

Health Committee, Senator Wesely.

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you. Mr. President, I will start off with a brief introduction of the bill, the committee amendments and then go to the amendment to the committee amendments. LB 209 is a very important bill and I commend Senator Smith for introducing it to the Hospital Association for their involvement with it. We have a very serious problem in rural Nebraska in terms of rural hospitals. They are faced with a DRG system from the federal government that is forcing them into a very tight fiscal situation. They need to be more efficient, and their services, they need to find different ways of providing for the health care needs of rural Nebraska. So LB 209 is an attempt to loosen up a bit on the definitions of hospitals and allow them some flexibility they don't now have under rules and regulations and under different classifications of hospitals. LB 209 is brought to you with the cooperation of not only the hospitals but the Department of Health to try to accommodate the need to change the focus of some rural hospitals, specifically rather than attempting to have small rural hospitals be full service institutions, this bill would allow them to be what would be called "short term" hospitals under the committee amendments so that they could provide for the health care needs of their area but when it comes to the more costly different hospital services they would probably not be able to provide those cost effectively so they are then to refer those people to a participating full service hospital. And what we have then is a tiered hospital system, much more than we have now. This would help those rural hospitals, now facing a very bleak future, to survive and continue to serve their communities and areas. That is the function of 209. The committee amendments, again, are a clarification of the terminology of what these hospitals under the new classification would be called. Under the bill they are called "hospital or clinic for rural health". Under the bill they would be "short term hospital". They also changed some terminology for rehabilitation facility to rehabilitation hospital, the waiver provision in the bill, which is an attempt to recognize that sometimes rules and regulations for these small rural hospitals don't always fit and don't always accomplish their purpose. There is a waiver allowed under the bill. This clarifies how that waiver would be operated by the Department of Health. And then some of the other amendments mostly are attempts to clarify different elements