

Legislative session moving into final 10 days

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Thursday, 27 March 2014 00:00 -

Letter Back Home

By Senator Mark Christensen

Another week of bills and amendments has come and gone as the Legislature begins to wind down for the year. After Wednesday, just ten more legislative days are left this year and everyone is scrambling to get their bills across the finish line.

I had two bills up Monday on what the Legislature calls the Consent Calendar. This is a list of non-controversial bills put on the agenda by the speaker that get only 15 minutes of debate to either advance or fail.

My two bills are LB 687, which changes the procedures for background checks on applicants for a real estate license, and LB 798 that allows certain power districts to use a fiscal year instead of a calendar year. This will benefit the Imperial Public Power District.

Water issues are still being looked at in the Natural Resources Committee. LB 1098 would expand the number of members on the Natural Resources Commission that will be disbursing the increased funding for water projects throughout the state. It was voted on and advanced out of committee, but wasn't reported to the floor by the writing of this letter Friday.

LB 1074 had another hearing on a proposed amendment to put a 30-year time frame to create basin-wide plans and reach a water balance in each basin making them sustainable into the future.

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Many showed up for the two-hour hearing giving the committee their position on the amendment. I testified in the neutral position, because either way, I believe someone in our district loses. The committee seems to be undecided on what to do with LB 1074.

At this point, it seems as if this bill may not make it out of committee. If that is the case, then, most likely, amendments will be waiting for LB 1098 on General File.

I believe there is a potential that amendments may be filed to put in statute criteria that limits who may receive money from the fund.

They could require natural resources districts to be part of a basin-wide plan for sustainability, could require that ground water and surface water interests agree on projects within the basin and more.

It seems to me that Sen. Steve Lathrop is not giving up on his issue and will most likely seek to make amendments to LB 1098.

Moving to another issue, Sen. Chambers' mountain lion bill, LB 671, to repeal the hunting season just implemented two years ago, was held up on Final Reading by several senators forcing it to be skipped on the agenda and postponed until Monday, March 24.

I support leaving this in the hands of the Game and Parks Commission to decide whether to have a mountain lion season or not. This bill should not advance.

Weekly call

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Since Christensen penned his letter last week, Chambers' bill to ban mountain lion hunting did pass Monday on a 28-13 vote, sending the bill to the governor.

In addition, LB 1074 will not make it out of committee. During his teleconference Tuesday, Christensen said it did not receive the needed votes to advance to the floor, with a vote that oddly fell along party lines in the non-partisan body.

He noted Chairman Sen. Tom Carlson of Holdrege, Sen. Ken Schilz of Ogallala and Sen. Lydia Brasch of Bancroft, all Republicans, voted against advancing the bill, with one member not voting. As a result, it fell short of the five votes needed to get out of committee.

Christensen said Sen. Lathrop, sponsor of LB 1074, wasn't happy with the committee's action and has tacked a bunch of amendments onto LB 1098 as a result.

The bill, introduced by Carlson as a result of the water task force work, would reconstruct the Nebraska Natural Resources Commission. It would add 11 new members appointed by the governor, in addition to the three currently appointed.

Christensen said the commission is largely comprised of NRD representation. If LB 1098 passes, Christensen fears it will dilute ag interests on the commission down to a slight majority, compared to the 85 percent representation it has now.

Christensen said it looks like LB 1098 has the support to pass.

Even if it doesn't, he expects a form of the bill, along with another form of LB 1074, to be reintroduced in the new body next January.

Christensen said the speaker has promised that his priority bill, LB 390, will be on the agenda next week.

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The senator said he's gotten strong support on the bill.

The bill would remove the power under the Emergency Act which allows the governor to suspend or limit the sale, dispensing or transportation of firearms.

In addition, the bill would clarify that the current state and federal laws regulating firearms and ammunition would still be applied.

The governor or any political subdivision would not be able to expand or tighten their regulation of firearms and ammunition and hinder the lawful possession, sale or transportation of firearms and ammunition during a declared emergency.

On Monday, the Legislature also sent the budget bill to the governor for his review.

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