

as...as floor amendments here in a few moments. I'd just like to comment a little bit about LB 245 and this time I have to explain committee amendments and then suggest the course of action that I believe we should follow with the bill. It's kind of ironic that usually the important bills of the session are heard in the final few weeks of the session. In my mind, at least in terms of the elementary secondary education agenda, this bill, LB 245, will be the most important bill that we deal with this session. At least I say that without knowing what all will be introduced. But at least of the issues that I know of, this is the most important one. It's the one dealing with setting standards for what we expect the young people in our schools to...to be able to do and devising means of assessing whether our schools are, in fact, providing the opportunities and the experiences to allow those young people to meet those objectives. There's probably nothing more important in the area of public education that a state can do than...than this particular area. Set the standards, set the method of determining whether they're meeting those standards. We have, as a Legislature, in the last four or five years...six or seven years, I should say, starting with LB 994 a few years ago, progressing through with other legislation, done an awful lot to improve public education in Nebraska, to change the way in which it's financed, to change the way in which it is organized. We passed a bill establishing a School Restructuring Committee. We've worked in early childhood education, distance learning. The one final...the one thing...I shouldn't say final because there will always be things, but as far as the...the original reform agenda that we have not done is establish state standards. That's what LB 245 is designed to do. It really ties in nicely with the work of the Nebraska 2000 Committee, the President's and the Governor's goals on improving education, and it's really essential that we do it. The purpose of the bill is to establish, first of all, a working group of citizens, business, private citizens and educators, who will have the responsibility of determining state standards for student achievement in the first phase of its work, and then maybe more importantly creating a mechanism for assessing whether students are meeting those...those levels of achievement and...and also reporting on whether they are meeting those...those levels of achievement. That's what the bill does. The committee amendment...since the bill came out of committee last year, we attached some committee amendments. They were basically a rewrite of LB 245. I have proposed a new set of amendments that don't differ radically from the committee amendments, but this