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LB 496

the Transportation Committee, advanced to General File. I do have committee amendments.

SENATOR BOHLKE: Senator Kristensen.

SPEAKER KRISTENSEN: Thank you, Madam President, members of the Legislature. It seems that when it rains it pours when you get two bills back to back and your voice is a little slim, but please bear with me and I promise to try to be as clear as I can. This is a bill that deals with, again, telecommunications, a bill that did come out of the Transportation Committee, a bill that received a tremendous amount of scrutiny by the Transportation Committee, and I want to frame to you what I believe the issue was, why the bill is here, and what it does. When the Federal Communications Act passed in 1996, as you all know, we moved from a monopoly system where a single telephone company had exclusive rights to an area for local service. Those were the services where they would lay the telephone line from your house to the street, down the street to the central office, from the central office to a main trunk, and then that trunk would connect with the next town in line, and this was all controlled by a series of switches. Now most of us have the idea that that switch is a manual switch, the old operator where he or she would plug in the connection from one to the other. Actually, those switches are very sophisticated computers today. And, of course, there's a lot of attention paid to the marketing, the competition for that, but when the Telecom Act of '96 was passed all of a sudden there is now the opportunity to have different competitors to come in, for more advanced services to come in and, thus, that means there's going to be more people who may want to enter and those good old relationships that used to be there between the cities, the counties and these companies has now been turned upside down. And one of the issues, we've dealt with universal service, we've dealt with lifelines, those all dealt primarily with consumers, customers, and the companies. But there's many other issues that are out there and this is, perhaps, the most pressing one and one that needs to be addressed this year, and that is the relationship of the advent of competition, which means more companies coming in and the use of the right-of-ways in cities, be they small cities, be they large cities or whatever. And the issue is, when they come in and want to lay new lines, new