Telephone conference report held on Tuesday, Jan. 29

By Jan Rahn
The Grant Tribune-Sentinel

Stressing the importance of making a difference, Senator Mark Christensen of Imperial strongly urges constituents to travel to Lincoln to testify on a couple of upcoming bills that have the potential to greatly affect producers in the southwest Nebraska counties he represents.

Seeking those who will testify on pipeline bill

Acknowledging short notice, Christensen announced during his Tuesday morning teleconference that an Appropriations Hearing on his pipeline bill is set for Friday at 1:30 p.m.CT.

The hearing is on LB185, Christensen's bill requesting $40 million in general budget appropriation to pay for the pipeline into the Republican Basin from the Lincoln County augmentation project.

Anyone wishing to testify is definitely welcome, he said.

Christensen is pushing for the state's investment in a pipeline that would make far more sense than paying fines. The completion of the pipeline is key for Nebraska to remain in compliance with the compact settlement with Kansas.

Farmers asked to testify on sales tax bill

Christensen also would like the backing of producers and asks that they testify on Wednesday and Thursday, Feb. 6-7 on the proposed bill to eliminate sales tax exemption, LB405.

"It'll be a difficult situation," said Christensen, stating Governor Heineman is already using persuasion tactics in pushing for the bill.

Christensen is especially concerned about how the bill would affect farmers and business owners in this end of the state because of what he calls "border bleed" when it comes to buying parts or machinery across the border into Colorado.

"I'd love to have some people come down and testify," said Christensen.

He said dealers are already calling him because they're concerned about what passage of the bill would do to their businesses.

The senator said farmers seeking parts or machinery would be paying at least 6 to 6.5 percent tax on top of the 5 percent they would be required to pay for personal property tax.

"That's 11 percent every time you buy something," said Christensen. "It's a huge issue."

Status of other bills

• The first bill up Tuesday morning was LB16 to transfer ownership of Champion State Recreation Area to Chase County.

• Scheduled for Wednesday were two hearings, LB186 and LB353, restricting rule and regulation authority of natural resource districts.

The bill would clarify that no NRD would have the power to promulgate any rule or regulation requiring the use of groundwater irrigation to maintain the right to irrigate those acres.

The bill seeks to prohibit current rules in a northeast Nebraska NRD that currently require that to keep a groundwater allocation on irrigated acres, those acres will have to be irrigated two out

of 10 years. Otherwise, the certified irrigated acres would be permanently retired.

This may encourage the costly and inefficient irrigation of acres, such as corner acres that a pivot irrigation system does not reach, just to keep the allocation of water for those acres, he said.

• Heard last week was LB52 on expanding work provisions for persons committed to the Department of Correctional Services.

Christensen said the bill should get out of Executive Committee this week and sent to the floor.

He said Sen. Ernie Chambers left during bill discussion, later making the statement, “It reminds me of the old chain gang days.”

Christensen, on the other hand, thinks prisoners want to work.

Christensen said it was a good sign when Chambers left. “He might not agree, but he doesn’t fight it” said Christensen, indicating Chambers did the same thing in previous legislative sessions.

• Christensen said his most troubling piece of legislation is Sen. Carlson’s water sustainability task force made up of four members from Omaha, four from Lincoln, four from the rest of the state and three at large.

“He’s stacking the committee,” said Christensen, urging people to protest.

Christensen said Carlson’s goal is to make sure irrigation in the Upper Republican Basin is limited to nine inches per year.

“This will get to the floor and pass with flying colors if there isn’t a group to protest,” said Christensen. “This could be a serious situation. This is an attempt to shut down the Upper (Republican); this is a very critical bill.”

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.