

By Sen. Mark Christensen

44th District, Neb. Legislature

To purchase, to lease, or to study? That is the question the Legislature addressed this last week regarding the governor's request in the budget to purchase the Beechcraft Super King Air airplane from the University of Nebraska Foundation.

Friday, May 10, the Legislature answered that question by amending the budget to give a third party a chance to study further what would be the best cost effective approach to meet the needs of the governor. The vote was 26-14 to remove the \$2 million appropriation.

Currently, the governor has been leasing the King Air from the foundation. The governor did a study and felt that this plane was the best choice for their continuing air travel needs.

Though my personal preference is to buy new, I am not in favor of spending additional money to start a brand new study from scratch.

The first right to purchase the plane was given to the governor, and was opened in January and closes June 1. An additional study risks losing the opportunity to purchase the King Air, and extends this process another 60 to 90 days beyond this date.

Moreover, I began to realize those in favor of another study really weren't against purchasing a plane in favor of leasing, they were really just politicizing the issue to go after the governor.

This is why I voted against the amendment to remove the appropriation and spend money on another study, which will likely not give us any new information.

If you have any questions or comments, contact my office. Mark R. Christensen, PO Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509, 402-471-2805 or mchristensen@leg.ne.gov.

Teleconference call

During his weekly teleconference call Tuesday, Christensen said they spent much of Monday debating the repeal of the death penalty.

He said there would be another two hours of debate again Tuesday morning.

Christensen said this would mark the eighth time in seven years that the body has debated the death penalty.

He said he's looking at a bill next year that would require conclusive video or DNA evidence before the death penalty can be sought.

He said video evidence, like the video captured in the Norfolk bank slayings, would be an example of sufficient evidence.

He said the Legislature would also debate Tuesday whether to override the governor's veto of a bill to fund a projected deficit in the state's retirement system for pension plans of teachers, judges and state patrol.

Water Issues

On water issues, Christensen said he and several other senators will meet Wednesday with the individuals who filed suit against the state and others over the Lincoln County augmentation project.

He said he offered a draft of a compromise that could be discussed at the meeting.

That meeting will likely determine the fate of Christensen's LB 522. That bill would reimburse surface water irrigation districts for water lost due to a compact call for the purpose of compact compliance with Kansas.

He said he's hoping the bill could get advanced following debate on Select File, even if it doesn't advance to Final Reading this session. If no action is taken this session, the bill would

roll over to next year's 60-day session.

He said the bill has been amended to pay the districts "just compensation." What amount will be "just" compensation remains to be seen, he noted.

Christensen said he's seen some positive movement to bring surface water and groundwater users closer together. However, he would not elaborate on what progress has been made.

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