Telephone conference report held on Feb. 7

Capitol Happenings

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Senator Mark Christensen's bill, LB 646, advanced to second reading Monday on a 28-1 vote, but the bill dealing with emergency medical service definitions faced some opposition during debate.

During his weekly teleconference Tuesday, Christensen explained the bill would broaden the definition of emergency medical services (EMS) but does not broaden the type of services an EMS technician could deliver.

Nebraska statute currently defines an Emergency Medical Service as an organization responding to a perceived individual need for "immediate" medical care in order to prevent loss of life or aggravation of physiological or psychological illness or injury.

LB 646 removes the word "immediate," which would allow EMS to provide the same medical services in a non-emergency setting on a scheduled or on-call basis.

Christensen emphasized the bill does not change the scope of practice for the level the service is licensed at.

The EMS and its employees and volunteers would still be required to conintue to operate under the statutes, which require supervision of a physician, medical director and the Nebraska Emergency Medical Services Board.

In addition, this change would allow an EMS to provide education and follow-up patient care in a non-emergency or non-hospital setting helping to increase access to care and to lower costs to both the patient and the medical providers.

He said this is especially critical to rural and under-served areas of the State, especially if home health services are lost.

He said there are many instances when volunteer and paid EMS workers are on duty or on call at sporting events, hospital/nursing home transfers etc... and are "technically" not responding to someone that may need "immediate medical care."

He said the bill would remedy the use of 'immediate' and prevent an EMS worker from potential liability.

Christensen said the nurses are opposed to the bill and didn't know what to expect opposition-wise on second reading.

LB 677

Christensen said he will continue support of LB 677 introduced by Senator Steve Lathrop. The bill was debated on the floor last week and advanced to select file.

The bill would increase penalties for assault on a health care professional while the health care professional is engaged in the performance of official duties.

Despite the invigorating floor debate regarding the imperfections of the bill, he said it does seem to hold some validity in protecting health care professionals that may be harmed not only by patients but by family and friends in a health service setting.

An amendment to the billredefines health care professional as "a physician or other health care practitioner who is licensed, certified, or registered to perform specified health services constant with state law who is practicing at a house or health clinic."

Lengthy debate on LB 540

Christensen said they spent a lot of debate on LB 540 which deals with providing a Medicaid waiver to provide medical assistance for family planning services for poverty-level Medicaid clients.

The income threshold is for persons whose family's earned income is at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

Christensen said the debate turned ugly when the focus shifted to a debate on abortion and money for Planned Parenthood.

He guessed the issue would consume all eight hours of allowable debate, followed by a vote to end the filibuster situation.

Other bills

LB 536 would allow land to be transferred after death without having to go through probate. The land owner would give non-binding title of the land before death. Upon death, the land would transfer directly, avoiding probate cost. The bill advanced to Select File.

A bill to create an entertainment zone for the new arena area in Lincoln has been introduced. It would allow open containers of alcohol in the new zone.

Christensen said enforcing the rule would be up to the Lincoln police. He noted the state patrol is fine with the local control issue in the bill.

The Natural Resources Committee heard testimony on establishing mountain lion hunting season. He said the hearing brought out a lot of people in opposition.

Christensen said the Game & Parks came in neutral on a bill that would allow farmers to get permits to control deer population when significant crop damage occurs, due to the deer.

They would like some involvement in determining whether the damage incurred would justify the permits.

LB 1043 would allow public power districts in the state to offer a locked, flat-rate electric rate for five years as part of an economic development incentive package to businesses who qualify for the Nebraska Advantage Act.

The bill would prohibit the districts from selling power below cost and provide an alternative to selling excess energy out of state. The bill did advance out of committee.

LB 1092 would create rules on how to dispose of energy-saving light bulbs that contain mercury.

Christensen said it was an interesting debate, leading back to the question that if mercury is such a hazard, why not just continue to allow the use of incandescent bulbs? For now, Congress halted a mandate in December that would have prohibited use of incandescent bulbs by October, 2012.

Senator MARK CHRISTENSEN holds weekly teleconferences at 7 a.m. MT/8 a.m. CT each Tuesday morning. The public is invited to attend the conference calls. Hosts of the conference calls are Imperial Republican in Imperial, Southwest Public Power District in Palisade and Midwest Electric in Grant. Christensen can be reached at 402-471-2805, or by mail at P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509, or via e-mail at mchristensen@leg.ne.gov.