

WEEKLY UPDATE August 10, 2020.

Heating up before winding down. That describes this past week at the Legislature.

On August 6, Governor Ricketts signed the Budget adjustments passed by the Legislature the week before. The Governor noted that the Budget adjustments included \$10,000,000 for Rural Workforce Housing, \$1,500,000 for Public Health Departments, over \$55,000,000 in Flood Relief, and \$4,000,000 in Career Scholarships, including \$1,000,000 for State Colleges. Recovery from the economic impact of COVID-19 is front and center on our minds as we move towards closing out the 2020 Legislative Session.

In the midst of this pandemic, I have not lost sight of the need for property relief in District 17 and throughout Nebraska. LB1106, the property tax relief bill I've discussed many times, got merged into a "Grand Proposal" bill along with the economic incentives of LB720 and the UNMC NExT Project previously found in LB1084. The new bill-LB1107 was debated into the night on Wednesday, August 5 and was eventually advanced to Select File (Second Reading). None of these bills, standing alone, had the number of votes needed to advance them otherwise. I am disappointed that one of the major parts taken out of the property tax portion of the bill amounts to a loss of over \$11,000,000 to District 17 schools. Next year I will continue to work on more substantial relief and fair treatment of rural schools and taxpayers.

Although not perfect by any means, and much less than I had hoped for, LB1107 does give some property tax relief to all Nebraskans in the form of tax credits that can be claimed by property owners to recover a portion of property taxes paid. In the first year, property owners can see a credit of up to an average of 6% of property taxes paid. That percentage will grow each year over the next five years to up to eighteen percent. A property owner will be entitled to the tax credit even if the property owner does not have an income tax liability when filing. LB1107 also offers incentives to attract new businesses to build and provide higher income jobs for Nebraskans. The incentives are performance-based, which means businesses will benefit from the incentives only after they have met the criteria for dollars invested and jobs created in our State. Lastly, LB1107 provides \$300 million for the University of Nebraska Medical Center for its NExT Project that involves substantial investment from federal and private funds before the State participates financially.

I am thankful that we have a beginning to property tax relief in LB1107 and that the Speaker worked with Senator Linehan, who chairs the Revenue Committee, Senator Stinner, chair of Appropriations, and other Senators to combine the bills to bring LB1107 across the first hurdle with a 43-2 vote. With only four days left of the Session as I write this update, time is of the essence. LB1107 will be heard on Select File on Tuesday, August 11 and if advanced, will be on Final Reading on the last day of Session, August 13, 2020.

LB814, which bans dismemberment abortions in Nebraska, is also scheduled for debate on Tuesday. If advanced, it, too, will be on final reading on the last day of the 2020 Legislative Session.

If you recall, a couple of weeks ago, the Legislature denied Senator Vargas's motion to suspend the rules and bring a brand new bill placing new regulations on meatpacking plants in Nebraska. Despite being denied by the Legislature, and rather than take the time to have a hearing in District 17 where folks living and working there could testify, the Senator introduced the same material as an amendment to a bill still in Committee. On Thursday, August 6, there was a hearing on Senator Vargas's amendment. The amendment proposed regarded the same subject matter that the Senator asked the body to suspend the rule. The amendment proposes a number of COVID-19 related regulations for meatpacking plants to be in place through December 31, 2021. Only twenty people at a time were allowed in the hearing room, so we observed the hearing by closed-circuit television. There were a number of people who testified at the public hearing on the amendment. It is well known that the largest number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in District 17 is in Dakota County, where the largest percentage of cases involved workers in the meatpacking industry. As of August 10, the Dakota County Health Department has reported 1900 confirmed cases of COVID-19, 6,827 negative tests, and 43 deaths. Fortunately, the rise in the number of new cases has declined as information about the virus has been distributed in multiple languages in the area and as Tyson has worked to modify its plant to incorporate social distancing, increased sanitation measures, and taking employees' temperatures. The largest numbers of testifiers at Thursday's hearing were from Omaha, with the largest portion of them being representatives of non-profit organizations of one sort or another.

A couple of Thursday's testifiers had family employed or were themselves employed at Tysons. One young man spoke of his father's death from COVID-19. My heart breaks for him and his family and for all of those affected by the virus. In addition to live testimony, the Committee received letters from facilities throughout Nebraska, including Tysons. The companies detailed reactive and proactive steps they took to provide a safer environment for their employees in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. It appears that the requirements and regulations contained in Senator Vargas's bill are being implemented by Tyson and other companies in the meatpacking industry. I look forward to looking over the bill in its entirety and listening to full debate, which I anticipate will come to the Legislature in the 2021 Session. In the meantime, I look forward to being invited to listening sessions on the topic in District 17 on the topic.

In addition to LB1107 and LB814, on Tuesday the Legislature will continue to hear other priority bills dealing with issues like solid waste management and flood mitigation plans, housing density, changes the age of majority in certain circumstances, regulations regarding nail technology, cosmetology, and body art, and potentially expanding the ability of local government to utilize land banks. I am expecting a very busy last four Legislative days. Over the next few weeks, I will share more details about some of the bills that have passed this session and that will have an impact on District 17.

As always, it is of great importance that I hear from my constituents to effectively do my job as your voice in the Legislature. I encourage you to contact me and I look forward to hearing from you. You can reach me by phone at 402-471-2716 or by email at jalbrecht@leg.ne.gov