

SENATOR RUPP: Yes. Mr. Speaker and colleagues, this bill, as you have noted, has garnered some favorable publicity in two or three newspaper articles so I think I will give you just a brief explanation of what it says and does. The first thing I would like you to remember is that it authorizes Game and Parks to conduct a season. It does not set a season. It authorizes Game and Parks Commission to conduct an elk season. I want to give you just a little bit of history as to where these animals probably came from, and this is speculation. It can't be documented. But back some time, I think in the 1960's when there was starvation problems with the elk herds in western Wyoming in the large national parks, and so forth, some of these elk were trapped and transplanted to northeast Wyoming. Some of these animals in all likelihood migrated into Nebraska down along the Pine Ridge and those of you that are familiar with that forested, timbered area, the Pine Ridge, a few had from the beginning expanded and are expanding at this point at a rate of about 25 to 30 percent yearly. The conservation officer, that works that territory primarily, testified at the public hearing and from 50 or 60 observations of various elk herds he has in mind a low range, now this is range, mind you, but he has in mind there are at the low end 100 elk, at the high end possibly 200 elk. It is also important to know that we will never know exactly because they can't be counted, they are a very mobile animal and there is a lot of heavy timber in the area, and so forth. If asked to put a point estimate on that herd, to pick one number, he picked 175. He thinks there are about 175 animals. I think if you are interested in this issue, it is also important to know that these animals are far-ranging. In the summertime they spend most of their time foraging on public land, on forest service land in the Pine Ridge, but in the winter they move to areas that are primarily private lands. They move there for more food, the colder the winter, the deeper the snow, the more abundant they are on these private lands, specifically in the valleys where there are a lot of hay piles, and so forth. The carrying capacity of the number of elk that the Pine Ridge can support is not determined by how many that are able to obtain feed. It is by how many of these landowners, these private landowners, will be able to tolerate in among their haystacks. There have been depredation problems. There are some going on right today out there south and east of Chadron just a few miles. There were more severe ones last year with the severe winter, of course. And the depredation problems are almost a