

March 12, 1981

LB 138

SENATOR V. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker and members of the body, this...LB 138 is a bill that would call for an amendment to the Constitution with respect to our pay. It is our salary bill. It is a simple bill. If this body adopts this particular measure, and if the voters approve this particular measure in the next statewide election, then this bill, if approved, will give us the authority to set our salary at whatever level we want to pay ourselves at whatever level we think is appropriate provided, however, that we can't set a salary in excess of one-third the Governor's pay. How much is the Governor now paid? He is now paid \$40,000 a year. So if this amendment was in place right now, we could not set our salary in excess of \$13,333. That would be the ceiling on what we could pay ourselves, if this law were in effect. Now I am having passed out some material. One of the items that you will receive is something that is labeled...it's two pages and it is labeled "Table Seven". Table Seven comes from the 1980-'81 book of states. Table Seven lists legislative compensation and expense money state by state. When I went through Table Seven and made an analysis of the kinds of pay and expenses that were allowed by various constitutions and by various state statutes, what I concluded was that Nebraska ranked 49th, we rank 49 in terms of an overall compensation package. New Hampshire ranks 50. It is the lowest state. We are the second lowest state by my reckoning. Now there are a couple of states that appear to pay their legislators less money for their work, such as South Dakota. On the other hand, South Dakota meets once every two years for less time than we meet. So in the end, it appeared to me that this state is now the second from the bottom in terms of legislative pay. And you and I well know that we have to do something about compensation, not just because it has become increasingly difficult for us to serve but more importantly it has become increasingly difficult for qualified people to run for this job. More importantly, persons who are dependent on a wage, persons who are not financially well off, genuinely cannot afford, they genuinely cannot afford to give up five months in the odd numbered years and three and a half months in the even numbered years to come down here at no pay to themselves other than our legislative pay. So we have to continue to put to the voters what I call a case of simple justice, and that case very simply is that our pay must be increased. Now I have set this figure at one-third the Governor's salary for a couple of reasons. And the first reason, and that is the receiving of one-third the Governor's salary for a couple of reasons. The first reason is this. We expend at least one-third as much time on state business as does the Governor. We may