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**Capitol View**

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**Lawmakers Face a Number of Obstacles in Closing Days**

If this were a horse race, Nebraska lawmakers would be heading into the final stretch looking to muster more unadulterated energy than disqualified 2021 Kentucky Derby winner Medina Spirit.

As it turns out, this promises to be more of a steeplechase in which competitors are required to jump diverse fences and ditch obstacles.

Sure, the 2021 Legislature completed its constitutionally required passage of a $9.7 billion two-year budget without a single gubernatorial veto. But gaining veto-proof support of several big issues will pose a problem and passing other measures with a hefty price tag will be a temptation to be resisted.

Speaker of the Legislature Mike Hilgers of Lincoln is hopeful he can end the race early, before the 90 days allotted for the event. Lawmakers do face a guaranteed special session this fall to deal with mandatory redistricting because completed census figures essential for the task have been delayed by the federal government.

So, what lies ahead? Would you believe another attempt to legalize medical marijuana (LB474) as championed by Lincoln Senator Anna Wishart, a Democrat in the officially nonpartisan Legislature? If history repeats, expect a filibuster or two on this issue, which is opposed by the Governor. The measure almost made the 2020 ballot as a voter-initiated petition drive until a lawsuit was filed by Lancaster County Sheriff Terry Wagner.

The state Supreme Court sided with the lawsuit, which was financed by an as yet undisclosed source and ruled that the ballot question contained too many subjects. If Wishart’s bill fails again, look for another petition- driven issue on the next general election ballot.

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Senator Tom Brewer of Gordon has a controversial bill (LB236) that would give all but two Nebraska counties the authority to allow people to carry concealed weapons without a permit. It would not apply to Douglas and Lancaster Counties where Omaha and Lincoln are located. Everyone knows that the shootings in the state’s two-largest cities are, well, just expected. Give me a break.

Just envision greater Nebraska west of South 9th Street in Lincoln looking like a scene from the mythical gunfights at Ogallala’s Front Street. Attention Senators, this is NOT the Wild West.

But I’m realistic enough to know that Brewer’s a Republican just like the Governor. The Governor invited the NRA to hold its national convention here one time and, by golly, this is Nebraska and people have been carrying guns, concealed or otherwise, registered or not, for years. If it can survive the filibuster, it’ll pass.

Expect a fight on at least two other Democrat senator sponsored bills. Omaha Sen. Mike McDonnell’s measure (LB298) would allow migrants working in the country legally and the so-called “Dreamers” to get unemployment benefits. Dreamers are those brought to this country illegally as children. Fremont Democrat Lynn Walz’s bill (LB542) would break with history by allowing the state to issue bonds to pay for expanding Nebraska’s expressway system – a major piece of which is in her district - and other highway construction. The Governor is pretty much my way or no highway on such measures.

With the passage of the budget and its implications on providing property tax relief, lawmakers are left with a finite amount of funds for other proposals. Appropriations Committee Chair Sen. John Stinner of Gering says his colleagues have already given first-round approval to a number of bills which, if fully implemented, would cost $1.2 million more than is available.

He said he remains optimistic that some careful tweaking can make everything fit. He plans conversations with the Speaker and Revenue Committee Chairwoman Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn to that end.

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A phase-out of taxes on Social Security income, elimination of taxes on military retirement income, reduction of taxes on corporate income and a package of sales tax exemptions loom large in that discussion.

So, here’s to getting it done, the sooner the better. Looking forward to the special session and watching the fits and snits as partisan lawmakers try to act like nonpartisan grownups to draw lines on a map to equally divide the Nebraska pie into 49 legislative pieces and bigger chunks for Congress and Regents and other constitutionally mandated areas.

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