

Senator: Session more difficult

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Wightman discusses veto overrides

With state senators at odds with the governor at times, the past session was more trying than others, said state Sen. John Wightman.

Wightman represents District 36, which encompasses Dawson, Custer and part of Buffalo counties.

On the last day of the legislative session, senators overrode Gov. Dave Heineman's veto of two bills:

LB599, which provides prenatal medical assistance for women not covered under Medicaid.

LB357, that allows cities to increase sales tax up to 2%.

Wightman supported the overrides, noting that passage of LB599 will save costs and lives in the long run.

Although the governor said the legislation will act as a magnet by attracting women who have entered the country illegally, Wightman said he finds that difficult to believe.

The senator was also in the majority of those favoring the optional sales tax, noting it can only be used for infrastructure.

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City officials in Gothenburg, Cozad and Lexington supported the measure, he said.

Senators also overrode a gubernatorial veto of a provision in the state claims bill. Fifty claims, totaling \$2.5 million by subcontractors of Boys and Girls Home, will be paid by the state.

Despite Heineman's belief that payment of the claims would violate the state constitution, Wightman said the state has an obligation to pay them.

"We need providers out here," he said, noting that he and other outstate senators fear the loss of providers for children in the state welfare system.

Wightman sided with the governor on a bill that would have allowed for pari-mutuel betting on historic horse races. A majority of legislators failed to override the veto of LB806.

Part of the governor's tax relief proposal would have eliminated inheritance taxes collected by counties.

Because counties are still grappling with budgets that don't include state aid, Wightman said he didn't support the proposal which didn't pass.

According to the most recent state auditor report, Dawson County collected approximately \$234,000 in inheritance taxes.

Three issues that will appear on the November ballot include increasing maximum consecutive senator terms from two to three, raising senatorial salaries from \$12,000 to \$22,500 and adding hunting, fishing and harvesting wildlife to the state constitution.

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From Wightman's experience in the Unicameral, he said he supports the first two amendments but thinks the third is not needed because Nebraskans already enjoy those rights.

He noted that several younger senators have families with children and spouses that work to support them and added that 1988 was the last time legislative pay was raised.

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