Telephone conference report to Imperial,
Grant and Palisade
on Tuesday, March 2

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

During his weekly tele-conference Tuesday, Senator Mark Christensen said his bill to fix the occupation tax language, LB 862, should be coming out of committee this week.

In order for the occupation tax not to be considered a closed class, which would make it unconstitutional, LB 862 changes the original wording of LB 701 that created the occupation tax.

Several changes have been made to the bill since it was originally drafted and introduced.

The new language says any natural resource district that has adopted an integrated management plan (IMP) that includes the four eligible projects outlined in LB 701 can be eligible to assess an occupation tax and have bonding authority.

hese four activities include vegetation management, leasing or purchasing of surface water, retirement of irrigated acres and augmentation projects.

The Department of Natural Resources would become the regulatory agency since they must approve all IMPs.

Christensen said some opposition to the bill has surfaced recently.

He said Nebraska Public Power District has taken a stand against it, while surface water irrigators want the bill amended to exclude them.

Surface water districts are seeking an amendment that would exempt acres irrigated by surface water from having to pay the occupation tax.

Christensen said he can go either way on the surface water amendment but expressed concern that NPPD's opposition carries some big weight in the legislative body.

He said NPPD's opposition last year stopped the occupation tax from being fixed a year ago.

Christensen said his bill to form a statewide water planning commission isn't going anywhere. However, he plans to create an interim study to look at the possibility.

He's also planning to create an interim study to look at the feasibility of a pipeline to move excess water from eastern Nebraska to western Nebraska.

Sen. Tom Carlson's bill to create a Republican Basin water task force will be considered in the coming weeks.

If the bill doesn't move, Christensen said Carlson will ask for an interim study on this bill as well.

Kindergarten eligibility

In his weekly letter back home,

Christensen talked about a bill that parents with preschool aged children might find interesting.

The Legislature advanced LB 1006, introduced by Sen. Adams, to the second round of debate. The bill changes the eligibility date for kids entering kindergarten and Christensen said he supports it.

Currently, statute requires a child to be five years of age by Oct. 15 to be eligible for entering kindergarten. LB 1006 would move the date backwards two and half months to July 31.

This would ensure kids are five years old before the school year begins. LB 1006 would go into effect beginning in the 2012-2013 school year.

Many teachers and administrators say the age range is becoming too large, and by moving the date back, it would allow some children to mature, increasing their chances of success.

Christensen said he agrees with them. "There is pressure in some areas of our culture to push kids earlier and earlier into school and formal activities; I believe we have gone far enough and a little push back on this trend is needed," he said.

LB 1006 does allow for an exception for children that turn five between Aug. 1 and Oct. 15 if they perform adequately on an assessment provided by the school. "I believe this is a reasonable exception since not all kids are similar in maturity," the senator said.

The bill advanced to Select File on a 33-0 vote.

People with questions, comments, or concerns regarding these bills or any issue can call Christensen's office at 402-471-2805 or view his legislative website at http://news.legislature.ne.gov/dist44/ .