

2020-07-31 Clements Column – Session Resumed

The Legislature resumed its 2020 session on July 20th after the COVID-19 shutdown caused us to recess for four months. I have had no health problems and I hope you are staying safe and well. We are keeping the Capitol building clean and safe, and it is still open for tours.

With less than seven Legislative days left, it is still unknown whether we will pass property tax relief. LB 1106, which I support, lowers school property taxes and replaces that amount with state aid. There are many strong views on the bill, making progress difficult. LB 1106 has majority support, but not enough to pass a filibuster. Several Omaha and Lincoln senators oppose the limit on school spending growth. I will keep working toward a solution.

Another major bill is LB 814, a dismemberment abortion ban. Last week we had a successful vote to move it out of the Judiciary Committee and onto the floor for debate. It was filibustered for three hours and the Speaker needs enough support shown for debate to continue. I am optimistic that enough votes will be found.

LB 870, which I prioritized, was signed into law and is now in effect. This new law allows cities to directly borrow from banks during disasters to make repairs and restore disrupted services. This would help cities like Peru that had to truck in drinking water during the 2019 floods.

LB 153 excludes 50% of military retirement pay from Nebraska income tax. It is on Final Reading with unanimous support and should pass. However, it may not be effective until January 1, 2022 due to the \$14 million cost and lower state revenues.

LB 147 would have provided training and guidance to school staff on how to intervene when students interrupt the classroom, harm others, or themselves. LB 147 failed by one vote due to a filibuster. It provided teachers legal protection if they responded reasonably to disruptive situations. Good teachers are leaving the profession because of increased violence in some schools.

The bill adjusting the 2019-2021 budget passed Friday July 31st. It allows for \$46 million for 2019 state flood damages not paid by FEMA, and \$9 million more for FEMA cost shares to counties. Correction worker pay increased by \$5.7 million to help retain prison staff. Homestead exemption payments to counties increased by \$5 million due to increased benefits. Also, \$1.5 million was added for public health departments that are stressed by flood relief and COVID work. There was excess revenue in March, but now the budget just breaks even. Remaining bills with added spending will be difficult to fund.

Feel free to contact me or my staff for assistance, information, or questions on issues. You may reach me at: Senator Rob Clements, State Capitol Rm 812, Lincoln, NE 68509, Phone 4024712613, or email: rclements@leg.ne.gov.