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**Capitol View**

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**More Guns in Schools, Pool for Legislative Clerks and More**

They're back. The 108th Legislature, Second Session, convenes today.

One can expect proposed bills and discussion of some hot button issues as well as what could be a protracted debate on rules. It’s likely that state Sen. Tom Brewer of Gordon will have something to say about guns in schools.

The Education or Revenue committees will likely address school financing and the Executive Council will seek discussion about putting legislative committee clerks in a pool to provide uniform training while avoiding partisanship. The council will also offer something to deal with legislative oversight of corrections and social services.

Who should be allowed to carry a gun on school property, beyond on-duty law enforcement officers?

  Brewer, a military veteran and gun rights advocate who has been shot at and missed more often than the ducks I hunted as a youth, held forth in an interim study on the question with invited testimony from rural and private school officials, firearms experts and security contractors. No teachers or teachers unions or leaders or school board members from public schools in Nebraska’s largest cities made that list.

While he said he hasn’t decided on wording for his next gun bill after successfully passing last year a bill eliminating training requirements for carrying concealed handguns, there were some likely targets identified during the hearing, according to the Nebraska Examiner.
 Among them: allowing certified law enforcement officers to carry service weapons on school property and at school events when off-duty; giving elected local school boards the authority to allow armed teachers and staff at schools; requiring updated digital mapping of

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school buildings compatible with mapping software and equipment used by local and state law enforcement.

“We don’t have enough money to put school resource officers in every school,” Brewer said. “For those schools … that don’t have that advantage, I think we owe it to them to do what we can.”

On another gun-related matter, a recent opinion from state Attorney General Mike Hilgers said that executive orders signed by the mayors of Lincoln and Omaha to prohibit firearms on properties owned, leased or managed by the city, including parks and public spaces, are non-binding and can’t be enforced. Some senators may want to revisit that issue.

Likewise, lawmakers are expected to look for a solution to another Hilgers’ opinion concerning ombudsmen for corrections and child welfare issues. Hilgers wrote earlier that such offices, created by the Legislature, were overreaching, and interfered with functions of the Executive branch.

Speaker of the Legislature John Arch of Omaha and Clerk of the Legislature Brandon Metzler have discussed placing legislative committee clerks in a separate office instead of the offices of committee chairs to de-politicize the position and to provide training aimed at much-needed adherence to clerks fulfilling the things necessary to perform the tasks with which they are charged.

 Arch said that more than 80 corrections were made last session to reports used as a historical and legal record for the work of legislative committees this year — four times as many as were made in both the 2021 and 2019 sessions, which were also 90 days long.

Eight committee clerks failed to turn in completed reports detailing the efforts of senators on those working groups to the clerk's office by the Oct. 1 deadline this year, while three end-of-session reports from the 2023 session are still missing. One committee clerk forgot to turn on the recording equipment during an interim hearing at the Capitol, meaning no record was created for a portion of the proceedings, while in other situations, recording equipment has been left on to capture senators' private conversations.

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They have suggested creation of a new Legislative Committee Support Office to provide clerks with uniform training and supervision from legislative staff rather than from state senators who chair committees and hire the clerks as part of their staff. Metzler said the centralized office would allow the Legislature to operate with fewer committee clerks than it does currently because clerks could be assigned to multiple committees.

Several senators, mostly those who now serve as committee chairs, bristled at the idea of moving the clerk outside of their office, which they said would cut down lines of communication and potentially slow the Legislature's work. Several said clerks work best when they work closely with senators.

Omaha Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh, who is not a committee chair, said she believed having a clerk that was part of the professional staff and not a political ally or former campaign member would benefit the institution as a whole.

"Your committee clerk should not be helping you get your bill out; their job is to run the meeting and keep a record," Cavanaugh said. "This shouldn't be a political position, and they shouldn't be in control over who is running the record of the Legislature."

Stay tuned. Trust me, this’ll be an interesting session.

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