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LB 492, 543

after that...after those visits were conducted and encouraged the Governor's Office to enter into some collective bargaining agreements that could alleviate the situation. In January of 2001, because nothing was happening that we thought was going to impact the whole situation at all, LB 492 was introduced to create a separate bargaining unit for the veterans' homes, and that did not get advanced by the Business and Labor Committee. It was more like kind of an opportunity to raise the issue again. And at...in January of 2001 the Governor did expand a directory, giving the Director of Veterans' Affairs the responsibility of directly managing the four veterans' homes, which was a real positive thing, we thought. And Keith Fickenscher, who was the person who was going to take over that, had, I think, the confidence of the committee and the committees. In March of 2001, Business and Labor sent a letter to the Governor, to Bill Arfmann, and Ron Ross to encourage investigation into the veterans' homes' problems and to encourage continued negotiations, and the administration responded by setting up meetings, saying that it was addressing the problem by instituting shift differentials and eliminating lowest-paid positions. The committees didn't really think that was going to make a substantial difference and then in April of this year we learned that the administration was asking for cuts in the budgets of these care facilities, and we were very, very concerned about it, so we brought it to your attention the other day. I think that there's a real problem of continuing care, possibly even eventually of accreditation for these veterans' homes. And particularly when I'm talking about them, I really mean the one in Omaha has the most severe problems but, of course, you have to address those problems on a statewide basis. So I...I know that the committees are going to have some interim studies this year, but we can't keep just doing interim studies. We can't just keep saying there's a problem. At some point, we have to address it. We can find...we can find the ability to pass bills in this Legislature which continually eat into our tax base, but we can't find the dollars to take care of these veterans who are our...our responsibility and should be our concern. So I know there's some other people who want to talk. I'm going to leave the motion up there for just a little bit and then I will withdraw it before we actually come to a vote on it. Thank you.