Today is the deadline to enroll for health insurance under the Affordable Act. This year, the enrollment period is shorter and it seems Nebraskans are aware and have been signing up. “I think the last numbers I heard it was a little more than 54,000 Nebraskans have signed up,” Nebraska Department of Insurance Director Bruce Ramge tells Nebraska Radio Network. There are two ways to enroll: through an insurance agent or online at Healthcare.gov. Medica is the only insurance company offering plans through the ACA in Nebraska. But, Ramge notes though only one insurer participates, it does offer several plans. Ramge says it is important participants make sure they are getting the plan they want; one which their preferred doctor or hospital accepts. If you think you can’t afford health insurance, you might want to check it out. “Many people, depending on their income level, might qualify for a premium subsidy,” according to Ramge. “So, that's important to know.” Data won't be available for a while, but it appears more Nebraskans are signing up through the ACA than a year ago. Free assistance from certified program counselors is available by calling 211.

AAA PREDICTING RECORD TRAVEL
Nebraskans who don’t have travel plans over the next few weeks are in the minority. AAA is predicting record travel, both in Nebraska and nationwide, for the upcoming Christmas and New Year’s holidays. Gail Weinholzer, at AAA-Nebraska, says more than 107-million Americans will be traveling at least 50 miles from home between December 23rd and January 1st. “There’s going to be a lot of people traveling and there’s been a lot people traveling all year,” Weinholzer says. “We’ve seen year-over-year increases for every major holiday this year, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving and now Christmas/New Year’s. Clearly, Americans are traveling in robust numbers and we expect that to continue into 2018.” This will be the highest year-end travel volume on record and 2017 marks the ninth consecutive year of rising year-end travel. Nebraska’s interstates and highways will be busy, so Weinholzer says to plan accordingly. “Actually, we are seeing increases across the board, personal automobiles, planes, trains, buses, everything,” Weinholzer says. “We’re seeing a significant increase and overall, the increase is 3.1% over last year.”

UPDATE ON STATE HIRING FREEZE
Governor Pete Ricketts this week delivered an update on a state hiring freeze which has reduced the size and scope of the state’s workforce. Starting in October 2016, the hiring freeze has targeted the reduction of non-essential state jobs as a tool to help the state manage budget reductions and make more efficient use of taxpayer dollars. “During times of budget restraint, my administration is successfully controlling state spending by eliminating non-essential positions through attrition and retirement,” said Governor Ricketts. “We’re working to exercise the same fiscal responsibility shown by Nebraskans in their households by doing more with less in state government. It’s the right thing to do.” The headcount in the Governor’s agencies was 13,786 in October 2016, and had been reduced to 13,302 as of December 1, 2017. Overall to date, there are 484 fewer personnel working in the Governor’s agencies, which is more than 3.5 percent fewer than October 2016. This count exempts National Guard who were on temporary deployment for hurricane relief efforts. All guard members previously deployed for relief efforts have returned to the state.
Nebraska will take on Florida Saturday for the NCAA volleyball championship in Kansas City. The Huskers survived a match point and rallied for a five set victory over top ranked Penn State and will be in search of their second national title in three years. The Huskers are 31-4 and handed Penn State both of its losses. “The Big Ten prepares us for matches like these”, said Nebraska coach John Cook. “There is never any panic on our side and they just continue to grind through it. It is a great win and I’m just really happy for these guys. They showed what they are all about and that is why they are Big Ten champions.” With the win, Nebraska advanced to the NCAA Final for the second time in three seasons and for the eighth time in program history (third-most in NCAA history). The Huskers will go for their fifth national title on Saturday. John Cook has taken a Husker team to the NCAA Final for the fifth time in his 18 seasons at Nebraska, and he will go for his fourth national title on Saturday. Florida defeated Stanford in five sets in the other national semifinal.

The McCook Bison basketball teams are back at home tonight and tomorrow. North Platte is in town for a girls-boys doubleheader tonight at the MHS gym. Girls pregame coverage on KICX starts at 5:40 with tip-off at 6. The boys game will follow. The Bison will host the Holdrege Dusters tomorrow night. Girls pregame coverage on KICX begins at 4:40 with tip-off at 5 and the boys game will follow. Southwest will travel to Arapahoe on 103.9 The Hawk. Girls pregame coverage begins at around 5:15 with tip-off at around 5:40. The Bison wrestlers head to Valentine for a two-day invite and the Bison swimmers/divers compete in the Scottsbluff Invite today.

S P O R T S

ACROSS

1 Viper
2 Resort hotel
3 Average work performance
4 Chirping sound
5 Green Gables dweller
6 Like some S.W. walls
7 Hin
8 Arkansas
9 Intolerant
10 Slinger
11 Cow sound
12 Empty spaces
13 Capital of the Bahamas
14 French Painter, “Sunday Afternoon…”
15 Clairvoyance
16 Arkansas
17 Him
18 Like some S.W. walls
19 Untied
20 Not as insane
21 Take off
22 Mislaid
23 Recess
24 Japanese city
25 Whoop
26 Pairs
27 Waterless
28 Resort hotel
29 Very large truck
30 Computer makers
31 Average work performance
32 Pastime
33 Chirping sound
34 Like some S.W. walls
35 Open
36 Ocean floor
37 Environmental protection agency (abbr.)
38 S.W. walls
39 Environmental protection agency (abbr.)
40 Winged
41 Spr. month
42 Acting (abbr.)
43 Tiny body part
44 Anger
45 Biological group (abbr.)
46 Not (refix)
47 Biological group (abbr.)
48 Skin
49 Biological group (abbr.)
50 Clothing size
51 Biological group (abbr.)
52 Biological group (abbr.)
53 Teacher’s assistant, for short

DOWN

1 American College of Physicians (abbr.)
2 Resort hotel
3 Average work performance
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