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NEBRASKA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

Lawmakers, nonprofit leaders and former Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne join Gov. Jim Pillen in February 2023 as he proposes a new state-funded initiative to support mentorship programs. Since its creation later that year, the program has awarded \$14.5 million in grants. Of that, 80% has gone to TeamMates Mentoring, a nonprofit founded by Osborne.

TeamMates gets \$11.6M from mentoring initiative

SARA GENTZLER
Flatwater Free Press

A month after taking office, Gov. Jim Pillen stepped to the mic, flanked by lawmakers and leaders from Nebraska nonprofits, and announced an initiative close to his heart: State money to support mentorship programs.

Now, three years later, that Pillen-pitched initiative has awarded \$11.6 million in taxpayer dollars — nearly 80% of the total awarded funding — to one nonprofit: TeamMates Mentoring.

The remainder has gone to 16 other nonprofits.

State leaders said the grant program, READ Nebraska, aimed to use mentorship to boost lagging reading skills among elementary school students. TeamMates, the nonprofit founded by Pillen's former coach, Husker football legend Tom Osborne, was well-positioned to accomplish that goal.

"Through READ Nebraska, thousands of mentors are equipping students with reading skills that are foundational to aca-

demic and career success," said Maureen Larsen, director of the Department of Economic Development, which distributes the grants. "This investment in our kids, reading and mentoring will make a generational difference."

But the overall picture raises questions about the program and bias, said Gavin Geis, executive director of government watchdog organization Common Cause Nebraska.

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NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

TeamMates Mentoring CEO DeMoineAdams speaks at a 2025 press event where the state announced the 2025 recipients of the READ Nebraska grants. Since READ Nebraska's launch, TeamMates has received \$11.6 million, nearly 80% of all the money awarded by the program. Pitched by Gov. Jim Pillen in 2023, READ Nebraska aims to boost elementary school reading proficiency by supporting mentorship programs.

DOJ aims to cut off cartels' money

ALANNA DURKIN RICHER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department took direct aim at the financial lifelines of Mexico's most violent drug cartels, targeting money brokers who prosecutors say adapted to intensified enforcement by increasingly routing drug profits through cryptocurrency from American cities to cartel leaders in Mexico.

The cases of four defendants recently sent from Mexico to the U.S. for prosecution provide a glimpse into shadowy money laundering networks that allow the Jalisco New Generation Cartel and other violent groups to continue pumping dangerous drugs into American communities. The prosecutions underscore the Justice Department's efforts to turn up the pres-

sure on cartels and stay ahead of their sophisticated and ever-evolving tactics to launder money across the border without detection.

By targeting alleged money brokers — rather than street-level traffickers — prosecutors say they aimed at a choke point they believe is essential to the cartels sustaining their operations as law enforcement pressure mounts on more visible drug routes.

"If you cut off the money, you hurt the cartels, and that's what we're trying to do," A. Tysen Duva, the assistant attorney general in charge of the Justice Department's criminal division, said in an interview.

Since the start of President Donald Trump's second

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JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON, ASSOCIATED PRESS

The U.S. Department of Justice logo is seen on a podium. Senior Justice Department officials say bringing cartel figures to the U.S. is designed to do more than be a deterrent message. It could also lead to indictments against other high-level leaders if defendants cooperate.

After 2-day closure, border point reopens

The Rafah crossing's opening is part of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas

SAMY MAGDY AND MELANIE LIDMAN
Associated Press

CAIRO — A limited number of Palestinians traveled Sunday between Gaza and Egypt as the Rafah crossing reopened after a two-day closure, Egyptian state media reported.

The vital border point opened last week for the first time since mid-2024, one of the main requirements for the U.S.-backed ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The crossing was closed Friday and Saturday because of confusion around operations.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said 17 medical evacuees and 27 companions had begun the crossing into Egypt. The same number was expected to travel to Gaza. Israel didn't immediately confirm it.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was expected to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday in Washington, though the major subject of discussion will be Iran, his office said.

Over the first four days of the crossing's opening, just 36 Palestinians requiring medical care were allowed to leave for Egypt, plus 62 companions, according to U.N. data. Rafah's reopening came after Israel retrieved the remains of the last hostage in Gaza and U.S. officials visited Israel to apply pressure.

Palestinian officials say nearly 20,000 people in Gaza want to leave for medical care that isn't available in the war-shattered territory.

A group of Palestinian patients gathered Sunday in the courtyard of a Red Crescent hospital in Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis before making their way to the crossing for treatment abroad, family members told The Associated Press.

Amjad Abu Jedian, injured in the war, had been scheduled to leave for medical treatment on the first day of the crossing's reopening, but only five patients were allowed to travel, said his mother, Raja Abu Jedian. He was shot by an Israeli sniper while doing building work in the central Bureij refugee camp in July 2024, she said.

On Saturday, his family received a call from the World Health Organization about traveling on Sunday, she said.

"We want them to take care of the patients (during their evacuation)," she said. "We want the Israeli military not to burden them."

A group of Palestinians arrived Sunday at the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing to return to Gaza, Egypt's state-run Al-Qahira News satellite television reported.

Palestinians who returned to Gaza in the first few days of the crossing's operation described hours of delays and invasive searches by Israeli authorities and an Israeli-backed Palestinian armed group, Abu Shabab. Israel denied mistreatment.

A European Union mission and Palestinian officials run the border crossing, and Israel has its screening facility some distance away.

The Rafah crossing, a lifeline for Gaza, was the only one not controlled by Israel before the war. Israel seized the Palestinian side in May 2024, though traffic through the crossing was heavily restricted even before that.

Restrictions negotiated by Israeli, Egyptian, Palestinian and international officials mean that only 50 people will be allowed to return to Gaza each day and 50 medical patients — with two companions for each — will be allowed to leave, but far fewer people have crossed so far.

A senior Hamas official, Khaled Mashaal, said the militant group is open to discuss the future of its weapons as part of a "balanced

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