

*Telephone conference report to Imperial, Grant, Palisade on Tuesday, March 16.*

***By Dave Vrbas***

***The Wauneta Breeze***

It's a relatively calm week for District 44 state senator Mark Christensen, despite hearings on budget cuts and the recent Republican River water rulings from LB 701.

Christensen went over a few pressing bills with constituents during his regular Tuesday morning teleconference to the district.

One bill that Christensen concentrated on during the call was LB 945, introduced by Sen. John Harms of District 48. The bill would make cell phone use without a hands-free device while driving a secondary offense.

"This is a bill that's tough to vote on for me," Christensen said. "I agree nobody should be texting or using a phone that's wireless (handheld), but at the same time, I don't know how you get police to enforce this bill."

Since the law would not create a primary law infraction—meaning people couldn't be pulled over for talking on their cell phones—Christensen believes police will be unable to enforce the secondary violation because they won't be able to see citizens using their handheld cell phones.

He also argued that when he sees people engaging in the dangerous act of texting on their phones during his travels across the state, they have their phones propped up on their steering wheels.

“I’m afraid people will start putting their phones in their laps to text, which, to me, is far more dangerous,” he explained.

Christensen went on to say his vote on the bill could go either way. “I don’t object to the way the bill is written,” he said. “I think it will pass. I just don’t know how I’ll vote.”

Senators went into general file budget hearings at 12:30 p.m. MT/1:30 p.m. CT on Tuesday to work on slashing \$46-49 million from the state’s budget.

“It’s not a huge thing,” Christensen said of the impending cutbacks this week, which he expected senators to wrap up either Tuesday or Wednesday.

“It’s easy to see, with all these budget cuts, why (Gov. Dave) Heineman didn’t want to dip into the tax reserve last year,” Christensen said.

After the budget meetings this week, Christensen plans to get immediately back to dealing with ongoing Republican River water issues. See article on Page Three this week for more information on recent rulings.

During his conference call, Christensen also referred to LB 836, which would allow depredation hunting of deer in an effort to control the species’ population throughout the state.

“I don’t think the state has handled the deer population situation very well at all,” Christensen said, noting that he is in full support of the bill, which would allow another hunting season for deer and for landowners of at least 20 acres to shoot female deer.

“In many areas, the damage done to crops being eaten by deer and the damage to vehicles after hitting a deer is very costly,” Christensen said in his weekly Letter Back Home.

