

CLERK: 26 ayes, 0 nays on adoption of committee amendments, Mr. President.

SPEAKER NICHOL: The committee amendments are adopted. May I introduce a couple of previous senators to the Legislature. Over under the south balcony we have Senator Tom Kennedy of Newman Grove who represented the area up around Norfolk. Senator Tom Kennedy, would you please stand. Thank you, Tom. We also have with us Eric Rasmussen who was with the body several years ago and recently has been with the Public Service Commission. Senator Eric Rasmussen, glad to have you with us. Thank you, both of you gentlemen. We're back to the bill itself. Senator Withem, did you wish to talk anymore about the bill?

SENATOR WITHEM: Yes, Mr. President, I'd just like to make a few very brief remarks because I think we have spoken enough about the bill to get the flavor of it. What the bill does is it provides an alternate method of registering to vote, that method being registration by mail. What it does, it gives a tool to the citizen who wishes to participate in our government to make that participation. It makes a statement by this Legislature that we encourage citizens in our nation to register and to vote. Philosophically it is my position that voter registration is needed, it is needed for one purpose and that is to prohibit fraudulent elections. Strict voter registration is needed for that purpose. However, when we get beyond the purpose of eliminating fraud and making it difficult for a person to participate in the process we go beyond that and we set up roadblocks to participation. There are those that will argue that it is not that much of a hassle to go down to your courthouse to register to vote. It's not that much of a hassle to take some time away from your job to go down to register, however, that is not the point. The point is in a democracy such as ours where we seek citizen participation we ought to make it as easy as possible for that person to participate, as easy as possible consistent with honest free elections. Anything that goes beyond that is, in fact, I think an infringement on the citizens' right to participate. I know I have in my district any number of people who live close to the Douglas County line. They work in Omaha, they shop in Omaha, but they are Sarpy County residents and to register to vote they have to drive all the way down to Papillion, take some time off of work, go down to Papillion