**For Release Wednesday, April 22, 2020**

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

**Happy Earth Day America, Here in Nebraska**

**We’re Acting Like What Pandemic?**

At this writing, there is still no mandatory “shelter-in-place” restriction in Nebraska, one of nine states to enjoy such “freedom.”

Just as I was about to laud Governor Pete Ricketts for his transparency in doing an afternoon COVID-19 news briefing five days a week to keep Nebraskans informed about the burgeoning pandemic, the Governor gets a letter from 45 doctors in Grand Island begging him to shut down the state.

Yes, these front-line medical professionals want the state’s elected Chief Executive to go beyond the “medical directive” which covers all 93 counties and requires restaurants to serve take-out only and other businesses to limit crowds to 10 or fewer and for everyone to practice social distancing. No mention of why the other states, representing most of the nation’s population, must be wrong and Nebraska is right.

It's obviously about state’s rights and Ricketts is obviously preening to be the poster boy for that movement. But I’m not sure why, given that he’s in his second term as governor and doesn’t appear to be running for any higher office – yet. Both Nebraska Senators and all three members of Congress are already Republicans, so there’s no opening there.

It’s been joked about for several years that Rickett’s father, Joe, the founder of the recently sold TD Ameritrade, wants his kid to be President of the United States. Who knows, maybe Pete wants that too and figures a presidential appointment – assuming the Republican incumbent wins re-election – would be his best ticket to the top.

He’s being strangely very political in a time of national crisis when people want leadership over partisanship. As I said, I was about to praise the

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Governor for being a leader and a great communicator. I don’t like the fact that he talks too fast and appears a bit too arrogant and condescending behind the podium. But he has been surrounding himself with the right state officials and getting some good information out there.

Sadly, we come back around to the refusal to order a “shelter-in-place” directive while the numbers of new cases and deaths increases exponentially. Questioned on it, by doctors and reporters, Ricketts clings to what is already in place as working for Nebraska. “One size doesn’t fit all,” he says.

But, most caskets are the same size, Governor. I would think that having the opportunity to prevent just one Nebraskan from being in one of those caskets would be a laudable goal.

So what does a sunny pandemic Sunday afternoon look like in my neighborhood? People and kids and their pets out in the yard, playing games and visiting and washing their cars in the driveway. Darned few of them wearing masks.

As I drove down the street with my windows up on my way to pick up curbside carry-out at a local restaurant where I would be greeted by a gloved and masked worker, I didn’t bother to count to see if there were no more than 10 people in a group and if they were all six-feet apart. I just saw people acting like everything is all right and there is no big health thing that is killing thousands of Americans. And I saw germs, lots of germs and a clear path to spreading them.

Is that on us? Or the people who lead us? Or both?

Wash your hands, Nebraska. Wear a mask in public and don’t touch your face!

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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.*