**For Release Wednesday, October 27, 2021**

**Capitol View
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**State Launches Pandemic Relief Funded Advertising Campaign**

"Nebraska is one big, small town.”

If you are here now or are from here, you’ve probably heard that before. Someone who knows where you are from will ask if you know so-and-so or are related to someone they know in that part of the state. If you haven’t heard it, at least you understand it.

The Governor said it recently when he announced the launch of a $10 million national marketing campaign funded by federal CARES Act money to attract people to come to Nebraska for jobs and to enjoy "the good life" that the state can provide.

The Return to the Good Life campaign initially will be targeted to audiences in the Kansas City, Denver, Chicago and Minneapolis media markets. Those are major urban areas within 500 miles of Nebraska.

Governor Pete Ricketts said the state would also be testing the campaign in places like Silicon Valley and Austin, Texas.

"The Good Life is Calling" includes commercials and social media videos voiced by Omaha native Adam DeVine. It also includes a website featuring Nebraska stories, statistics and resources. In the latest report from the Nebraska Department of Labor, the state had 22,364 unemployed individuals. Ricketts noted there are currently around 50,000 open jobs on the NEWorks site and it’s time to let the world know that.

The commercials, currently available at TheGoodLifeisCalling.com and on YouTube, will be broken into 30-second segments for advertising, Anthony Goins, director of the Department of Economic Development, said. The campaign was developed in partnership with Archrival, a creative agency with a national reach that is headquartered in Lincoln.

**For Release Wednesday, October 27, 2021 – Page 2**

"We have to keep the economic engine going," Archrival CEO and founder Clint Runge said. "We believe Nebraska can be an ideal landing spot for many people looking for business opportunities, to start a family or to relocate for a better cost of living."

But would that necessarily be a small town given concerns about infrastructure such as internet access, distance to medical facilities and shopping, even some basic quality of life things. Yes, the “good life” is an intriguing concept. But define “good.”

John Mellencamp romanticized small towns decades ago in a song by that name:

“Well, I was born in a small town
And I live in a small town
Probably die in a small town
Oh, those small communities.”

We know those places. Ricketts said he hopes young Nebraskans who may have left will consider coming back to raise their families here. And he said Nebraska should be attractive to people who may be "looking for a better quality of life." Goins said the state is "a welcoming home for all walks of life." That’s arguable.

One might naturally assume that major population centers would be more attractive to lure returnees.

Mellencamp sang:

“Got nothing against a big town
Still hayseed enough to say
Look who's in the big town
But my bed is in a small town
Oh, and that's good enough for me.”

Ricketts, Goins and Runge explained that the good life calling is all about welcoming communities – again, arguable – and work-life balance and widespread opportunities. Then there’s lower than national average costs on housing, utilities, transportation and health costs. The commercials tout things such as a smile, a head nod, a wave, and a door held open for you. The small things that make a community. The best state for the middle class.

**For Release Wednesday, October 27, 2021 – Page 3**

I’m hopeful that this campaign will meet the expectations of supporters. If there’s quantifiable evidence of success, I’d like to see it released to the public.

What I’d really like to see is that $10 million used on tangible projects to revitalize Nebraska’s small towns. Helping small businesses to thrive gives me a warmer feeling than inviting ex-pats to come back home.

I will admit that I still like the Nebraska Tourism Commission’s self-deprecating 2019 campaign: “Nebraska. Honestly, it’s not for everyone.”

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