

SENATOR CLARK: Senator Fowler.

SENATOR FOWLER: Mr. President and members of the Legislature, I think it is always customary when you start this motion to indicate that this is the first time that you have ever done this. Well, I can't say necessarily it is the first time that I have tried to raise a bill from committee but it is the first time I have tried to raise a bill of the Governor's from a committee, of any Governor in the years that I have been in the Legislature. This is the bill that Governor Thone requested Senator Marvel to introduce with regards to loosening up our statutes with regards to allocating a certain amount of the gas tax for funding of public transit. Now a few years ago this Legislature decided that up to \$1 million of the gas tax could be set aside for the funding of transit programs, both urban and rural, the regular city buses, the senior handi buses that run in rural counties, and so on. The decision was made that a million dollars of the gas tax would be allocated to that up to a million. Well, since that time the new federalism has arrived and the transit programs that used to rely in part on federal funding are finding that those federal dollars are being phased out over the next three years. And so in a way this is the first test of the new federalism. Now this also is one of those times that they are cutting the federal funding but not providing us any revenue base to pick up the cost. So you see situations such as the City of Lincoln looking to raise its sales tax in part because of the federal cutbacks in the area of transit. You see fares being raised, the senior citizen dime ride being eliminated. You see a whole variety of efforts to somehow find the money to keep the transit programs going. I think that the Governor introduced this bill to allow flexibility in decision making recognizing the crisis in general funds that we'll be discussing over the next week and recognizing the reluctance to raise the sales and income tax. The Governor I think was looking for other revenue sources that might provide support for these programs recognizing the cutback. And so for this reason I believe Governor Thone had this bill introduced, and coincidentally I also had a bill introduced that did much the same thing. But recognizing the fact that the media has said the Governor controls this session and that whatever he wishes if he wishes it can happen, I felt it would be better to try and raise his bill than mine because nobody in the press has indicated that I have that much influence with my own legislation. I thought maybe if I tried it with the Governor's bill, I would have greater success.