**For Release Wednesday, March 25, 2020**

**Capitol View
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**The Nebraska Press Association**

**May You Live in Interesting Times**

Somewhere years ago, I ran across an alleged Chinese proverb that read: “May you live in interesting times.” I think we’re there.

In an unprecedented move, the Speaker of the Legislature has placed the 106th Legislature on an indefinite adjournment until further notice. The announcement came March 16th, 24 hours before the 41st day of the 60-day session was to convene following a traditional four-day weekend. Such weekends often coincide with things like statewide basketball tournaments. Or blizzards.

The Nebraska Boys High School Basketball tournament was also one-of-a-kind historic, played before coaches and close family members at Lincoln venues without fans and cheerleaders and pep bands.

Speaker Jim Scheer of Norfolk said “We have made this decision primarily for the health and safety of the state and to protect the health of the members [of the Legislature]. The governor encouraged this weekend that public gatherings of more than 50 individuals should be postponed, a recommendation also made by the CDC.” Scheer said he had consulted Executive Board Chairman Sen. Mike Hilgers of Lincoln after speaking with public health officials, Governor Pete Ricketts and some senators.

It’s just another spin-off of the COVID-19, Coronavirus Pandemic that is gripping the world at this writing with no real relief in sight. Omaha has recorded a number of cases of the illness with community spread -- cases that are not tied to travel or connected to a person who has traveled.

Elsewhere in the Capital City, many churches have suspended their Sunday morning worship and weekly meetings, small group studies, youth group activities, etc. The Lied Center for Performing Arts on the University of

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Nebraska-Lincoln campus is looking at events on a case-by-case basis. Performers who were scheduled to play the Pinnacle Bank Arena have postponed shows to a later date.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Doane University, Southeast Community College and others have shut down in favor of on-line classes. Lincoln Public Schools are closed as teachers learn how to conduct school on-line for Second Graders and up using laptop computers.

Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird has declared a local emergency and a broad slate of operational changes that will alter the lives of thousands of residents. The declaration allows the city to receive potential state and federal reimbursement for crisis-related expenses and to access emergency reserve funds. The city will close all senior centers but work to ensure that senior meals will still be delivered.

The Parks and Recreation Department is suspending its before-and-after school programs, which serve about 400 children, until Lincoln Public Schools reopens. It’s also canceling all of its programming and classes at recreation centers.

As for the Legislature, remember they are required only to pass a budget before the next fiscal year, which starts in July. Budget debate commenced before they adjourned and passage can be accomplished in the remaining 20 days.

Of course, that leaves the big issues yet unresolved. Remember, several of those could be impacted by initiative petition measures that could appear on the November ballot.

Interesting times to say the least.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for 20 years.*