

SENATOR R. JOHNSON: Mr. President, I'd ask that part of whatever remaining time I have left be deferred to Senator Scofield. Mr. President and members, I recognize the fact that I probably don't have 25 votes to kill this bill, but I think the discussion that has been generated here has been good. It has laid out both the pro and the con of this issue. It has made us aware of the fact that we do need to address the taxation issue in this state and I'm not, for one, arguing against that. But I am saying to you that this is not the vehicle that is going to solve all of the problems. There are still going to be some inequities out there in the country. No one has discussed or at least not in great detail the concern that I have and I'm sure many people have with transportation and the distances that are going to be traveled. I think Senator Lamb hit on the question of nonresident tuition. There are some schools that quite frankly live on that as the Roseland School has indicated and the loss of that would create an additional burden on that school district. I'm also quite concerned from the fact that the upkeep of these rural schools may deteriorate. I know that Senator Lamb has already passed an amendment onto this bill that would give them some recourse if that local school district was not...or that local school site was not kept up to par, but I guess I still have a great deal of concern with that. I want you to know from the very beginning of this that I certainly want to do what I can to keep education strong in this state. We've had a tremendous track record of quality education in this state. I would certainly support continuing to work toward avenues of providing better and more equal distribution of programs and classes to all the school districts. I'm also very supportive of providing our educators in those schools better salaries and better benefits. But those things will be addressed later on other issues. The question here is, are we in the end going to do away with Class I school districts? Under this bill certainly it does not show that that is going to be the case, but I think down the road we are going to lose some school districts. As Senator Landis pointed out, the evolution of the rural area of Nebraska is coming about, but I think that the people living in those areas should have the option to make those decisions as when it is financially not feasible to keep those school districts open. Senator Landis made one of the best arguments in favor of killing the bill. Two-thirds of the state already have reorganized themselves. The people in