.
Frost said he doesn't want to critique other schools' plans but said college football lacks a uniform approach to testing and managing the safety and well-being of players. Every conference, university president, athletic director and coach may have their own perspective, and the pendulum on whether a season can be played or not swings back and forth with regularity. There is not yet a protocol on how teams will test, and then isolate, players once the season begins, and because the U.S. is so vast, a "blanket approach," Frost said, may not be best.
And while testing is important, Frost said, he laid out a practical scenario in which it becomes clear that an attitude shift related to the virus may be more important than testing.
"If you try to peel back the onion of thinking that testing is going to keep everyone from getting this, you're lying to yourself," Frost said.
Based on UNMC expertise, Frost said, the incubation period for the virus is 72 hours before a person would test positive, and it takes 24 hours to get back test results. So if Nebraska tested its players on Wednesday of a game week, the school would know who might have contracted the virus the weekend

prior.
“But if they got it on a Monday or Tuesday, it’s not going to come up positive,” Frost said. “They’re still going to class Thursday, they’re going to class Friday morning, and if you have an away game, they’re going to be around bus drivers, flight attendants, hotel people preparing food. To think that testing is going to keep our kids safe is probably a very flawed way of looking at it. We’ve gotten to the point — not our decision, but advice from experts — that the ones we need to be worried about in regards to the age group of people we’re working with, young, healthy kids, is that we need to focus on kids who are symptomatic.”
Sore throats. Fever spikes. Shortness of breath. Identify and isolate those players, Frost said. And Nebraska said it will be “very attentive” toward players with risk factors like sickle-cell trait or asthma.
“If we don’t get there, where we’re able to just play football and take care of kids who are symptomatic — pull them, isolate them, isolate people in direct contact with them and let everybody else go — I think football’s unlikely.”
The mindset surrounding the virus, Frost said, has to change. And there has to be consideration for whether athletes will contract COVID-19 regardless of whether they play football.
“I think that’s an important point,” Frost said. “Whether our kids are playing football games or not, or whether our kids are practicing football or not, they’re at just as high risk — or even a higher risk — of getting it without that structure. That’s another reason we allowed kids to come back — because of the structure and things to do.”
The clock ticks toward the season. Starting July 13, the NCAA will allow coach-supervised workouts. On July 24, the NCAA allows a mini-camp structure in which coaches can work with players 20 hours a week. By then, the sport will either have turned the corner toward a normal season or not.
Nebraska spends much of its time chewing on contingency plans. Frost quipped that “0%” of Big Ten coaches would be in favor of an all-league schedule, but the possibility has been floated. As far as NU knows, all three of its nonconference opponents — Central Michigan, South Dakota State and Cincinnati — plan on playing this season. The Huskers have contracts — which generally do not include out clauses for pandemics — that they want to honor.
Frost, and his staff, are all-in.
“We’re fighting the fight,” he said.
By Sam McKewon

GII: Central District Health Department to move to Phase 3 Directed Health Measure on July 6

The Central District Health Department will move to a Phase 3 Directed Health Measure on July 6.
In a news release Monday evening, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services said counties in CDHD’s service area — Hall, Hamilton and Merrick — and Dakota County will all move to Phase 3 to align with other counties in Nebraska that are, and will remain in, Phase 3.
Under Phase 3, bars and restaurants can be open at 100% capacity. Self-service buffets and salad bars are prohibited. Indoor gatherings will be limited to 50% of rated occupancy not to exceed 10,000, while outdoor gatherings will be limited to 75% of rated occupancy not to exceed 10,000.
Wedding and funerals are allowed, with dances at the former being allowed in a limited capacity.
An outline of Phase 3 DHMs is available at http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/COVID-19-Directed-Health-Measures.aspx.

LJS: Nebraska faring better than nation during pandemic economic hit

While recovery from the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic is likely to be a multi-year journey nationally, Nebraska appears positioned to begin a strong recovery in terms of non-farm income as early as next year.

That was the message delivered Monday during an OpenSky Policy Institute webinar on the national, state and local impact of the pandemic.

Speaking in national terms, Matt Fiedler, a fellow with the Brookings Institute, said "there's a very real possibility that recovery will take a very long time."

"We're in uncharted territory," Fiedler said, with "large budget shortfalls ahead" that could possibly last into fiscal 2023.

"Nebraska has been less hard-hit by this recession" than the nation has been, said Eric Thompson, director of the University of Nebraska Bureau of Business Research.

It's possible that Nebraska may be back to pre-pandemic employment levels by the middle of 2021, he said, and the state may be in position to "return to normal growth" in 2022.

Thompson is forecasting "a strong recovery in 2021 in terms of non-farm income."

Brandon Kauffman, director of finance for the city of Lincoln, said reacting to the loss of local tax revenue "has been a struggle, especially (due to) the city's reliance on sales tax revenue."

Lying ahead is the possibility of another big economic hit in terms of city revenue if the University of Nebraska's football season is canceled along with other Husker sports, he said in answer to a question.

"There are so many unknowns," Kauffman said. "We are very cautious."

Renee Fry, executive director of OpenSky, said the webinar, which attracted 135 participants online, was designed to explore the economic impact of the pandemic in advance of the return of the Legislature on July 20.

One of the key challenges awaiting state senators, who suspended their 2020 legislative session in March as the coronavirus spread across the nation, will be adjusting the state budget in view of declining revenue.

"Nebraska seems to be doing better than the rest of the country," Fry noted in launching the webinar, but she said that's accompanied by a lot of uncertainty.

But the nation faces the prospect of "a very deep recession," Fiedler, the Brookings fellow, said a few minutes later.

By Don Walton

Columbus Telegram: Foley visits Platte County Museum; museum sees increase in attendence

Nebraska Lt. Gov. Mike Foley toured the Platte County Museum Monday morning to promote the Nebraska Passport Program.

“I think a lot of Nebraskans are traveling within the state,” Foley said, noting that there are sites and attractions that residents can visit “safely within their own backyard.”

In the Passport Program, a list of attractions is provided that guests can visit to receive a stamp in their “passport.” There’s a virtual version that allows participates to digitally check-in and take a selfie at the establishment.

The sites and attractions featured in the program vary every year. This year, the Platte County Museum is the only attraction listed for Columbus. The museum was last in the Passport Program in 2014.

Members of the Platte County Historical Society and Museum Board of Directors accompanied Foley on a tour of the museum, which included the west building with various exhibits, the 1857 Gottschalk Log Cabin and the Third Ward/Lincoln School building.

Foley asked what the museum’s biggest exhibition is, which some said is the log cabin.

Mike Siedlik, president of the Platte County Historical Society and Museum, noted that the log cabin, which boasts original furnishings, had been transported to the museum with the building it's located in being built around the cabin.
The cabin is also a feature that takes visitors by surprise, along with a 1913 Indian Motorcycle.
"There are a lot of interesting things in the museum that people don't even know about," Siedlik said after the tour.
The Third Ward building boasts an authentic turn-of-the-century barbershop and pianos and wooden shoes crafted in the area back then. Siedlik noted that shoes were created for steelworkers so they could safely walk on embers and special sandals made for military men to keep their feet safe during the war.
According to Siedlik, the majority of the items the museum displays are donated to them.
Officials at the museum say that the program has already significantly impacted attendance at the facility in the first month of the program.
Cheri Schrader, executive director of the museum, said that as of Monday morning, 270 people had visited the facility due to the Nebraska Passport Program. This does not include the number of those visiting who utilized the Passport Program app.
"It has increased our attendance," Schrader said. "Some days, 20 people will come by. On a regular summer day, that doesn't happen."
Treasurer Rich Aerni noted that most visitors don't realize how much the Platte County Museum is, which can be good for them as families will often come back to visit the areas they didn't get to before.
The Nebraska Passport Program runs until Oct. 31.
By Hannah Schrodt

OWH: Invasive emerald ash borer found in central Nebraska for first time

The emerald ash borer, an invasive insect expected to wipe out most ash trees, has been found in central Nebraska.
The insect was found along a street in Kearney by the local parks department, and the discovery was confirmed by the Nebraska and U.S. Departments of Agriculture.
This is the first Nebraska discovery outside the eastern portion of the state, according to a press release from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.
The insect, native to Asia, was first found in Omaha in 2016 and since then several eastern Nebraska counties have been placed under quarantine for the movement of ash trees and wood.
Steve Wellman, director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, said it's inevitable the insect will continue to spread.
Infestations are devastating because ash trees make up a sizable percentage of the natural and urban forest. When they die, the trees become brittle and pose a significant hazard to property and public safety. Cities are proactively removing ash trees.
The borer is a small, metallic-green beetle that is about half an inch long. Its larvae tunnel under the bark of ash trees and effectively starve the tree of water and nutrients. Thinning and dying branches at the top of ash trees are a symptom.
Cass, Dodge, Douglas, Lancaster, Otoe, Sarpy, Saunders and Washington Counties are under quarantine, which means saplings from that area can't be sold or moved elsewhere. The movement of firewood, mulch and other ash products is restricted. With the help of citizens, Nebraska can slow the spread of the borer, Wellman said.
By Nancy Gaarder

OWH: OPS board votes to move start of school year to Aug. 11, require masks for all

The Omaha Public Schools board pushed the first day of school up a week and will require that all students and staff wear masks.

The school board met on Monday night and approved changing the 2020-21 school calendar. School will now start on Aug. 11. Winter break also has been extended by one week.

The school board voted 9-0 to approve a resolution requiring anyone engaging in any activity on district property to wear a mask when other people are present. Bandanas are prohibited.

Exceptions would be made when people are eating, drinking, with members of their household in a separate space or participating in athletic activities with proper social and physical distancing.

The board had already approved the purchase of more than 360,000 cloth masks for students and staff.

The bulk of the discussion on Monday night centered on the district's plan to return to school this fall.

Last week, OPS unveiled a fall reopening plan that would divide students into two groups who would each attend school in person part of the week.

Students would be divided into two groups based on the first letter of their last names.

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

The plan would be for all grades across the district. The school board is not scheduled to vote on the plan, which was instead determined by district leadership.

Nearly two dozen parents, teachers and students spoke during the public comment portion of Monday night's meeting.

Some parents complained that the survey sent out by the district did not mention the two-group plan as an option. Others wondered how working parents will juggle child care and remote learning for part of the week.

Mark Meisenbach, an OPS parent, said he doesn't understand why other districts in the state and bordering schools in the metro area can fully reopen schools but OPS cannot.

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

"None of us want to be in this position right now," Logan said. "We all want to have our students back 100% of the time."

If conditions improve, Logan said she would be the first person championing getting students back in school five days a week.

Students in several special education programs will go to school every day, including all classrooms at JP Lord School.

Kate Wigg, an OPS teacher and parent, told the board that she's incredibly scared but excited to see her students. She said the plan is the best possible option to help kids.

The board meeting on Monday night was the first time parents, teachers and school board members could publicly ask district officials about the plan.

Robert Miller, president of the Omaha Education Association, said the return-to-school plan was shared with OPS staff at 4 p.m. on Friday. Teachers have many questions about what the return will look like, but Miller said he can't answer them because teachers were not part of the planning or discussions.

"OPS has a dedicated staff who are willing to do what is needed," Miller said. "They want to see their students in person and they understand the need for normalcy, but at what cost? It very well could be at the cost of staff and students' health."

The Douglas County Republican Party said Monday that it opposes the district's plan, saying it "puts a lot of stress on working parents and disproportionately hurts kids from underprivileged families."

Other metro area school districts this week began revealing their plans or the dates when more details would be released.
The Westside Community Schools announced Monday that the district will open up for all students in August with safety and social distancing measures in place.
The current plan is to have all Westside students attend school every day. The district has a backup plan that would divide the students into two groups and have them attend school on different days of the week.
By Emily Nitcher

LJS: Nebraskans react to Supreme Court decision on abortion case

Nebraska civil rights organizations Monday applauded a U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn a Louisiana law that would have struck a major blow against abortion rights.
Meanwhile, several anti-abortion groups and politicians said the latest ruling further eroded faith in the nation's highest court's ability to rule with impartiality.
The case stemmed from a 2014 Louisiana law requiring doctors at abortion clinics to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals, which opponents said created unreasonable barriers for women to access abortions, and forced all but one abortion clinic in Louisiana to close.
Similar legislation enacted in Texas was overturned by the Supreme Court in 2016, when then-Justice Anthony Kennedy sided with the court's four liberals to rule the law's requirement had no medical benefit.
On Monday, Chief Justice John Roberts was the swing vote in the 5-4 decision, writing that legal doctrine requires the court to treat like cases alike barring any special circumstances.
"The Louisiana law imposes a burden on access to abortion just as severe as that imposed by the Texas law, for the same reasons," Roberts wrote in a concurring opinion. "Therefore, Louisiana's law cannot stand under our precedents."
Abortion opponents, including Nebraska Sen. Ben Sasse, a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, called Monday's decision the result of "bad lawyering."
"If the court cares about preserving its legitimacy as a non-political institution, then it shouldn't make decisions based on how its judgments will be perceived politically," Sasse said in a statement. "The problem with today's decision is absolutely terrible jurisprudence."
The Nebraska Family Alliance said the decision to uphold the Louisiana law at the center of the June Medical Services v. Russo case "weakens the public's confidence in an impartial justice system and the rule of law."
"Abortion harms women and ends the life of an innocent human being," said Karen Bowling, Nebraska Family Alliance's executive director. "Instead of protecting mothers and their babies, the court's decision allows abortion clinics to skirt around common-sense health and safety regulations."
Bowling said Nebraska Family Alliance "will never quit working to build a culture of life and protect the most vulnerable in our state."
The Nebraska Catholic Conference said the decision gives a privileged status to abortion clinics that it says profit from abortion while escaping liability for injury done to mothers.
"(Monday's) Supreme Court decision ... further entrenches the abortion industry's unique and undeserved privilege of non-accountability to the law and those they injure," said Marion Miner, an associate director for the Catholic Conference.
And Nebraska Right to Life called the decision "an affront to unborn babies and their mothers."
"(The ruling) further solidifies the idea that abortion facilities do not have to meet common-sense standards of other medical entities," executive director Julie Schmit-Albin said. "That is a sad

commentary on the protection afforded abortionists who are performing invasive medical and chemical procedures."
The ACLU of Nebraska, on the other hand, lauded the decision as affirming longstanding precedent protecting the right for women to seek abortions without undue burdens placed on them by the government.
"Like any deeply personal medical situation, decisions about abortion care belong to patients and their physicians — not politicians," said Scout Richters, ACLU of Nebraska's legal and policy counsel. "Instead of trying to push care out of reach, state lawmakers should be working together to expand access to quality, affordable reproductive health care, including abortion, contraception, prenatal care and preventative screenings."
Richters said individuals have a right to make health care decisions that are the best for themselves and their families.
The civil rights group noted that since the Supreme Court recognized the constitutional right to abortion in Roe v. Wade, Nebraska had enacted several laws that restrict access to the procedure, while still other abortion-related legislation remains before the Legislature.
In the final days of the 90-day session last year, lawmakers passed a measure (LB209) from Sen. Joni Albrecht of Thurston requiring the state Department of Health and Human Services to provide women information on how to reverse a medication abortion.
Omaha Sen. Megan Hunt introduced a bill (LB872) early in the 2020 session to repeal the law, pointing to a scientific study that showed the so-called abortion reversal regimen was potentially dangerous to a woman's health.
That bill failed to advance out of the Judiciary Committee, however.
Another bill (LB814), introduced by Lincoln Sen. Suzanne Geist, prohibiting dismemberment abortions on a live fetus, also failed to advance from committee, but Geist filed a motion to move her priority legislation to the full Legislature for debate.
Her motion was filed March 11, shortly before the Legislature recessed because of the coronavirus. Lawmakers are scheduled to reconvene July 20.
By Chris Dunker

OWH: Terrie Jackson Miller: It's time to understand our society and change our norms

As our country is engaged in a national discussion about race, history and justice, The World-Herald is providing space in our normal editorial space for commentary from the local black community. Terrie Jackson Miller is an adjunct professor in the Department of Black Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.
As a black studies professor at a local university, on the first day of class I introduce four things:
1. Epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies. When any group within a large, complex civilization significantly dominates the other groups for hundreds of years, the ways of the dominate group not only become the dominant ways of that civilization, but also these ways become so deeply embedded that they typically are seen as “natural” or appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions. In other words, much of what we experience are not laws but the social constructions of the dominant group.
2. Culture. A shared, learned, symbolic system of values, beliefs and attitudes that shapes and influences perception and behavior. (Case in point: For many black Americans, “The Star-Spangled Banner” does not have the same meaning as it does for others. If we are to reconcile as a country, perhaps it is time to choose another national anthem more reflective of all citizens, such as “God Bless America.”)
3. Lens. The meaning we assign to everything turns into a filter through which we view the world, such

as walking while black or driving while black. (Case in point: 38% of black respondents and 77% of white respondents trust local police and law enforcement to look out for the best interests of them and their family.)

4. White privilege. Hidden benefits that white people possess in a society where racism is prevalent and whiteness is considered normal. A Public Pulse writer recently wrote, “We live in a great country even though some fail to see that. So stop complaining about what you don’t have and start to work to build a better life, because it’s not my responsibility to give you a better life; that’s your responsibility.” I am part of the long legacy of family who believes in higher education, which for us is inclusive of 30-plus bachelor’s and master’s degrees and doctorates. Though we rose above the circumstances and roadblocks, it did not keep us from experiencing discrimination, bias, prejudice and institutional racism.

African American history cannot be understood except in the broader context of American history. American history cannot be understood without African American history. It is time for white America to be quiet, listen and learn, because we are all in this together from the young to the old. It is time we all begin to understand, appreciate and embrace all races and ethnicities that make up our great city, state and country.

Young women and men of all races and ethnicities are showing us it is beyond time to make a change. That will only happen when we recognize that past norms are no longer acceptable.

LJS Local View: It's a money game now

In the mid-1980s, Common Cause Nebraska led a coalition of like-minded organizations and individuals concerned that campaigns expenditures for our state legislature were beginning to exceed $100,000. It was argued that getting elected was becoming a “rich man’s game.”

The effort resulted in the creation of the Campaign Finance Limitation Act. The act went into effect in 1996, creating voluntary spending limits for all campaigns for state offices. It also provided public funding for abiding candidates who were being outspent by non-abiding candidates.

From 1996 to 2012, the vast majority of candidates abided by the spending limits and public dollars were only triggered 11 times. The spending limit was adjusted several times but it never exceeded $93,000.

In 2012, after the Citizens United decision and an Arizona case that challenged the public funding mechanism, the Nebraska Supreme Court was forced to declare the CFLA unconstitutional. Nebraska was left with no restrictions on campaign spending or campaign contributions. The floodgates were opened.

According to the latest records compiled by the Accountability and Disclosure Commission, during the 2018 election cycle the 19 legislative races resulted in 23 candidates spending over $100,000 on their campaigns. Of that group 6 spent over $300,000. The most expensive race, Merv Riepe vs. Steve Lathrop, resulted in Riepe spending $350,958 and losing to Lathrop who spent $465,497.

It is interesting that four incumbents were unopposed, yet they felt the need to protect themselves by spending more than $50,000. (Sen. Matt Hansen $118,025, Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks $114,184, Sen. Curt Friesen $69,318, and Sen. Matt Williams $57,155).

In the 15 competitive races, 11 were won by the candidate who spent the most. This trend tends to limit the candidate pool to those who have money or have the ability to raise money. The one possible exception to the trend was Tom Brandt who spent $144,334 to defeat incumbent Sen. Laura Ebke, who spent a shocking $457,268.

Although the courts have made it impossible to establish campaign spending limits, it is within the ability of our Legislature to create contribution limits. It is a fair estimate that more than 80% of the contributions to legislative candidate come from large donors contributing more than $250.

Altria Client Services (Philip Morris) spent $449,105 on lobbying our state government since 2018 and contributed $71,000 to campaigns.
It is estimated that small donor contributions, less than $250, account for as little as 6% of some candidates' campaign funds.
This raises the question of how important is the average person who contributes $20 to a candidate's campaign. Will the average person have the same access and influence as Altria Client Services?
Common Cause has approached legislators hoping that one would bring legislation to limit campaign contributions, but the effort has been futile. Both Democrats and Republicans fear the loss of their major contributors. They also fear the attacks by "dark money" groups late in their campaigns when money is running out.
So, in Nebraska, it appears that politics has become a rich man's game. If you don't have the money, you may have to sell your soul to those who do.
Jack Gould is issues chair for Common Cause Nebraska.

LJS: Counties know risks the best

Wait! What? Gov. Pete Ricketts has dictated that counties cannot require masks if they want federal coronavirus funding? Where's the logic in that?
Counties know their public health risks and should be able to make those decisions. That funding was for the State of Nebraska, and no county should be penalized for wanting to protect its citizens.
Patricia Taft, Lincoln

LJS: Governor risking public health

Gov. Pete Ricketts' order denying county governments federal funds if they require masks be worn by employees and customers seems to be a bad decision based on politics rather than medical science. The wearing of masks has been proven to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.
My mask protects you, and your mask protects me, plus new research is showing that masks protect the wearer as well. It is completely irresponsible for people to go into a public place without wearing a mask, and the governor is showing a blatant disregard for the safety and health of county employees as well as customers. Should an employee have to risk death so people can renew their driver's license?
Al Mumm, Waterloo
Nebraska Alliance for Retired Americans Educational Fund

OWH: Nebraska GOP chairman: Party flyer targeting legislative candidate 'crossed the line'

Nebraska Republican Party Chairman Dan Welch told a fellow Republican in June that the state party made a mistake by targeting a GOP legislative candidate in a campaign flyer, a transcript of his phone call shows.
The details of Welch's private conversation were made public Monday by the campaign of Janet Palmtag of Syracuse, the target of the GOP flyer. The World-Herald independently confirmed the phone conversation.
Welch, in a statement, acknowledged talking to Nebraska Republicans about the southeast Nebraska race involving two Republicans. He said he hopes the Palmtag campaign will stick to "relevant issues" going forward.
The state's Republican titans stand on opposite sides of the contest between Palmtag and Sen. Julie Slama of Peru.

Gov. Pete Ricketts and the state GOP back Slama, who was appointed by Ricketts. Former Gov. Dave Heineman and U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry support Palmtag, a longtime party activist.

The flyer, sent to District 1 voters before the May primary, criticized Palmtag for opposing Ricketts' push to boost the pay of the director of Nebraska's prison system. It said she stood with "radical" State Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha. The flyer also questioned Palmtag's commitment to gun rights, based on her past statements.

State GOP spokesman Ryan Hamilton has previously defended the flyer as accurate. Welch said in his Monday statement that party leaders, including Ricketts, remain "totally committed" to making sure Slama stays in office. Voters agreed by a large margin, he noted.

Slama defeated Palmtag by more than 4,000 votes in this spring's officially nonpartisan primary. A third candidate was eliminated in the primary, so the two will face off again this fall.

During the private call, Welch apologized for the attack on Palmtag, a real-estate agent. Welch said he had heard from others that she was "a good person, a good volunteer and a good Republican."

Welch went on to say the mailer "was not in good taste" and "crossed the line." He said the party has since beefed up its internal processes to make sure the state party doesn't attack a good Republican again.

Welch, in his statement, said he disagreed with a concept that appeared on the mailer but would not specify.

The flyer drew criticism from Heineman and former Gov. Bob Kerrey, a Democrat, who wrote a joint letter calling the advertisement misleading and racist for its statements about Palmtag and Chambers, who is one of Nebraska's two black state senators.

On the call, Welch also criticized Palmtag and Heineman for forcing the party to get involved in a race where the seat was ably filled by Slama, whom Ricketts and the GOP had already endorsed.

Welch said on the call that Ricketts "made the decision to go after Janet (Palmtag) hard to try and beat her in the primary so it would be over." His aim, Welch said, was party unity.

Welch also said Ricketts' legislative appointees have struggled in recent years to win when they stood for election. Welch wondered if some Republicans backed Palmtag to embarrass Ricketts.

Heineman has said he supports Palmtag because he knows her from working with her at the state GOP.

Ricketts' spokesman referred questions to the state GOP.

Palmtag said Nebraska "needs a leader who will take responsibility, not someone who runs and hides." She called Welch "an honorable man and a strong leader."

Slama, who declined to comment Monday, has referred ad-related questions to the GOP.

Jane Kleeb, chairwoman of the Nebraska Democratic Party, said her party prohibits spending state party money on Democrat vs. Democrat races. She offered to share a copy of the resolution with the GOP.

Welch is the latest party insider caught in the crossfire of the GOP skirmish between Ricketts and Heineman over the legislative race and also how much influence Ricketts should have in the state GOP.

Traditionally, governors lead state parties. But Ricketts' influence in the state GOP is larger than many of his predecessors. He has been the party's principal private donor over the past six months, giving $190,000.

Heineman and former Omaha Mayor Hal Daub, also a Republican, have questioned whether one person should have so much influence.

Ricketts' supporters have pointed to GOP election results in the state and the party's advantage over Democrats in registered voters as evidence of the job he's doing.

Welch, in his conversation, alluded to Ricketts' influence: "He's a big donor to the party. When he makes a decision that he wants something done, things will happen."

By Aaron Sanderford

Iowa Capital Dispatch: Nebraska and Iowa senators join flared-up fight over ethanol

Backers of the ethanol industry are fighting a federal government effort to exempt more small refineries from buying the corn-based fuel while also pushing Congress to offer coronavirus pandemic-related aid. Nebraska and Iowa senators and 12 others wrote the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency opposing 52 new exemption requests.

Small refineries have asked for new exemptions retroactive to as far back as 2011, arguing that the requirement that they blend ethanol into gasoline was too much of a financial burden.

Ethanol is primarily made from corn. Iowa is the nation's top producer of the grain.

Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, is holding up a political appointment to make her point. As part of her work on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which oversees the EPA, Ernst is opposing deputy administrator nominee Doug Benevento, in effect blocking the nomination.

Ernst publicly criticized EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt in June 2018 before he was ousted, contending he was "about as swampy as you get here" and had broken promises to farmers. She held up an EPA air office nominee until Pruitt said in writing he would not reduce the amount of ethanol refiners are required to blend.

Ernst's Democratic opponent in the November election, Theresa Greenfield, has called for EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler to resign. Greenfield has been hitting Ernst in radio ads for voting to confirm Wheeler in February 2019.

The latest battle is over new exemption requests filed with EPA not long after the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the agency had overstepped its authority in granting previous exemptions.

"Iowa's hard-working ethanol and biodiesel producers are sick of being yanked around by Andrew Wheeler and the EPA. Our producers need certainty; until we get that, no EPA nominee is getting my vote," Ernst said in a statement.

In their letter, the bipartisan group of 16 senators — including Ernst, Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley and Nebraska Sens. Ben Sasse and Deb Fischer, all Republicans — asked Wheeler to reject the petition requesting exemptions.

"We urge you to reject these petitions outright. … These petitions should not even be entertained because they are inconsistent with the 10th Circuit decision, congressional intent, the EPA's own guidance, and — most importantly — the interests of farmers and rural communities who rely on the biofuel industry," the senators wrote.

The exemptions "would only worsen the unprecedented economic challenges facing the biofuels industry and the rural communities that it supports," the senators added.

The 52 new exemptions would cover "gap years." The refineries are asking for exemptions even though the law was intended to only offer them for a year or two, and the refineries can't get them if they haven't renewed them continuously, Monte Shaw, executive director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association said in an interview.

The exemptions would worsen an already cloudy future for ethanol plants, Shaw said.

Iowa's ethanol plants were operating at about half-capacity six weeks ago but now are 15% to 20% below normal. Even that level ranks as the lowest production of the past 20 years, Shaw said.

"We have taken steps toward normal demand," Shaw said. "But people should not think the economic crisis is over. We are in dire need of some sort of assistance from the federal government."

"What we have seen is a direct result of the government ordering people to stay home," reducing the amount of fuel Iowans and other Americans bought, he said.

The U.S. House considered support for biofuels in the HEROES Act, but the Senate wouldn't pass the aid, Shaw said. Grassley appealed to the U.S Department of Agriculture, and was turned away, so he had proposed assistance in legislation that could be considered as early as this week, Shaw added.

“If we don’t get a cash infusion, I do think you will see some of these plants go into bankruptcy,” Shaw said. That could lead to oil companies buying ethanol plants, which would shift profits from farmers to multinational corporations, he added.

Last month, Grassley and Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., introduced legislation that would reimburse farmers for the corn they bought going back to the beginning of this year. The House had considered aid at 45 cents per gallon produced.

What the industry doesn’t need is more exemptions, Shaw said. “The oil industry is not easily shamed,” he said.

“This is so far beyond the pale of anything that is reasonable or legal. It’s a blatant attempt to circumvent the law and the court decision,” he added, referring to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals case.

Oil interests have long fought the ethanol-blending requirement, contending it is expensive and unwarranted. Among their chief proponents is Sen. Ted Cruz, a Texas Republican and former presidential candidate.

The Renewable Fuels Association said the EPA is breaking the law and threatening the Midwest economy with the move.

“EPA’s failure to comply with the recent 10th Circuit Court decision is prolonging uncertainty and exacerbating economic harm in rural America, which was already reeling from the effects of COVID-19 on the agriculture and biofuels sector,” association President and CEO Geoff Cooper said in a statement.

“RFA agrees with these Senate leaders that granting “gap-year” small refinery exemptions would not only be illegal, but it would also worsen the demand destruction that renewable fuel producers have already endured at the hands of EPA in recent years.”

In a recent meeting of the Iowa Governor’s Economic Recovery Advisory Board, Nick Bowdesh, president & CEO of Atlantic, Iowa-based Elite Octane, said demand for ethanol dropped 45% as the COVID-19 pandemic spread in March.

The nation’s ethanol plants saw a 45% drop in demand as the COVID-19 pandemic spread, Bowdesh said. Current demand still is off 10% to 15%, but dozens of plants around the country have resumed production after temporarily closing or scaling back production. Iowa’s 41 plants saw similar drops. Bowdesh said the production of hand sanitizers was a boon to some plants.

By Perry Beeman

Ryan Kopsa
Digital Communications Manager

Office of Governor Pete Ricketts
OFFICE 402-471-1974
CELL 402-890-2467
ryan.kopsa@nebraska.gov
governor.nebraska.gov | Facebook | Twitter