

Telephone conference report held on Tuesday, May 7.

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Holdrege Senator Tom Carlson's bill, LB 517, to create a new Water Sustainability Project Task Force will likely come up for final reading this week, Sen. Mark Christensen of Imperial said.

However, Christensen doesn't expect it to just go through without a little more debate.

Christensen said there will be an amendment filed on the bill, which would pull it from Final Reading.

The substance of the amendment will be to eliminate having the governor appoint task force members, change the make-up to include just senators and strip the \$1 million in funding.

Christensen said Carlson's motive for the task force is to target areas of groundwater decline and reduce irrigation allocations to six inches annually.

The last water task force convened for more than a year and their report yielded no legislation.

Christensen expects the same thing to happen with this task force if it isn't made up of just state senators.

The goal of the new task force would be to develop a priority list of water resources programs, projects and activities in need of funding to meet the goals of water sustainability, increased water use productivity, and otherwise maximize the beneficial use of the state's water supply.

Pulling a bill off Final Reading is no small task but Christensen said the effort, led by Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha, will be made.

LB 522 Still in the Wings

The fate of Christensen's LB 522, remains in the balance until a meeting next week.

The bill seeks state reimbursement for surface water irrigators who lost water through a compact call for compact compliance purposes.

He said he's lined up a meeting of the parties filing the lawsuit against the Lincoln County augmentation project with five to six other state senators.

He's looking for ways to get the plaintiffs to lift the lawsuit and what it might take for them to do that.

Even if there's some compromise, Christensen said it's likely not to make all parties happy.

Christensen said the augmentation project will get water into the Medicine Creek drainage basin and he'd like to see the pipeline extended so water could be put into the Red Willow drainage basin.

That could increase the amount of surface water available to holders of surface water rights. 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.