

By Mark Christensen

Senator, Dist. 44

In last week's tele-conference with the McCook Area Chamber, one of the topics was one of my bills, LB 1052.

This bill is the Agricultural Production and Economic Stability and Assistance Act.

It would redirect the current state sales tax revenue generated within two and half miles of any river, stream, or tributary (the Department of Natural Resources rapid response area) of the Republican River Basin to eligible Natural Resources Districts (NRDs).

These funds would be for managing water resources and the augmentation of water supplies for the economic stabilization of agricultural production.

Unfortunately, the headline for the Jan. 21 McCook Gazette article about the call implied that this was a new water tax. It is not a new tax, but a "kickback" of your current sales taxes you pay the state of Nebraska.

You may be asking, why I would introduce such a bill? The reason is to object to another bill, and at the same time, make a point about the mixed up priorities of the state.

The bill I am objecting to is LB 779, which will expand the current Convention Center Facility Financing Assistance Act, or better known as the "Qwest Center Kickback Act."

This bill would allow Omaha to keep even more of the state sales tax revenue generated around the Qwest Center, whose primary purpose is entertainment, to help pay it off.

The Convention Center Facility Financing Assistance Act is what I modeled my bill, LB 1052 after, in hopes to make a strong point about real state responsibilities and priorities.

I believe LB 1052 addresses a real state interest and responsibility, compliance in the Republican River Compact and the economic stability of agricultural production in southwest Nebraska.

Now, I have nothing against Omaha looking for innovative ways to improve their city and create economic opportunities.

However, when the State's responsibility in the Republican River Basin becomes a lower priority than entertaining eastern Nebraska and western Iowa, I have a problem with it.

What is good for the goose is good for the gander, right?

If economic health and growth is important in Omaha and Lincoln and the state wants to fund it, then it had better be important in the Republican River Basin where there is a real state interest, and where agricultural production, which is the lifeblood of the area, could take a big hit.

The likelihood of success for LB 1052 is slim. However, I believe it can be used as a good tool to remind the state of its mixed up priorities and the serious economic situation the Basin could be facing.

On Feb. 3, I have LB 893 in the Revenue Committee for its public hearing. This bill would allow for the refunding of real or personal property taxes, occupation taxes, or assessments that are declared unconstitutional without having to file a claim.

This would include the property tax from LB 701.

On Tuesday, my bill on allowing the operation of mini-trucks on the highway got first round approval.

As a member of the Executive Committee, we have been reviewing all legislative budgets to see where more cuts can be made.

The governor has asked the Legislature to cut another \$1 million from its own operations.

More budget cuts will be likely if state tax receipts don't improve.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding these bills or any issue please call my office at 402-471-2805 or for more information you can view my legislative website at <http://news.legislature.ne.gov/dist44/>

While the Legislature is in session, I hold two conference calls every week. One of the calls is on Tuesday, for the western end of District 44, and the other call is on Thursday for the McCook Area Chamber of Commerce.

The calls are open to the public. Call for information on times and locations.