

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

As the sponsor of LB430, which made changes to Nebraska's Concealed Handgun Permit Act, State Sen. Mark Christensen of Imperial is pleased that Gov. Mike Johanns signed it into law last week.

Christensen worked with the National Rifle Association to craft changes in the state's Concealed Handgun Permit Act that specify what powers cities and villages have with respect to both concealed and unconcealed firearms.

Among other things, the bill states that cities and villages don't have the power to regulate the ownership, possession and transportation of firearms except as expressly provided by state law.

Christensen said he didn't like the fact that, in the past, "people going town to town, innocent (about carrying concealed weapons) and becoming lawbreakers" because the town's laws weren't posted. "It bothered me that you could be trying to do everything correctly and do wrong."

As a case in point, Christensen told fellow senators that there is an intersection in Omaha where Papillion and LaVista also meet. Each of the cities has a different ordinance for concealed weapons.

"Any way you turn you break the law because there are three different rules," he noted.

With the new bill, Christensen said a business or government entity may prohibit the carrying of a concealed or unconcealed weapon on that business's property or that government's property if all exits are clearly posted so the signs can be easily seen.

That doesn't work so well with things like city parks, he stated, as there are too many ways a person could enter an unfenced park.

"Buildings are easy to post. It's hard to post a park because you can walk in anywhere," he added.

Christensen noted that it is still illegal to carry an unconcealed or concealed firearm into any building in which there is polling going on, where court is held, or where government meetings are held.

A few roadblocks concerning the bill were circumvented, Christensen said. The judiciary committee originally removed a portion of the bill dealing with concealed handguns in churches, but a senator was able to again include the section that allows a place of worship to authorize its security personnel to carry concealed weapons as long as each member possesses a concealed handgun permit.

The original bill, Christensen pointed out, also allowed permanently stationed military personnel in Nebraska who aren't Nebraska citizens to receive a permit after six months. That was amended to letting them receive a permit immediately.

Another portion of the bill requires the Nebraska State Patrol to issue a permit within 30 days after a criminal background check is made after an application for a permit. Before, it was within five days.

Christensen said LB430 was not a result of an incident in Imperial over a year ago when a resident carried a concealed handgun into a city council meeting, allegedly to make a point concerning the city's ordinance on concealed weapons.

The city had been discussing banning concealed handguns within the city limits. The city council eventually adopted an ordinance that restricted concealed or unconcealed handguns on city property.

City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland said, "Everyone had interpreted the law as you couldn't

have concealed weapons within the city limits.” While that wasn’t correct, the city’s attorney, Phil Pierce, concluded that the city still has the right to restrict weapons on city property.

Leyland said LB430 won’t change the city ordinance at this point, according to Pierce.