Telephone conference report held on Tuesday, Feb. 26.

By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

Senator Mark Christensen's bill, LB 52, got several more hours closer to closing debate Tuesday.

LB 52 would allow the director of the Department of Correctional Services to enter into arrangements with any charitable, fraternal, or non-profit corporation for labor services that have a public benefit by persons committed to the incarceration work camp.

This was previously done and was requested by some McCook community members to allow for this to happen again, especially at the McCook Work Camp.

No action was taken on the bill due to lack of time and some concerns raised by other senators.

The bill has already been amended to require the inmate to volunteer to serve on a work force. That is how it is presently being done with governmental entities.

Christensen said Tuesday the bill still needs four more hours of debate before the bill can come to a vote. About three hours of that debate came Tuesday morning.

That's because Sen. Ernie Chambers is filibustering the bill. Christensen said Chambers doesn't like the bill because it's reminiscent of the chain gangs in the south.

Chambers has tacked several amendments on the bill, including one to indefinitely postpone the bill, but all have failed except one. On Tuesday, Chambers got approval of an amendment relating to discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The amendment reads: No organization or entity which discriminates against any person on the basis of sexual orientation shall be permitted to participate in the program.

Christensen, who voted against the amendment, said he feels he has the votes to move the bill on to select file. If Chambers continues his filibuster, another four hours of debate is necessary before taking a vote to move it to final reading.

Three More Weeks of Hearings

Christensen said Tuesday the Legislature will continue to meet in session during the mornings with hearings in the afternoon.

He said the final day for hearings is set for Thursday, March 21. After that, the Legislature will begin meeting all day on the floor.

He said he has until March 15 to declare his priority bill for the session. He still hasn't selected a bill for that status.

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.