

By Josh Sumner

The Wauneta Breeze

Nebraska 44th District Sena-tor Mark Christensen took time to talk individually about a series of bills he has introduced in the short time he has been back to work following the Jan. 5 opening of the first session of the 102nd Nebraska Legislature.

Sen. Christensen has kept busy, already introducing seven new bills during the 10-day bill introduction period following the reconvening of the Unicameral.

Among Christensen's most intriguing bills is LB 298, which makes provisions relating to self-protection laws –also known as the Castle Doctrine.

Known as a champion of gun rights, Christensen said he believes people should have the right to defend themselves from trespassers who pose a threat.

Castle laws give people the legal right to use deadly force if an intruder enters their home. LB 298 makes provisions modifying the language included in Christensen's self-protection bill.

The biggest provision to the bill was added to state that a person cannot legally shoot a trespasser who has retreated from their home after breaking in. The bill was also revised to read that deadly force is not justifiable in a vehicle unless the owner believes the person against whom the force is used has unlawfully entered and is not attempting to exit.

According to Christensen, he has wide support for LB 298, however, most opposition comes from those state senators in the Omaha District.

“If I ever get it out of committee, I would get it passed on the floor very easily,” said Christensen.

LB 89, which is perhaps Christensen’s most controversial bill, is “hated” by the governor according to Christensen himself.

The bill calls for a change in the qualifications of the state’s Superintendent of Law Enforcement and Public Safety. Christensen said the governor opposes this bill because it restricts his ability to choose who serves in the capacity.

Christensen said LB 89 was brought to him by Nebraska State Patrolmen. Among other requirements, the bill mandates that candidates for the superintendent position have at least four years of experience as a law enforcement officer prior to his or her appointment, as well as a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university.

Fifteen years of law enforcement experience and five years of management experience in law enforcement would also be part of the new guidelines.

Other Bills to Note

In sticking to his promise of making the cuts necessary to offset the state’s budget problems, Christensen introduced LB 86, which would eliminate the state’s legislative reference library.

“A lot of senators didn’t know where it was,” said Christensen. Christensen called the library an accumulation of periodicals and written studies that senators use rarely, if at all. Christensen said he also supports the removal of the state’s legislative research office, but that the idea hasn’t received as much support as he had hoped for.

One bill that will be of particular interest to residents in Chase County is LB 87, which makes provisions relating to the way weeds are mowed in ditches on county roads and highways.

Christensen said many people didn't agree with the Chase County Commissioners' decision to require farmers to mow ditches, citing concern that farmers using rear mowers could tip over while mowing ditches that aren't properly groomed.

Christensen said the dust created during mowing also limits drivers' visibility, making accidents possible.

Instead of reversing the requirements made by the commissioners, Sen. Christensen kept the law in place. However, LB 87 would give people the opportunity to petition the decision, which would force a county-wide vote.

"The best decision to do was to allow it to go to a vote," said Christensen. "People can also vote to remove the commissioners if they don't want them."

LB 88—a bill requiring signage duties for the Nebraska State Patrol—was Christensen's next order of business. The bill is aimed at preventing people from breaking the law unintentionally when carrying a concealed handgun into a business.

The bill would charge the state patrol with creating uniform signs that would be displayed in certain locations at businesses.

It would notify people that they are prohibited from entering the business with a concealed weapon, said Christensen. He added that people would know exactly where to look for the sign, and that they would have a better idea of the repercussions of breaking the concealed weapon law.

LB 231—a bill which changes provisions relating to bad checks—would make it easier to prosecute people who pass bad checks during the billing process for services given, said Christensen.

LB 232—authorizing the use of force in protecting unborn children—is a proactive law which would give mothers the right to defend children in their womb.

Sen. Christensen has roughly eight more bills that have yet to be introduced.

Senator Changes Committees and Applies for Another

Christensen opened his first teleconference of the new legislative session by making mention of his move from the Judiciary Committee to the Natural Resources Committee. Christensen returns to the Natural Resources Committee, filling the spot formerly held by State Sen. Deb Fischer.

Although he said he is excited to be back on Natural Resources, Christensen said he had also looked forward to fighting for issues of personal importance on the Judiciary Committee—namely those bills relating to abortion and gun issues.

Christensen, who is vocal about being strongly pro-life and anti-gun control, voiced a concern about the Judiciary Committee's split on these issues.

Christensen said he has more concern about the committee's split on gun bills than pro-life issues, and made mention that he has been contacted by several NRA members who were disappointed to see him leave.

The state senator did hint at a possible run for the chair of Natural Resources in two years, however, which he said was one of the main reasons he changed committees.

As redistricting talks begin to heat up, Christensen made mention that he is one of many senators who have filed to be part of the upcoming Redistricting Committee. The board is to consist of members chosen by the Executive Board, and will include nine members, with no more than five hailing from one party.

“When you do redistricting maps, you basically always have to start in the west and work east,” said Christensen. “There are basically two approaches—we can take one senator out of the west and move it into Omaha, or stretch every district from the west and work them east, sliding everybody over.”

Christensen said preliminary numbers indicate that District 44 will likely gain Harlan and Gosper Counties, although official numbers are not released until April 1.

Christensen also enters his fifth year on the Banking, Commerce and Insurance Committee.

Weekly teleconference

SENATOR MARK CHRISTENSEN holds weekly teleconferences at 7 a.m. MT/8 a.m. CT each Tuesday morning. The public is invited to attend the conference calls. Hosts of the conference calls are Southwest Public Power District in Palisade, the Imperial Republican in Imperial and Midwest Electric in Grant. Christensen can be reached at 402-471-2805, or by mail at P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509, or via e-mail at mchristensen@leg.ne.gov.