Telephone conference report to Imperial, Grant, Palisade on Tuesday, March 9.

By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

Unsure if he will endorse it, Senator Mark Christensen was heading to a floor debate on LB945, a proposal on outlawing texting while driving.

“My concern is: Can police enforce it,” said the senator from Imperial during his weekly teleconference on Tuesday morning.

Christensen is puzzled over how police could ever enforce the bill.

There are so many other things that distract drivers, such as putting on makeup, reading, adjusting a tie. “Can we stop them all?” he said.

Christensen said he is looking at both sides of the issue.

The ones who get caught, however, will be the ones holding on to the wheel with their phone in hand texting, he said. “At least they can see the road,” if it’s in their lap their eyes are off the road.

Christensen said the bill seems like it’s a feel-good bill and accomplishes nothing even though the intent of the law is good

“You’ve got a law—is that really going to stop anyone—how can police enforce it?”

Christensen said he can think of one reason to support it—it might be an incentive for people to get hands-free service.

“Beyond that, I can’t support it. I don’t want it on the books if we can’t enforce it. If it serves as an incentive to go hands free, let’s get it done.”

Abolishing State Treasurer

The first thing on Tuesday’s agenda for the state’s senators was LR 284 CA, a resolution that would put on the next general election ballot an option for voters in the state to amend the Constitution of Nebraska and abolish the office of the Nebraska State Treasurer.

“I have no opinion formed,” said Senator Mark Christensen of Imperial during his teleconference early that morning. “It’ll be interesting to hear arguments—I’m anxious to see what they come up with.

It should be a very interesting discussion, between those who believe the treasurer is duplicated and its functions could be delegated to the Department of Revenue and other agencies, and those who believe the treasurer brings a necessary balance of power, acting as another check and balance for the proper functioning of government, said Christensen in his weekly Letter Back Home.

“Right now, I tend to lean towards the latter, a proper balance of power in government,” he said. “Of course, the primary responsibility of the treasurer is treasury management, in many ways acting as the state’s banker.”

The treasurer is also responsible for several other functions, such as the unclaimed property program, the Nebraska College Savings program, the state disbursement unit for child support payment, the long-term care savings plan, and the new Nebraskaspending.gov website created in the Taxpayer Transparency Act.

Christensen said according to information he received from the treasurer's office, there are 1,720 sections of Nebraska's law referencing the Nebraska State Treasurer and an average of 100 bills per biennium that have made it to final reading in the last three Legislatures, which reference the state treasurer.

"Though most of those references probably deal with the management of specific funds, there is much to think through about unintended consequences of such a big change," said Christensen.

The big question for him is not whether the state can do this, but whether it should be done. He doesn't think there will be much of a savings from the move because many of the same people will still be needed to do much of the same work.

"Most importantly, I am concerned that there might be too much consolidation of power over the people's money coming to the state," said Christensen.

Potentially having one department responsible for the administration of state taxes and management of state funds might lead to too much influence by the governor or an appointee; problems could appear down the road, he said.

"Independent responsibilities, and checks and balances are important when it comes to the proper handling of money."

More figures from the treasurer's office show a decrease of 11.88 percent in their budget and a 22 percent decrease in staff in the last four years, said Christensen.

“Will we actually see significant savings from abolishing this office? I do not think so. However, I will listen intently to the proponents of the resolution as the debate unfolds,” he commented.

Constituents with questions, comments or concerns may contact Christensen at 402-471-2805.

Other information is also available at his legislative website: http://news.legislature.ne.gov/dist44/

SENATOR MARK CHRISTENSEN *holds a weekly teleconference at 7 a.m. MT each Tuesday with sites at the Imperial Republican, Midwest Electric in Grant and Southwest Public Power in Palisade. The teleconferences are open to the public and Christensen encourages constituent participation.*