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LB 457

advancement.

SPEAKER MARVEL: Senator Murphy.

SENATOR MURPHY: I guess I would have a question for Senator Fowler. Senator, I have a feeling that the public knows about as much about utility rates as I do which is about nothing and the factors that go into setting them and the variables in fuel costs that come up repeatedly have to be dealt with. They are in most instances public agencies having no particular benefit to private individuals and it just seems to me that my state government is about to engage in another bit of false pretense. We are going to have a hearing that has no authority to change anything but we are going to put the utilities through hearing procedures that are going to be expensive and you will forgive me but everytime money is spent it becomes a cost factor in that utility rate. In reality, I think what you are doing is driving up that rate by burdening them with an additional cost. Do we really need this?

SENATOR FOWLER: Well, I guess, it is more of a rhetorical question than an information one. I believe that there is a need for an opportunity for the public to comment on the issue of electric rates and I think that that opportunity for communication between the board and the consumer is very important and I think that, in fact, it would improve the quality of the public power system here. Now most boards have some sort of process as far as setting rates and the idea here is simply that we try and develop some uniformity across the state, kind of some minimum standards and that is the intent. As far as to your question, should the public be involved? I think, yes, because they are the ones that are, in fact, paying the bill. And does the public have something worthwhile? I believe that, yes, that the comments of the citizens are important and would make a contribution to the setting of rates in Nebraska.

SENATOR MURPHY: Do you believe, Senator, that one out of a thousand citizens will go to a rate hearing involving the raising of their rates and say, yes, by all means that rate should be advanced or will they be like I would be and say, enough already? Don't we have a pointless argument? No one wants an additional cost of anything, be it utilities or anything else, and I guess this is what my basic feeling is. We know what the public's feeling is, they are too expensive now, but the public has no knowledge, no ability to judge that, and more than that, under the terms of the hearing they have no power to alter anything anyhow.