**For Release Wednesday, July 14, 2021**

**Capitol View
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**Here’s a Look at What the Legislature Accomplished**

It’s easy to keep track of the high-profile things the Unicameral wrestles with each year, but on days when things are going smoothly and there’s more action than talk, some important work is accomplished. Let’s look at a brief summary from seven of the Legislature’s committees.

The Agriculture Committee heard and forwarded for legislative approval bills that update the Livestock Brand Act (LB572) and another (LB324) to allow farmers and ranchers to offer livestock ownership shares to customers. The brand bill allows for electronic inspection of cattle and allows for violations of brand rules and regulations to be punishable by a citation. The share bill means that consumers can acquire meat through a written contract with the farmer or rancher. Many a quarter or side of beef has been sold with a handshake; this provides more formal acquisition.

The Appropriations Committee crafted and shepherded the passage of the state’s $9.7 billion budget package which funds state government for the next two fiscal years and provides funding for several other big-ticket projects ranging from a study to determine if a new state prison is needed to money for underfunded public health departments.

The Banking, Commerce and Insurance Committee heard, and lawmakers passed, bills dealing with digital asset management, insurance parity and protection of vulnerable adults. One measure (LB649) creates a regulatory framework for managing digital assets (think cryptocurrency). Under another (LB297), broker-dealers and investment advisers could hold transactions for up to 30 business days in suspected cases of exploitation of seniors and vulnerable adults. Senators also passed a bill (LB337) that gives health care providers greater flexibility in prescribing treatment recommended by a patient’s health care provider rather than one recommended first by the insurer.

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Compensation for families of first responders, strengthening worker protections and expanding unemployment benefits and family leave were issues from the Business and Labor Committee which were passed by lawmakers. One measure (LB255) provides monetary compensation to the family of a law enforcement officer, firefighter, correctional officer or government or nonprofit EMS ambulance squad member killed in the line of duty. Under (LB451), the definition of race in the Nebraska Fair Employment Practice Act will include characteristics associated with race such as skin color, hair texture and protective hairstyles such as braids, locks and twists. Lawmakers also approved a bill (LB260) to expand eligibility for unemployment benefits to those who voluntarily leave employment to care for a family member with a serious health condition.

Measures to create a school safety reporting system and require schools to create health plans for students with seizure disorders were among proposals from the Education Committee approved this session. The safety reporting program (LB322) requires the state Department of Education to establish an anonymous reporting system to allow students, school staff, parents, and community members to report information about concerning behavior or possible harm to people or property anonymously. Senators also passed a bill (LB639) that requires each public, private, denominational, and parochial school in Nebraska to create individualized health plans for students with seizure disorders and have at least one employee at each school building who is trained to recognize and respond to seizures and administer medications.

The big challenge for the General Affairs Committee was establishment of casino gaming regulations under a bill (LB561) to implement provisions of a constitutional amendment approved by voters that legalized all forms of games of chance at licensed Nebraska horse racing tracks. The new law allows wagering on sporting events at racetracks but prohibits betting on high school youth sports or Nebraska college teams when they are playing in the state. It requires that keno played at licensed racetrack casinos operate in accordance with the same state regulations that govern existing keno parlors.

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The Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee saw to the passage of updates to the state’s concealed carry regulations and open meetings law. The weapons bill (LB236) combined provisions of a handful of gun control measures ranging from expiration notifications on concealed carry permits to the transportation of a firearm in a vehicle for lawful purposes. Local political subdivisions have greater flexibility to meet virtually under (LB83) which allows authorized political subdivisions to hold meetings virtually (electronically or by phone) during a declared emergency. The bill also reaffirms the validity of any actions taken by a public body between March 17, 2020, and April 30, 2021, in reliance on an executive order from the governor that waived open meeting requirements during the pandemic.

We will wrap up the rest of the committees, Health through Urban Affairs, next week.

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