

He's pleased senators held the budget in line.

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Senator Mark Christensen completed the fourth legislative session of his career earlier this month and felt good about the accomplishments the body made in the 60-day session.

Looking back, he said he and his colleagues did a great job of holding the line on the state budget with no new taxes or any new programs created.

By nature, Nebraskans favor fiscal responsibility, the senator said this week. And the Legislature did a good job of holding true to those values, he added.

The state budget will maintain a cash reserve of \$320 million, despite the economic downturn.

This session, the Legislature lopped off another 2 percent with across-the-board cuts.

That came after a special session in November, 2009, when they adopted a 5 percent across the board reduction in the state budget.

These cuts will continue to keep Nebraska's budget balanced at a time when many states are seeing red ink.

Highs, Lows of the Session

For Christensen, the passage of three key bills he sponsored or worked hard on highlighted his accomplishments this session.

LB 862, which passed on a 40-2 final vote, provides a fix for the occupation tax language created in his 2007 water bill, LB 701.

His fix means the occupation tax can still stand should the Nebraska Supreme Court rule that LB 701's wording created a closed class.

Christensen sees the occupation tax as a key element in helping natural resources districts in the state meet compact compliance issues and other issues, such as state-to-state agreements and endangered species protection.

Passage of the pro-life bill, LB 1103, was a victory for life and the value of families, the senator said.

While he wasn't the sponsor of the bill, Christensen said it was a bill he really worked hard on and believed in.

Throughout his four-year career, Christensen's voting record represents his strong pro-life stance.

LB 1103 shortens the timeline allowance of late-term abortions from 22 weeks to 20 weeks.

Passage of the law has created a national fire storm between pro-life and pro-choice advocates on the issue, which centers on when the fetus can feel pain.

Christensen said the bill's constitutionality will be tested in court.

On another local front, Christensen's bill to allow the licensing and operation of mini-trucks on state highways passed early in the session.

It was a carry-over from last year's 90-day session. The law will go into effect Jan. 1, 2011.

In the 2009 session, Christensen's LB 274 passed, which allowed correctional officials to place more types of inmates in the Work Ethic Camp (WEC) in McCook.

As a result, use of the camp has increased.

Christensen added language to LB 510, to collect \$1 per day from state inmates who are paid during work release, to expand programs at WEC.

This will allow WEC to add women's vocational training and expansion of their welding program.

Christensen's LB 817, which addressed permitting for concealed weapons, was amended into LB 1033 and was passed.

His language will prohibit cities from requiring a separate concealed carry permit for their respective city.

One of the disappointments for the senator came when LB 889 was killed.

The bill, which is similar to those adopted in other states, would have given homeowners the right to defend themselves with lethal force if someone breaks into their home, as well as civil protection from lawsuit.

Election Season

Since the session ended, Christensen has been hitting the campaign trail.

He's seeking re-election to the legislative seat for another four-year term.

Former Senator Tom Baker of Trenton is running for the seat as well.

Both names will appear on the Primary Ballot next month but both will automatically advance to the General Election in November.