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**Capitol View**

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**Enjoy the Memories Governor, the Honeymoon Is Over**

The new governor says, jubilantly, the honeymoon cruise with the Nebraska Legislature was a huge success.

Sorry governor, I’m seeing flags. Red flags. The cheering I hear is “see you in court!” So, let’s wait until the lawsuits are filed and the petition drives are all launched before we get too excited.

In a “report card” from his office, Governor Jim Pillen said he was elected to office “with a clear mandate to make transformational change in the areas most important to our future: **our kids; our tax code; our agricultural industry**, the backbone of our economy; and**our conservative Nebraska values.** With yourengagement, we've worked in partnership with the Legislature to deliver what I believe is the most wide-ranging package of commonsense reforms in our state's history.”

Some of what the Governor and a divisive Legislature enacted (changes in abortion laws and outlawing gender transition surgeries for minors) faces already filed lawsuits. The Opportunity Scholarships Act (school choice) is the subject of a repeal petition.

Changes to the tax structure face a bumpy road ahead when the money runs out.

Pillen said the abortion and transgender issues “are the most significant advancements for Nebraska social conservatives in a generation. We took a major step forward this year, and I'll continue fighting to outlaw elective abortion in Nebraska, period.” Spoken like a clone of the National Republican Party.

“We have a plan to win 38 of 49 seats in the Legislature. We need your help in our plan for democracy,” he said. Did I miss something here? Having more than one political party represented is NOT democracy? Look how 32-16-1 worked out this year.

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OK, so much for the nonpartisan Nebraska Legislature, right? Please Governor, just stop right now.

But I digress. Let’s see what else the Governor is excited about. He lists more than $6 billion in property and income tax relief, including complete elimination of the state income tax on Social Security benefits beginning next year. He’s excited that state aid to schools has been reformed to give every K-12 public school student in Nebraska $1,500 in aid to whichever district they attend.

Pillen touted the Opportunity Scholarships Act because Nebraska was one of two states that didn’t allow for school choice. He said the act will empower parents to make education choices and find the right fit for their kids, ensuring the doors to opportunity are open for all Nebraska's children.

OpenSky policy think tank opposed the approval of funding tax credits to individuals and businesses that donate to organizations granting scholarships to students who attend private schools. The organization said the credits, which divert up to $25 million of public funds beginning in FY 24-25 to support private schools will cause a drain on state funds as most of the benefits flow to wealthy taxpayers.
 Pillen said a new 3 percent cap on the growth of school district spending would ensure that education investments would result in dollar-for-dollar property tax relief. OpenSky said the revenue cap could be problematic because in some cases, modeling suggests that the amount they will receive in foundation aid and special education reimbursements will be less than the amount they will be required to drop their property tax request. School boards have the ability to go above the revenue cap, but in some instances, districts will still have less revenue available to fund education at a time of rising costs and staffing issues.

OpenSky issued a caution that at full implementation the income tax cuts will cost the state $905 million in revenue in FY 28-29 with three-quarters of the benefits going to the top 20% of wage earners. By FY 30-31, the property tax breaks will cost the state $415 million. Such

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massive commitments will likely lead to tough decisions for future lawmakers regarding cuts to services that Nebraskans rely on or raising other taxes and fees to balance the state’s budget.

Pillen also signed into law a measure to allow motorcycle riders 21 and older to ride without helmets if they have passed an approved safety course. Likewise, a concealed carry act will allow Nebraskans to carry a handgun without a permit. We’ll just have to weigh the costs of those two depending on what kind of carnage or mayhem may result.

The state will allow the Nebraska Department of Transportation to use bonding authority to complete road projects that have dragged on for years. Finally.

Pillen approved the state committing $575 million for the Perkins County Canal and $96 million for a new state prison. The problem, the ditch will never be dug but lawyers will line their pockets while battling the outcome. The new prison will simply replace the state penitentiary in Lincoln and not do anything to address overcrowding.

So, Governor enjoy your sweet memories. There are more battles to be fought next session. Pending court outcomes, some of them may seem very familiar.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for more than 20 years.*