

excuse me, Senator Rod Johnson, you are next. I'm sorry.

SENATOR R. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, members, first of all, let me say I applaud Senator Schmit and the others who are co-introducers of this measure for bringing it to the Legislature's attention. You know, as Chairman of the Ag Committee it has been very frustrating to try and fix an economy that is broke, and yet you have no tools to work with. And clearly from a state's advantage, or vantage point, it has been very difficult to address the problems you have in society, especially in the agricultural sector and fix that economy, get something going. But this is, for the first time, something that we really have some control over, some direction to provide to the state. And I think there are many smaller communities in the state that could enjoy the economic benefits that LB 1230 would provide, I think. I have a smaller community, Central City, that is looking at a plant at this particular point. I know there are a number of other communities the size of Central City that are looking for economic development. And this certainly would be one to stimulate the economy in the rural areas of our state that so desperately need the help. We often hear about the economic development in Omaha and Lincoln, but this is one proposal, I think, that does provide some advantages to the rural areas of our state. Secondly, I want to talk about the check-off fee. I do know that there are some people that are concerned about the check-off fee. I had a reporter call me over the noon hour and ask me whether or not the farmers would accept the check-off fee. We're really in a situation where talk is very cheap at this point. We have to put our money where our mouth is in this particular case. And I think that if we want to reap the benefits of this industry, we are going to have to put some money behind the industry. And I know we've had several different incentive programs in the State of Nebraska in the past to try and fund the ethanol industry. I can't say that they have met with much success. We only have a very few plants in operation today, really only one large commercial plant. I think what we need more now than ever is the larger commercial facilities. So I think the check-off fee is certainly the right direction to go as far as getting some of that up front money. Finally, I want to speak just very briefly about the decreased gas prices. The reporter also asked me whether or not this is an appropriate time to begin discussing the ethanol industry at a time when the gas prices that we're paying for are dropping and have dropped significantly in the last few months. I anticipate that the decrease in the gasoline prices are only a temporary thing. I think that most of us