From: Shelburn, Andrew
To: Shelburn, Andrew
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 5-17-22
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AG VALLEY CO-OP

Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	May 2022	7.91	-15.00	07:42
Corn	Oct 2022	7.19	-45.00	07:42
Milo	May 2022	7.46	-60.00	07:42
Milo	Oct 2022	7.09	-55.00	07:42
Soybeans	May 2022	15.57	-103.00	07:42
Soybeans	Oct 2022	14.43	-70.00	07:42
Wheat	May 2022	12.48	-85.00	07:42
Wheat	Jul 2022	12.48	-85.00	07:42

TV and Radio

KETV: Applicants sought for Southwest Omaha legislative seat
NTV: Gov. Ricketts to call special session to pass total abortion ban if Roe is overturned (no video)
NCN: Ricketts: Abortion ban would include cases of rape and incest
10/11: SCOTUS abortion ruling could spur special session, Ricketts says in CNN interview
KPTM: Nonprofit group, lawmaker react to governor's comments on abortion
KNOP: Memorial Day ceremony planned for Fort McPherson National Cemetery (no video)
WOWT: Experts: COVID-19 detection in Omaha wastewater can help pandemic response

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OWH: Ricketts seeking applicants for Pahls' replacement in Nebraska Legislature

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts is seeking applicants to fill an open seat in the Nebraska Legislature that was created after the death of State Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha.

Applications to fill the vacancy in Legislative District 31 will be accepted until 5 p.m. May 27, according to a press release. To be eligible, applicants must be at least 21, be registered to vote and must have lived within the district for at least one year.

District 31 lies in Douglas County and includes most of the Millard neighborhood in southwest Omaha. The boundaries are between South 192nd Street and South 144th Street, and between West Center Road and Harrison Street.

Interested individuals may complete an application for executive appointment online at governor.nebraska.gov/board-comm-req.

Pahls died late last month at age 78.

The appointee will serve until Jan. 3, 2023. During the November 2022 general election, voters will elect a member of the Legislature for District 31 to serve the remainder of Pahls' original term, which lasts until January 2025.

Tim Royers, who lost to Pahls in the 2020 election, announced Monday that he would run for the District 31 seat in this year's general election. He did not mention in his campaign press release whether he also was applying for an appointment to the seat.

To get on the ballot, the appointee and other interested candidates must submit at least 2,000 valid petition signatures from registered voters in the district by Sept. 1.

By state law, the governor must appoint a replacement to a vacant legislative seat within 45 days of

the seat opening up. Ricketts previously confirmed to the Omaha World-Herald that he plans to appoint Pahls' replacement before a potential special session is called to debate Nebraska's abortion laws.
Ricketts said he may call a special session later this year if the U.S. Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade. A leaked draft opinion showed several Supreme Court justices favored overturning the 1973 ruling that legalized abortion nationwide, but a final decision isn't expected until late June.
This spring, a bill that would have banned all abortions in Nebraska if the high court overturned Roe fell two votes short of overcoming a filibuster against it. Pahls was absent at the time because of his illness.
By Erin Bamer

Nebraska Examiner: Ricketts seeks applicants to fill remainder of the late Sen. Rich Pahls' term

LINCOLN — Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts is seeking applicants to fill the late State Sen. Rich Pahls' legislative seat.
Applicants from Legislative District 31 in southwest Omaha have until 5 p.m. May 27 to apply. Applicants need to live in the district and be at least 21 years of age. Find a map of the district here. People can apply online at governor.nebraska.gov/board-comm-req. They will need a resume, cover letter and supporting materials.
Ricketts has until June 11 — 45 days from Pahls' death on April 27 — to appoint a replacement. Ricketts' spokeswoman said the person chosen likely will stand for election in November's general election.
The timing means the seat will be filled before any special session aimed at outlawing abortion in Nebraska, which the Governor's Office said would come only after a Supreme Court decision overturning Roe vs. Wade.
The Legislature nearly passed an abortion ban that would have gone into effect if the high court acted. It fell two votes short of passage. Pahls was absent because of his ailment.
Ricketts is not confined to the applicant pool to select a replacement. He has appointed new senators to vacant seats before from outside of the application process.
Tim Royers, a former Millard West High School teacher wrapping up his first term as president of the Millard Education Association, lost to Pahls in 2020. He announced Monday that he plans to run again this fall. Royers said late Monday that he would also apply for the appointment.
By Aaron Sanderford

LifeNews: Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts: We Will Ban Abortions and "Protect Preborn Babies"

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts promised Sunday to take action to protect unborn babies from abortion

in the likelihood that the U.S. Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade this summer.
"Nebraska is a pro-life state. I believe life begins at conception," Ricketts told CNN host Dana Bash. The Republican governor said he plans to call a special legislative session if the court overturns Roe and allows states to protect unborn babies by banning abortions again, according to The Epoch Times.
"If Roe v. Wade, which is a horrible constitutional decision, gets overturned by the Supreme Court, which we're hopeful of, here in Nebraska we're going to take further steps to protect those preborn babies," Ricketts said.
"I will work with our speaker of the legislature to work on a special session and do more to protect preborn babies," he continued. "We'll have to wait and see what that decision is before we can take further steps, but that would certainly be my intention."
When Bash asked if the governor believes there should be exceptions for rape and incest, Ricketts responded that unborn babies conceived in violence are "still babies" who deserve to be protected.
In April, the Nebraska legislature almost passed a trigger bill that would ban abortions once Roe v. Wade is overturned, but pro-abortion Democrats filibustered the legislation and an effort to break the filibuster failed by two votes. State law requires a two-thirds majority to end a filibuster.
An abortion ban would save thousands of babies' lives every year. In 2021, 2,378 abortions were reported in Nebraska, according to state health statistics.
Currently, because of Roe, states are forced to legalize abortions up to viability. However, the Supreme Court is considering a Mississippi case that challenges that precedent, and a ruling is expected this summer.
Earlier this month, a leaked draft ruling showed a majority of the justices agreeing to overturn Roe. However, the draft is not final and judges can change their minds. It is not clear when the high court will issue its final ruling on the abortion case Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health, but many believe the court will overturn Roe and allow states to protect unborn babies again.
Polls consistently show that most Americans support stronger legal protections for unborn babies than what Roe allows. LifeNews highlighted 11 recent polls here. A new Rasmussen poll found more Americans want Roe v. Wade overturned (48 percent) than want the ruling to remain in place (45 percent).
Since 1973, more than 63 million unborn babies and hundreds of mothers have died in supposedly "safe, legal" abortions.
By Micaiah Bilger

Washington Post: States pursue extreme restrictions in crafting post-Roe abortion law

The day after the stunning leak of a Supreme Court draft opinion overturning Roe v. Wade, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt (R) signed a ban on abortions in the state for pregnancies past six weeks. He wanted Oklahoma to be "the most pro-life state in the country," which was in part why the state's new ban included no exceptions for rape or incest.
Within 48 hours of the leak, Republicans in Louisiana advanced a bill that would classify abortion as homicide and allow prosecutors to criminally charge patients, not just abortion providers. Though

the bill would ultimately be scrapped, its supporters vowed that they would continue to push for "what's right."

And by the weekend, state GOP lawmakers were openly questioning forms of birth control, including the Plan B pill, a widely used form of emergency contraception often provided to rape victims.

What had been a slow, deliberate erosion of abortion rights over the 50 years since the court's ruling in Roe now seemed to be a flash flood of increasingly severe restrictions and proposals cropping up at the state level, abortion rights advocates say, as antiabortion Republicans envision a post-Roe world.

"I think these state lawmakers are feeling emboldened based on what they think is coming down the pike from the Supreme Court," said Rachel Fey, who works on policy programs for Power to Decide, a nonprofit organization that seeks to prevent unplanned pregnancies and supports abortion rights.

"We are in uncharted territory," Fey added. "In my 20 years in health and reproductive justice, I've never seen … such a plethora of extreme, extreme attacks, and that's really saying something."

Such concerns have largely been dismissed as alarmist by abortion foes, who say they are not focused on doing away with things like birth control — but who themselves are divided over what would come next if Roe is overturned.

After heated debate Thursday, GOP lawmakers in Louisiana stripped language out of their bill that would have criminally charged abortion patients with homicide, revealing a split within the antiabortion movement. State Rep. Danny McCormick (R), the bill's sponsor, argued that a fetus must be granted the same protections as a person, while other Republicans urged caution, emphasizing that the antiabortion movement does not support imposing criminal charges on people who are pregnant.

The antiabortion movement turned away from punishing abortion patients because the public does not support those measures, said Mary Ziegler, a visiting professor at Harvard Law School who specializes in the history of abortion. According to a recent Monmouth University poll, nearly two-thirds of Americans support keeping abortion legal, either always or with some limitations. An additional 26 percent said it should be illegal with exceptions for rape, incest or to save the life of the mother. Only 8 percent said they thought abortion should always be illegal.

But there was no question that the prospect of the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade, the 1973 decision guaranteeing a right to abortion, had energized Louisiana Republicans, despite prevailing public sentiment. While 12 other states have introduced similar legislation granting full constitutional protections to a fetus from the moment an egg is fertilized, Louisiana's bill was the first to move out of a committee, said Bradley Pierce, the executive director of the Foundation to Abolish Abortion, who helped draft the Louisiana measure.

Once the Supreme Court's decision is final, Pierce said, he expects more penalties for people seeking abortions, no matter how those laws might be viewed by the public.

"Ultimately it's not an issue of doing what's popular. It's an issue of doing what's right," Pierce said.

If Roe is overturned, "trigger laws" banning abortion would go into effect in 13 Republican-led states. Most of the recent abortion bans proposed by Republican-led state legislatures include no exceptions for rape or incest, and more GOP lawmakers and candidates are defending their support for comprehensive bans.

J.D. Vance, the Republican nominee for Senate in Ohio, called rape and incest "inconvenient" but said he still did not support any exceptions to an abortion ban.

"Two wrongs don't make a right," Vance told Spectrum News. "The question to me is really about the baby."

Questioned about the lack of exceptions for rape or incest, Stitt told Fox News on Sunday, “That is a human being inside the womb. … We’re going to do everything we can to protect life and love both the mother and the child. And we don’t think that killing one to protect another is the right thing to do either.”

Those exceptions are actually not the norm, said Elizabeth Nash, a principal policy associate for state issues at the Guttmacher Institute, an abortion rights think tank. Since 2013, 10 states have passed six-week abortion bans, but only one of those states, South Carolina, included exceptions for rape or incest.

Rep. Nancy Mace (R-S.C.), who supports abortion restrictions but who has spoken out in the past about being a victim of rape, said that she had pushed for those exceptions in South Carolina’s law and urged other Republicans to do the same.

“When you realize what’s happened in your life, the trauma, the emotional, the mental, the physical trauma in a woman’s life, that decision — she should make that decision with her doctor and between her and her God,” Mace said.

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson (R) has also expressed uneasiness about his state’s ban, which makes exceptions for women facing medical emergencies but not for rape or incest cases.

The debate over rape and incest exceptions has played out on the floor of several statehouses this year. As Florida considered its 15-week abortion ban in March, which passed without exceptions for rape and incest, Senate Minority Leader Lauren Book (D), delivered an emotional speech on the subject, sharing her own story of sexual assault: At age 13, she said, her nanny brought her to a party, where she was drugged and raped by several men.

She urged her colleagues to consider an amendment that would add the exceptions to the bill.

“I am begging you, for little Lauren, for me. … I am asking you to give those survivors more time to heal,” she said as she addressed the chamber.

Since the leaked Supreme Court decision, several Republican lawmakers have also signaled their willingness to restrict emergency contraception in addition to abortion, a subject legislators have rarely discussed in public.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves (R) recently refused to rule out the possibility that his state would ban certain forms of contraception. Several Republican lawmakers and candidates for elected office have openly questioned Griswold v. Connecticut, the 1965 Supreme Court case that granted married couples access to contraception without government restrictions — and that undergirds Roe and other decisions.

Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) has called the Griswold decision “legally unsound.” Blake Masters, a GOP Senate candidate in Arizona, says on his website he would “vote only for federal judges who understand that Roe and Griswold and Casey were wrongly decided.” Both have denied that they want to ban contraception.

The architects of the Louisiana bill, before it was scuttled late Thursday, also originally intended for it to extend to emergency contraception like Plan B, according to Pierce, the abortion opponent behind the measure.

La. Republicans weaken bill that would have charged abortion as homicide

The day after the Supreme Court draft opinion leaked, President Biden drew the line from a possible overturning of Roe v. Wade to the potential undermining of Griswold and other decisions related to privacy.

“In my view, if it becomes a law and if what is written is what remains, it goes far beyond the concern of whether or not there is the right to choose. It goes to other basic rights: the right to

marry, the right to determine a whole range of things," Biden said on May 3. "I think the decision in Griswold was correct overruling; I think the decision in Roe was correct, because there's a right to privacy. There can be limitations on it, but it cannot be denied."

Within the antiabortion movement, leaders have been quick to steer the conversation away from contraception.

"That's just not our focus," said Kristan Hawkins, president of Students for Life of America, a leading antiabortion organization. While she would eventually support restrictions on Plan B, Hawkins said the movement needs to end abortion first.

"Our focus now in the post-Roe world is on chemical abortion," she said, referring to abortion pills.

Abortion rights groups are using contraception as a "scare tactic," Hawkins said. By telling people they could lose access to birth control, she added, abortion rights leaders are hoping to mobilize more people on the Supreme Court's draft decision.

But abortion rights activists who have sought to broaden access to contraception say it is not out of the realm of possibility for Republicans to target contraception next if Roe falls.

"I don't think folks are being alarmist," said Power to Decide's Fey. "We have seen a long and continued assault on contraceptive access for many years at the federal level and at the state level."

In Texas, for example, those covered by the state Medicaid program are not allowed to receive contraception from any clinic that provides abortion care or that could be affiliated with one that does. Missouri lawmakers last year attempted to exclude coverage for IUDs and emergency contraception from their Medicaid program, an effort that ultimately failed.

Under the Trump administration, programs receiving federal funding via Title X were prohibited from even mentioning abortion, leading to hundreds of clinics leaving the program — which meant far fewer places for uninsured people to obtain contraception and other health services.

And more generally, Fey added, state policymakers and governors now frequently mischaracterize certain methods of contraception as abortifacients — either intentionally or because they are not clear on how they work.

Fey said she and other advocates will continue to fight for access to abortion and contraception, but added that it was "heartbreaking" that it took the leak of the Supreme Court draft opinion for many people to pay attention to the threats to Roe.

"I'm perpetually angry that it has to be such a fight for something so core to how people plan and build their families," she said.

The Supreme Court is expected to issue its decision next month. Some Republicans are looking beyond the court ruling.

Idaho state Rep. Brent Crane (R), chairman of the House State Affairs Committee that oversees abortion legislation, said last week that while Idaho's current Republican caucus did not support penalizing people who are pregnant, that may change in the future if the court overturns Roe.

"We're going to probably see 30 new individuals come into the House of Representatives next year," he said. "It will be interesting to see the impact that this decision will have on those individuals."

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts (R) said Sunday on CNN that if the court overturns Roe, he would call a special session of the legislature to impose a total abortion ban with no exceptions for rape or incest.

"I believe life begins at conception," he said. "And those are babies too."

By Amy B. Wang

Union Journal: Pete Ricketts Has Decided To Call A Special

Session If Roe Is Overturned

The Republican Governor of Nebraska, Pete Ricketts, stated on Sunday that he would calling a special session for his state legislature- in order to pass a total ban on abortion. This would be the case if the Supreme Court decided to overturn Roe v. Wade this term. In his interview with CNN's Dana Bash, Ricketts mentioned that Nebraska was a pro-life state.

He believed life began at conception- and those were babies too. When he was asked if he thought the state should ask a young girl to carry her baby after she was raped, the Governor clarified that after the 'horrible' Roe v. Wade was overturned, they would be looking at further steps to protect preborn babies. Bash went on to ask if the rules would be same in the event of incest or rape, to which the Governor replied that it applied to both.

Pete Ricketts Wants To Install Abortion Ban in Nebraska

Pete Ricketts also has a backup in place if Roe fails. He stated that he would be working with the speaker of their legislature to work on a special session and do more in order to protect more preborn babies. But until then they would have to wait and see what the decision from the Supreme Court was going to be before they could take any further steps. Nonetheless, this was the plan that he was going to follow.

The comments from Pete Ricketts do come as the conservative majority of the Supreme Court does seem to be on the verge of overturning Roe v. Wade, the landmark case in 1973 that legalized abortion throughout the country. Earlier this month, a draft opinion was leaked- authored by conservative Justice Samuel Alto- which indicated that the court was pretty poised to reverse Roe in a case that would concern an abortion law in Mississippi.

Close to a dozen states already have trigger laws in place, which implies that abortion will almost immediately be banned if Roe is overturned. In fact, Pete Ricketts' Nebraska almost passed one such law previously.

By Md Shahnawaz

Nebraska Examiner: Slama lawsuit moves forward with new groping details; Herbster denies

***Editor's note**: This story contains a graphic description of an alleged sexual groping incident.*

LINCOLN — State Sen. Julie Slama's lawyers made clear in a new filing Monday that her counter-lawsuit alleging sexual battery by Charles Herbster will continue after Herbster's loss last week in the GOP primary race for governor.

Slama's lawyers asked that Herbster's defamation lawsuit against her be thrown out as being "frivolous" and in "bad faith." They added details to Slama's counter-suit, including a new claim alleging that Herbster's political defense cast Slama in a false light.

The new filing said: "Herbster and his counsel know, or should know, that Senator Slama's statements in question are true or substantially true."

Slama, the filing said, is still coping with the mental and emotional toll of being groped and with how

Herbster responded to her allegation in April. The filing said she is dealing with anxiety, depression and feared loss of reputation.
Herbster on Monday repeated his denial of wrongdoing. He has alleged he is the victim of a political conspiracy involving his former opponent, GOP gubernatorial nominee Jim Pillen, and Gov. Pete Ricketts. Pillen and Ricketts have denied being part of any conspiracy.
Slama's new filing provides the most detailed account yet of what she said Herbster did to her during the Elephant Remembers fundraising dinner in Omaha in 2019. It said Slama, then 22, was walking to her table at the dinner.
"Senator Slama felt a hand reach up her dress from behind and first touch and grope her genital area on the outside of her underwear," the filing said. "She then felt the hand move up and grope and squeeze her right bare buttocks.
"As she turned, startled by the contact, she saw Charles Herbster as he was removing his hand from under her dress. Herbster did not make eye contact with Senator Slama but she observed a smirk on his face as he walked away."
The document said Slama had never met Herbster until that night, though she knew who he was since he was a major Republican donor. The filing said she told at least two people immediately afterward what had happened.
The filing alleges that Slama and "several other" people saw Herbster grab another woman's buttocks at the event. The Nebraska Examiner reported April 30 that Elizabeth Todsen came forward on the record to confirm what she had earlier told the Examiner anonymously — that Herbster had groped her at the Elephant Remembers dinner.
Slama's filing mentions interviews that Herbster and his national campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, gave about Slama's allegations on Steve Bannon's podcast. Conway and Bannon were both advisers to former President Donald Trump.
Herbster told Bannon that Slama's allegations were made up and that Ricketts and Nebraska's GOP establishment were after him. Conway told Bannon that she and Ricketts had talked about Slama months earlier and that Slama was politically obsessed with Herbster.
"Senator Slama was shocked, mortified, and traumatized by Herbster's actions," the filing said. "Senator Slama was also frightened of retribution."
By Aaron Sanderford

The Hill: Five things to watch in North Carolina, Pennsylvania primaries

Voters in five states will head to the polls on Tuesday to cast their ballots in some of the most crucial nominating contests of the 2022 midterm elections.
Some of the biggest primaries will unfold in Pennsylvania and North Carolina, where Democrats and Republicans are slated to choose their nominees to fill two Senate seats. But the night will also see voters make key decisions on the future direction of both parties.
Here are five things to watch in the May 17 primary elections.
Does Trump suffer another major loss?
Former President Trump was dealt a blow last week when his preferred candidate in Nebraska's GOP

gubernatorial primary, Charles Herbster, lost to a Republican backed by the state's current Gov. Pete Ricketts.

On Tuesday, he'll face another test of his sway among GOP voters, this time in Pennsylvania.

Trump has endorsed celebrity physician Mehmet Oz in the state's closely watched Republican Senate primary. And while recent polling shows Oz with a narrow lead in the race, he still faces some stiff competition.

Former hedge fund manager David McCormick has trailed Oz by low-single-digit margins for more than a month, and he's still not far behind him. Even more recently, though, conservative commentator Kathy Barnette has surged in the polls, putting up the latest challenge to Oz's front-runner status.

If Oz is able to pull off a win on Tuesday, it could help sharpen Trump's argument that Herbster's loss in Nebraska was nothing more than an anomaly in his track record. But a defeat for Oz would likely raise further questions about just how closely Republican voters are taking cues from the former president.

Does Biden's endorsing power take a hit?

Biden has weighed into this year's Democratic primary battles only sparingly. But his endorsing power will be on the line on Tuesday in Oregon's 5th District, where moderate Rep. Kurt Schrader is facing a challenge from his political left.

Progressives are lining up behind Jamie McLeod-Skinner, arguing that Schrader is an unreliable vote for Democrats' agenda at a time when the party can't afford any defections.

McLeod-Skinner has racked up a number of endorsements, including from Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and four of the six county Democratic parties in the district.

Despite that, she has been heavily outspent by Schrader in the run-up to the primary. From April 1 to 27, Schrader's campaign dropped more than $1.5 million compared to McLeod-Skinner's $343,000, according to their latest federal filings.

A loss for Schrader on Tuesday would almost certainly be seen as a bad omen for Biden's influence over his party, especially in a year in which his low approval ratings are already viewed as a liability for Democrats.

Can progressives notch much-needed wins?

Progressives are looking to make a comeback on Tuesday at a pivotal moment for the Democratic Party.

While the party's left flank has seen its profile rise in recent years, progressives have continued to run up against roadblocks in key races. Earlier this month, voters in the Cleveland area sent Rep. Shontel Brown (D-Ohio) back to Washington in a closely watched primary, passing up progressive Nina Turner for a second time in less than a year.

On Tuesday, however, progressives are hoping to reverse their fortunes.

In Pennsylvania, Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, who has drawn the support of many in his party's left wing, is heading into the state's Democratic Senate primary as the clear favorite to win the nomination.

Progressives are also backing state House Rep. Summer Lee in the primary to succeed retiring Rep. Mike Doyle (D).

At the same time, progressives are hoping to knock off Schrader in Democratic primary for Oregon's 5th District, arguing that the seven-term congressman's moderate politics are out of step with the majority of his party.

Whether voters actually want to take the party in a more progressive direction, however, is one of the biggest questions heading into the primaries.

Will voters punish Cawthorn?

Rep. Madison Cawthorn drew several rivals for the Republican nomination in North Carolina's 11th District after he decided to run in another district closer to Charlotte, only to return to his old territory later.

But despite the fact that he's running as an incumbent, things haven't gotten easier for him. Cawthorn infuriated many of his GOP colleagues earlier this year when he insinuated during a podcast interview that some of his fellow lawmakers were attending orgies and snorting cocaine. He's also been the subject of a series of salacious revelations, including a leaked nude video. Cawthorn has sought to brush off the attacks against him as an effort by the so-called political establishment to undermine him. Still, the risks he is facing are very real.

The top Republicans in the state General Assembly have endorsed one of his rivals, state Sen. Chuck Edwards, in the primary, while both of his state's U.S. senators have spoken out against him. Cawthorn has the endorsement of Trump, however, who doubled down on his support for the first-term congressman this week. Given his district's conservative tilt, that could go a long way toward saving him from defeat on Tuesday.

How far right have Republican voters moved?

A handful of races on Tuesday are slated to test just how far to the right GOP primary voters have moved, with or without Trump's influence.

In Pennsylvania, Barnette is surging in the closing days of the primary, threatening to overtake Oz in the race for the Senate nomination. While Oz may have Trump's endorsement, Barnette has ties to her party's far-right flank; she's made past disparaging remarks about Islam and gay people, and previously promoted the conspiracy theory that former President Obama was secretly a Muslim.

Likewise, in the state's GOP gubernatorial primary, Republican Doug Mastriano, who advocated for the 2020 presidential election results to be overturned, appears to be the favorite to clinch the nomination to take on Democrat Josh Shapiro in November. He scored Trump's endorsement on Saturday.

And in Idaho, Trump's preferred gubernatorial candidate, Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin, is running to oust incumbent Gov. Brad Little in a closely watched primary. Little isn't exactly a moderate, but McGeachin has run to his right and the two have a history of tension.

More than once, when Little has left the state, McGeachin has signed executive orders related to the coronavirus pandemic as acting governor, only to have them rescinded by Little later on.

Regardless of who emerges from the Tuesday primaries, the contests are almost sure to say something about where GOP voters stand in the aftermath of Trump's four years in the White House.

By Max Greenwood

LJS: Nebraska drops ban on poultry events

A nearly two-month ban on live poultry events in Nebraska has been lifted.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture announced Monday that its controlled movement order that canceled all poultry events because of the threat of bird flu has expired.

The order was first issued March 26 and extended April 27 as the state dealt with several outbreaks of the highly contagious disease.

Nebraska has had seven confirmed cases of bird flu so far in domestic flocks, resulting in about 4.8 million birds being destroyed. But there has not been a case reported in the state since April 27.
“While we continue our focus to protect the poultry industry, epidemiological information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicates the spread of (bird flu) in Nebraska has been from wild birds and not from domestic flocks,” state Agriculture Director Steve Wellman said in a news release. “It is important for Nebraska to allow our poultry producers and youth exhibitors to get back to a normal routine.”
The department said sale organizers are required to keep records, including contact information for all buyers and sellers, and exhibition organizers should also keep records, including contact information, for all participants and consider moving shows to a “show-and-go” type of format.
State Veterinarian Roger Dudley said he would advise poultry producers who attend such events to continue to use "extreme caution."
"It is very important that poultry owners who choose to attend these events follow strict biosecurity measures, including isolating new birds for 30 days before introducing them to your flock,” Dudley said in the release.
The department said the ban could be reinstated if new cases of the disease are reported in the state.
By Matt Olberding

OWH: Hospitalizations and COVID cases going up again in Nebraska

Nebraska COVID-19 cases are back on the rise, with the number of cases last week reaching the highest level in three months.
The state reported 1,500 new virus cases last week, a sharp increase from just over 800 each of the two previous weeks, according to figures compiled from U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.
It was Nebraska’s fifth straight weekly increase and put cases at their highest level since mid-February.
Nebraska’s two-week case growth of 86% exceeded the 61% U.S. figure and ranked in the top third among the states. But Nebraska’s per-capita case rate continues to rank in the bottom tier nationally, 41st among the states.
Neighboring Colorado (third) and Iowa (eighth) also rank high in their two-week growth in cases. In all, COVID case numbers were rising last week in all but four states.
Hospitalizations in Nebraska also are creeping up, averaging 69 last week compared to 55 the week before. But they remain relatively low, still half the levels they were just two months ago.
Nationally, the increase in cases is being driven by the subvariant BA.2, which was the dominant variant as of the week ending May 7. But the subvariant BA.2.12.1, which reportedly is more transmissible than BA.2, has taken over in places such as New York and New Jersey.
It’s widely recognized that new cases of the virus are being underreported as more people rely on at-home tests. Those results typically are not reported to health agencies.
In Nebraska, BA.2 made up 89% of positive virus samples that had been genomically sequenced,

according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Service's report last week. However, the state currently is not distinguishing between BA.2 and BA.2.12.1 in its reports.
A tiny percentage of samples sequenced were the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants of omicron, which are driving a surge in South Africa.
Health officials continue to urge all eligible Americans, including those who have had COVID-19 at some point during the pandemic, to get up to date on vaccines. For everyone age 12 and older, that means one booster in addition to the original series of vaccines. People 50 and older and those who are immunocompromised can get a fourth shot. The CDC's online tool outlines who can get boosters.
Nebraska also added 18 more deaths last week, bringing the total number of confirmed or probable COVID deaths to 4,234. The state has reported 482,000 confirmed COVID cases.
By Julie Anderson and Henry J. Cordes

OWH: Medical marijuana backers challenge Nebraska petition signature requirement in court

LINCOLN — Medical marijuana backers are challenging the constitutionality of a requirement that petitioners collect a certain number of signatures from at least 38 Nebraska counties for the measure to make the ballot.
Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana joined with the American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska to file a civil rights lawsuit on Monday in U.S. District Court in Lincoln.
The suit names Crista Eggers, the statewide campaign coordinator for the petition drive and the mother of a boy with uncontrolled seizures, as a plaintiff. Secretary of State Bob Evnen, the state's top election official, is named as the defendant.
The lawsuit asks the court to issue a temporary restraining order suspending the requirement that petitions get valid signatures from at least 5% of registered voters in two-fifths of the state's 93 counties to qualify for the ballot.
It also asks for a ruling that the multicounty requirement is unconstitutional based on the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, guaranteeing freedom of speech, and the 14th Amendment, guaranteeing equal protection and due process.
"We have a real shot at qualifying," Eggers said. "I am hopeful this case will remove a barrier to Nebraskans' constitutional right to petition their government and help us put the issue to voters."
A statement issued by the Secretary of State's Office noted that the multicounty requirement has been in place for more than 100 years. Evnen declined to comment on the suit, saying the state attorney general will represent his office in responding to it.
According to the lawsuit, the multicounty requirement gives more power to voters in rural counties while diluting the power of voters in more populous counties.
"The signature of a voter in a rural county on an initiative petition is more valuable because it goes further in reaching the target of 5% of that county's registered voters" in violation of the equal protection clause, the suit said.
"Because of this voting imbalance, voters in rural areas can act as gatekeepers who prevent otherwise valid initiatives from qualifying for placement on the ballot," it said.

In addition, the suit argues that the requirement impaired Eggers' right to engage in core political speech because it "dramatically compounds the complexity and cost of obtaining necessary signatures to put an issue on the state ballot."

The multicounty requirement is in addition to the requirement that petitions collect a certain number of total signatures. Both requirements are in the Nebraska Constitution.

State Sen. Adam Morfeld of Lincoln, a campaign co-chair for the medical marijuana petition, said that, to ensure petitions have support from across the state, the multicounty requirement could be replaced with a requirement that petitions get a certain number of signatures from each congressional district. Congressional districts have the same size of population.

But he also said it would not be good politics for a petition drive to focus signature-gathering efforts solely in urban areas. He said signature-gathering across the state helps build support to pass the measure if it makes the ballot.

The campaign to legalize medical marijuana is circulating two petitions for new laws, which requires valid signatures from 7% of registered voters statewide. Based on May 3 voter registration figures, that means each petition needs nearly 87,000 valid signatures by the deadline of July 7.

One petition would protect patients with serious health conditions from being arrested for possessing and using limited amounts of marijuana when recommended by health care providers. The second would create and regulate a system for producing and distributing cannabis for medical purposes.

The Nebraska lawsuit comes more than 50 years after the U.S. Supreme Court determined a similar Illinois multicounty requirement violated residents' rights. Courts have struck down these requirements in other states, including Idaho, Utah and Wyoming.

In 2014, U.S. District Judge Joseph Bataillon ruled that Nebraska's requirement was unconstitutional in a case brought by former Omaha businessman Kent Bernbeck. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eight Circuit later overturned the decision on a procedural matter without ruling on the merits of the case.

Bernbeck, a veteran petition organizer, argued in his case that the requirement dramatically increases the time and travel costs to gather signatures.

The new lawsuit makes a similar argument. It says the multicounty requirement hinders petition efforts by forcing the campaign to spread its limited resources across sparsely populated counties where it takes longer to collect signatures than in areas with higher populations with the potential to collect more signatures.

The push to legalize medical marijuana in Nebraska has encountered numerous obstacles in the last few years.

In 2020, the campaign raised about $2.5 million and, despite the pandemic, secured more than 182,000 signatures. The petition had well above the number of signatures needed to put the issue on the ballot, but it was disqualified by the Nebraska Supreme Court for containing more than one subject.

This year, the petition drive has been short of funds after suffering the loss of two people who had been expected to make a major contribution to the current legalization campaign. One of those donors, who contributed to the group's last effort, died in a plane crash. A second person was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Without the money for a traditional signature-gathering effort that relies heavily on paid circulators, leaders of this year's campaign announced plans to mobilize supporters for a grassroots volunteer effort to collect signatures.

Eggers said Monday that response to the announcement has been “phenomenal.” She said she signed up more than 250 volunteers since the announcement. But she said more people are needed to get the proposal across the finish line.
By Martha Stoddard

LJS: Lincoln hospitals dealing with shortage of medical imaging dye

Hospitals and health care facilities have had to deal with numerous shortages at various times caused by the coronavirus pandemic, including tests, personal protective equipment and even workers.
But now, pandemic effects a world away are leading to an "unprecedented" shortage of a very specific substance used in imaging.
A COVID-19 lockdown in China over the past several weeks has led to a shortage of intravenous contrast dyes that are used in CT scans and some other imaging tests.
GE Healthcare, which is the main supplier of the dyes, said in a letter last month that its plant in Shanghai was temporarily shut down because of the lockdown, leaving it short of supply and leading to the need for rationing.
The company said last week that some production has restarted at the Shanghai plant and it also has shifted some of the work to a plant in Ireland, but it does not expect to be back at full production until late June.
That has health care facilities looking at ways to conserve their supplies and hoping they don't run out.
"We're hoping that we can make it through the next two months," said Georgia Blobaum, director of operations at Lincoln-based Advanced Medical Imaging.
Blobaum said the facility has not had to cancel or postpone any procedures yet, but its clinical committee will be meeting soon to discuss the issue and what potential changes could be made to conserve supplies.
She said some of the options that might be considered include using less contrast dye for some tests, postponing nonemergency scans and doing more scans that don't require the contrast dye.
Blobaum said the company also is looking at finding other vendors.
"It's definitely put a huge burden on imaging as a whole for radiology and cardiology," she said.
So far, no other facilities in Lincoln have reported any concerns.
A spokesman for Bryan Health said it gets IV contrast dyes from multiple vendors and as of yet has "not seen a disruption in our ability to perform these scans because of the shortage."
"Our team is working diligently with vendors to continue on this path and prevent an impact to our patients," said Brad Colee, the Bryan spokesman.
A spokeswoman for CHI Health, which owns St. Elizabeth and Nebraska Heart Hospital in Lincoln, said it is not currently experiencing supply issues with IV contrast dyes and "does not anticipate any issues in the foreseeable future."
But Blobaum said she knows there are other facilities in the area having supply issues.
"We've already had offices and hospitals calling us to ask if they can borrow," she said.

By Matt Olberding

OWH Midlands Voice: Paid internships will turn the tide in Nebraska's 'brain drain' fight

The old saying might go, "it's not the grades you make, it's the hands you shake," but in truth it takes equal parts classroom experiences and professional connections to launch a career today.

While student academic achievement is the primary mission of every university, the importance of building connections between students and prospective employers — primarily through internships — is undeniable. But not all internships are created equal, and neither are the outcomes.

A recent study from the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that in 2021, students who worked paid internships were nearly twice as likely to receive a job offer than those who didn't take on an internship at all. The study sends a very clear message: paid internships are the difference between meaningful employment and underemployment.

This matters even more when according to UNO's Center for Public Affairs Research, Nebraska has lost 2,000 college educated people per year to other states over the last 10 years. To make matters worse, 72% of those losses are from individuals between the ages of 20 to 29 years old. Added up over time, the lost economic potential is staggering.

But why are paid internships so important? And what do paid internships have to do with young people leaving the state?

Students from low-income backgrounds — who often need to work part- or full-time jobs to support their academic journeys — quite literally cannot afford to work for free. At the University of Nebraska at Omaha, nearly 80 percent of our student body are already employed full- or part-time in addition to their coursework.

When we restrict who can gain meaningful work experience and build connections while in college based on their economic background, two things happen.

First, low-income students who are unable to take on an unpaid internship are at a disadvantage in the state's job market, forcing them to look out of state for a career they can apply their degree to, or remain underemployed in Nebraska.

Second, because employers place an emphasis on internships during their recruitment process, the talent pool for them to pick from in our state shrinks, and those employers end up looking out of state for talent. Both outcomes contribute directly to what is called "brain drain," or the emigration of high-skilled people from one state to another.

If we truly want to make a difference in our community and slow brain drain, universities in our state must play a more active role in connecting our students with paid internships in their communities. Similarly, as we attract talent from out of state, we must make an extra effort to retain those students and keep them in our Omaha community.

Earlier this month we announced a groundbreaking partnership with nearly 50 Omaha-based companies and non-profits called UNO Career Connect to close this gap. Through this program, partner employers that include Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, and nonprofits pledge a certain number of internship positions to UNO students.

For UNO students — especially the one-third of our student body that is Pell grant-eligible and the

roughly 25 percent that are Nebraska Promise eligible — it opens up new opportunities, experiences, connections that they wouldn't have had otherwise.

For employers, it provides a new level of access to the talent they need to move their businesses forward. Most importantly, for our state, it keeps top talent in Nebraska, effectively turning the tide against brain drain.

More than 1,800 UNO students received their diplomas during Spring 2022 Commencement ceremonies on Friday at Baxter Arena. Each of these students and the thousands more who will follow in the years ahead have an incredible amount of talent and love for their campus communities.

The graduates that we fail to keep in Nebraska will be another state's gain.

We owe it to our students and the future of our state to give them every opportunity to work, live, grow, and make a difference right here in Nebraska.

Joanne Li, Ph.D., CFA, is the chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

LJS Local View: Rebuilding trust in a trust

For 30 years, the Nebraska Environmental Trust has allocated Nebraska Lottery funds to worthy, environmentally beneficial projects. However, in recent years, the trust's grant process has become mired in controversy.

In the last year or two, the trust board's funding priorities have left many former grantees feeling confused and frustrated. There were 118 grants submitted to the trust last year, and unprecedently they scored 34 of these grants as ineligible. Of the 82 eligible grants, only 71 were funded and over $3 million was left unallocated.

The latest funding cycle stands in stark contrast to how projects were typically funded. Historically, only a few projects were denied funding, and no more than $200,000 remained unallocated each year.

With the apparent shift in the funding practices of the trust, grants for conservation and recycling services were particularly hard hit. Only four of 12 recycling projects even scored high enough to be eligible for funding. Many of these essential recycling programs, such as "Recycling on the Go!" and "Keep Alliance Beautiful," rely heavily on the trust funding to maintain their important services. Unfortunately, these programs, which have a track record of great success and have never been denied funding in the numerous years that they have applied, were not given any money this funding cycle.

Adding insult to injury was the lack of transparency in the new funding process. In unprecedented fashion, those who had their grant applications denied were not given any feedback on why their application was denied.

The altered funding priorities have many people feeling that the trust is failing to follow its original mandate and is becoming beholden to outside influences.

The apparent shift in priorities is best illustrated by an infamous incident in 2020 where the trust diverted funds from worthy recycling and conservation projects to fund questionable ethanol blender pumps, a decision that was reversed after a lawsuit was filed to challenge the plan. This example clearly illustrates that the trust has strayed from its original purpose, which was to "conserve, enhance and restore the natural environments of Nebraska."

The Nebraska Environmental Trust is funded directly by citizens who buy lottery tickets. This public funding means the trust must be more transparent about its processes and funding priorities.
The trust scheduled a public meeting for May 19 to announce changes regarding its funding practices. It's my fervent hope that the original mission of the trust will be preserved. Recycling and conservation efforts are a critical component in climate change strategies, and the trust must continue to support these environmental needs.
However, if the trust board is contemplating a change in the long-standing funding priorities, it is incumbent on the trust to openly declare its intentions, provide for public comments, and give the Legislature an opportunity to decide whether the new funding priorities support the best interests of the state.
Sen. John McCollister of Omaha represents District 20 in the Nebraska Legislature.

AP: BNSF tweaks attendance rules but unions still complain

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — BNSF railroad is tweaking its strict new attendance policy that upset workers, but the unions that challenged the rules since they took effect in February say the changes don't go far enough.
The railroad has told employees that starting next month it will make several small changes in the formula it uses to determine whether workers are missing too many shifts.
The unions say the rules still do too much to encourage workers to show up when they are sick or fatigued. They also argue the rules have contributed to more than 700 employees leaving the railroad at a time when BNSF is struggling to hire.
BNSF's two largest unions that represent nearly half the railroad's 35,000 workers — the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, and the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation union — have both been fighting the policy since it was announced. A federal judge ruled earlier this year they couldn't strike over the issue so they are now trying to address their concerns through arbitration.
"BNSF Railway's newly announced changes to its Hi-Viz attendance policy are little more than fluff," BLET President Dennis Pierce said. "Hi-Viz has been an abject failure. This unreasonable policy which keeps locomotive engineers and other railroaders on call day after day, around the clock, has caused hundreds of BNSF's employees to quit and it has made recruitment of new employees a nightmare."
The railroad has said the policy is helping make sure it has the workers it needs to operate its trains available. BNSF said Monday that the railroad has actually seen an increase in the number of vacation and personal days employees have taken since the policy took effect.
And the rules haven't kept the railroad from hiring, which it has made a priority to help eliminate widespread delays that shippers have been complaining about this spring.
"We currently have more train crew employees today than we did a year ago, coupled with a robust 2022 hiring plan that already has 300 new employees currently being trained," BNSF said.
Under the new policy, engineers and conductors begin with 30 points, and then points are deducted from that for absences, with the deductions ranging from two points to 25 points. A worker can earn four points back by being available to work for 14 days in a row including weekends. An employee would be disciplined when their points are exhausted.
Now the railroad plans to offer seven bonus points to workers who log the most hours in a month.

Workers will also receive one extra point if they remain available to work right before or after planned vacations, show up on holidays and other in-demand days or if they have to report to work between Friday afternoon and midday Saturday.
The head of the Transportation Trades Department union coalition that includes BLET, SMART-TD and several other rail unions said the tweaks BNSF is making don't change the overall effect of the policy because earning an extra point or two won't offset provisions like the 15-point deduction for being unable to work on a holiday.
"BNSF's proposed changes to its Hi Viz attendance policy are unimpressive. These changes do nothing to address the policy's fundamental flaws," said TTD President Greg Regan.
BNSF, which is based in Fort Worth, Texas, is one of the largest railroads in the United States, and it operates 32,500 miles (52,300 kilometers) of track in 28 western states. It is owned by Warren Buffett's Omaha, Nebraska-based Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate, and dozens of railroad workers recently demonstrated outside Berkshire's annual meeting because of their concerns about the attendance rules.
By Josh Funk

AP: US allows more baby formula imports to fight shortage

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under fire from parents and politicians, President Joe Biden's administration announced steps Monday to ease a nationwide shortage of baby formula, including reopening the largest domestic manufacturing plant and increasing imports from overseas.
The Food and Drug Administration said it was streamlining its review process to make it easier for foreign manufacturers to begin shipping formula to the U.S.
"We are hopeful this call to the global market will be answered and that international businesses will rise to the occasion to assist in bolstering the supply of products," said FDA Commissioner Robert Califf, in a statement.
Califf said the U.S. will prioritize companies that can provide the largest shipments and quickly show documentation that their formulas are safe and meet U.S. nutrition standards.
The imports announcement came shortly after regulators said they'd reached a deal to allow Abbott Nutrition to restart its Sturgis, Michigan-based plant, which has been closed since February due to contamination issues. The company must overhaul its safety protocols and procedures before resuming production.
Neither step will have an immediate effect on tight supplies that have left many parents searching for formula online or in food banks.
After getting the FDA's OK, Abbott said it will take eight to ten weeks before new products begin arriving in stores. The company didn't set a timeline to restart manufacturing.
Getting imports into the U.S. supply chain could take several months, according to administration officials. Even before the latest change FDA officials said imports of baby formula are already up more than 300% from last year.
Monday's announcement was previewed last week by the White House, which has been leaning on the FDA and formula makers to quickly find ways to alleviate the shortage. Outrage over the issue has quickly snowballed and handed Republicans a fresh talking point to use against President Biden ahead of November elections.

The shortage stems from a February recall by Abbott that exacerbated ongoing supply chain disruptions among formula makers, leaving fewer options on stores shelves across much of the country. The shortage has led retailers like CVS and Walgreens to limit how many containers customers can purchase per visit.

Abbott's voluntary recall was triggered by four illnesses reported in babies who had consumed powdered formula from the Michigan plant. All four infants were hospitalized with a rare type of bacterial infection and two died.

After a six-week inspection, FDA investigators published a list of problems in March, including lax safety and sanitary standards and a history of bacterial contamination in several parts of the plant.

Chicago-based Abbott has emphasized that its products have not been directly linked to the bacterial infections in children. Samples of the bacteria found at its plant did not match the strains collected from the babies by federal investigators. The company has repeatedly stated it is ready to resume manufacturing, pending an FDA decision.

Former FDA officials say fixing the type of problems uncovered at Abbott's plant takes time, and infant formula facilities receive more scrutiny than other food facilities. Companies need to exhaustively clean the facility and equipment, retrain staff, repeatedly test and document there is no contamination.

As part of the FDA's new import policy, regulators said companies would need to provide documentation of their factory's inspections.

Pediatricians say baby formulas produced in Canada and Europe are roughly equivalent to those in the U.S. But traditionally, 98% of the infant formula supply in the U.S. is made domestically. Companies seeking to enter the U.S. face several major hurdles, including rigorous research and manufacturing standards imposed by the FDA.

San Diego father Steven Hyde has faced heart-wrenching challenges finding formula for his medical fragile daughter, who was on an Abbott formula but has had to switch with the recall and subsequent shortages in other brands.

Zoie Hyde was born 19 months ago with no kidneys, a rare life-threatening condition that requires dialysis and a feeding tube until she weighs enough for a kidney transplant.

Hyde said he used an organic brand from overseas until costs and customs hurdles made that too difficult. Friends and strangers from out of state have sent him other brands, but each time she switches requires more blood tests and monitoring, Davis said.

Despite her challenges, Zoie is walking, talking and "doing pretty good'' on other developmental milestones, Davis said.

"She's a shining light in my life,'' he said.

Very Respectfully,

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