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**Capitol View**

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**No Special Session, But Plenty to Discuss Next Year**

As predicted, there will be no special session of the Nebraska Legislature to introduce bills and set policies to address systemic racism.

At the urging of a number of social justice groups in the aftermath of demonstrations – some of them not so peaceful – in Lincoln and Omaha, a group of 11 urban lawmakers signed a petition for said special session. After Secretary of State Bob Evnen polled all 49 senators, only 14 said they wanted the session.

Proponents told a group of eight senators participating in listening sessions in the wake of the George Floyd death in Minneapolis that they didn’t want to have to wait until next year. The senators and many of the rest of us sincerely believe the law needs to value every citizen so they know their life is respected, regardless of color, age, economic background or legal standing.

The 35 who said “no” to a special session had a variety of reasons for not returning to Lincoln. For some it’s probably a belief that it’s strictly an urban problem. Others might have been concerned about the Coronavirus danger meter being in the orange in Lincoln, its highest mark since the pandemic began. Still others didn’t want a repeat of the rancor that marred the end of the regular session last month. With a statewide election looming, some probably didn’t want to give their opponents ammunition if they disagreed with the incumbent’s comments.

I am NOT surprised that the session was a no-go. But six Democrats in the officially nonpartisan Unicameral have introduced study resolutions that could be the fodder for bills when lawmakers meet again in January. Such

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resolutions are designed to gather information on problems and look at solutions.

The recent death of Lincoln Police Detective Mario Herrera – the first active duty death of a Lincoln Police officer in 52 years – could change the debate. But it’s quite possible that Omaha Sen. Justin Wayne’s bill to create police standards boards in cities and villages with full-time police officers will be introduced again. The late entry died at the end of the 2020 session.

**Wayne is promoting two of the six study resolutions. His LR146 would examine the** feasibility of a prosecutor-transparency act to collect data and establish a process to report on city and county prosecutors. Such information would include numbers of people incarcerated and racial disparities that may exist.

As chairman of the Legislature’s Urban Affairs Committee, Wayne is sponsoring LR374 to look at the history of redlining -- the practice of banks, mortgage lenders, Realtors and others restricting services to certain areas of a community, often based on race. The study would look at negative impacts of redlining on racial and socioeconomic segregation and the role of government in promoting the practice, as well as potential policy solutions to reverse the negative impacts.

Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks’ LR377 would consider reforming policing through independent government oversight of law enforcement agencies requiring more transparency in matters of internal affairs, restraint tactics and staffing and hiring practices.

Lincoln Sen. Matt Hansen’s LR417 would focus on policies on the use of force by law enforcement, including the components of the policies, national best practices and their use by agencies and barriers to adopting effective use-of-force policies.

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Omaha Sens. Steve Lathrop and Sara Howard are sponsoring LR421 to study the racial and ethnic disproportionality in Nebraska's foster care and juvenile justice systems, specifically for those committed to the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers. The study would include an action plan for reducing those disparities with input from Nebraska's four federally recognized Native tribes and others who have been affected.

Omaha Sen. Tony Vargas’ LR449 would examine systemic and institutional racism in Nebraska and offer recommendations to make things equitable for those who are biracial, interracial and people of color.

That’s quite a load of concepts on a single topic. I can see the results of several resolutions being combined to create some viable legislation. Let’s hope that those who yearn for change can be patient while lawmakers, with a revived sense of purpose, work it out.

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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.*