

County sales tax to pay certain judgments advanced

A county could impose a sales tax to help pay a federal judgment against it under a bill advanced from general file April 4.

Introduced by Adams Sen. Myron Dorn, LB472 would authorize a county board to adopt a resolution to impose a sales and use tax of 0.5 percent on transactions within the county to pay a qualified judgment, which the bill defines as a judgment rendered against a county by a federal court for a violation of federal law.

Dorn said the proposal is intended to help the residents of Gage County. In 2016, a federal judge awarded more than \$28 million in damages to the six men and women wrongfully convicted of the rape and homicide of a Beatrice woman in 1985.

The individuals, commonly known as the "Beatrice Six," had sued Gage County in federal court after DNA evidence exonerated them.

Dorn said the county increased its property tax levy for the 2018-19 fiscal year from approximately 38 cents per \$100 of valuation to the statutory 50-cent limit, as required by law. Gage County will use the additional revenue



Sen. Myron Dorn said the proposed county sales tax would allow Gage County to pay a federal judgment against it as quickly as possible.

to pay the judgment, he said, but that will take at least eight years under current valuations and budget conditions.

The state Department of Revenue estimates that LB472 would generate \$526,000 in sales and use tax revenue for Gage County in fiscal year 2019-20 and approximately \$1.3 million in each of the three subsequent fiscal years.

Although he does not relish asking

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Hearing aid coverage for children advanced

Lawmakers gave first-round approval April 3 to a bill that would require most health insurance plans to pay for hearing aids for young Nebraskans.

LB15, introduced by Bellevue Sen. Carol Blood, would adopt the Children of Nebraska Hearing Aid Act.

The bill would require most health plans to cover expenses associated with hearing aids for Nebraskans



Sen. Carol Blood

younger than 19, including evaluation, fitting, programming, repairs and auditory rehabilitation and training.

Many insurance companies consider insertion of hearing aids to be an elective procedure, Blood said, but for Nebraska children with a hearing impairment, a hearing aid is a lifeline.

Blood, who was deaf as a child, said the \$1,500 to \$3,000 cost of hearing aids is unaffordable for many families. Without access to hearing aids, children's quality of life can be impacted severely, she said.

"Hearing empowers us," Blood said. "It helps us lead our everyday lives without limitations. It provides us with the ability to socialize, work and communicate."

Small-business group health plans would be exempt from the bill's provisions. Insurance companies that could show that expenses associated with hearing aids would exceed one percent

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Hearing aid coverage for children advanced

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of premium dollars collected per year would be exempt for one plan year.

LB15 also would cap covered expenses at \$3,000 over four years and would take effect Jan. 1, 2020.

A Banking, Commerce and Insurance Committee amendment, adopted 39-0, would define a hearing impairment as an impairment diagnosed by an otolaryngologist with an auditory assessment completed by a licensed audiologist.

The amendment also would require that a hearing aid be purchased from a licensed audiologist with medical clearance from an otolaryngologist in order to be covered.

Following adoption of the committee amendment, the bill advanced to select file on a 39-0 vote. ■



Unicameral Youth Legislature registration open

High school students with an interest in law, government, leadership or public speaking are encouraged to register for the 2019 Unicameral Youth Legislature, which will convene June 9-12.

The Unicameral Youth Legislature is a four-day legislative simulation conducted at the State Capitol Building and coordinated by the Clerk's Office of the Nebraska Legislature. Student senators will sponsor bills, conduct committee hearings, debate legislation and discover the unique process of the nation's only unicameral.

Students will learn about the inner workings of the Legislature directly from senators and staff. Bills will be

based on legislation considered during the current legislative session.

Registrants are encouraged to apply for a Speaker Greg Adams Civic Scholarship award, which covers the full cost of admission. Applicants must submit a short essay. Other \$100 scholarships also are available.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Extension 4-H Youth Development Office coordinates housing and recreational activities for the camp as part of their Big Red Summer Camps program.

Registration forms can be obtained from the Legislature's Unicameral Youth Legislature page: www.NebraskaLegislature.gov/uyl.

The registration deadline is May 15.

UNICAMERAL UPDATE

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the Legislature to approve the proposed tax, Dorn said, the additional revenue could help the county pay the judgment within six years.

“The county does not have a choice in paying the federal judgment,” he said. “This judgment is a bill—it has come due, it is owed.”

The state tax commissioner would administer the proposed tax and would collect any sales and use tax imposed under LB472 in the same way that state sales and use tax is collected. The commissioner would remit the monthly proceeds to the county after deducting a 3 percent administrative fee. The tax would end after the judgment is paid.

Counties currently may impose a sales and use tax to pay for public safety services and interlocal agreements. LB472 would prohibit a county from imposing that tax if it imposes the one proposed by the bill.

Dorn introduced an amendment, adopted 47-0, that would require any county that imposes a sales and use tax in order to pay a qualified judgment to set its property tax levy at the 50-cent maximum for each year it imposes the sales and use tax. It would require the county to use revenue from that levy to pay the judgment.

Under the amendment, the sales and use tax could be imposed for no more than seven years and only to pay judgments of more than \$25 million. The amendment also would terminate the act on Jan. 1, 2027.

Bellevue Sen. Sue Crawford supported the proposal even though she said it would set a concerning precedent of allowing a county to impose a sales tax that overlays a municipal sales tax. Crawford said she supports

limiting the use of such a tax to narrow cases when a county must pay an extremely high federal judgment.

“I realize that this is a very specific situation that Gage County finds itself in and that these kinds of drastic times call for measures we might not otherwise approve of,” she said.

Sen. Tom Briese of Albion also supported LB472, saying it would be a more equitable way to pay the judgment than relying solely on property taxes. Agricultural land comprises approximately 72 percent of Gage County’s property tax base, he said, but only 13 percent of the county’s residents are farmers, meaning they would pay a disproportionate share of the judgment.

“Without this bill, ag producers already struggling from pathetic market prices, onerous property taxes and the devastating impact of a flood will be further called upon to bail out Gage County,” Briese said. “Folks, that’s not right.”

Omaha Sen. Steve Lathrop, chairperson of the Legislature’s Judiciary

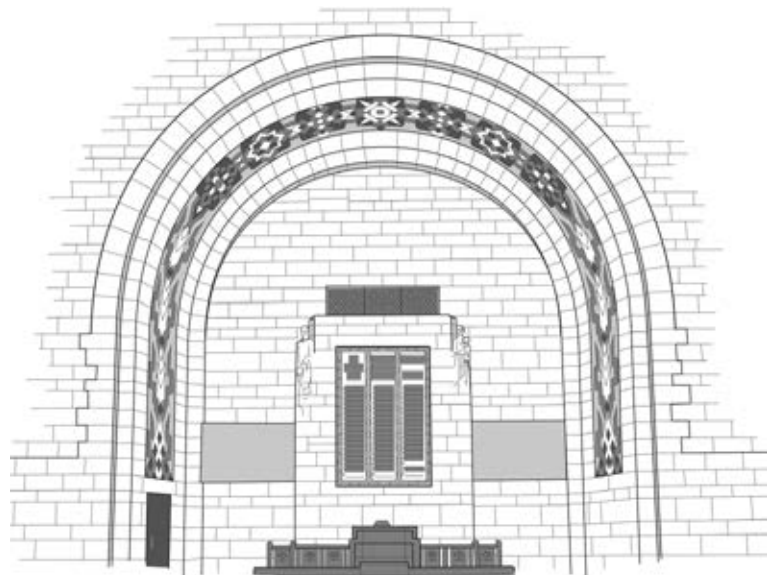
Committee, also supported the bill. Lathrop said the committee will not advance a bill Dorn introduced that would require the state to help pay the judgment because no direct relationship between the state and the judgment exists. However, he said, the Legislature has the responsibility to give Gage County the tools it needs to pay the judgment.

Sen. John Lowe of Kearney said authorizing a county board to impose the tax, rather than requiring a vote of a county’s residents, concerned him.

“I view this new tax much the same way that I would view a levy override,” he said. “And so I believe this bill should be amended so the taxing decision goes to the vote of the people [of the affected county].”

Another Dorn amendment, adopted 45-0, would clarify that adoption of the resolution to impose the tax would require the affirmative vote of at least a two-thirds majority of all elected county board members.

Senators voted 40-1 to advance LB472 to select file. ■



MEET THE SENATOR

Legislature gains a radical pragmatist in Hunt

By the time Omaha Sen. Megan Hunt wrote the business plan for Hello Holiday—a boutique that supports the work of local designers, artists and activists—she already had founded or co-founded a bridal accessory business, a shared co-working space and a non-profit with the goal of reducing harassment at Omaha nightclubs and bars.

That entrepreneur’s adaptability, comfort with risk and realistic expectations about how things can go wrong will be useful as she balances her priorities with those of 48 other senators, Hunt said.

“You can’t have tunnel vision in entrepreneurship, and you can’t have tunnel vision in politics,” she said, “because if you’re just focused on this one goal ... you’re going to miss all these doors that open up along the way that might lead to something better.”

The Blair native and Dana College graduate said her pragmatic approach might surprise those who know her only by her reputation as a progressive activist interested in economic justice.

“I’m definitely radical—I’ll own that,” Hunt said. “But there’s a different playbook you can use when you’re an activist—a private citizen—than when you’re an elected official.”

As her first session in the Legislature unfolds, Hunt hopes her fellow senators discover that she is approachable and amenable to compromise. Hunt said she has found that same willingness to compromise in the other senators.

“We all have our favorite issues that

we’re always going to hold a torch for, but in general we all want to be productive,” she said. “The body is too small for us to jam each other up.”

Despite a busy legislative schedule, Hunt finds time to spend with her 8-year-old daughter, Alice. She spends nights and weekends running her business, and Hunt said she could not do her job in the Legislature without the support network provided by her business partner and employees, many of whom came to Lincoln to see her take the oath of office.

“[It was] just all these young women in the front row who just looked like the most fashionable people I’ve ever seen,” she said. “I admire them so much.”

Hunt also likes to read, do crossword puzzles and dine at restaurants in the Dundee and Benson neighborhoods where she lives and works.

“There’s a lot of great restaurants in my district that I love to support,” she said. “Everybody knows I don’t cook, so I’m showing up somewhere pretty much every night.” ■



Sen. Megan Hunt and her daughter, Alice, at home in 2018.

BANKING, COMMERCE & INSURANCE



Clarification of in-school behavioral health reimbursement amended, advanced

A bill that would require insurance companies in Nebraska to pay for covered behavioral health services delivered in schools advanced to final reading April 2.

Omaha Sen. Rick Kolowski said he introduced LB619 because there is confusion in current law about whether insurance companies will reimburse a provider who meets with a client at a school. The bill would prohibit an insurance company from denying coverage or payment for a mental health service solely because the service is delivered in a school.

As amended during general file debate, LB619 would not require an insurer to cover services otherwise excluded from a policy and would take effect June 1, 2020.

Kolowski offered an amendment on select file, adopted 40-0, to clarify that the bill would not require payment for mental health services provided by an individual employed by or under contract with a school district or an educational service unit in a regular full-time or part-time position.

He said the change was intended to address concerns raised on general file by North Platte Sen. Mike Groene that school personnel could bill an insurer for services rendered.

Groene supported the amendment, which he said simply clarifies that no school or ESU staff would be eligible



Sen. Rick Kolowski

for reimbursement under the bill.

“Sen. Kolowski wrote a very clear amendment that clarifies it,” he said. “It felt good to work together as a team of senators to accomplish this.”

Following adoption of the Kolowski amendment, senators advanced the bill to final reading by voice vote.

BUSINESS & LABOR



Lawmakers give second-round approval to bill aimed at wage discrimination

Senators amended and advanced a bill from select file April 3 intended to combat wage discrimination in Nebraska.

LB217, as introduced by Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, would prohibit an employer from discharging or retaliating against any employee because he or she inquired about, discussed or disclosed comparative compensation information for the purpose of determining whether an employer is compensating employees in a manner that provides equal pay for equal work.

Pansing Brooks said the bill was modeled after legislation introduced in the U.S. Senate. The measure is important, she said, because women continue to earn considerably less than men for doing the same work—earning 80 percent of what their male counterparts make nationally.

Lincoln Sen. Matt Hansen, chairperson of the Business and Labor Committee, offered an amendment on select file, which he said was a



Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks

compromise resulting from a series of meetings with stakeholders.

“[The amendment] addresses concerns brought to myself and Sen. Pansing Brooks following general file debate,” Hansen said.

The amendment, adopted 28-0, clarifies that the bill would not apply to employers that are exempt from the Nebraska Fair Employment Practice Act or create an obligation for any employer or employee to disclose information regarding wages, benefits or other compensation.

The amendment also would prohibit disclosure or dissemination of:

- information to a competitor;
- proprietary or other privileged information; or
- information to the general public or by an employee during work hours.

Pansing Brooks supported the amendment, although she acknowledged that it would result in a less expansive provision than originally intended.

“Additions are not always perfect to any bill, but I believe the art of compromise means that perfection can’t be the enemy of good,” she said. “So, I think we are moving the needle in Nebraska ... [and] I do believe that there is some value in moving the needle a little bit.”

Following adoption of the Hansen amendment, lawmakers advanced the bill to final reading by voice vote.

GOVERNMENT, MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS



Open meeting changes for teleconferencing amended, advanced

Lawmakers advanced a bill from general file April 3 intended to use

technology to create more efficient and transparent government public meetings.

LB212, introduced by the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, would apply to organizations created under the Interlocal Cooperation Act that sell electricity or natural gas at wholesale on a multi-state basis, organizations created under the Municipal Cooperative Financing Act and risk management pools.

The bill would allow those organizations to designate a nonvoting individual, not included as part of the quorum, to be present at a site where a public hearing is being held to keep the site open for members of the public who wish to attend the public hearing by telephone conference or videoconference.

The bill also would allow qualified entities to hold more than 50 percent of their meetings by telephone or videoconferencing as long as at least one meeting is not held in that manner.

Finally, LB212 would extend the allowed length of a telephone conference call from two hours to no more than five hours.

Gordon Sen. Tom Brewer, chairperson of the committee, said the changes would improve the public meeting process for entities covered by the bill.

"[It] makes it easier for the government bodies to do their work that they're assigned and provides transparency for these public meetings," Brewer said.

A Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee amendment, adopted 34-0, added provisions of two additional bills.

Provisions of LB191, introduced by Greta Sen. Andrew La Grone, would harmonize bond definitions and delete obsolete language regarding

financial instruments approved and agreed to prior to July 1, 1999. The provisions would limit to one year the period for which a governmental unit may exceed the allowable growth percentage if approved by voters at a meeting.



Sen. Andrew La Grone

The provisions also would change the publication requirement prior to a budget hearing from five calendar days to four and define such days to include the day of publication but not the day of the hearing.

Provisions from LB239, introduced by Adams Sen. Myron Dorn, would amend the County Budget Act to mirror the four-day notice language in the Nebraska Budget Act.



Sen. Myron Dorn

Following rejection of an amendment offered by Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers that would have gutted LB212 and replaced it with provisions of another proposal, senators advanced the bill to select file on a 34-0 vote.

Tourism promotion bill advanced

A bill that would allow the Nebraska Tourism Commission to sell promotional products advanced to select file April 4.

Sen. John Stinner of Gering said he introduced LB637 to allow the state to benefit from the attention given to the state's tourism slogan: "Honestly, it's not for everyone."



Sen. John Stinner

"There have been a number of major events in

Nebraska recent history which [have increased] our exposure as a tourist destination," Stinner said. "The commission must have the ability to develop and sell promotional products as part of this marketing strategy."

LB637 would authorize the tourism commission to develop and approve state marketing campaigns and develop and sell tourism products. Revenue generated by any sales would be credited to the commission's promotional cash fund.

After approving a Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee amendment, which would make the bill's provisions effective upon passage, lawmakers advanced LB637 on a 40-0 vote.

JUDICIARY

Regulations for use of jailhouse informants clears first round

A bill that would require increased transparency in the use of jailhouse informants was advanced from general file April 4.

LB352, as introduced by Lincoln Sen. Adam Morfeld, would require each prosecutor's office to maintain a record of each case in which testimony is provided by a jailhouse informant and any benefit or plea deal offered to the informant.



Sen. Adam Morfeld

Morfeld said the bill hopefully would curtail false jailhouse testimony, which he said has played a role in 159 wrongful convictions in the U.S. since 1989.

"The expectation of a reduced sentence or other benefits creates a strong incentive to lie, which can cause

a tragic ripple effect in the criminal justice system,” he said. “[False jailhouse testimony] harms innocent people and allows actual perpetrators to escape justice.

Morfeld introduced an amendment, adopted 43-0, which replaced a Judiciary Committee amendment and became the bill.

Under the amended bill, if a prosecutor intends to use the testimony of a jailhouse informant, he or she would be required to provide certain information to the defense, including:

- the informant’s known criminal history;
- any benefit requested, offered or provided to the informant in exchange for testimony;
- the specific statements the defendant allegedly made to the informant that would be used against the defendant;
- other cases in which the informant testified or intended to testify; and
- any case in which the informant recanted testimony against a defendant.

A prosecutor who offers any benefit or plea deal to a jailhouse informant first would be required to notify any victim of a crime committed by the informant.

Lincoln Sen. Mike Hilgers spoke in support of the amended bill. He said it would help strengthen protections within the context of the current legal system.

“The most important aspect ... is to ensure the defendant has due process and, in order to have that, it’s important that they have notice,” he said. “If they have notice, then they have the opportunity to ... get discovery or move to strike the [jailhouse informant] testimony.”

Senators voted 42-0 to advance the amended bill to select file.

REVENUE

Income tax on certain out-of-state corporations considered

Out-of-state corporations selling software to Nebraska customers would pay state income tax on those sales under a proposal heard April 3 by the Revenue Committee.

Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn, sponsor of LB288, has said she introduced the bill as a placeholder that could be amended to include any state income tax law changes needed to reflect federal tax code changes made by Congress in 2017.

At an April 3 rehearing of LB288, Linehan introduced an amendment that would replace the bill. The amendment would expand the definition of “doing business in this state” to include the sale, lease or license of services, intangibles or digital products to customers in Nebraska that exceed \$500,000 in the previous or current calendar year.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled last year in *South Dakota v. Wayfair* that a state may require online retailers without a physical presence in the state to collect and remit state sales tax. In response to that decision, the Legislature passed a bill earlier this session that requires out-of-state internet retailers to collect and remit state sales tax on purchases made by Nebraska residents if those retailers meet certain sales thresholds.

Linehan said the proposed amendment would set a similar threshold beyond which out-of-state corporations that license trademarks, sell software

or provide consulting services to Nebraska customers would be subject to state income tax.

Stacy Watson testified in support of the amendment on behalf of the Grow Nebraska Tax Coalition, saying many states have passed or will pass similar legislation based on the *Wayfair* decision. Linehan’s amendment would make it clear to taxpayers and the state Department of Revenue that Nebraska may impose income tax on out-of-state corporations, she said.

Adam Thimmesch, an associate professor at the Nebraska College of Law who studies state and local taxes, gave neutral testimony on his own behalf. He said the amendment would both clarify and limit what the state already may do.

Nebraska already imposes its corporate income tax on any business that exceeds the protections of the “public law,” Thimmesch said, a federal limitation that bars states from imposing income tax on companies that only solicit orders for sales of tangible personal property that then are sent outside of the state for approval or rejection.

Thimmesch said the proposed \$500,000 threshold is similar to what some states impose, but he noted that others impose a lower threshold or leave it to their respective departments of revenue to determine an appropriate threshold.

No one testified in opposition to the amendment and the committee took no immediate action on LB288.

Productivity-based ag land valuation system stalls

A bill that would value farmland for property tax purposes based on the income it can produce stalled on general file April 4.

Under LB483, introduced by



Sen. Lou Ann Linehan

Bayard Sen. Steve Erdman, agricultural and horticultural land would be assessed based on its agricultural productivity value, which in turn would be based on that land's capitalized net earning capacity.



Sen. Steve Erdman

Beginning with tax year 2020, county assessors would determine capitalized net earning capacity using an agricultural land valuation manual created by a new Agricultural Land Valuation Board.

Erdman said the current market-based system of valuing agricultural and horticultural land produces skewed valuations because it relies on too few sales. He said the proposed method would have prevented large increases in farmland valuation over the past decade that have resulted in farmers and ranchers paying a disproportionate share of the property taxes used to fund local governments and public schools.

The proposal is not meant to reduce the amount of property taxes farmers pay, Erdman said, but to create a system that values farmland in a way that reflects what that land is capable of producing.

"My goal is not to have them pay less," he said. "My goal is to make it a fair way to value ag land."

The agricultural productivity value would be determined by:

- dividing agricultural and horticultural land into major use categories described in the bill and then dividing those categories into subclasses based on soil productivity classifications;
- computing a net revenue based on an eight-year Olympic average of annual net incomes, in which the highest and lowest one-year values are discarded; and

- dividing the net revenue by a discount rate determined by each county's eight-year Olympic average of annual precipitation.

The five major use categories would be irrigated cropland, dryland cropland, irrigated grassland, non-irrigated grassland and wasteland, including forests and shelter belts.

The bill would require the state Department of Revenue's Property Assessment Division to calculate net revenue per acre for both irrigated and dryland cropland, as well as other data that would be forwarded to the board for inclusion in the land valuation manual.

For tax year 2020, the board would set the discount rates so that the total agricultural productivity value of all agricultural and horticultural land is the same as the total assessed value of that land for 2019.

The board would set the discount rates for tax year 2021, and each following year, so that the total agricultural productivity value of all horticultural and agricultural land deviates from the total agricultural productivity value from the prior tax year by no more than 15 percent.

Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte supported LB483, saying it would prevent large swings in valuations. Valuing farmland based on what it can produce—which he said can be determined with readily available data—would be fairer than the current system, Groene said.

Several senators raised concerns and questions regarding the proposal.

Bellevue Sen. Sue Crawford cautioned that because Agricultural Land Valuation Board members would be appointed by the governor and represent agricultural interests, they would have a political incentive to raise discount rates in order to reduce agricultural land valuations.

Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha said the bill's provisions might not meet constitutional requirements to value agricultural and horticultural land uniformly and proportionately for tax purposes.

After three hours of debate on general file, the Legislature adjourned for the day before voting on LB483. Per a practice implemented by Speaker Jim Scheer, the sponsor of a bill that is facing a potential filibuster must demonstrate sufficient support for a cloture motion before the measure will be scheduled for additional debate.

Valuation adjustment for destroyed property debated

A proposed amendment meant to provide tax relief for those whose property has been destroyed by a natural disaster became the focus of debate on a tax cleanup bill April 5.

Sponsored by Elkhorn Sen. Lou Ann Linehan, LB512 would make several technical changes to state tax law requested by the state Department of Revenue.



Sen. Lou Ann Linehan

As introduced, the bill would allow a property owner to petition his or her county assessor for a reassessment of a property's value for that year if the property is destroyed or damaged by a major calamity—such as a fire, flood or tornado—between the assessment date and July 15.

A pending Revenue Committee amendment would remove that provision, but Sen. Steve Erdman of Bayard introduced an amendment to include provisions from his LB482, which also deals with changes to the valuation of destroyed property.

That amendment would require a

county assessor to report to the county board of equalization all real property that is destroyed by fire or other natural disaster between Jan. 1 and Oct. 1 of any year.

The county board then would adjust the value of the destroyed property based in part on the portion of the year during which the property was intact. The board's action would apply only to the current assessment year.

Erdman said it is unfair to require property owners to pay property taxes on a home's full valuation after it has been destroyed by forces that are beyond their control. He said the proposal especially is needed after the destruction caused by the recent floods in eastern Nebraska.

"This bill makes total sense and allows us an opportunity to help people who have had their property destroyed," Erdman said.

Most counties could raise their property tax levies to make up for any lost revenue due to the change, he said.

Sen. Robert Clements of Elmwood supported Erdman's proposal. Assuming that 6 percent of the houses in Sarpy County were destroyed by the floods, Clements said, the county would have to increase its levy by approximately 1.7 percent in order to offset property tax revenue lost due to the proposed valuation change.

"I think people would be willing to pay another 1.7 percent for a year to help out their neighbors whose house is completely gone and [who] have a lot more things to worry about," he said.

Brainard Sen. Bruce Bostelman also supported the amendment, saying it could benefit all Nebraska communities, not just those in rural areas or those affected by the recent floods. Natural disasters can and will affect the entire state, he said, and the proposal would provide some relief to

families and businesses that have lost everything.

Sen. Kate Bolz of Lincoln cautioned senators that Erdman's amendment would reduce property tax revenue to counties that need funds to repair damaged roads and bridges and provide matching funds necessary to receive federal disaster aid.

"While certainly we want fairness and relief, when possible, for those who are affected by emergencies and these terrible circumstances," Bolz said, "we also don't want to tie the hands of the counties who are also helping to recover from the flooding."

Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers filed a series of motions intended to delay a vote on the underlying bill. He said the amendment's supporters were asking the Legislature to help their constituents after they opposed other bills introduced this session that would help a number of marginalized groups.

After three hours of debate on general file, the Legislature adjourned for the week before voting on LB512 or the pending amendments. Per a practice implemented by Speaker Jim Scheer, the sponsor of a bill that is facing a potential filibuster must demonstrate sufficient support for a cloture motion before the measure will be scheduled for additional debate.

TRANSPORTATION & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Bill to expand high-speed broadband availability advanced

Lawmakers gave first-round approval April 4 to a bill that would make it easier for customers to switch to a new telecommunications company.

Currently, a customer who wants to

receive high-speed broadband service from a telecommunications company that operates in a local exchange other than the one in which the customer resides must show that he or she currently is not receiving those services or would not receive them in a reasonable time.

Under LB268, sponsored by Henderson Sen. Curt Friesen, the customer only would be required to show that he or she is not receiving such services at the time of application. It will be easier for rural residents to improve the quality of their broadband service under the bill, Friesen said, and help close the "digital divide" between rural and urban Nebraska.

"We have some companies that are not willing to invest the resources to expand broadband service," he said "This won't solve all of the rural broadband problems, but it will help some residents and hopefully get more companies interested, especially if they start to lose customers."

Venango Sen. Dan Hughes supported the bill, saying many larger telecommunications companies are unwilling to invest in new rural broadband service or maintain current infrastructure.

"It is extremely important that we get high-speed broadband built out as quickly as possible to rural Nebraska so that we have the same opportunities as those in the cities," Hughes said. "The more pressure we can apply to those companies to do their jobs and get high-speed [broadband] out to more rural areas, the better off we all are."

Senators advanced LB268 to select file on a 37-0 vote.



Sen. Curt Friesen

URBAN AFFAIRS

TIF repayment extension advanced

A proposal that could extend the maximum length of time to repay tax-increment financing indebtedness in certain cases advanced from general file April 4.

LR14CA, introduced by Sen. Justin Wayne of Omaha, would place a proposed constitutional amendment on the November 2020 general election ballot. The amendment would authorize the Legislature to extend the maximum repayment period for TIF indebtedness from 15 to 20 years



Sen. Justin Wayne

if more than half of the property in a project area was designated as extremely blighted.

State law defines an extremely blighted area as a census tract with an average unemployment rate that is at least 200 percent of the average state unemployment rate and an average poverty rate of more than 20 percent according to the most recent federal decennial census.

“While this [proposal] is for my community ... there are areas throughout the state that it also touches,” Wayne said. “We have the ability for local control and all we’re doing is giving cities the ability to use this tool to help develop their blighted—and in this case extremely blighted—areas.”

Sen. Jim Scheer of Norfolk said an exception made by the Legislature decades ago to extend repayment to 20 years on a bond for Norfolk to build a more robust flood control system

likely saved the city from devastation during Nebraska’s recent flooding.

Doing the same for areas of Omaha may not be the answer to that city’s problems, he said, but it might be.

“If they think it will [help], I think I’ve got the obligation to let them try,” Scheer said.

Gordon Sen. Tom Brewer also spoke in favor of the proposal, saying it could be an important tool of local control.

“At this point, I think we do need to bring this to a vote, and it’s a bill that I will support because I cannot help but want to help someone who’s focused on their district,” Brewer said.

Lincoln Sen. Mike Hilgers said he would support the measure on general file, but that concerns remain that a future Legislature could broaden the definition of extremely blighted beyond what senators currently intend.

Lawmakers voted 40-0 to advance LR14CA to select file. ■

FIND YOUR SENATOR

Find your Senator and District

elmwood nebraska

District 2
Robert Clements
Web Page

If you want to know which legislative district you live in, www.NebraskaLegislature.gov provides an easy tool for locating your district and senator.

Enter your full address into the “Find Your Senator” search field located on the right side of the home page. This opens a map that shows your legislative district and a picture of your senator, along with a link to that senator’s web page. This page includes senators’ contact information and links to their biography and photos. It also provides a list of committees they serve on and the bills they’ve introduced.

2019 Legislative Session

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		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		
	DAY 13	DAY 14	DAY 15	DAY 16		

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
February						
					1	2
					DAY 17	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	DAY 18	DAY 19	DAY 20	DAY 21	DAY 22	
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	DAY 23	DAY 24	DAY 25	DAY 26	RECESS	
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	HOLIDAY	DAY 27	DAY 28	DAY 29	DAY 30	
24	25	26	27	28		
	RECESS	DAY 31	DAY 32	DAY 33		

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
March						
					1	2
					DAY 34	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	DAY 35	DAY 36	DAY 37	DAY 38	RECESS	
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	RECESS	DAY 39	DAY 40	DAY 41	DAY 42	
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	DAY 43	DAY 44	DAY 45	DAY 46	RECESS	
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	DAY 47	DAY 48	DAY 49	DAY 50	RECESS	

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
April						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	RECESS	DAY 51	DAY 52	DAY 53	DAY 54	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	DAY 55	DAY 56	DAY 57	DAY 58	RECESS	
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	DAY 59	DAY 60	DAY 61	DAY 62	RECESS	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	RECESS	DAY 63	DAY 64	DAY 65	DAY 66*	
28	29	30				
	DAY 67	DAY 68				

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
May						
			1	2	3	4
			DAY 69	DAY 70	RECESS	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	RECESS	DAY 71	DAY 72	DAY 73	DAY 74	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	DAY 75	DAY 76	DAY 77	DAY 78	RECESS	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	RECESS	DAY 79	DAY 80	DAY 81	DAY 82	
26	27	28	29	30	31	
	HOLIDAY	DAY 83	DAY 84	DAY 85	DAY 86	

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
June						
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	DAY 87	DAY 88	DAY 89	DAY 90		
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

Federal & State Holidays

January 21 – Martin Luther King Jr. Day April 26 – Arbor Day
 February 18 – Presidents' Day May 27 – Memorial Day

Legislative Recess Days

February 15, 25 April 3, 6, 17, 20
 March 8, 11, 22, 29 May 3, 6, 17, 20

*The Legislature will be in session on Friday, April 26, the Arbor Day holiday.

**Unicameral Information Office
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03-23-05**

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