**For Release Wednesday, January 12, 2022**

**Capitol View
*Commentary by J.L. Schmidt***

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**They’re Back with a Lot on The Table for a Short Session**

Amid continuing Capitol remodeling and a lingering Covid-19 pandemic, lawmakers have returned to Lincoln for the Second Session of the 107th Legislature.

The so-called short session (60 days) will be long on workload, political intrigue and philosophical debate. There are 490 bills and 33 Legislative Resolutions carried over from the first session. Twelve of those resolutions call for proposed Constitutional Amendments, which could be on the November general election ballot. All of this is in addition to new proposals, which can be introduced during the first 10 days of the current session.

There are 12 senators who will be term-limited at the end of the session. Several of them are running for other offices including county attorney, county clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, University of Nebraska Regent and Governor. Expect the most vocal of that group to go out with a verbal bang while the candidates for other offices may be more measured in their remarks.

Governor Pete Ricketts is also term limited. While he’s not an announced candidate for another job, expect some rhetoric that might make it seem he has higher aspirations. There’s long been speculation that he wants to be President of the United States. Let that one sink in.

Term limited Sen. Brett Lindstrom of Omaha is one of six Republicans seeking the gubernatorial nomination. Sen. Carol Blood of Omaha, who is in her second term, is seeking the Democratic nod for that office. Former Sen. Theresa Thibodeaux of Omaha is also seeking the GOP nod.

Sen. Patty Pansing-Brooks of Lincoln, also term limited, is seeking the Democratic nomination for the Congressional seat currently held by Republican Jeff Fortenberry of Lincoln.

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Tony Vargas of Omaha, in his second term, is seeking the Democratic Congressional nod in the Omaha District represented by Republican Don Bacon.

Term limited Sen. Matt Williams of Gothenburg Is seeking the Regent’s position being vacated by Bob Phares of North Platte. Williams is a Republican in the nonpartisan race. One of the GOP gubernatorial candidates, Jim Pillen of Columbus, is also a Regent.

Sen. Adam Morfield of Lincoln, a Democrat, is running for Lancaster County Attorney. Sen. Matt Hansen of Lincoln, also a Democrat, is running for Lancaster County Clerk. Both men are term limited.

Other state senators in their final year are: Curt Friesen of Henderson; Mike Groene of North Platte; Dan Hughes of Venango; Robert Hilkemann of Omaha; Mark Kolterman of Seward; John McCollister of Omaha and John Stinner of Gering.

Expect senators to air philosophical differences on the spending of pandemic relief funds, prisons and an overhaul of the state’s tax system. The governor has made it clear that he doesn’t want new or unsustainable programs to use the anticipated $10 billion in relief funds. Prison debate centers of building a new prison or reforming the system to better prepare inmates for successful release and provide alternatives to incarceration. Nebraska has now surpassed Alabama as the most crowded state prison system in the United States. Based on data at the end of 2020, Nebraska’s prisons held 5,250 inmates or 48.5 percent more than the system was designed to hold. Alabama was 46 percent above capacity.

I favor an emphasis on sentencing policy, release policy and supervision and support after release.

Tax reform is the longshot. It’s an issue that could clearly eat up a regular session and, in my opinion, would best be dealt with through statewide hearings during the interim and an independent committee to recommend specific proposals to the next Legislature. Recent sessions have spent considerable time just hammering out acceptable changes to the property tax part of the overall system.

Welcome back senators. We’re watching!

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