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January 29, 1999 LR 11

SPEAKER KRISTENSEN: Thank you, Madam President, and members of the Legislature. LR 11CA is a carry-over constitutional amendment that was taken out of committee, was on the floor, but was not prioritized during the last sessions and was not able to be debated. The purpose of the constitutional amendment is to provide for gender neutrality and for inclusiveness into the Nebraska Constitution. Let me give you a little history. As late as 1914 in this state, the voters of this state rejected women's suffrage, in other words allowing women to participate in this state's government. Of course, the United States Constitution changed and we changed shortly after that, but for a good share of the Nebraska Constitution, when it was written, women were not part of the equation because they couldn't participate. References are made to the Governor and his term; he shall present. Legislative members make reference only to the male gender. The Constitutional Revision Commission, as part of their charge, was to update, modernize and recommend changes to this body to present to the people. What this constitutional amendment does is two things. We had the task of saying, okay, we could go through with every section and sort out which ones needed to be made neutral. Sometimes that could be adding the feminine pronoun, sometimes that could be done by just removing the pronoun, and there are many other ways to make it gender neutral. That would require quite a process because, as you know, each one of those separate articles that has that little change would have to be published three times in statewide newspapers. And you just couldn't publish the change, you'd have to publish the entire article. It would be an extremely confusing task but it would be a very expensive task to publish all those changes in the newspapers of the state. So we sought out a way to try to make this a more coherent process so it would be clear and we came up with this process. The first is to add a new section which says the use of the masculine gender in this constitution shall be construed to include the feminine gender. Since there aren't any that go the other way where there is only a feminine reference, it doesn't need to be made both ways. There are more references, in fact a good number of references made only to he or his. And so that's the first article. Then the second portion comes in and says as soon as practical after the adoption of this section, we then give it to the Secretary of State to reprint the constitution to