Telephone conference report on Tuesday, May 24.

By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

The biggest news coming out of the Legislature this week is their decision to adjourn three days early.

Senators will use just 87 of the allotted 90 days to complete this year's session.
The final day is today, (Thursday, May 26).

44th District Senator Mark Christensen of Imperial said he's excited to see things draw to a close earlier than planned.

He said there were only two days scheduled next week and the final day a week later. He said it didn't make sense to have to drive back in to Lincoln since the business could be completed this week.

He said they plan to complete all votes on Wednesday and will have today to vote on any veto overrides.

Park Fees Veto Overridden

Speaking of vetoes, the Legislature decidedly overrode a veto by Gov. Dave Heineman on a measure to increase park fees.

The measure approved by more than 40 senators on final round debate will allow the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission to increase park fee permits.

Annual permits will increase by $5 and day passes by $1 each.

After the governor vetoed the bill, a total of 42 senators voted to override his veto, with only five dissenting.

Christensen said he strongly supported this bill and was among those voting to override.

Final Items

Christensen said the legislative and congressional redistricting bills have yet to pass final reading.

He said there have been several tweaks to the maps in the form of amendments but Christensen doesn't see those amendments going anywhere.

He expects the legislative districts will remain as initially proposed, which preserves the 44th and 47th districts. He said he will lose parts of Dawson County and will pick up all of Gosper and Harlan counties.

He said they passed a pro-life measure that would prohibit the use of tele-medicine when providing abortions.

Christensen said he worked hard behind the scenes to help forge a compromise on the proposed Trans-Canada oil pipeline that will cut across the eastern Sandhills.

The big key was getting agreement on full restoration if a spill or leak would ever occur.

The Legislature also reached compromise on the Court of Industrial Relations, which deals with labor and wage disputes amongst public employees and the public bodies they work for.

The senators established a range for wages during a review process. This range of 95 percent to 102 percent of comparable jobs will provide some flexibility to insure wages are in range.

Lincoln's horse-racing operations could be jeopardized without live racing in the city.

Law allows for simulcast betting on horse races, provided the track has 15 days of live racing.

Lincoln wanted approval to have their live racing somewhere else other than Lincoln.

The attorney general said such a move is likely unconstitutional. That clouds the future of the bill in this session, Christensen said.

Unless they are called into a special session by the governor, the body will not reconvene until January 2012 for the 60-day session of the two-year calendar.

• • • • • •

Constituents with questions, comments or concerns may contact Christensen at 402-471-2805.

Other information is also available at his legislative website: http://news.legislature.ne.gov/dist44/

Sen. 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 Southwest Public Power District in Palisade and Midwest Electric in Grant.