

Keystone pipeline issue not going away

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Friday, 02 March 2012 19:33 - Last Updated Friday, 02 March 2012 19:35

By Mark Christensen

State Sen. 44th District

At the Legislature this week we will begin full day debate on the floor. The Speaker of the Legislature released his priority bills and I was pleased to find out that my bill, LB 1125, was chosen as one of them.

This bill would allow for the rebate of the occupation tax on land in conservation programs that is not being irrigated.

Despite the President's denial of TransCanada's permit for the Keystone XL Pipeline, the issue continues to make a splash here at the Capitol.

I would like to discuss LB 1161, in relation to the events surrounding the pipeline issue in Nebraska.

During the special session of 2011, Nebraska passed, LB 1, legislation allowing the Nebraska Department of Environmental Equality to work on a state funded supplemental environmental impact study with the U.S. State Department to help develop a route around the Sandhills.

It also allowed the governor to have final review of the project. The Federal Pipeline Safety Act has exclusive control over pipeline safety.

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President Obama's decision to deny the federal permit of TransCanada has also ended Nebraska's state funded supplemental study for Trans-Canada's application. This leads us to the need for LB 1161.

In light of the events that have occurred since the special session, Sen. Jim Smith of Omaha introduced and prioritized LB 1161 for the 2012 Legislative Session. This is an important bill for our state as well as the many Nebraskans who voiced their concern with the original pipeline route.

President Obama's denial of the permit denotes that Trans-Canada will have to re-apply for a permit. If a new permit is applied for, the application would fall under the Major Oil Pipeline Siting Act, giving the Public Service Commission the authority to site the pipeline route.

This puts the state in jeo-pardy for a potential study to be done on the original pipeline route, through the Sandhills. Senator Smith's, LB 1161 with AM 1984 would allow the DEQ to continue their current study of a re-route for the TransCanada Keystone XL oil pipeline projects and reduce the chances that a pipeline will be routed through the Sandhills.

I agree with Senator Smith that the pipeline is an issue that should continue forward, for the betterment of our state. In the meantime the Natural Resource Committee has decided to wait for a statement to be made by the Governor before the bill will move forward out of committee.

Teleconference call

During his weekly teleconference Tuesday, Christensen said they spent considerable time Monday debating the need for a voter identification system in the state.

Debate was ceased without any action but will come back up for debate later this week.

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Christensen's LB 950, which would return NRD loan repayments to a revolving water cash fund, is expected to come up later this week as well.

But in between, the Legislature will be discussing five different bills dealing with the child welfare situation in the state.

Christensen expects some lively and intense debate on the issue.

Christensen said he believes the whole child welfare system be stripped from the Department of Health and Human Services, with the possibility for a whole new department just for that.

He feels that better fiscal responsibility within the program and better training of caseworkers would go a long ways to solving the problems being faced by the state.

The state privatized the system several years ago but has all but collapsed after several private contractors pulled out of the system.

Christensen said LB 653, which would allow the inter-basin transfer of non-appropriated flood waters, has developed opposition.

The Department of Natural Resources is saying this can already be done without further legislation. In addition, a number of parties submitted written testimony in opposition.

The way it looks now, Christensen said, is that the bill will be gutted and replaced with a study to move water from wells drilled near Nebraska Public Power's Gerald Gentleman generating station near Sutherland.

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Christensen said these wells have the potential to pump more than 65,000 gallons per minute. If pumped in the winter season when NPPD wouldn't be using them, that water could go a long way towards keeping the state in compliance with Kansas.

Questions or comments? Contact Senator Mark R. Christensen or staff at the information below.

Senator MARK CHRISTENSEN's address is c/o State Capitol, P.O. Box 94604, Rm. 1000, Lincoln, NE 68509, Phone 402-471-2805, email: mchristensen@leg.ne.gov.