By Mark Christensen

State Sen. 44th District

Last week we debated many bills, and fortunately one of those bills was my bill, LB950. The bill was designated a priority bill by the Natural Resources Committee. I would like to discuss this bill in more detail this week.

LB950 would redirect the remaining repayments from the Republican River Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) from the Water Contingency Cash Fund to the Water Resources Cash Fund. It advanced to the second round of debate (Select File) with a 29-0 vote.

If you recall, the NRDs were given an $8.5 million loan for the state in 2008, pursuant to LB1094, to pay for stored water that was sent to Kansas in 2007 to meet compact compliance with Kansas.

The NRDs were required by the Legislature to repay the state by 2013. LB950 seek to use a portion of those repayments from the Republican Basin NRDs to further fund water needs in Nebraska.

The Legislature has made it clear over the last several years that wisely managing and protecting Nebraska's significant water resources is a priority that needs to be funded. In 2011, the Legislature passed LB229 to provide funding for water resources management using funds from the Environmental Trust.

The Natural Resources Committee is also in the middle of a thorough study created in LR314. It

examines current and future state water needs and funding sources to develop recommendations for the necessary funding for management of Nebraska's water resources into the future.

I see LB950 as a great opportunity that follows this intent of the Legislature to adequately fund water resources management by redirecting repayments to the Water Resources Cash Fund for use in the Platte and Republican river basins and throughout the whole state.

Out of the $8.5 million the state gave to the Republican River NRDs in 2008, $1.3 million has already been repaid to the states Cash Reserve Fund.

With the emergency clause that was attached to LB950 with a 30-0 vote, the total amount of repayments redirected to the Water Resources Cash Fund will be $7.2 million for addressing the states many water needs.

This gives the Department of Natural Resources and our NRDs flexibility to address the short term critical needs in the Republican and Platte river basins.

Lastly, in attempt to perfect the Appropriations process the chairman of the committee, Senator Lavon Heidemann, has asked that the original language in LB950 be removed and new language be inserted for select file. The bill will still do all that has been mentioned above it merely allows the appropriations committee to effectively appropriate the bill.

Previous legislation provided for $3.3 million to be deposited in the fund each biennium beginning in 2012-13, ending in 2018-19.

Teleconference call

During his weekly conference call Tuesday, Christensen said they made good progress last week on bills relating to foster care and Health and Human Services.

Christensen said some of these bills will likely get vetoed by the governor so it's important they pass with 30 or more votes, which is the amount needed to override a veto.

An effort to shorten the times between keno games failed to get the necessary votes Monday to advance.

By shortening the time between games from five minutes to three minutes, he said it was projected to bring in more than $1.5 million to the state. However, the bill is now dead for this session.

Bills passed Monday included putting the question to state voters whether to increase state senators' salaries from $12,000 to $22,500.

LB863 passed which makes businesses which produce films, commercials and television programs eligible for economic development funding under LB840, the Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act passed in 1991. Imperial is among 55 Nebraska communities who have voted in LB840 programs.

LB646 goes to governor

Christensen's LB646 passed Monday on a 48-0 vote and contains the emergency clause, making it law as soon as the governor signs it.

The bill broadens the definition of emergency medical services (EMS) but does not broaden the type of services an EMS technician could deliver. It also lessens liability of an EMS volunteer or worker.

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.

LB646 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 continue 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.

Questions or comments? Contact myself or my staff at the information below.

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