**For Release Wednesday, July 31, 2019**

**Capitol View
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**The Nebraska Press Association**

**It’s a wrap. And here’s why you care.**

It’s that awkward time, the Legislature has been adjourned for months and it’s still more than four weeks before the first University of Nebraska-Lincoln Husker football game. Our friends at Unicameral Update have come to the rescue with a concise roundup -- committee by committee -- on the 2019 Legislature. So, why do you care?

The Agriculture Committee advanced and lawmakers passed bills authorizing the cultivation and processing of hemp, expanding legal protections for agricultural producers and allowing for cottage food sales from a private home. You can now buy more so-called cottage foods (we used to call them home made) directly from producers’ and at certain events.

The Appropriations Committee proposed and lawmakers passed a balanced budget, which escaped gubernatorial veto. The budget increased funds to the state Office of Violence Prevention, funded a study of long-term care availability to Medicaid recipients and increased behavioral health provider rates. It’s your money.

Banking, Commerce and Insurance bills were passed to require insurance companies to cover hearing aids for children, to allow for the synchronization of medication (saves you trips to the pharmacy), and prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage of behavioral health care solely because it is delivered in a school.

The Business and Labor Committee advanced a bill which was passed to prohibit collection of medical debt for treatment of a work-related injury while the matter is pending in the Nebraska Workers’ Compensation Court.

 An Education Committee bill passed by the Legislature provides resident college tuition rates for spouses and dependents of active duty military

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personnel who are assigned to duty stations outside Nebraska. Social studies requirements for Nebraska schools will be upgraded to ensure they teach and assess foundational knowledge in civics, history, economics, financial literacy and geography.

General Affairs Committee bills passed add electronic skill games to the regulation of mechanical amusement devices, require the Nebraska Lottery to publish the odds of winning the largest prize in every advertisement and raise the age for possessing and using vapor and tobacco products from 18 to 19.

Government Committee bills passed would allow the Nebraska Tourism Commission to sell products and another to allow certain public information dealing with physical and cyber assaults of critical energy infrastructure to be withheld in the interests of national security, public health or safety.

Health Committee bills passed by lawmakers would: delay transition of long-term care facilities to the state’s Medicaid managed care program; give the Department of Health and Human Services five days to respond to all complaints of child abuse or neglect at a licensed facility and allow mental health substance use treatment facilities that use locked rooms to retain licensure.

The Judiciary Committee advanced and their colleagues passed an omnibus bill that makes numerous changes to current criminal justice statutes. Among the provisions: fine those who try to smuggle a cell phone to an inmate; require juvenile records to be sealed automatically upon satisfactory completion of diversion, mediation, probation, supervision or other treatment program; increase judges’ salaries; govern the use and training of school resource officers.

Natural Resources bills enacted: merge the state Department of Environmental Quality and the state Energy Office into the new Department of Environment and Energy and allow the new department to assume responsibility for a permit program for the federal Clean Water Act; and allow a

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landowner to challenge eminent domain in the construction of a wind energy project.

Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee advanced and lawmakers passed a bill to require the Public Employees Retirement Board—in consultation with the committee, Omaha Public Schools board of education and other stakeholders—to prepare a work plan that examines the possible transfer of management responsibilities for the Omaha plan to the public employees’ retirement board.

Bills from the Revenue Committee passed require a political subdivision to hold a public hearing before increasing its property tax request, require out-of-state internet retailers to collect state sales tax on purchases made by Nebraska residents and allow a county to impose a sales tax to pay a federal judgment against it.

The Transportation Committee forwarded and lawmakers passed a bill to authorize the state Department of Motor Vehicles to create several specialty license plates including designs honoring people who have served in the armed forces in Iran, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf War, the Vietnam War and the Global War on Terror. It also creates a “Support Our Troops” plate available to those who have not served, but would like to show support for the armed forces.

Urban Affairs bills passed authorizing creation of a new regional transit authority, blighted properties and updated building codes. Blighted areas in an economically disadvantaged area are eligible for federal funding. The 2018 version of the International Building Code, the International Residential Code and the International Existing Building Code were adopted. Nebraska has been using the 2012 edition.

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***J.L. Schmidt has been*** *covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for 20 years.*