

*Telephone conference report held on Tuesday, March 26.*

**By Russ Pankonin**

*The Imperial Republican*

On Monday and Tuesday, senators debated whether to allow medical providers to provide drugs to treat the partner of a person diagnosed with a sexually-transmitted disease.

In his weekly conference call Tuesday, Christensen said the bill is starting to get some traction and he wouldn't be surprised to see it advance.

However, Christensen said he has problems with the bill—one being that a minor and their partner can get treatment without parental notification.

He believes a parent should be notified.

In an era where children have to get permission to take an aspirin in school, how can the Legislature think about dispensing antibiotics to a partner without ever seeing a medical provider, Christensen questioned.

He believes it's because the make-up of the current Legislative members tilts more liberal than in his past six years as a senator.

This same bill has been brought before the legislature for the past several years but has always been killed but this time he fears it could have support for passage.

Christensen said the bill goes against his conservative values. It's been those same conservative values that have put him in the cross hairs of Sen. Ernie Chambers.

Christensen said Chambers has attacked his values on the floor and in hearings.

**Task Force Bill Coming Up**

Christensen said Sen. Tom Carlson's bill, LB 517, to create a statewide water sustainability task force will be coming up for debate soon.

It's Carlson's priority bill for the session.

Christensen said it got 8-0 support to advance out of committee and feels the bills will likely pass.

He said he has mixed emotions on the bill, wondering if the state needs another water task force.

Some have questioned what was learned from the last task force that targeted just the Republican Basin.

To fund the study, Carlson wants \$3 million from a state severance tax fund that funds school aid. Christensen said that cost may have to be pared down some if the bill advances.

Next year, Carlson wants state water projects funded with a 1/4 percent sales tax. That bill has already been tabled until next year at Carlson's request.

**Augmentation Loan**

Before declaring priority bills, Christensen asked the Revenue Committee whether he should prioritize the request for a \$40 million loan from state reserves.

The loan would fund pipeline construction on the augmentation project in Lincoln County, designed to benefit both the Platte and Republican River Basins.

The committee told him the request needs to remain within the state budget and not as a stand-alone bill.

Christensen said he's gotten support for the loan but said it could come to making choices by the senators.

That's because an \$80 million cash reserve loan has been requested for upgrades to the vet's home in Grand Island.

Christensen believes the water compliance issues facing the state makes the loan for the augmentation a high priority.

However, Christensen doesn't want to see veterans underserved either, due to facilities.