

By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

Barely 10 days have passed since the 102nd Legislature convened for a 90-day session.

Several of the new bills introduced by Nebraska senators have caught the attention of constituents across the state.

Senator Mark Christensen of Imperial is among those who have introduced legislation—one bill allowing for protection of a fetus at any stage of development in utero. The bill allows a woman to defend her fetus from unlawful attack.

Another bill introduced by Christensen would make it easier to use deadly force in self-defense cases.

Dubbed “stand your ground” by supporters, the bill would create an automatic presumption that a person is justified in using deadly force to ward off an attacker.

Two other bills introduced last week by Sen. Greg Adams of York would cut state aid to public schools in Nebraska. Adams chairs the Legislature’s Education Committee.

Sen. Bob Krist of Omaha introduced a bill that would decrease the number of state lawmakers from 49 to 45 in 2012. Just prior to that, Sen. Kate Sullivan of Cedar Rapids introduced a bill

that would increase the number of legislative seats to 50.

State Sen. Mike Gloor of Grand Island proposed a tax increase on cigarette and tobacco products. The proposal would generate nearly \$73 million yearly in additional revenue.

Gloor also introduced a bill designed to protect police from assault with bodily fluids that can transmit diseases such as HIV and hepatitis B or C.

Under LB221 introduced by Sen. Charlie Janssen of Fremont, welfare recipients and applicants would be subjected to drug testing before they could collect cash benefits.

A bill introduced by Sen. Beau McCoy of Omaha would prohibit the state from forcing people to buy health insurance or fining people for not obtaining insurance, citing a flaw in the federal health care bill that requires citizens to have insurance coverage.

LB1899 introduced by Sen. Brenda Council of Omaha would prohibit initial employment applications for government agencies from asking whether a person filling out the application had been convicted of a crime.

The senator's bill reads, "The public is best protected when criminal offenders or ex-convicts are given the opportunity to secure public employment and that barriers to such employment should be removed to make rehabilitation feasible."

The senator from Omaha has also introduced a measure that would require children to be tested for lead as part of their immunizations before being allowed to enroll in school, identifying children who might have been poisoned by lead.

Sen. Council has another bill (LB192) requiring Nebraska schools to offer sex education classes. The bill would require all school districts to provide age-appropriate and medically accurate sex education starting in the 2012-13 school year.

Daylight Saving Time would end in Nebraska if Sen. Colby Coash's bill (LB101) passes.

Sen. Galen Hadley of Kearney seeks legislation to give Nebraska courts discretion to order noncustodial parents to help pay children's college costs and also give that parent access to the child's grades.

If LB267 passes, Sen. Gwen Howard's new bill would limit the kinds of beverages that could be purchased with food stamps to milk, juice and water. Federal law already bars the use of food stamps for alcoholic beverages.

State Sen. Tony Fulton of Lincoln has introduced LB408, a bill that would require counseling in divorce cases where the couple has children or in cases where either the husband or the wife feels the marriage is not irreparable. Divorce proceedings could be delayed as much as six months while counseling takes place.

LB357 introduced by Sen. Brad Ashford of Omaha would change the current limit on local sales taxes, allowing the state's cities and counties to raise their local sales tax rates to 2 percent. The current cap is 1.5 percent.

This is only a few of the numerous bills being introduced by Nebraska lawmakers. They had until the middle of this week to present new measures to the Legislature.