

Senators talk ag policy before ICON

Written by Gothenburg Times
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Transaction tax, eminent domain and water rights were just a few of the topics touched on by state senators and members of Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska (ICON) at the recent annual convention held in Broken Bow.

A panel of senators including Annette Dubas, Mark Christensen and LeRoy Loudon spent three hours trading comments with ICON members about issues all considered a priority for today's Legislature.

"More and more senators are seeing the need to reconsider the revenue stream," said Dubas. "A transaction tax seems the best route but we have to consider how counties will generate revenue if the state makes the change to that type of system."

She said the governor has put his ideas forth and now it's time for the Legislature to get serious; put everything on the table. A study of all tax laws is the next step to consider all the pros and cons.

"Maybe at the end of the day, we might be happy; maybe not," said Dubas. "But the door needs to be opened for change. Remember though, a change here will affect something over there. Something someone will not be happy about will pop up."

If a transaction tax is considered, the process will eliminate all sales tax exemptions statewide and that will be a huge hurdle to overcome, Sen. Loudon said. He also indicated there is talk about the statehouse taking another look at the school aid formula but he will not part of the process because he is termed out.

Eminent domain is an issue which came to the forefront because of the pipeline debate and perimeters will need to be set for future projects, Dubas said. More research of state statutes will be needed to determine purposes for the use of the eminent domain clause in projects like roads and infrastructure. Landowners need specific language about who can use it and where it is applicable.

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Water rights boil down to politics and money, said Sen. Christensen. There is no subsoil moisture left anywhere in the state and allocations will possibly be adjusted this year.

He has been researching a state statute which says a landowner has the right to the beneficial use of the water under his land. Moratoriums and water allocations may infringe on a landowner's right to his water and that will have to be studied more. He is surprised a lawsuit hasn't come forward with just that principal in mind.

"How each individual looks at these landowner rights is the difficult issue," Christensen said.

ICON met on Saturday in Broken Bow and also listened to a drought and grass management presentation from Scott Cotton, UNL Extension educator in Dawes County, before concluding the day with a business meeting and banquet.