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**Capitol View**

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**Legislative Leaders Want to Change the Way They Do Business**

A change is gonna come. Leaders of the Nebraska Legislature want to streamline the process and perhaps change a few rules during the upcoming short session to avoid the mess of last year's 90-day struggle.

A short recap. An Omaha senator introduced a measure to limit medical care for transgender youth, clearly something that is part of the Republican Party national agenda, but not a Nebraska issue. What resulted was months of filibuster by two other Omaha senators that slowed the Legislature to a near halt.

Opponents of the measure, which ultimately passed, showed up every day to protest loudly in the Rotunda outside the legislative chamber. The last few days were marked by protests in the balcony of the chamber with some protestors throwing feminine hygiene products down from the balcony onto senators below. There were arrests.

Note to Senators for 2024 (you know who you are) that want to drop some heavy load promoted nationally by your political party. DON'T DO IT!

Speaker of the Legislature John Arch of Omaha, clearly flummoxed by that outcome, vowed there would be changes. Some of those were outlined at a recent two-day meeting of senators and the Legislature’s Executive Council at Innovation Campus (old State Fairgrounds) in Lincoln.

While Sen. Steve Erdman of Bayard, Chair of the Rules Committee, outlined pages of proposed changes, which he vowed to pursue in opening days of the session, the filibuster queen – Sen. Michaela Cavanaugh of Omaha – smugly said she’d work within the rules as she always has. She spent days fighting the transgender bill during last session.

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That doesn’t bode well for a change in attitude for the upcoming session, but Arch and others quickly turned attention to an issue that might see more senators of one accord.

Lawmakers likely will consider changing the duties of inspectors general for the state’s prison and child welfare systems next year following a Nebraska attorney general’s opinion that said those offices were unconstitutional. Some want to seek a ruling from the court on whether the laws creating those offices meet constitutional muster rather than bend to the wishes of the executive branch.

Arch said the leaders elected by state senators had opted to find a legislative fix rather than engage in what could be a lengthy court battle.

The inspectors general work in the state Ombudsman’s office, which was created in 1969 to field complaints from the public about administrative agencies of state government and was expanded to focus on corrections in 1976 and welfare services in 1994. The Legislature later created the Office of the Inspector General for Child Welfare after Nebraska’s attempt to privatize those services, and the Office of Inspector General for Corrections following a 2013 rampage by a recently released inmate that left four people dead.

Both offices were passed into law with unanimous support among lawmakers at the time and have had their duties widened in the years since as lawmakers seek more information about the agencies with which they are tasked with investigating.

Arch said the inspectors general, contrary to popular assumption, do not serve as an “oversight committee” and have no authority over the executive and judicial branches, but rather gather information retroactively to help senators look for patterns of problems that could be solved through legislation.

But Attorney General Mike Hilgers, a former state senator and speaker, said in an August opinion those offices had “untrammeled power to impede, control and access” information from the executive branch of state government.

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Although the language of the bill has not been finalized, Arch said the legislation — if passed — would potentially narrow the scope of information the inspectors general can access and clarify those offices’ function as factfinders rather than as the Legislature looking over the shoulder of the executive branch.

Lincoln Sen. Danielle Conrad said finding a solution to the dispute should be a “hallmark issue” for the 2024 legislative session. She wants the Legislature to assert its authority as a co-equal branch of government charged with investigating government fraud and abuse.

“This is really going to be a test for us as a body to come together and look at this objectively,” Conrad told reporters.

Here’s hoping we see some positive results this session from those we elected. Nebraska deserves nothing less.

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