From: Kopsa, Ryan
To: Kopsa, Ryan
Cc: Pinkerman, Justin
Subject: Governor"s Office Daily Update - 2-12-20
Date: Wednesday, February 12, 2020 8:14:56 AM
Attachments: image001.png

Ag Valley Co-op
Eustis, NE

Commodity	Delivery	Price	Basis	Date (as of)
Corn	Feb 2020	3.54	-25.00	07:44
Corn	Dec 2020	3.51	-40.00	07:44
Milo	Feb 2020	2.91	-88.00	07:44
Milo	Dec 2020	3.06	-85.00	07:44
Soybeans	Feb 2020	7.89	-95.00	07:44
Soybeans	Dec 2020	8.13	-105.00	07:44
Wheat	Feb 2020	3.96	-70.00	07:44
Wheat	Jul 2020	4.04	-75.00	07:43

TV and Radio
WNAX: Nebraska Corn Growers Want Unicameral To Pass Property Tax Relief
NET: Higher incomes for childcare subsidies advanced; emergency room bills, YRTCs discussed
NET: Americans Potentially Exposed to Coronavirus Quarantined at Camp Ashland

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AP: Brewer Stolen Gun Bill Headed To Governor
AP: Feds providing $2.3M for repairs to irrigation system tunnel
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LJS: Ricketts would further limit spending growth in 'government schools'

Gov. Pete Ricketts on Tuesday endorsed the "general framework" of a property tax relief and school aid reform bill now being fashioned by the Legislature's Revenue Committee while arguing specifically for a provision that would limit growth in funding for public schools to the rate of inflation.

In a written statement, the governor repeatedly referred to public schools as "government schools," a term that President Donald Trump used in his State of the Union speech earlier this month in which he criticized "failing government schools."

Annual spending growth for schools under state law is limited to 2.5%, a figure that Ricketts said exceeds the annual inflation rate of 1% to 2% per year over the last decade.

As the governor weighed in with a statement of general support for the legislation (LB974) under construction, the committee scheduled an executive session Wednesday to consider action on the bill.

Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn, committee chairwoman, wants to move the proposal to the floor of the Legislature for early consideration, fulfilling a goal that's also shared by Speaker Jim Scheer of Norfolk.

Tagging along will be a proposed new business expansion tax incentives bill (LB720) whose fate has been politically tied to the property tax reduction and school aid reform package.

Property tax relief is "my top priority for the Legislature," Ricketts said.

"The only way to achieve long-term property tax relief is to control spending at both the state and local levels while we grow Nebraska's economy," he said.

Ricketts said legislation should adhere to three core principles: "first, no tax increases; second, protect the property tax credit relief fund; third, encourage spending restraint in local governments."

The state's property tax credit relief fund has been nearly doubled during his governorship, he said.

Meanwhile, state budget growth over the past six years has been held to less than 2.4% annually, Ricketts said, while the state has been increasing revenue through economic growth.

"For the property tax plan to work, local governments also have to do their part to control spending," he said.

"K-12 government schools are the biggest spenders," he said.

"On average, they are responsible for roughly 60% of Nebraskans' property tax bills. Over the past 10 years, school property taxes have increased by 54%."

Even with a proposed new school spending increase limit tied to the rate of inflation, school boards still would have the option to ask voters to override the annual budget growth limitation, the governor said.

Citizens need to "hold local political subdivisions like K-12 government schools accountable for how they spend taxpayer dollars," Ricketts said.

By Don Walton

AP: Brewer Stolen Gun Bill Headed To Governor

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) - The Unicameral has given unanimous final approval to Gordon Senator Tom Brewer's bill to help get stolen guns off the streets. LB 582 now goes to Governor Pete Ricketts for his signature.
The bill gives prosecutors increased authority to bring charges for receiving stolen firearms by adopting a new standard on whether a person should have known or had reasonable cause to believe that a gun was stolen. Currently, a person must have actual knowledge or belief that a gun was stolen to be convicted of crimes related to receiving a stolen firearm. Possessing a gun that is believed to be stolen is a felony carrying a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

AP: Feds providing $2.3M for repairs to irrigation system tunnel

GERING, Neb. — A federal agency intends to provide a $2.3 million loan to help pay for repairs to an irrigation system tunnel that collapsed last July, cutting off water to farmers in western Nebraska and eastern Wyoming.
The loan will be in addition to a $3.8 million grant that Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts has said the state will provide to the irrigation district.
The collapse left more than 150 square miles of cropland without water at the peak of summer.
Temporary repairs got the water flowing again by the end of August.
Officials say permanent repairs are expected to cost about $16 million.

OWH: Conservationists decry Environmental Trust board's decision to increase funding for ethanol firm

LINCOLN — Conservationists are up in arms over a decision that calls for directing an extra $1.8 million in grant money to a private company for ethanol pumps at the expense of projects to preserve saline wetlands, duck marshes and a Pine Ridge ranch that features a trout stream.
The Nebraska Environmental Trust board, which distributes grants from state lottery money, voted 7-2 with two abstentions last week to override the recommendations of its own grant review committee.
While two board members defended the move as a bigger help to the agriculture economy and clean air, conservationists said it turned its back on the real mission of the trust — “to conserve, enhance and restore the natural environments” of Nebraska — and was more about economic development than the environment.
“We have some big question marks as to why these ethanol pumps, which were way down the list (of ranked projects), managed to get funded over things that were way higher on the list,” said Bruce Kennedy, president of the Nebraska Wildlife Federation. “It looks like someone circumvented the process.”
The vote took away funding from five projects that got high rankings by the trust’s grant review committee — from No. 7 to No. 36 — and shifted $1.8 million over three years to a project ranked No. 78 among 120 applicants — a proposal by Green Plains Inc., one of the nation’s largest ethanol companies.
Green Plains had been recommended for $1.3 million in funding by a grant review committee to help install 60 ethanol blender pumps and storage tanks at service stations across Nebraska. The recommended change, which faces a final vote on April 2, would grant Green Plains $3 million over three years. That is about 50% of the total cost of its project to provide more fuel pumps that can blend ethanol at percentages of 15% and higher.
The defunded projects included $900,000 to continue restoration of rare saline wetlands in the Lincoln area, $834,000 for three marsh restoration projects by Ducks Unlimited, and $117,000 to the Nebraska Land Trust to finance a conservation easement to maintain a 2,900-acre ranch that features wild sheep habitat and a publicly accessible trout stream.
Two members of the Environmental Trust board who voted for the money shift said the board was well within its powers to alter the grant recommendations. Rod Christen of Steinauer and Sherry Vinton of Whitman both said they oppose the public funding of conservation easements, which is a legal step to prevent any future development of a plot of land and conserve its unique properties. They said most of the projects defunded included such easements in some way.

Christen, a farmer, said the economic benefit of the ethanol project is broader than preserving a wetland or ranch. Both Christen and Vinton, a rancher, said a conservation easement can shift the tax load onto other landowners by freezing the valuation, and taxes paid, on the conserved property. And both board members said the rankings by the grant committee are sometimes very subjective.

While conservation easements can preserve a "scenic view," Christen said he could see such views on "most of the roads in Nebraska."

But Kennedy, as well as three representatives from other conservation groups who feared reprisals if they were named, said the grant applications undergo a technical review by volunteers with expertise in wildlife habitat and environmental projects. They said they'd never seen such a big change in the rankings, especially one that favored a private company and had "dubious" environmental benefits, over projects from nonprofit groups that preserved unique properties.

"That was a private endeavor that they funded," Kennedy said. "The public values of the other projects were readily apparent."

He said the conservation community will have a lot of questions for board members at a public hearing April 2, when the board votes to finalize its recommendations.

Kennedy added that Gov. Pete Ricketts, who appoints nine citizen members on the 14-member Environmental Trust board, should prioritize naming members "who support the entire realm of Environmental Trust projects and let the rating system take hold."

Public comments can also be mailed or emailed until April 1 to the Nebraska Environmental Trust, P.O. Box 94913, Lincoln NE 68509-4913, or via email at marilyn.tabor@nebraska.gov.

By Paul Hammel

Scottsbluff SH: Secretary of State Bob Evnen says updated machines assure secure elections voting

Voters in the May 12 primary election "can be confident that their primary election ballots will be counted and reported promptly and accurately," Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen said during a visit to Gering Tuesday.

Evnen was in Gering Tuesday to demonstrate the state's new election equipment, which is being delivered to all 93 Nebraska counties before the election.

"My predecessor, John Gale, had a view to replace election equipment across the state," Evnen said. "I was able to take that vision to work with the Legislature and the governor to make it happen."

Gov. Pete Ricketts included the $9.5 million expenditure in his biennium budget released in January 2019. The state will also pay for all repair contracts, maintenance costs and software licensing fees for the useful life of the machines, expected to be around 12 years.

Each county will receive a ballot counting device that replaces the current ballot counters used since 2005. The new version won't stop operating if it encounters a write-in ballot or a ballot with structural damage, such as a crease.

"Many features of the new ballot counters offer better speed, accuracy and security," Evnen said. "We also purchased devices that go into every polling place to mark the ballots."

The new ballot marking machines are ADA compliant to be used by disabled individuals. The machines use touch screen or voice technology to display the ballot.

Another advantage is the new ballot marking machines are much smaller and about four times lighter than the ones in use today.

All other voters will continue voting as before by filling in the oval by the candidates they choose.

"We cast paper ballots in our state and will continue to do so," Evnen said. "You can't hack paper. It's the most secure method to cast ballots."

The new ballot counting machines are not connected to the internet, so vote total reports will remain secure and tamper-proof.

Evnen said that prior to all elections, machines are tested three times for accuracy. A mock election is conducted to assure the machines are functioning properly.

Following the formal election, an audit is conducted from randomly selected precincts. Those ballots from both rural and urban districts are hand counted and the numbers compared to the machine results.

Evnen also emphasized the state's election process is secure and reliable.
"There are foreign actors who are trying to undermine the confidence of Americans in the integrity of our elections," Evnen said. "Don't let them do it. Our elections are fair and secure, but some actors use social media to sow the seeds of uncertainty and introduce upset into our election process."
He urges people to contact their county clerk or the Secretary of State's office if they run across information that doesn't seem right.
During his visit to Gering, Evnen spoke about current legislation calling for a constitutional amendment requiring photo ID verification prior to voting.
"I've supported that all along," he said. "It's something the vast majority of people across the nation support because they want to be assured their vote counts."
The Secretary of State's office estimates that 98% of Nebraskans eligible to vote already have a state-issued ID that can be used at the polls.
"The remaining 2% without photo ID is a manageable number so we can get IDs to them," Evnen said. "We'll figure out alternatives that will work for them at the polls. It's just common sense because it helps secure our elections."
Thirty-four states currently have voter ID laws on the books. Evnen said the state is preparing legislation that has been researched for what works and what doesn't so it will stand up to court challenge.
"We'll be crafting legislation that will address all those questions," he said. "If this constitutional amendment doesn't pass, I anticipate we'll have legislation introduced next year that will avoid the pitfalls that have led to court challenges in the past."
By Jerry Purvis

OWH: Court hearing on request to block historical horse racing in Nebraska postponed

A Lancaster County District Court hearing set for Tuesday on a request to block Fonner Park from installing historical horse racing terminals has been postponed, according to court staff.
No new court date had been set in the case pitting the Nebraska Attorney General's Office against the Nebraska State Racing Commission over its approval of the controversial terminals.
Historical horse racing terminals allow a bettor to make wagers on unidentified horses in previously run races from across the U.S.
Opponents of expanded gambling claim they look like slot machines, but horse racing officials contend they're a new form of the already legal wagering method used to bet on live and simulcast horse races in the state.
In December, the State Racing Commission issued its order approving Fonner Park's request to install the terminals.
The decision spawned two lawsuits, one from Hall County residents and another by Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson, each seeking to invalidate that decision and alleging it was an unconstitutional expansion of gambling.
The lawsuit brought by Hall County residents Duane Fuller and Jeffery Hayman is set for a hearing in April.
By Riley Johnson

OWH: HHS officials ask judges to pause adding juvenile offenders to troubled Kearney youth facility

LINCOLN — State officials are asking judges to temporarily stop sending juvenile offenders to the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center-Kearney, saying the troubled facility is at the "maximum safe census."
Bo Botelho, chief operating officer and general counsel for the Department of Health and Human Services, made the request in a letter sent to judges on Tuesday.
Also on Tuesday, a key lawmaker told the Appropriations Committee that the assaults and escapes increase the urgency of replacing the Kearney center's barracks-style housing with private rooms and showers.
The HHS letter went out following a string of assaults and escapes at the state-run juvenile center over the weekend.
"DHHS places both the care and safety of all juveniles committed to the custody of the department and our

teammates paramount," Botelho said. "In order to ensure continued safety we respectfully request courts to pause future commitments for the next 10 days."

The request did not sit well with Lancaster County Juvenile Court Judge Rodger Heideman. In a letter to senators, he said that most, if not all, youths headed for the center are being held in secure detention.

"I find this unacceptable to suggest we allow youth to remain in secure detention until DHHS can fulfill its statutory obligation to provide rehabilitative and treatment services," he said.

Although the youth center has had a history of assaults and escapes in recent years, there have been five incidents in the past two weeks. They included an assault by four male teens early Friday morning that sent three staff members to the hospital.

There also was an assault Thursday in which a male youth stabbed a staff member with a ceiling tile support, as well as two escapes involving three teens on Saturday and Sunday. Two boys escaped from the center the previous week and allegedly stole two vehicles, assaulted a driver and racked up multiple potential charges in three counties.

On Tuesday, State Sen. Sara Howard of Omaha, who chairs the Health and Human Services Committee, told colleagues that switching to private rooms would increase safety for both staff and youths. It also would bring Nebraska in line with best practices in juvenile facilities.

"Given the events of this past weekend, I feel very strongly that this committee needs to consider an investment to put rooms in there," she said.

Legislative Bill 1146, which Howard introduced, would put $3 million toward building private rooms and shower facilities at the Kearney center.

The Kearney center, which had been for male teens, has housed both male and female teens since August. The girls were moved out of a similar center in Geneva after staff shortages, inadequate programming and deteriorating buildings combined to create a crisis situation.

Howard said the barracks-style living units, where most of the male youths are housed, contribute to violence at the center. They also pose a safety risk for staff, who must cross through the boys' sleeping area to leave. Meanwhile, the center's communal shower facilities can exacerbate problems for female youths, who often have a history of sexual abuse and assault. Howard said the experience does not contribute to rehabilitation and treatment.

HHS provided no testimony on LB 1146.

When questioned later by the Appropriations Committee, HHS Facilities Director Mark LaBouchardiere said the department took no position because HHS officials would need to have an architect look at the potential cost of the work proposed. He said the construction would have to include such features as metal doors and walls that could not be destroyed easily.

Howard said LB 1146 grew out of the Health and Human Service's Committee's six-month investigation into the state's centers for juvenile offenders. The investigation looked particularly at the events surrounding the deterioration of the youth center for female juvenile offenders in Geneva.

The girls were moved out of the Geneva center in August into the Kearney center, which previously housed only boys.

In response to the recent assaults and escapes, HHS officials said they will have additional management on-site 24 hours a day "providing additional assistance and leadership to ensure safety and security for our team and the youth we serve." The agency also plans to set new limits on visitation and furloughs.

By Martha Stoddard

OWH: Grand Island mom backs bill requiring schools to adopt policies against teacher-student sexual contact

LINCOLN — Lisa Albers fought to retain her composure Tuesday as she described for a panel of lawmakers how a substitute high school teacher groomed her daughter for sex.

Albers, a Grand Island school board member, urged members of the Legislature's Education Committee to support Legislative Bill 1080, which would require Nebraska schools to adopt policies prohibiting sexual contact between educators and students or former students for up to a year after they left school.

Albers testified that her 17-year-old daughter was manipulated into having sex less than two weeks after graduation.
"While we will never know if a stronger school policy would have prevented this incident, we must send a message to school employees that actions like his will have consequences," Albers said.
If the bill passes, public, parochial and private schools would have to adopt policies prohibiting grooming and listing what conduct is inappropriate between teachers and students. The policies would have to indicate how to report misconduct, how employees would be made aware of the policy, and specify the consequences for a violation. It would also have to designate the preferred method of electronic communication between teachers and students.
Most Omaha area districts and the Lincoln Public Schools have professional boundaries policies, though they vary in scope and detail.
Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha told the committee that the vast majority of Nebraska teachers would never engage in the kind of behavior the bill is intended to prevent.
"We have great teachers in this state. It's unfortunate that the actions of a small group, or a small number of individuals, have us here today."
He said the impetus for the bill came from meetings with families affected by abuse about the same time as The World-Herald and other media outlets published stories on educator sexual misconduct.
The World-Herald published a story Dec. 15 detailing how a math teacher's abuse of a student went on at Davis Middle School in Omaha, despite numerous red flags about the teacher's behavior.
In January, the newspaper published the results of an investigation into the frequency of educator sexual misconduct. The paper found that, on average, 10 Nebraska educators are caught each year engaging in inappropriate sexual communication or contact with students.
Experts say that only one in 10 student victims reports the abuse.
Grooming behaviors are what perpetrators use to gain a victim's trust and break down their resistance.
Albers told the committee that minimum behavior standards are vital to protect students from predators.
She said that while many districts already have such policies, LB 1080 would ensure that all schools have one.
"We have watched our daughter suffer from the aftermath of the abuse by this teacher," she said. "This event has had life-altering effects on her. We can only begin to understand the consequences of grooming and manipulation on a young person's development."
Recovery "is a very long road," she said.
In Nebraska, the age of consent for sex is 16. The Grand Island substitute teacher could not be criminally prosecuted, but the Nebraska Department of Education permanently revoked his teaching certificate.
State Sen. Mike Groene, the Education Committee chairman, asked Lathrop how an administrator enforcing the policy would know if a teacher's behavior was intended to groom a child for sex.
"I'm fully on board if the crime was committed, but is there a crime prior to there being sexual contact?" Groene asked.
Lathrop said his bill doesn't make grooming a crime, only a policy violation. Four other bills have been introduced that would essentially make it a crime for an educator to have sex with a high school student, regardless of age.
He acknowledged that grooming is difficult to define.
But he said most people would recognize it, he said.
Lathrop said grooming is a pattern of behavior intended to develop a close relationship that creates the opportunity for sex.
He said he would leave it to the school districts to define grooming.
"I think people know it when they see it," Lathrop said. "I'm going to use a poor analogy. A Supreme Court judge once said it's hard to describe porn but you know it when you see it. And that's a little bit like grooming. It's hard to define because it can take many different forms."
Lathrop said he would expect that school administrators would initially warn and counsel teachers when they violated a boundary.
The bill garnered support from the Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, the Nebraska Council of School Administrators and the Nebraska State Education Association.
Maddie Fennell, executive director of the 28,000-member teachers union, said there's no acceptable reason why

a teacher in a pre-K-12 school district should be in a sexual relationship with a student, regardless of the age of the student.
“If that does occur, the educator needs to face consequences even greater than the revocation of their teaching certificate,” Fennell said.
She said the union does have a responsibility to its members to make sure there are not unintended consequences from such policies. But she said the union would put the safety of children first.
Jack Moles, executive director of the rural schools association, said that it would be difficult for school administrators to monitor behavior after a student leaves a district, but the association believes that there needs to be a clear separation between the educator and former student.
“For an administrator it might be a little difficult to monitor that year out, but more than likely, within that time frame, there was grooming going on before the student graduated or left the school,” he said.
By Joe Dejka

LJS: 'Something didn't look right': Parent urges policies to prevent grooming of victims

Lisa Albers doesn't know if a stronger school policy would have prevented her child from being groomed by a substitute teacher.
Future policies, the Grand Island Public Schools board member said, defining what interactions between students and teachers are appropriate — as well as what the consequences are for breaching that trust — will prevent future students from being violated.
Under a bill (LB1080) from Omaha Sen. Steve Lathrop, all public and private schools in Nebraska would be required to adopt policies outlining appropriate conduct between employees and students.
The policy would also need to include a statement prohibiting school employees from engaging in sexual acts with current students or those who have graduated or left school in the past year.
"The vast majority of teachers would never engage in the type of behaviors this bill would prohibit," Lathrop told the Legislature's Education Committee on Tuesday.
But, because of the actions of a "small group of individuals," Lathrop said it was up to the Legislature to ensure every school is ready to "prevent, protect and report" inappropriate behaviors between teachers and students such as grooming when they take place.
Lathrop said the bill asks schools to draft policies that would prevent adults from building a friendship or relationship with a child in order to exploit them for sex, also known as grooming.
Albers said the substitute teacher, twice her child's age, groomed her child through confiding personal information through texts and other communications and even providing alcohol.
The teacher manipulated Albers' child into going to a friend's house where they would be alone two weeks after high school graduation, she said. The inappropriate relationship was only discovered after Albers found text messages between the two.
"I knew something didn't look right," she said. "There was a reason I was looking at (the) phone. It was just too little, too late."
Once alerted, Grand Island Public Schools took immediate action, Albers said, notifying the teacher they would no longer be teaching in the district, but it took two years for the state to launch an investigation.
Later, law enforcement determined there had been no crime — the child was over the age 16, which is the age of consent in Nebraska.
Several bills scheduled to go before the Judiciary Committee on Feb. 20 would create criminal offenses for teachers who engage in sexual relationships with students.
Lathrop said his bill would require school districts to create policies for their employees in order to clearly delineate what is appropriate and what's not, which would be a step in that direction.
Maddie Fennell, executive director of the Nebraska State Education Association, said the statewide teachers union was in favor of strengthening policies and penalties "for educators who take advantage of their position to coerce students ... into a sexual relationship."
"There is no acceptable reason that an educator at a PK-12 school district should be in a sexual relationship with a student, regardless of the age of the student," Fennell said.

NSEA also supports schools defining the acceptable means of communication between teachers and students, which Fennell said could include limiting contact on social media.
Clearly defined policies outlining the potential consequences of grooming or engaging in sexual relationships with children, could prevent those incidents from occurring, said Brian Halstead, deputy commissioner at the Nebraska Department of Education.
Individuals who engage in sexual relationships with students have their teaching licenses revoked, which means they can no longer teach in Nebraska.
NDE also forwards the information to a national teacher clearinghouse that shares it with education departments in other states.
Other school groups, including the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, also backed Lathrop's proposal Tuesday.
Albers urged the Education Committee to send Lathrop's bill to the floor for debate by the whole Legislature. The committee did not take action Tuesday.
She said her child is still suffering "the aftermath of this abuse by this teacher."
"This event has had life-altering affects," Albers said.
By Chris Dunker

LJS: Hippopotamus used in analogy by senator to promote racial profiling bill

In August, an ACLU of Nebraska report showed racial disparities in traffic stops continued to increase in the state, despite an effort by some law enforcement agencies to address profiling and offer anti-bias training to some employees.
In January, Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers introduced a bill in the Nebraska Legislature that would prohibit racial profiling. It requires a written policy by every law enforcement agency to attain such a goal, including two hours per year of anti-bias and implicit-bias training for law enforcement officers.
During a hearing on the bill Jan. 31, Chambers talked to the Judiciary Committee about how this one small step is needed, a minimal ask, knowing the issue is one that will never be resolved in America.
He gave a sobering speech, talking about the 46 years he has been working on these issues in a hostile environment.
“If I were a giant hippopotamus, and all of the problems that black people confront could be put in a bushel basket, I would open that huge hippo mouth and I’d swallow them in one gulp," Chambers told the committee.
“But not being a giant hippopotamus, not able to swallow even an apple in one gulp, I have to take small nibbles, do it incrementally, and get what I can."
Chambers has taken LB924 as his priority bill in this, his last session before term limits take him out again. Speaker Jim Scheer said the bill would be on the agenda for debate Wednesday morning.
Racial profiling is one of the most important issues, Chambers said in an interview, because so many black people around the country — children, women and men, mentally ill people and those who are unarmed — are killed by police officers.
He referred to a Washington Post article in which a Georgia police officer was captured on camera trying to calm a nervous passenger during a 2016 drunk driving traffic stop, telling her: "Remember, we only kill black people.”
At the hearing, Chambers was, as always, candid.
“I’ll be completely honest with you," he told senators. "There is a different approach that I would take were I free to do so. But when I took my hand and raised it the first time I was sworn in … I said without mental reservation that I would discharge the duties of this office to the best of my ability."
That, he said, does not include grabbing people by the throat. It doesn’t allow sneaking up behind somebody with a baseball bat, or killing as many people as he could before something could happen to him.
“That is not what I agreed to do," he said, "And my word is my bond. No swearing to God, nothing. No threats to anybody else. It’s a self-imposed standard of conduct that I comply with."
That is why, the longest-serving Nebraska senator said, he could be more or less civil for 46 years in a hostile environment. Forty-six years of driving a car back and forth from Omaha to Lincoln in all kinds of weather. Forty-six years of taking unpopular positions alone.

“Forty-six years of overlooking all of the hostile, discriminatory things done by white people to black people and swallowing it and forgiving and looking at white people as citizens," he said.
And if those people have a problem, if they are treated unjustly, he can help them, instead of gloating, he said, and saying like Christians do, "God is bringing justice."
“I didn’t swear to let God do it. I said I would do it. I have stood and protected the family of a racist farmer who was killed, I felt unjustly, by the State Patrol," he said.
He has spent 46 years compiling that record, Chambers said to the committee. And at the end of that long journey, in the twilight of his life, on the back porch of the years that he’ll spend on this earth, he said, he is reduced to bringing a bill that only does this small thing to address one of the most intractable, unyielding types of racist mistreatment at the hands of the police.
It's a mandate, yes, but for two hours out of the year. Two hours, he repeated.
Tell these people, he said, to enforce the law the way they know it should be enforced. Enforce it the way they swore that they would enforce it.
But as he prepares the bill, he gets a call from the president of the Police Chiefs Association of Nebraska, Steve Hensel, who tells him his colleagues feel that two hours a year would be too much, he said.
Hensel, contacted later by the Journal Star, explained that many of the 90 to 100 law enforcement agencies represented in the association are small, and it can be difficult for them to find time for extra training. The state requires each sworn officer to have 20 hours a year, and many agencies struggle to get that done.
"There are a lot of subjects that law enforcement officers need to be trained adequately on," he said. "And those hours are allocated by the individual law enforcement heads. What each agency may need in the form of training varies."
With a mandate for subject matter, even important ones such as anti-bias training, the number of hours can go beyond 20, he said.
But Chambers asked the committee to weigh those two hours police chiefs say would be too much against his 46 years of abiding hostility and discrimination, of reading about the deaths of William Green, Botham Shem Jean, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin ... .
"And you might get an idea of how much self control that I can manifest when I have to,” he said.
By JoAnne Young

OWH: China evacuee is celebrating his 1st birthday under quarantine in Nebraska, but he still had a party

Neal Shepherd won’t remember his first birthday, but his parents sure will.
The family of three had the pleasure Tuesday of being together on Neal’s birthday. The circumstances, however, were odd.
Neal, his father, Tyler, and mother, Yang Meng, are among the 57 people who have been quarantined at Camp Ashland between Omaha and Lincoln. None of the 57 has been diagnosed with coronavirus, which has swept part of China, but they must spend 14 days in quarantine to make sure they don’t become ill with the virus.
Federal staffers overseeing the quarantine threw a birthday party for Neal in a conference room in the quarantine quarters. Neal’s father said about 15 staffers came, as did some of the evacuees. The staff “got him a little cake and everything,” Shepherd said.
The staffers wore their protective gear and masks. Some of the evacuees wore masks, too. The party was in a large conference room.
“Pretty much everybody was trying to stay apart from each other,” Shepherd said.
Because the virus is transmitted through cough and sneeze droplets, evacuees generally stay at least 6 feet apart.
Attendees sang “Happy Birthday” to Neal. They gave him a toy, a blanket and socks. The toy requires Neal to drop small, colorful, plastic donuts onto a stick. He then removes them, a dexterity challenge that Neal enjoys.
“He likes anything, to be honest,” the father said.
The three wound up in quarantine in Camp Ashland because they had visited some of Yang Meng’s relatives near the city of Wuhan, which has been hit hard by coronavirus. Shepherd said he is an English teacher in China.
They spent a couple of weeks in lockdown with Yang Meng’s father, then managed to get on an evacuation flight

to the United States. Travelers from the Wuhan area have been quarantined at places in California and Texas, and at Camp Ashland.
It's been a weird experience, Tyler Shepherd said. But the situation becomes less frightening as time passes and everyone remains well. Staffers have "been very nice to us, trying to do everything they can to make our quarantine pleasant," he said. "There haven't really been any bad parts of the experience so far." Staffers acquired a kind of snack chip that Tyler wanted.
The family of three can take walks outside in a specified area and toss a Frisbee. They go down the hall to pick up their meals and take the food back to their room. Staffers check their temperatures twice a day. Including the day they flew out of China, they are in day five of their quarantine.
Shepherd has had no income during this time, and family members have set up a GoFundMe page.
When the three are released, they will visit Shepherd's family in California. They owe at least $2,200 for the evacuation flight and more if they are charged for Neal's ticket. They'll owe a few hundred to fly to California. They also have diapers, wipes, food and other expenses to worry about.
They pass the time by watching television, playing with Neal and communicating with others by social media.
Neal had no problem with Camp Ashland on Tuesday. What's 14 days of quarantine when you've been on Earth for a whole year?
By Rick Ruggles

LJS: Brief shot of cold air to disrupt warm weather trend in Lincoln; flooding issues minimal – for now

Other than one blast of cold air Thursday, the upcoming forecast looks almost springlike, with temperatures in the 40s and 50s forecast for Lincoln over the next couple of weeks and few, if any, chances for significant snow.
The National Weather Service is forecasting above-average temperatures extending through President's Day — with the exception of Wednesday night and Thursday, when a cold front delivers a reminder that it's still winter.
In Lincoln, there's a slight chance of rain or snow with temperatures taking a nose dive beginning Wednesday afternoon, tumbling to 3 degrees overnight and rebounding to just 19 on Thursday.
But any accumulating snow is expected to stay to the south — the Kansas City area could see an inch or 2 — and longer-term forecasts from other sources extend forecasts for temperatures in the 40s or higher in Lincoln through Feb. 25.
While that's a welcome contrast to last February, which was one of the coldest and snowiest on record, it also raises the question of whether the warmer temperatures could heighten the flood threat in eastern Nebraska.
The answer: probably not, at least in the short term.
"We're kind of out of snow to melt, which is good," said David Pearson, a hydrologist with the National Weather Service in Omaha.
The lack of snow and ice means less runoff into creeks and rivers and less risk for ice jams, Pearson said.
That doesn't mean there won't be isolated trouble spots, such as the stretch of the Elkhorn River in northern Dodge County that has flowed over U.S 275 between West Point and the Nebraska 91 junction more than once over recent days, causing it to close. But widespread flooding issues are unlikely.
"At least in the short term, we're looking good," Pearson said.
The longer-term outlook is much more uncertain.
While the weather looks favorable through the rest of the month, March is notoriously unpredictable.
University of Nebraska-Lincoln climatologist Ken Dewey said on Twitter on Monday that while the extended forecast could be the start of an early spring warmup, "March is famous for spring snowstorms, so don't count winter out just yet."
Pearson said that rivers continue to run high and there still is a lot of moisture in the ground that will eventually thaw out.
And while there is little to no snow cover across Nebraska, there is plenty of snowpack in the Dakotas, which has the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers concerned about what might happen on the Missouri River this spring.
The Corps last week predicted that runoff into the river north of Sioux City, Iowa, will be about 40% higher than normal.
John Remus, chief of the Corps' Missouri River Basin Water Management Division, said Thursday that the

potential for above-normal runoff, coupled with above-normal flood stages on many tributaries that join the Missouri River below Gavins Point Dam, increases the potential for flooding, particularly south of Omaha.
The Corps last week increased the amount of water flowing out of the dam on the Nebraska-South Dakota border from 30,000 cubic feet per second to 35,000, which is more than double what's normal for this time of year.
The Corps said it is working to clear out as much space as possible in its reservoirs to account for the expected higher-than-normal runoff.
The National Weather Service plans to release its spring flood outlook Thursday. While it has forecast an above-average risk of flooding, it said it's too early to determine the potential severity.
By Matt Olberding

OWH Editorial: HHS must address the security concerns at the Kearney juvenile facility

It's often rightly said that we can learn from the past. That applies now to the state center for juvenile offenders at Kearney, where an assault by four male teens Friday sent three staff members to the hospital. The state senator from Kearney, John Lowe, says the state is "sitting on a powder keg" in regard to the center's security conditions.
This situation is a troubling repeat of conditions at the facility from years back. In 2012, Lowe's predecessor at the Legislature, Galen Hadley, voiced similar concerns to fellow state senators. He told of the high assault rate on staff and described what happened when he and the chairman of the Legislature's Judiciary Committee were in a meeting with administrators at the Kearney center when they were called out because of an assault on a staff member. The juvenile offender bit the staff member, "kicked him, spit on him and got his two-way radio and hit him five times with it," Hadley said. "That happened while we were there."
The troubles at the Kearney center described by Hadley and others spurred much deliberation at the Legislature and the state Department of Health and Human Services, which operates the facility. Some changes and improvements were made. Yet, eight years later, the state is again struggling with security concerns at the center.
There's little support in the Legislature for placing the facility under the authority of the state Department of Correctional Services; control will remain with HHS. Indeed, state senators are right that the center's rehabilitative support services for juveniles need to be strengthened. But in carrying out that rehabilitative mission, the state has a crucial responsibility to see that its staff are kept safe. The security concerns must be addressed.
The state senator from Kearney made that point eight years ago. His successor makes that point now. It's time for HHS to take strong action to bring an end, at last, to the center's troubles.

OWH: No threat to religious freedom

Both Gov. Ricketts and the Nebraska Catholic Conference say a bill barring job discrimination against gays would take away religious freedom. They need to specify whose religious freedom is being taken away.
I was brought up Catholic and remember no encyclical or doctrine requiring Catholics to discriminate against gay people in employment.
Maybe it's some other strange religion they're looking out for?
Gerard Harbinson, Lincoln

LJS Editorial, 2/12: NExT big thing is big, indeed

If opportunity – in the form of the Department of Defense -- knocks, we hope Nebraska is ready to answer the door.
The University of Nebraska Medical Center hopes to embark on a $2.6 billion public-private partnership called NExT, or the Nebraska Transformational Project.
NExT would build from the ground up a state-of-the-art academic medical facility and an all-hazard disaster response facility operated as a military and civilian partnership.
The Department of Defense will look at several possible sites before selecting where it wants to put the program. But one factor in their decision will be the local commitment of financial resources to the project.

To that end, we endorse LB1084, introduced by Sen. Mark Kolterman, which sets in motion a $300 million state investment over six years if funding from the federal government and the private sector gets kicked in.
The benefits of NExT are enormous and, as the name implies, "transformational." Between construction and permanent medical staff, nearly 42,000 jobs could be created. For the state's $300 million investment – spent only if the other money comes through – it could add $1.3 billion to the state's economy annually by the time the facility is fully operational in 2030.
NexT would build one or two towers in the northwest corner of the current medical center campus in midtown Omaha, towers being optimal for potential quarantine situations and for maximizing land use.
Sweetening the deal for the state and potential contributors and investors are the commercial opportunities quite literally surrounding the project – hotels, restaurants, other office space. A center for training and treatment draws far more than patients, and they need places to eat and stay.
The project would be designed to treat military and civilian victims – lots of them – affected by trauma or biologic, chemical or natural disasters.
With the coronavirus making headlines and a plane of evacuees arriving Friday for 14 days of quarantine at Camp Ashland, the need for this capability is obvious. Less obvious is the minimal risk to the population at large posed by such a facility. UNMC Chancellor Jeff Gold cited their successful treatment of Ebola virus patients in 2014 and 2015. With top-notch facilities and training as well as experienced personnel, a more robust treatment and research center makes us safer than were it not here.
LB1084 deserves approval. The state's share, $50 million annually for six years of construction, would mark an investment in our state's economy, worldwide health and our future.

LJS Local View: 3 bills carry big price tag

As Nebraska lawmakers head into the heart of this short session, three proposals -- LB720, LB974 and LB1084 -- have emerged as the most prominent fiscal items for the Legislature to address this year.
And a major factor for lawmakers to keep in mind is that the bills' combined fiscal impact could make it difficult to impossible to balance the state budget without having to raise taxes or slash funding for vital state services like K-12 education.
If the measures are approved, combined they could consume between roughly 7% and 9% of state revenues a year between FY23 and FY28. The average annual cost could be more than twice the size of the state appropriation for Corrections and nearly equal to state funding for the University of Nebraska.
Even if state revenues continue to grow at their historic adjusted annual rate of 4.2%, the impact of these measures would create a structural deficit that would have lawmakers continuously faced with having to increase taxes or cut funding for essential services like K-12 education to balance the state budget.
Two of the measures -- LB720 and LB974 -- also create other significant concerns for lawmakers to keep in mind.
LB720 would create a new state business tax incentive program to replace the current program, the Nebraska Advantage Act, which sunsets this year. The program would provide companies tax breaks for undertaking projects in Nebraska. LB720 -- which is projected to reduce state revenues by about $1 billion through FY31 -- has the potential to significantly impact state revenues for decades to come. It also fails to adequately incentivize the high-wage jobs that economic development experts say Nebraska needs.
Furthermore, the measure lacks transparency, which will make it hard to gauge its effectiveness. Considering that prominent national research shows between 75% and 98% of projects that receive tax incentives would have happened even without the tax subsidies, it's important that state leaders have the ability to ensure the revenue we forgo in tax incentives is a good use of state resources.
LB974, a measure purporting to help reduce property taxes, when fully implemented, would cost the state more than $300 million annually and squeeze school spending for all school districts. It also would flip the school funding formula on its head, resulting in less state funding going to districts with the greatest educational needs, like Omaha and Lincoln Public Schools, and more going to districts that have the ability to raise revenue locally. There are other alternatives that would reduce property taxes without harming public schools.
LB1084 -- which would allocate up to $300 million in total by FY27 to help fund the UNMC NExT project -- does have the potential to provide considerable benefit to Nebraska and its economy. The state funding for the project

would help create a large state-of-the-art teaching and clinical care facility on the UNMC campus designed to improve response to national disasters, environmental accidents and highly contagious diseases.
Given its considerable fiscal impact, however, it's important that lawmakers carefully consider how that benefit compares with the need to fund other services that are also vital to our economy.
Making strategic economic development policies and addressing Nebraska's overreliance on property taxes are essential undertakings for this year's Legislature. These issues, however, must be confronted in a way that also ensures other vital state priorities -- such as our investments in K-12 education, higher education and Health and Human Services -- are adequately funded. The combined impact of passing these three measures could make that virtually impossible.
Renee Fry is executive director of OpenSky Policy Institute.

LJS Local View: Businesses focused on climate

Recently, people at the very top of global financial institutions have been warning about the risks we are running, and the urgent need for action, on climate. Here are three examples, all from mid-January.
The World Economic Forum at Davos put out its annual Global Risk Report 2020. This year, business and public sector leaders ranked the effects of climate change as the top risk to the world's stability and prosperity over the next 10 years. They saw a high risk of "climate action failure" resulting in extreme weather, biodiversity loss and "human made environmental disasters."
The report says, "The next 10 years will shape the outlook for climate risk for the rest of the century. To avoid the worst consequences, global emissions need to peak almost immediately and decline precipitously — by 7.6% each year between 2020 and 2030. This implies an additional US $469 billion a year of clean energy investment over the next decade. Far reaching policies need to transform industrial processes, transport, agriculture and land-use, alongside changes in consumer behaviors to scale the necessary critical solutions."
About economies like Nebraska's, the report says, "Shifts in seasonable temperature and rainfall will place particular stress on economies reliant on agricultural output, creating new winners and losers in the trade sphere."
The necessary changes must be carefully managed, the report says, otherwise "action to reduce emissions could turn approximately 30% of current oil reserves, 50% of gas reserves and 80% of coal reserves into stranded assets;" that is, assets nobody wants to buy.
It notes that The Bank of England has warned that "corporations in incumbent 'dirty' industries can expect to go bankrupt if they fail to understand the risk of their business models becoming obsolete as investment flees to net-zero-emission alternatives."
"Alongside the risks" the report says, "the next decade brings tremendous opportunity." Clean energy Is "getting cheaper and creating jobs. ... In most countries, it is now cheaper to install new wind or solar power stations than new coal power plants. The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that shifting to renewables could grow the world economy by 1% a year until 2050, a cumulative gain of over US $52 trillion."
BlackRock is the world's largest asset management firm. It holds $7 trillion in investments. In January, its chief executive officer and executive committee wrote to investors, "We approach a period of significant capital reallocation" and "are on the edge of a fundamental reshaping of finance" because of climate.
The CEO announced these new practices for BlackRock: "exiting investments that present a high sustainability-related risk, such as thermal coal producers" and "launching new investment products that screen fossil fuels."
A successful transition, BlackRock's executive committee explains, will take decades and require coordination with governments, alignment with the goals of the Paris Agreement and a price on carbon.
A very similar January call to action was made by the Bank for International Settlements, which acts as a bank for central banks. On their website, BIS published "The Green Swan: central banking and financial stability in the age of climate change."
It calls for coordination of policies such as carbon pricing and the integration of sustainability goals into financial practices and accounting frameworks. It examines unpredictable risks, the possibility of irreversibility and the chances of reaching tipping points like the melting of the permafrost with release of large amounts of carbon. It reports that "We face a situation of deep uncertainty related to the biochemical processes that can be triggered

by climate change."
All three reports endorse putting a price on carbon. Now that both Republicans and Democrats recognize the need for action on climate volatility, the next challenge is to build bipartisan agreement for many solutions, from a trillion trees to a tax on carbon with all the funds collected to be distributed to the American people.
People in a position to know are telling us climate is a very big problem. We need many ways of addressing it, and we need them soon.
Marilyn McNabb is a volunteer with the Citizens' Climate Lobby.

McCook Gazette: The morality of taxes

Oh the joy! It is the time of year to be working on income tax. It is a task that I have always accomplished on my own; admittedly over the past several years with the assistance of a software package for my computer. It is as always a learning task.
Doing your own taxes is a great, if sobering, review of how one is doing financially. Not only personally but also what is happening politically that trickles down to affect one's bottom line. I'm forever intrigued with my father's advice that there should be no withholding of taxes, that all should come due just before Election Day. Then only those who have paid taxes should be able to vote. Such would focus attention on any politician that votes to spend our taxes foolishly. It'll never happen yet I still think it a good idea.
A week or so ago our Governor Pete Ricketts wrote a piece "An honest look at marijuana." that was printed in the Gazette. Unlike a lot of politicians Gov. Ricketts is against the legalization of the weed and promotion of its use in the variety of forms we see today. Colorado has legalized the recreational use of marijuana and as a result has seen doubling the rate of fatal traffic accidents by drivers under the influence.
Currently there is a big effort in Nebraska to push the sale and use of oil extracted from the marijuana plant. CBD they call it and it is a remedy for anything that might be causing pain in one's body. Harmless, it contains no THC which is the ingredient from marijuana that affects the minds of those that use the drug for whatever reason. Yeah right! Who or what governmental regulating body checks on the potency of the drugs in CBD? Why is it that the FAA who regulates what medicines can be legally used by pilots bars the use of CBD?
Marijuana, the scientific name is Cannabis, originated in Central Asia. Under the generic name of hemp was imported to the US in the era of WWI as it was a source of fiber that was necessary in the manufacture of rope. Rope was a necessity of sailing ships and farmers were encouraged to grow it. When sailing ships, and most usages of rope in the farming industry, fell out of favor the growing of hemp also went by the wayside. The plant adapted itself to our farmlands and continued to grow unaided as a weed.
I grew up on a farm just a few miles south of McCook. Our neighbor, Bob Kelly had acres of river bottom pasture and Bob, a WWII pilot veteran pointed out the patches of marijuana that grew in several areas. Bob was somewhat younger than my dad and would laugh about livestock eating too much of the plant and acting goofy. He also mentioned that some dummies smoked the stuff to get "high". To my knowledge no one in this area ever used the stuff.
Probably some 25 to 30 years later I was raising a family and was stationed in the San Juaquin Valley of California. That was the time of hippies and war protestors and drug use was a way to step out from the world. With family we were strolling in the Merced City Park one evening when walking past a group of young people the familiar smell of weeds burning in the road ditches, scenes and smells from my childhood back home in Nebraska, came vividly back to me. Ditch weed burning; the young people there were smoking marijuana. Some later a California friend Jim Glidden who worked in the County of Merced Division of weights and measures was chiding me about Merced County having a higher gross dollar output of agriculture than the whole state of Nebraska. The next revelation that the highest value of any crop produced there was thought to be marijuana. It was grown openly and the really good stuff was produced in hippy's basements under controlled lighting conditions and water bed mattresses were popularly used as water reservoirs to grow the stuff hydroponically. That was some 50 years ago but reportedly the same kind of operation is currently happening in the old WPA school building close by in Traer, Kansas.
Prohibition back in the 1930s is always cast as a failure. Well in respect to taxes, funds raised for government, it was. However if one observes that there was a whole lot less alcohol brought across the Kansas-Nebraska border

in the trunk of the bootleggers cars than comes across regularly now by semi-trailer. Probably the same will be true, marijuana in the trunks of drug trafficker's vehicles coming from Colorado now than when it becomes legal and will be imported by the semi- load if legalized in the future.
In the mid 1940s my father sold a section of ground, mainly grassland, to Ed Oren, neighbor and well known bootlegger. Ed liked Fords because they were fast and he told one story of being pursued by the Feds. He was running lights off at night and pulled off the country road into a canyon filled with tumble weeks. Ed hopped out, threw some weeds over the hole in the weeds that he had made on the way in and kept quiet. The Feds never found him that long night.
On settlement day to purchase our farm, Ed showed up at the lawyer's office to do paperwork. He also carried a couple of brief cases containing stacks of cash, ones, fives, tens and twenties. No checks just cash plus one loaded 45 caliber pistol. Humm I wonder where all those cash notes came from? Do you suppose that he paid taxes on the proceeds of the multiple sales of "goods" from his trunk?
The trouble with prohibiting drugs like marijuana and alcohol is that people will find a way to get them anyway and the government will miss its cut. Best I can tell is that taxes from the sale of liquor in 2018 brought in some $360+ million to the State of Nebraska's coffers. Governor Ricketts and our Legislature are looking hard for a way to reduce property taxes. I consider Governor Ricketts a brave and moral man to overlook the easy money that legalizing recreational marijuana could bring in taxes. I agree with him that the human cost of approving the use of marijuana would not be worth the tradeoff and I applaud his stance on the matter.
That is the way I saw it.
Dick Trail

OWH: Sasse seeks support for 'abortion survivors' bill, which fell short of advancing last year

WASHINGTON — Sen. Ben Sasse opened a Tuesday hearing by stressing he wasn't there to persuade colleagues who support abortion rights to join him at next year's March For Life.
But the Nebraska Republican said he does hope more Democrats will back his Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act.
"This hearing is about making sure that every newborn baby has a fighting chance — whether she's born in a labor and delivery ward or whether she's born in an abortion clinic," Sasse said.
The Sasse legislation would require "in the case of an abortion or attempted abortion that results in a child born alive," any health care provider present must act to preserve the life of the child just like any other born alive at the same gestational age. Penalties include up to five years in prison.
Three Senate Democrats supported the legislation when it came up for a vote in the Senate a year ago, but that 53-44 tally was still short of the 60 votes required to break filibusters and advance legislation.
Sasse needs a few more Democrats to cross the aisle in order to move the bill forward.
Backers say the proposal represents critical protections for the most vulnerable. And they describe blocking the bill as de facto support for infanticide.
Critics have rejected that, however, suggesting that the real purpose of the measure is to intimidate health care professionals into refusing to provide abortions. They say the bill is vague and focuses on gestational age, ignoring potentially complicated medical circumstances. They say that infanticide has always been illegal and that if there were any confusion about the matter, a 2002 federal law made clear that infants born alive are considered persons.
Backers of Sasse's bill say that law is only "definitional" and lacks any enforcement mechanisms or criminal penalties.
Democrats who attended Tuesday's Senate Judiciary Committee session characterized the proposal as an unnecessary and dangerous intrusion by the federal government. They pointed to opposition from groups such as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which said in a statement that the proposal is not based on medical science.
"S. 311 uses dangerous rhetoric that undermines the public trust in obstetrician-gynecologists, stigmatizes necessary health care for women and callously disregards the tragedies and difficult decisions women and their families face," according to the group.

Advocates for both sides testified at Tuesday's hearing.
Dr. Robin Pierucci, a clinical neonatologist, described the lengths to which providers go to care for tiny babies born extremely premature.
"There is no ethical reason why this medical standard of care should be abandoned for a subgroup of people because they might be less 'wanted' than others," Pierucci said. "Wantedness does not determine humanness."
On the other side, Erika Christensen described being 30 weeks pregnant when she and her husband learned that fetal growth had stopped and no treatment existed that could turn things around.
Carrying to term would have meant giving birth to a dying baby and endangering her own health, so they opted to terminate the pregnancy.
"Had I sought to end my pregnancy by early induction — and this bill had been law — my doctors could have been required to commence extreme measures on a baby who could never breathe, regardless of the futility of such measures," Christensen said. "This does not sound like compassion to me."
Sasse disputed that the bill would require intense medical intervention when it comes to babies who cannot survive.
Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, thanked Christensen for sharing her story but said her testimony was "neither here nor there on this bill."
Ernst held up a tiny diaper from the University of Iowa Children's Hospital and recounted the story of Micah Pickering, a native of Newton, Iowa, born prematurely at 22 weeks.
Micah visited her office a few years later, Ernst said, and spotted a photo of himself hooked up to tubes in the hospital. He pointed to that picture and exclaimed "a baby!"
Ernst said it brought tears to her eyes.
"That is a baby," Ernst said. "Now, we as a society will be judged on how we handle the most vulnerable in our society whether they're wanted or not."
By Joseph Morton

AP: Hemp prices plunge as CBD demand falls

NEW YORK — It may not be apparent when you're spending $70 on CBD foot cream, but hemp prices are plunging amid a "grossly oversupplied" market, according to the head of the industry's first price provider.
Hemp biomass prices reached a high of more than $40 a pound in July, just before the 2019 harvest came in, according to PanXchange Chief Executive Officer Julie Lerner. Today, it's trading less than $10 a pound following a quadrupling of supply from 2018 to 2019.
Meanwhile, the CBD consumer market remains limited as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration continues to prohibit the extract in food or dietary supplements, although many sellers ignore that mandate. CBD is legal in other uses, such as topicals, as long as it contains less than 0.3% THC, the cannabis compound that gets you high.
"Every way you slice it, the physical demand for the CBD market is much, much smaller" then the supply, Lerner said in an interview. "I'm a little surprised that retail prices have not started to come down yet. There's so much competition."
Lerner, a former Cargill trader, founded PanXchange in 2011. It started as a trading platform and benchmark pricing service for commodities in East Africa, then expanded into the U.S. via the specialty sand market for oil and gas. PanXchange launched the hemp industry's first suite of benchmark prices in January 2019, one month after the U.S. farm bill legalized the plant, and added a trading platform in August.
Today, the hemp market is "rife with desperate sellers and opportunist buyers," Lerner said in her December analysis of the industry. She looked at three measures of potential CBD demand and found in each case that farmers are growing far more hemp than the industry needs.
For example, Lerner estimated that Charlotte's Web Holdings Inc., the largest publicly traded CBD company, needed less than 500 acres of hemp to service an estimated $95 million of sales in 2019. Assuming Charlotte's Web accounts for about 2.4% of the $4 billion U.S. CBD market, that means about 20,000 acres of hemp are needed in total.
Instead, Lerner estimated that about 115,000 acres were harvested in 2019. And it's only going to get worse.
"We are hearing that despite the losses people have had this year, they're still going to increase plantings, and

you have Texas, Florida, Wyoming and a bunch of late-comers that are just starting this crop year," she said. Nebraska legalized growing hemp last year.

Lerner predicted that industrial demand for hemp will eventually dwarf the CBD market, but that won't happen until prices drop even more.

"It's a little bit chicken and egg," she said. "There won't be demand for it until prices drop, and people won't be planting for the industrial fiber market until there's huge demand for it, so we've got to get over that hump first."

Meanwhile, U.S. prices for cannabis also fell in most states and categories in 2019 — the opposite of the trend seen north of the border.

An analysis by wholesale cannabis marketplace LeafLink found that statewide pricing across categories fell in every legal state except Washington and Oregon. Prices also dropped in all categories except for edibles and ingestibles.

Notably, prices for smokable flower dropped 8% nationwide, with California prices falling 21% and Oregon tumbling 24%. "This is likely due to the proliferation of non-flower-related products as these two markets reach maturity," LeafLink said in its report.

Despite the price increases in 2019, Washington remained the cheapest state to buy cannabis because of "product oversaturation," LeafLink said. The most expensive state is Alaska, with its "exceptionally high logistics and shipping costs."

By Kristine Owram

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