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Wednesday, July 16, 2025

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Going up against Dollar General

Nebraska grocery stores
close as chain expands

NATALIA ALAMDARI
Flatwater Free Press

OAKLAND — If you drive down U.S. 77, you won't see the grocery store that has managed to keep afloat in this town for more than 100 years. It's five blocks off the highway, on Oakland's main drag.

What you will see is a bright yellow sign, beckoning highway drivers to make a pit stop. You'll see the beige cinder block storefront and metal warehouse walls plopped between cornfields and the highway.

In small-town Nebraska, it's an instantly recognizable sight. It's the Dollar General.

Over the past 25 years, Dollar General stores have become a fixture of the retail landscape in rural Nebraska. In 2000, the only Dollar Generals in the state were in Omaha and Lincoln, according to a Flatwater Free Press analysis of Nebraska grocery store permits.

Now, there are 142 chain "dollar" stores — 115 of them Dollar Generals — located in Nebraska towns with a population smaller than 10,000.

In that same amount of time, the number of grocery stores in those small cities and villages has shrunk from 326 to 272.

"A grocery store is about quality of life," said Charlotte Narjes, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln expert in helping rural grocery stores stay sustainable. "It truly is an anchor institution for many of our rural communities."

Local grocery stores matter, experts say, because they're often a community gathering space and often the last line of defense keeping a town from becoming a "food desert" where residents can't

Please see DOLLAR, Page A6



KENNETH FERRIERA, JOURNAL STAR

Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen will seek the steepest cuts to the state's budget since at least 1982 next year in a move that could cost state employees their jobs.

PILLEN SEEKS CUTS

Governor hopes to slash \$500M from state budget

ANDREW WEGLEY
Lincoln Journal Star

Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen will seek a 10% cut to the state's general fund budget next year in a move that a member of Pillen's cabinet acknowledged could cost some state employees their jobs and that critics warned would deal a blow to state services.

A spokeswoman for Pillen's office confirmed to the Journal Star the governor has asked leaders of Nebraska's code agencies — the state departments whose directors are appointed by Pillen — to "identify

savings opportunities equivalent to 10% reductions" ahead of next year's legislative session.

Lee Will, Nebraska's chief operating officer and a member of Pillen's cabinet, said the executive branch also expects non-code agencies like the University of Nebraska system and the offices of elected leaders like the state's auditor and attorney general "are also looking at their budget" for cuts.



Pillen



Will

In a Tuesday phone interview, Will told the Journal Star the governor's goal is to cut \$500 million from the state's budget — nearly 10% of the \$5.57 billion general fund budget for the 2026-27 fiscal year lawmakers approved in May — which Will acknowledged is a "really lofty expectation" that he predicted would

Please see PILLEN, Page A2

Fire spread after 'controlled burn'

Blaze levels historic
Grand Canyon Lodge

ROSS D. FRANKLIN AND JOHN SEEWER
Associated Press

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, Ariz. — A wildfire that tore through a historic Grand Canyon lodge and raged out of control Monday was allowed to burn for days before erupting over the weekend, raising scrutiny over the National Park Service's decision not to aggressively attack the fire right away.

The wildfire along the canyon's more isolated North Rim, where most visitors don't venture, burned quickly with no containment, fire officials said. No injuries were reported, but more than 70 structures were lost, including a visitors center and several cabins.

At first, the fire didn't raise alarms after igniting from a lightning strike July 4. Four days later, the Park Service said the fire was being allowed to burn to benefit the land and fire crews were keeping close watch.

"There are no threats to infrastructure or public safety at this time," the park said on Facebook.

Three days later, fire officials and the park service sent out warnings to "evacuate immediately" as the fire grew by nearly eight times within a day to more than 1.4 square miles (3.6 square kilometers).

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs called for a federal investigation into the park service's handling of the fire.

Please see FIRE, Page A2



COURTESY PHOTO

This photo provided by Caren Carney shows the family's view of fires over the Grand Canyon after they had to evacuate Grand Canyon Lodge, a historic lodge on the North Rim, in northern Arizona, July 10.

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