

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Executive Board February 4, 2026
Rough Draft

HANSEN: All right. Good a-- good afternoon, and welcome to the Executive Board. My name is Senator Ben Hansen. I represent the 16th Legislative District in Washington, Burt, Cuming, and parts of Stanton Counties. And I serve as chair of the Executive Board. I would like to invite the members of the committee to introduce themselves, starting on my right with Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: Rob Clements, District 2.

McKINNEY: Terrell McKinney, District 11.

BALLARD: Beau Ballard, District 21.

IBACH: Teresa Ibach, District 44.

DORN: Myron Dorn, District 30.

FREDRICKSON: John Fredrickson, District 20.

HANSEN: Also assisting the committee is our legal counsel, Benson Wallace; and our committee clerk, Natalie Schunk; and our committee page, Lexi. A few notes about our policy and procedures. Please turn off or silence your cell phones. We will be hearing two bills, and we'll be hearing them in the order to list outside the hearing room. On the table near the door to the hearing room, you will find green testifier sheets. If you're planning to testify today, please fill one out and hand it to the page when you come up to testify. This will help us keep an accurate record of the hearing. If you are not testifying at the microphone but want to go on record as having a position on a bill being heard today, there are yellow sign-in sheets at the entrance where you may leave your name and other pertinent information. Also, I would note: if you are not testifying but have an online position comment to submit, the Legislature's policy is that all comments for the record must be received by the committee by 8 a.m. the day of the hearing. Any handouts submitted by testifiers will also be included as part of the record as exhibits. We would ask if you do have any handouts that you please bring 12 copies and give them to the page. We use a light system for testifying. Each testifier will have five minutes to testify. When you begin, the light will turn green. When the light turns yellow, that means you have one minute left. When the light turns red, it is time to end your testimony and we will ask you to wrap up your final thoughts. When you come up to testify, please begin by stating your name clearly into the microphone. And then please spell both your first and last name. The hearing will begin with each

introducer giving an opening statement. We will then hear from supporters of the bill, then those in opposition, followed by those in neutral capacity. The introducer of the bill will then be given the opportunity to make closing statements if they wish to do so. On a side note, the reading of testimony that is not your own is not allowed unless previously approved. And we do have a strict no-prop policy in this committee. So with that, we will begin with LR300 and welcome Senator Spivey.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair Hansen and members of Exec Board. Last time I testified in front of y'all was only a few people here. So I'm glad to see everyone for LR300. I am Ashlei Spivey, A-s-h-l-e-i S-p-i-v-e-y. And I represent District 13 in northeast and northwest Omaha. So in front of you, you all have an, an LR300 that I'm really proud of. And I want to start by thanking Senator Ibach and her work and guidance and partnership, as well as Senator Jacobson for having this conversation around economic development. So this really started for me last year, my first session in the body. And I brought a number of economic development policy bills. I brought a bill that would create an office of economic development in the Governor's branch. I brought some tax incentives around credits and how we think about economic development and really through this holistic approach of public health. And so I had an LR this summer that you all heard that really looked at post the pandemic, where are we as a state? I think there's been a lot of major global events that impact our economy that we've never really paused and recalibrated to say, where are we going for economic development? What does that look like? And how do we get in front of it and become proactive in building resilient economies versus reactive? I think the Tyson plant and experience in Senator Ibach's district is a really great example of that. How do we think about policy to get ahead of a major employer leaving? How are we communicating with major employers and economic stakeholders for our state? And I don't think that, that responsibility lives just in our Governor's Office or an agency like Department of Economic Development. I think we as policymakers agree economic development is important. We need to have discourse on how we get there and what does it look like, but we need intentional space to dialogue around that. And so that's what LR300 does. It creates that intentional dialogue and would create a special committee of state senators to have that conversation in the interim and put forward then policy recommendations around how do we prioritize an economic development agenda for us as a body. What things do we need to be paying attention to? This was done previously with LR239 in 2018-- and there will be former Senator Mello here to talk about that and, and his

role and, and now with the Omaha Chamber. But the body had that conversation before. I think the, the unfortunate part of starting that special committee is that senators were a part of the committee that were termed out. So they couldn't see the work forward. They, they weren't able to put a-- more legs to what was in front of them. And so I think now more than ever we are seeing the need for strategic economic development. I have some data in your synopsis from the Aksarben Foundation and the work that they have done around our economy. I know I worked with Senator Fredrickson to host for Omaha senators a roundtable about data. And then Aksarben Foundation hosted an event at SAC Museum for senators across the state to, again, really look at, what is our numbers around workforce? How do we think about child care within that? What are the industries that we really need to focus on? And again, it's about intentional strategy, which I think we can leverage through policy. And so my hope today is that you will consider advancing LR300 and that we can work to put together that intentional committee fo-- of state senators to have that conversation. And I've already talked to some folks in the body around, would they be willing to sit on this? What does that look like? To ensure that we have a mix of expertise, we have a mix of tenure and geography as well, even though we're nonpartisan [INAUDIBLE] party, so that we can have really candid, full, comprehensive conversations because the decisions that we make today around economic development are absolutely going to impact the Nebraska that we hope to build and leave for generations to come. And so with that, I would be happy to answer any questions about LR300.

HANSEN: All right. Thank you. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Senator Spivey. In reading through this LR, I didn't see an end date--

[MALFUNCTION]

SPIVEY: --senator because he's also my chair on Appropriations. So because it's an LR and we didn't do it as an LB when I worked with the [MALFUNCTION] just a year. And so the report would happen at the end of 2026. So all of the meetings would happen this year. And then we would have a report that then we would have for the body.

CLEMENTS: OK.

[MALFUNCTION]

HANSEN: Any other questions? All right. Seeing none. Are you staying to close?

SPIVEY: Absolutely. I wouldn't miss it.

HANSEN: All right. So with that, we will take our first proponent for LR300. And you have five minutes. But if you're affiliated with the Chamber, you have two minutes.

HEATH MELLO: Good afternoon, Chairman Hansen and members of the Executive Board. For the record, my name is Heath Mello. That is H-e-a-t-h M-e-l-l-o. And I have the honor to serve as the president and CEO of the Greater Omaha Chamber. On behalf of our nearly 3,000 members and our eight-county economic development partnership, we'd like to thank Senator Spivey for introducing LR300, which will create the Nebraska Economic Development Task Force. Economic development is not a single program, a single incentive, or a single biennium decision. It is, by its very nature, long-term, interconnected, and strategic. LR300 correctly recognizes that Nebraska's economic competitiveness would benefit from a more coordinated, deliberate, and forward-looking policy approach. That recognition is both timely and necessary. During my time as both the state senator and the chief lobbyist for the University of Nebraska System, I had the opportunity to engage directly with the prior legislative economic development-related task forces that operated both from 2009 through 2010 and 2017 through 2019. Those efforts were valuable because it brought together legislators, state agencies, and stakeholders like the Chamber and others around a shared understanding, that Nebraska must think beyond short-term wins and instead align policy, investment, and planning around long-term competitiveness. That lesson is even more relevant today. Nebraska is not competing just with our neighboring states but with regions across the country and increasingly across the globe for talent, capital, and innovation. To compete effectively, economic development policy must be comprehensive. It must look at traditional tools like site readiness and infrastructure while also addressing modern realities such as energy generation and reliability, workforce and talent development, and quality-of-life factors that influence where people choose to live, work, and invest. A legislative task force outlined in LR300 is uniquely positioned to do this work. It creates a forum for sustained analysis, cross-committee collaboration, and long-range planning, which is something that is difficult to achieve in confines of a single session or a single policy silo. Importantly, it also ensures legislative ownership of broader economic development strategy informed by state agencies, economic development practitioners, employers, and

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communities across the state. LR300 is not about reinventing the wheel; it's about sharpening it. It's also about learning from past efforts, building on what works, and positioning Nebraska for sustained-- sustained success both in the near term and generations to come. We want to thank Senator Spivey for her thoughtful leadership on this issue and in the economic development space, and would urge the committee to support LR300. Thank you for the opportunity to be with you. And I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

HANSEN: Are there any questions? Speaker Arch.

ARCH: Thank you for your testimony.

HEATH MELLO: Mr. Speaker.

ARCH: And I'm sure you have a memory-- memory of the economic development committee that the Legislature actually had at one time. I, I happened to serve on that. And I think my first two years I was on that. Less than effective. And, and part of the problem was the issues cut across standing committees. Now, you're not proposing a-- you're not proposing a special committee here, but, but I-- I'm just saying we, we do want to learn from what was good and what didn't work in those past efforts to try to get a coordinated economic development policy because it cuts across committees. So you-- you've got, you've got a number of committees that, of course, touch and are very involved in some of these discussions as well. And-- broad enough, but not too broad, you know. So I noticed even in membership, you know-- you know, how do you get, how do you get the university into here? How do you, you know, how do you get your, you know, your community colleges? How do-- you know? How do you get that in as well? And, and maybe, maybe you would envision something like this as a start, but, but I, I just hope it-- I mean, it's-- it, it, it is, I think, very necessary that we have some type of body where you can get together and you can attempt to get a single vision, a strategic plan. I mean, a resurrection of Blueprint Nebraska, something that puts us together on the same course, but-- anyway. We-- we've made many attempts at this, and, and I, I just want to learn from the past so we don't create something else and it's not as effective as could be.

HEATH MELLO: I, I think, Senator-- Speaker Arch, I think-- all I can speak about in terms of the, the economic development committee is I kind of got involved in that when I went to the university at the-- December of 2017. And it felt like in some form or another things shifted and changed the second half of that three-year period when the

Legislature's committee chose to contract with a third-party entity to kind of do its own kind of a self-analysis, landscape analysis of, of economic development policy across the state and other states and then kind of help, help the committee guide where do you want to focus your time and energy around. It was around innovation-based economic development. It was reforming tax incentives. It was making to look investments in higher education, which is why they brought the university at the time more engaged around data and scholarships and what we were doing to, to retain our top ACT students in the state, so. I, I, I think based on my experience from the la-- this last experience, this last go from 2017 to 2019, I think it's more the Legislature leadership kind of decides and determines that scope and that direction first and foremost. So I think, though, the opportunities to bring in other partners and other third-party entities that can help do some of the heavy lifting and give the guidance to them so that you really do have four or five priorities you're focusing on statewide that then-- as what happened with the, the 2018-2019 reports with CREC, that was kind of the, the driving force from what happened from the rest of the committee's work. So I, I think it was a valuable lesson in the sense of what's the limitations of, of citizen legislators in terms of the interim and, and not having the resources to be able to do this full time. And I think-- you know, I only can speak for the Greater Omaha Chamber. We'd, we'd be more than willing to help find and support the Legislature's efforts to bring in a third-party entity to do that research, that work. You heard Senator Spivey share-- there's, there's policy areas that all of you are engaged in in some capacity or another, and having that other entity to be able to help be that buffer for you-- sometimes being the buffer against us. Those of us who are, are practitioners or active in the policy space I think only benefits you as the Legislature.

ARCH: I, I just wanted to comment, and that is that, you know, we, we don't have-- we don't have a forum at present for this type of discussion. And, and I think as a result of that, our efforts have been fragmented. So we hear var-- various things. I mean, the report from the Chamber, you know, and, and Aksarben and, and-- our own Planning Committee is involved and we're getting those same reports from UNO and-- on all of this, but we don't have a coordinated forum. I would only say this, that LB-- LR300 could be a start to something like this. But to think that-- to think that major lifting will be done by the end of '26, it, it-- probably unrealistic. I mean, I don't-- I'm not sure what the report would say other than more work to do.

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HEATH MELLO: I, I, I, I, I, I will defer to the Legislature in terms of how kind of-- how, how you look to structure, you know, kind of-- I know the limitations in terms one, one two-year session ends. That's the end of the two-year session. You have a new class of senators that come in in January 2027. Only speaking from my experience, we did it-- you know, we did it 20-- 2009, the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Task Force, which was kind of the first economic development task force committee in a long time in the Legislature that-- Senator Conrad and Senator Galen Hadley led that effort. And we-- it was a minimum-- it kind of had to have a minimum two years to be able to do that first year kind of data collection, data research, and then the second year take that work and try to act on it. I think Senator Spivey described exactly this is an LR. It can only go till the end of this year. But the hope would be is you have something fruitful at the end of 2026 that can lead into more work in 2027 and beyond.

HANSEN: OK. Any other questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

HEATH MELLO: Thank you.

HANSEN: Next testifier in support. Welcome.

JASON BALL: Thank you, Chairman Hansen, members of the Executive Board. I'm Jason Ball. I'm the president and CEO of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce as well as the Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development. On behalf of both, I'm offering my comments today. And that is J-a-s-o-n B-a-l-l. We'd like to thank Senator Spivey for bringing this bill. We're very enthusiastically supportive of this type of exercise. And I'm very happy to see so many members of the Lincoln and Lancaster County delegation here with us today to have the, the conversation about it. We're, we're grateful that the Legislature's so interested in economic development. I can tell you the business community of Lincoln and Lancaster County is feeling a lot of economic uncertainty and concern these days, both of them from relevant events in our state as well as just national trends. There are a lot of people feeling uncertain about America's economic future and Nebraska's economic future within that. And we have already referenced the Aksarben study and some of the other available data sources that, you know, express what that is. As a very brief aside, I'd just like to express I've been in economic development as a practitioner sitting across the table from businesses expressing, come to my community instead of your other choices, since 2008. I've done that not only in Nebraska but in Kansas, South Dakota, and Texas. And I'm more broadly familiar with all the places and states that we're competing against for projects. And the

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competition level right now to bring new business and new investment into any state or community is higher now than at any point in my background professionally doing this work. Please, as you do this analysis, I recommend people avoid the, the single easy answer. Being successful in economic development is not about tax structure alone or education systems alone. It takes both of those to be in place, as well as, yes, competitive incentive programs. But also infrastructure investments, particularly right now in energy and roadway infrastructure, will be important for the state. Also, Nebraska has to have a statewide approach the-- from an agency or entity that wears everybody's hat, that is spending all day every day marketing Nebraska as a place to do business as aggressively as possible. This is something we have to do to remain competitive if we want to do this. To Speaker Arch's point-- I'll just conclude by saying I really appreciate his comments and questions. We think this effort is a great platform. We are very willing to help bring in other voices or other entities or other perspectives. As you're thinking of folks to add voices and get information from, I would also highly recommend that you work with the Nebraska Economic Developers Association. They represent the local economic development professionals of the state. They also are very familiar with what communities' capacities, desires, and approaches can be. And there is no doubt one single year effort is not going to be the magic wand you get to wave to make Nebraska as competitive and economically successful as we all want. It will take a long-term, sustained effort. I'd be thrilled to answer any questions you might have for me. Thank you.

HANSEN: All right. Thank you. Are there any questions from the committee? Speaker Arch.

ARCH: I, I-- were you, were you at the Lincoln Chamber when I spoke last week?

JASON BALL: Yes, sir. I was.

ARCH: OK. So--

JASON BALL: Thank you for speaking to our members.

ARCH: You heard Regent Tim Clare speak to--

JASON BALL: Yeah.

ARCH: --as he said, second year of suggesting that we have some type of a-- some type of a forum where, where leaders can, can get together

and, and actually get it down into, into some type of direction for the state we can a-- that we can sign off on and implement. I think one of the frustrations of, of some of our economic development, it is-- it's very, it's very fragmented. So we focus on incentives and then we focus on training and then we focus on scholarships and then we focus on-- and we move and we move thinking like, well, maybe if we hit one of these, we'll, we'll get the combination. So again, I would just say that if, if we do something like this, let's, let's drive to some type of a structure that would, that would not only make a plan but then stick together long enough to implement a plan and understand how the Legislature has to, has to do some statute changes and how the industries have to get-- what education has to do, all those things, so. Hopeful, but it-- it's-- it's-- this could be-- this could be a start.

JASON BALL: Speaker Arch, thank you very much for those comments. I agree completely. It will take an iterative, long-term, and sustained effort. But there's no doubt, I think, right now the entire ecosystem, if you will, is maybe more fragmented and a little bit more piecemeal than I would suggest I've seen in other, other states. And so we have an opportunity to refine the approach. But again, to-- with respect to this legislative resolution, we feel like this is a very important step that the Legislature also have a very forward and direct role in shaping that approach as well.

ARCH: Thank you.

JASON BALL: Thank you.

HANSEN: Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Do you think also-- the other thing that I don't think ever gets discussed beyond incentives and things like that is, we have a western side of our state and a eastern-- eastern side of our state, which is siloed, and it feels like they're competing against each other. You got some people that want to focus more on the ag industry and others in bigger cities like Lincoln and Omaha that want to focus on bringing newer industries to the state. Then when we get to the table, there's a disconnect. And I think this would provide an opportunity for both to potentially communicate better with each other to have a, a better focus because you could focus on technology in Lincoln, but you could use that focus of technology for the ag industry going into the future. But it, it feels like a lot of things are lost in translation be-- because of the competing interests.

JASON BALL: Senator, you're entirely right to point out that there are differing needs and perspectives based on locality and geography and different opportunities across the state. That is not new or unique to Nebraska. We faced the same set of conversations in Texas when I was part of the Austin area eco-- economic development ecosphere as well as in Kansas when I was representing one of the more rural communities in the central part of the state. I think that also highlights the need for a dialogue like this and some resetting of some shared expectations and desires around economic development precisely because the needs and outcomes and opportunities for some of the comparatively more rural or smaller communities in the state will be different. And those need to be embraced as well. Again, this is why I would also recommend some direct interaction as part of this process with the Nebraska Economic Developers Association and the totality of their local membership. They have a really great sense of what each of those communities need. And I think without that flavor of local input from economic development practitioners, it might be a missed opportunity to gain some insights from those folks.

McKINNEY: Thank you.

JASON BALL: Thank you.

HANSEN: Any other questions? Yes, Senator Ibach.

IBACH: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for joining us today too. Can you expand maybe a little bit on how you would see an approach with the 6 Regions, One Nebraska? I know that you've been involved with some of those discussions. Is that a, a resource? Is it a-- how, how could that program-- because, you know, in reference to Senator McKinney's comment, I think those regions have done a really thorough job in establishing what their priorities are.

JASON BALL: Mm-hmm.

IBACH: How do you see that kind of funneling into what we would want to accomplish here?

JASON BALL: Yeah. Thank you for the question, Senator. 6 Regions, One Nebraska I will just point out is-- has been led more directly by the State Chamber of Commerce, so please stump Hunter with additional questions on that. As-- insofar as my read on it, I think 6 Regions, One Nebraska is-- has also been an, an additional start in the conversation, particularly in areas that are just more geographically

dispersed. Having some coordination there I know has helped those or-- entities and cities work together just a little bit more collaboratively. I see this as another step in that iteration of, of having additional conversations. For example, there could be strategic initiatives that are identified by a process like this that would make sense in the context of a 6 Regions, One Nebraska effort which is aligned around the community college geographic footprints. There are other-- going-- there are likely other opportunities that Nebraska has that would cross those borders. And particularly, I, I spent a lot of time speaking with my colleague from Omaha about how Lincoln and Omaha, for example, can be doing more to market together, to grow our economies together in a, in a more unified way, and our teams are doing that. And so 6 Regions, One Nebraska is helpful. I think this is another tool that we would encourage the Legislature to take advantage of.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

HANSEN: Yup. Seeing no other questions. Thank you.

JASON BALL: Thank you very much.

HANSEN: Take the next testifier in support.

HUNTER TRAYNOR: Chairman Hansen, members of the Executive Board. Senator Spivey, thank you for your work on this legislative resolution. My name's Hunter Traynor. That is spelled H-u-n-t-e-r T-r-a-y-n-o-r. I'm here today in my capacity as vice president for legislation and policy at the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry. My first job is to say ditto to a lot of what Heath and Jason shared before me. And I think a lot of the questions asked of them dovetail well with some of the table-setting comments I wanted to provide today. So firstly, to Heath and Jason's point, we have undertaken over the last three or four years at our State Chamber Foundation a portfolio of, of research on economic competitiveness and structural public policy issues that are facing the state. And that research spans from a general economic competitiveness assessment to a more specific analysis of our state manufacturing sector-- much more research of late on energy-- but have drilled down as well onto what I would dub community infrastructure by way of child care and housing insufficiencies. And what we have gleaned and what our stakeholders have gleaned from the research is that a lot of the economic competitiveness issues that the state is facing are, one, not unique to Nebraska in many ways. They are generational challenges that fall into four buckets. Firstly, capital is incredibly

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mobile and incredibly fickle in this economic environment compared to generations past. Two, labor market constraints that other states are facing-- and acutely so in Nebraska-- are structural in nature. And that is a fixture of not only demographic changes-- people-- but as well broader economic considerations like housing and child care that make it more difficult for communities and states to translate labor demand into labor supply because of those community infrastructure bottlenecks. Technology has been referenced, and we see that as an absolute imperative for a state economic development strategy, particularly for incumbent firms, that it can increase productivity while still dealing with the labor market issue. And then Jason and Heath also talked about infrastructure. That is growing in its importance, and readiness is essential. To Senator Ibach, Senator Arch, and Senator McKinney's questions, the 6 Regions, One Nebraska exercise that our organization has undertaken with the Governor's Office and the Department of Economic Development offers a great lens on the fact that different communities may be dealing with the same problems, but it will require different strategies to solve them. And so the balance for this legislative task force-- having diversity across committees of jurisdiction but hopefully as well communities of different sizes-- is to take that same lens, that-- while the challenge may be the same in metropolitan Omaha and Lincoln as it is in McCook or in Gering, the strategy for solving it may be a little bit different. And we work with partners across the state. It's a challenge of our organization, for sure, but it's something that we take very seriously. And alignment is something that we think often about, understanding that there's differences within what the strategy is. My red light has been on for a while, but I would love to answer questions.

HANSEN: See, this is why I make it two minutes. And so far the chambers you have-- uses up all their five minutes every time so far, so. It's always good information, though. That's great.

HUNTER TRAYNOR: Brevity is not my strong suit.

HANSEN: I always gotta give you guys a hard time when you get here, so. All right. Are there any questions from the committee? All right. Seeing none.

HUNTER TRAYNOR: I used all my time.

HANSEN: Yeah. That's perfect.

HUNTER TRAYNOR: Thank you all for--

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HANSEN: Yeah. Thank you.

HUNTER TRAYNOR: --the opportunity.

HANSEN: All right. We'll take our next testifier in support. Anyone else to testify in support? All right. Seeing none. Are there any wishing to testify in opposition to LR300? Seeing none. Is there anybody wishing to testify in the neutral capacity? All right. Seeing none. We'll welcome Senator Spivey back up. And let the audience know there were 2 letters in support and 0 in opposition to LR300.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair. And thank you again, committee, for taking the time over your lunch to hear about LR300. A couple of things that I just wanted to uplift from the notes-- and I wish Senator Jacobson was here-- is that this dialogue actually kind of started a little bit like an argument when I was in front of Revenue for a tax credit bill that I brought for qualified census tracts. And it's still alive in committee, but we'll see what happens. And so he was, you know-- Senator Spivey, why, why more-- why does north Omaha need more? And I was like, well, actually, Senator Jacobson, this is about qualified census tracts. And we all have them in some of our districts across the state. And so we talked about his district and mine specifically and the impact that having these qualified census tracts have on Nebraska as a whole, and that led to him and I talking about in this Revenue meeting us having a comprehensive approach to economic development. And so kind of to some of the points here is that we don't have intentional space to dialogue. As a-- I guess I'm in the second semester of my freshman year. Things happen fast, and there's a lot of competing priorities. And so this is an intentional first step to having dialogue as colleagues of what do we envision as a body for economic development. There are lots of other stakeholders that have ownership within the ecosystem. And I think one of the best parts that I have seen of having a unicameral is that we as a body have a perspective on a certain issue. It does not get into, again, partisan politics, but we all know that economic development is integral to how Nebraska really thrives. And so if we don't have that intentional space to pause, to dialogue, to talk about what are emergent trends, things that we need to think about, then I, I feel like it's a, a missed opportunity. And even as we talked about-- I think, Senator Ibach, you talked about the 6 Regions. Again, that is a, a strategy that is being led by the State Chamber, the Governor's Office. I've had dialogue with folks of, how do we think about economic development from our congressional districts? Is that an option? You think about Invest Nebraska, they are doing venture capital across the state when they are really housed and better situated maybe to look at

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one CD. And then we can redivide those dollars and think about how do we have investments. Like, there's so many opportunity there. But if we don't have an intentional starting point to talk about that and suss that out, I think we are just cutting ourselves short around the possibilities here. And then to Speaker Arch, just to some of your feedback-- which I really appreciated. So I went the LR route versus LB because I think it gives us as a body to have that conversation around what is needed. And it makes it a little bit more timely and urgent. We have a short time to have intentional, serious conversations with the makeup of the committee that is proposed in the LR. I worked with Senator Ibach already to start to identify colleagues that have a longer tenure in the body that represent different geographies and expertise within economic development so we can have some of those conversations. But by no means do I feel like we will solve it in an interim. Right? This is a longer process, and I think it has to be coupled with strategies in other committees that we are leading. And I wanted to uplift one of those examples, is my LB999, which creates a commission for business and innovation. And so when we think about what a commission does in this quasi-government entity, how I have the bill structured would have industry experts that are in this day-to-day, right? Like, we see a lot of things that we're talking about addressing, where these folks are experts in their field, coming together to help chart the path for the state, whether it's working with our government, our Governor's Office, or working with legislatures or working with people on the ground that are supporting business development in their respective regions. And so this is a piece of a larger comprehensive approach that I hope that I'm doing well with and, and trying to hold and manage because I know that it's important. And I think-- the last thing that I will say is that the benefit of this is taking not an economic development approach in a silo of, like, are we attracting new businesses? How many jobs? Like, kind of the transactional data that you usually see. But, like, what is the public health side of economic development? Do people have strong built environments? Do they have quality housing and schools? Are their roads nice? Do they enjoy the cultural amenities around where they live and work? Because otherwise, they're not going to stay. We're going to keep losing them and keep having the same conversations around retention and attraction. And so, again, my hope is that this is a starting place as people are transitioning out, that the conversation is needed to be at the forefront. And this will help to create a launchpad that hopefully will have ripples for years to come while at least I'm in the body. So with that, I would be happy to answer any other questions.

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HANSEN: All right. Are there any questions? Seeing none.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair.

HANSEN: Thank you for coming.

SPIVEY: Thank you, committee.

HANSEN: All right. That concludes the hearing for LR300. And we will now open it up for LB986. And welcome Senator Bostar-- yes.

BOSTAR: I think so.

HANSEN: I couldn't remember whose bill it was. Welcome to your Executive Board.

BOSTAR: Good afternoon, Chairman Hansen and fellow members of the Executive Board. For the record, my name is Eliot Bostar. That's E-l-i-o-t B-o-s-t-a-r, representing Legislative District 29. Here today to introduce LB986. LB986 responds to a well-documented and growing reality facing candidates and public officials at every level of government: threats, harassment, violence, and intimidation tied to public service are increasing. We've all seen and followed the news of recent attacks on Minnesota lawmakers, presidential candidates, as well as plots and attacks on governors and officials across the country. National research from the University of Nebraska at Omaha's National Counterterrorism Innovation Technology and Education Center with data compiled from 2013 to 2023 shows that the threats against public officials have risen steadily over the past decade, with 2023 representing the highest number of federally charged threat cases on record. Elected officials and election workers are among the most frequently targeted groups, and researchers note that federal cases represent only a fraction of total threats, many of which are handled by state and local law enforcement or go unreported. At the state and local level, a 2024 Brennan Center report found that more than 40% of state legislators have experienced direct threats, and nearly one in four reported being less willing to hold public events because of safety concerns. The same report specifically recommends that states update existing laws to allow candidates and officeholders to pay for security measures as part of participating safely in the democratic process. LB986 does just that. The bill addresses growing security concerns by expressly allowing campaign funds to be used for security services and systems. The bill allows candidates and officeholders flexibility to respond quickly to safety and security concerns without

having to draw solely on personal or state resources. Congressman Flood requested I distribute a letter to the committee expressing his support for LB986, which you have in front of you. Additionally, he requested that I introduce AM1885 for your discussion and consideration. The amendment strengthens protections for candidates and officeholders by allowing them to request that the county assessor, register of deeds, and county treasurer withhold their residential address from public property records, a protection currently offered to judges and law enforcement officers. This would be an opt-in protection that helps reduce the risk of harassment, intimidation, and targeting at home. LB986 is about safeguarding participation in the democratic process and protecting the people who serve our communities. I'd appreciate the committee's time and attention. I urge you advance LB1096. And I'd be happy to answer any questions.

HANSEN: Thank you. Are there any questions? Senator Fredrickson.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Chair Hansen. Thank you, Senator Bostar, for bringing the bill. So can you-- I'm sorry. You said this briefly. The amendment, it just in-- it adds president and vice president. Can you share a little bit more what the amendment does?

BOSTAR: So the amendment-- which, again, I handed out as a request by a congressman-- would add the ability to have-- I'm trying to make sure I didn't give away all the copies of it [INAUDIBLE] have one in front of me. Essentially the ability for folks to withhold personal information from government databases. So like we do with judges in law enforcement where, you know, you can't just go to the assessor's site and look up what their home address is, right?

FREDRICKSON: Got it. Got it. I see. Then my other question was, on page 3 of the bill, it talks about security services and systems, electronic security equipment, installation, maintenance, and monitoring. Is that in reference to, like, a individual's personal home? Not, not like a-- not here in the Capitol, right? I imagine if we installed things, that would be--

BOSTAR: Yeah. The, the point of this bill is to really examine this to, to try to address security landscape outside of this building, right? We-- we're, we're currently in the middle of a lot of discussions about what it should look like here in the building.

FREDRICKSON: Mm-hmm.

BOSTAR: But obviously, we spend the majority of our time not in this building, thankfully. And so, you know, I, I have, and I know many others have, experienced security and safety challenges outside of, of the State Capitol.

FREDRICKSON: Got it. So that, so that applies primarily to places outside of the actual [INAUDIBLE].

BOSTAR: Yeah.

FREDRICKSON: Got it. Thank you.

HANSEN: Any other questions? So it's-- I think I have one. It-- so does it explicit-- OK. Yeah. OK. You're, you're more explicit with the "physical and structural security measures and improvements."

BOSTAR: We tried to make it broad to deal with-- I mean, the, the intent is to give individuals the ability to use these kind of funds-- campaign-derived funds on necessary security improvements, whether that's dealing with cybersecurity threats or, or physical intimidation and maybe you need actual, physical, you know, security personnel somewhere. It's, it's happened to a number of people in this body. Or you need a-- you know, on the physical side that really is kind of what you mentioned, maybe an alarm system at your home, right? So trying to-- we tried to write it to, to ensure that we weren't missing something that could become critical for an individual down the road. And, and I'll just add, you know, a lot of-- so a lot of states are looking at this-- the challenges on this landscape. And not just states. Local governments, the, the federal government, you know, the-- so Congress-- individuals and members of Congress were given and are given essentially funding for this purpose for them as individuals. So for their homes, for their offices-- I mean, they, they have an entire budget allotment that's given to them for this. And actually, they're now in the process of really enhancing that on their end. And there are states that do that as well, where the state sort of provides funding out of basically the General Fund to all of its members for security purposes. That isn't the direction that, obviously, I chose to go here. I thought that this was a-- instead of saying, hey, we should have taxpayer money going to support our security needs, I thought this was good-- using campaign funds. So it's still private dollars. It's not public dollars. We're not talking about taxpayer money. But just allowing a, a-- adding an allowable use for these funds already for these purposes. And unfortunately, I think it's absolutely necessary.

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HANSEN: Yeah. I like the intent of the bill. I, I got another question here. Can I buy a firearm with this?

BOSTAR: You know, I--

HANSEN: Like, would this be included? Can I use campaign funds to buy a firearm? Like, legit. I'm just kind of curious. Because, like, that's just something you might want to put in or out of this or-- I don't know if this-- the-- you know-- or, like, bulletproof glass for my car. You know what I mean? Are-- do we have to be more specific with this or do we have to just-- or is that kind of-- are we-- I don't know how vague we need to be here.

BOSTAR: We, we looked at some-- what other states have, things like that. So this-- we didn't, we didn't develop this in a complete vacuum. So this is representative of what exists kind of broadly. I mean, we at least-- we took pieces from other places. I think that's a, that's a question for how would-- because we're talking about the NADC statutes. So how would the commission, the NADC, interpret this when it comes to the purchase of a firearm? I don't know that answer.

HANSEN: OK. Well. All right. OK. Senator, Senator Dorn.

DORN: Thank you, Senator Hansen. Thank you for bringing the bill. I, I-- mine-- mine's a little bit piggyback on him-- his, and maybe it's for Accountability and Disclosure, I guess, who-- it's up to the candidate or the person to report this and to, I call it, justify it being, or will the Accountability and Disclosure come back to you six months later and say, hey, we don't think that was allowable or wha-- I mean, it-- you're doing this, this kind of broad, but yet it's-- I don't know where there are specific guidelines, I guess.

BOSTAR: It just fits into the existing practices. We're not reinventing the wheel here. So it's like everything else-- everything else that we can spend money on, campaign funds, you make a judgment. You decide what you're going to spend your campaign money on. Now, if you spent it in an inappropriate way, yeah, you might hear from NADC on that, right? Or if someone has a complaint about that. The commission will look into it. So this-- again, we're not treating this any differently. The fra-- infrastructure to determine whether or not expenditures are happening in line with our laws is still there, and we-- and it's, it's not changing that.

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DORN: But, but this-- and I, I call it an a-- not a roundabout way, but in a certain way, allows certain more expenditures that would be OK, I call this.

BOSTAR: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

DORN: Yeah.

BOSTAR: So, so currently, you know, you, you couldn't use your campaign funds to put an alarm system at your home, right, that you, you-- currently, that would not be permitted. But if we pass this, you could.

DORN: And-- would. OK. Thank you.

HANSEN: All right. Seeing no other questions. I'm assuming you're staying to close.

BOSTAR: Absolutely.

HANSEN: All right. We'll se-- take our first testifier in support of LB986. Welcome.

BRYAN WAUGH: Thank you so much. Good afternoon, Chairperson Hansen and members of the Executive Board. My name is Bryan Waugh, B-r-y-a-n W-a-u-g-h. And I serve as the colonel and superintendent of Law Enforcement and Public Safety for Nebraska State Patrol. I'm here today to testify in support of LB986. And thank you, Senator Bostar, for presenting this legislation. We believe this bill will strengthen our ability to provide safety and security at the State Capitol and across all state office buildings under our responsibility. I'd like to provide you an overview of the Nebraska State Patrol's current security posture and capabilities within the State Capitol Complex as well as our role in safeguarding elected and judicial officials. Since 2004, the Nebraska State Patrol's Capitol Security Division has been responsible for the safety of the Capitol Complex, Supreme Court, and surrounding state buildings. This division includes sworn troopers, civilian staff dedicated to maintaining a secure environment for the public state employees, elected officials, and visitors. Our Capitol Security Division consists of 4 Nebraska state troopers, 12 civilian guards, 6 communication specialists, 3 civilian sergeants working across three shifts to provide 24/7 security. We monitor the State Capitol, State Office Building, Information Systems Building, Executive Building, Governor's Residence, and additional facilities in Lincoln. Daily operations include mobile and foot patrols, electronic access control, video surveillance, alarm monitoring through our 24-hour

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communication center, and incident documentation. We also enforce parking regulations within the Capitol Complex. During the legislative sessions, our personnel provide dedicated security for senators, legislative chambers in coordination with the Sergeant at Arms, and other law enforcement partners. We also provide security for judicial functions whe-- when the Nebraska Supreme Court and Court of Appeals are in session at the Capitol or elsewhere across the state. When senators receive threats, our Capitol Security Division and the NIAC thoroughly investigate and maintain open communication with the senator and their staff to ensure their safety. In short, the Nebraska State Patrol-- our role at the Capitol combines routine security, emergency response readiness, coordination with other agencies to support public safety and the effective operation of state government. Any opportunity to strengthen this capability-- which we believe LB986 would-- we would welcome and fully support. I thank you for your time. And I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

HANSEN: Thank you. Any questions? Senator Dorn.

DORN: I, I guess mine's a what-if. What if it happened if a-- one, one state senator came and asked you for personal security here and outside the Capitol? Would you ever consider telling that state senator if we pass this now you need to reimburse us with your campaign expenses?

BRYAN WAUGH: Great question, Senator Dorn. Thankfully, at the Nebraska Patrol-- and unlike any an-- a-- additionally, like all other law enforcement agencies across the state of Nebraska, we have policies in place for troopers to be hired as security personnel, for example. And we, and we really have a, a important responsibility to make sure those policies are effectively followed by our troopers. So in that particular instance, our policy would prohibit a Nebraska State Trooper from performing duties as an off-duty security officer for a state senator.

HANSEN: Any other questions? Seeing none. Thank you very much.

BRYAN WAUGH: Thank you so much.

HANSEN: Any other-- anybody else wishing to testify in support of LB986? Welcome.

TODD WILTGEN: Good afternoon, Ste-- Senator-- or, Chairman Hansen and members of the Executive Board. My name is Todd Wiltgen I am the current Lancaster County election commissioner and I'm also a former

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Lancaster County commissioner. I am here testifying in support of LB9--LB986.

HANSEN: Hey, Todd. If you can, can you spell your first and last name, please?

TODD WILTGEN: Apologize. It's Todd, T-o-d-d; last name, Wiltgen, W-i-l-t-g-e-n. And I'm providing a, a report from the Institute of Strage-- Strategic Dialogue. And it was released yesterday. It kind of expands on what Senator Bostar was talking about. It was entitled "Tick Tock Traitor: The Rise of Violent Rhetoric Targeting U.S. Public Officials." There's just a few highlights. There's a continuation of, of rhetoric targeting U-- U.S. officials, and that increases 5% monthly. And I will just point out that it's spread out across the political spectrum. 42% of the targets are Democrat, 57-- 56% are Republican, and 2% are just a mix. And I would just point out that Nebraska is not immune from this. Back in 2024, myself, along with many election officials across the country, was targeted by implicit threats of violence. While I was able to take steps to increase security at our election office for myself and my staff, I also needed to increase security at home for my family. I will just-- you know, from my personal experience, that additional cost for candidates and elected officials is, is becoming a barrier. I know that-- at the local level this last year, I did instruct my staff to scrub our website. Nebraska Election Act does not require the publication of candidates' or elected officials' home addresses on our website. It was there voluntarily as a courtesy to third-party groups like the League of Women Voters and other organizations that had an interest in elections. But that information is no longer being provided on our website. That information is still available through records requests, through the register of registered voters, but those will require additional steps to obtain that information. And so I would just echo what the previous testifier mentioned, that I would be in support of, of this legislation and ask that it advance to benefit of-- not only state and federal officials but also local officials as well. And I'd be happy to answer any questions.

HANSEN: Thank you. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Ibach.

IBACH: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Do you think there's opportunity for abuse or for using campaign dollars for things that they shouldn't? I mean, should we put parameters on it? Should we put costs-- I, I know we're referring to different instances that have occurred around the

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country-- and we don't want that to happen here, which is why we're even addressing it here in the Capitol building. But I'm just wondering if there's an opportunity for, for abuse of the, of the policy.

TODD WILTGEN: I, I think the opportunity for abuse is counterbalanced by public disclosure. If you go to your NADC form, to your reports-- I mean, those expenditures are public. And so there are-- the public does have some awareness about the cost that associates with that. And yeah, the NADC could investigate if they have any questions like they do now. While that information's not all really accessible to the public, I think the NADC does have the ability to investigate. And they do so, I think, today and into the future. I think-- and they do it responsibly, based on my experience.

IBACH: So that would be a good checks and balance.

TODD WILTGEN: Yeah. I, I think Nebraska does have a, a mechanism in place to, to safeguard against any abuse of this, this legislation.

IBACH: What would qualify.

TODD WILTGEN: Yup.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

HANSEN: Yes. Yeah, I wouldn't be completely against maybe some parameters in the bill, perhaps, because, could somebody buy a new home with their campaign funds because they feel like where they're staying isn't secure? You know what I mean? Could they, you know, buy a new vehicle because they feel like theirs isn't secure enough? You know what I mean? I think there might be-- I don't know if-- unless the NADC explicitly says certain things.

TODD WILTGEN: Right.

HANSEN: I don't know if we have to be maybe more specific.

TODD WILTGEN: Right.

HANSEN: You know what I mean? Does not include, like, an, an entire dwelling or automobile or, you know, AR-15.

TODD WILTGEN: Yeah. I mean, I think it'll be weighed against, you know, common sense. But I'll just say that, in 2024, I, I, I did consider moving out of my home. And cost was really not a factor when it

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involved my family. But it-- that was reality. And so-- but I think the more parameters you have, I think, like I said, the, the-- becomes more complicated. And I-- again, I think that the reasonableness of the NADC I think would, again, be able to address a lot of those concerns.

HANSEN: OK. Any other questions? Seeing none. Thank you very much.

TODD WILTGEN: Thanks.

HANSEN: Anybody else wishing to testify in support of LB986? Seeing none. Anybody wishing to testify in opposition? Seeing none. Is there anybody wishing to testify in a neutral capacity? Here comes the expert.

SCOTT DANIGOLE: You may have set your heights-- sights a little high, Senator Hansen. Senator Hansen, members of the Executive Board, my name is Scott Danigole. That's S-c-o-t-t D-a-n-i-g-o-l-e. I'm the executive director of the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission. And I'm appearing on behalf of the commission in a neutral capacity on LB986. As we've heard, LB986 explicitly allows campaign funds to be used to pay for security services and systems, as, as have been mentioned. This is a policy issue about the commi-- about which the commission is neutral. However, it may be prudent to place some parameters on this language. And we've heard the concerns in some of the questions. In general, campaign funds should only be spent for campaign-related expenses. By way of example, let's say a candidate for mayor receives threatening emails or calls. The candidate is operating their campaign out of their home. Candidate feels the need to have a security system installed in the home. This would reasonably be allowed under the provisions of LB986. But what if the candidate were to completely gut their house and rewire it to install cameras for the new security system? Is that level of expenditure authorized in LB986 with campaign funds? Again, we, we just feel that there should be a, a tightening up. In addition to that, what about the ongoing monitoring costs, say, six months after the campaign ends? The campaign paid for the installation and has paid for the contract for, call it, a two-year lea-- or, a two-year process of paying for the security system. At what point does the campaign need to stop paying for the ongoing expense and have that expense fall to the individual? Similarly, if candidate feels the need to hire security personnel, a bodyguard at what point does the validity of using campaign funds to pay for that expire? Could the campaign pay for the bodyguard to accompany the candidate on a trip overseas? Presumably that could be something allowable under the, the current provisions of LB986. Committee may want to consider some more

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limiting language relating to allowable uses of campaign funds for security to ensure that campaign spending is related to the campaigning or the holding of public office and not of a more personal nature. I'd like to thank you for your time. And I'll be happy to answer any questions.

HANSEN: All right. Thank you. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Ballard.

BALLARD: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Director, for being here. Is there-- can you put a cap on something like this? Does the NADC put caps on, on any-- I know there's flo-- there's thresholds, there's limits-- like 250-- but is there anything we put a cap on? Like, you can't spend more than \$10,000 on this?

SCOTT DANIGOLE: No. For expenditures-- and this is a specifically allowable expenditure. Now, we-- clearly, you could say that if there's a security system involved, you could have a wide variance in the cost of that system, the installation as well as the ongoing monitoring. Depends on the system you want.

BALLARD: So is there any heartburn to setting so-- some kind of limit on this so we are not-- as-- chairman's question, you're not going out and buying a new home-- but maybe a security camera too. Is there any heartburn to setting kind of that, that, that cap or that limit?

SCOTT DANIGOLE: I would have no problem with that. The commission, I don't believe, would have a problem. Again, on a case-by-case basis, if you set a hard cap, that may limit some candidate and their ability-- again, if you look at, for example, a bodyguard issue. Perhaps the candidate needs a bodyguard, but they only really need them eight hours a day. Perhaps there have been personal threats and the candidate feels the need to have that bodyguard physically in their home at night, and you're talking about 24/7 security. If you place a cap on that number, you may limit some candidate to using campaign funds to pay for what their truly-- they feel their need for security is.

BALLARD: OK. Thank you.

HANSEN: Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Director Danigole.

SCOTT DANIGOLE: Senator.

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CLEMENTS: It's good to see you again. Didn't read the entire bill, but I was wondering if the commission would like to have a provision saying you, you may issue rules and regulations or-- is that in the bill, or would you like to have that?

SCOTT DANIGOLE: It's not in the bill specifically, but that would be very helpful, yes.

CLEMENTS: Because you had some concerns about limitations of things. That would give you some ability to do-- have some controls, right?

SCOTT DANIGOLE: Yes, it would.

CLEMENTS: OK. Thank you.

SCOTT DANIGOLE: Thank you, Senator.

HANSEN: All right. Any other questions?

IBACH: Last question.

HANSEN: Senator Ibach.

IBACH: Thank you very much. So just with reference to your last sta-- first of all, my campaign funds would not buy me a new car or a new home. But to-- it-- with regards to your last statement, you agree that this would be a good policy to put in place. And would you be available to help us kind of set those guidelines?

SCOTT DANIGOLE: Certainly be available to help with that. Have no problem whatsoever with the policy, especially in this day and age where we see violence erupting from the very small scale to the very large scale.

IBACH: Perfect.

SCOTT DANIGOLE: We, we need to make sure that any candidate will feel a level of security where they're willing to put their name forth on a ballot like all of you have done.

IBACH: Great. Thank you for that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

HANSEN: Any other questions? All right. Seeing none. Thanks for coming. Appreciate it.

SCOTT DANIGOLE: Thank you for your time.

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HANSEN: Anybody else wishing to testify in neutral capacity? All right. Seeing none. Senator Bostar, if you want to come up to close. And for the record, we did have 1 testifier in support and 1 testifier-- or-- online comment in support, 1 in opposition.

BOSTAR: Thank you, Chair Hansen and members of the Executive Board. I don't have a whole lot to add. Just thought I would make myself available for any final questions. I, I think that it's unfortunate that this is, I believe, necessary. But I do think it is necessary. I'm happy to have-- like, I, I think we should have a conversation about what's the right way, what's the exact line which we should have. I get a little nervous about some caps because you-- there are some things that are expensive to provide that can be necessary. But at the same time, I agree. People shouldn't be buying entire homes with, you know, their campaign account. So I, I, I get it. And I think, I think we just need to figure it out and kind of move forward with what we feel like can work. But with that, happy to answer any final questions.

HANSEN: All right. Are there any questions? Senator Ibach.

IBACH: I have one. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think you and I have had this conversation, and I've had this conversation with legislators from other states as recently as just this last fall. There are some states that provide "exorbant" funds from the general funds for protection of their--

BOSTAR: Enormous.

IBACH: Enormous. I mean, you probably could buy a new house in some states. And so I think, I think this is very relevant that we approach this and find a, a way to satisfy the needs of the legislators in their private lives and, and come to some kind of an agreement as to how much the state can be involved with it because I think it's very relevant. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

BOSTAR: Thank you.

HANSEN: Yeah. All right. Seeing no other questions. Thank you very much.

BOSTAR: Thanks a lot.

HANSEN: So that will wrap up LB986 and our hearing for today.