

March 26, 1981

LB 384

SPEAKER MARVEL: Senator Vard Johnson.

SENATOR V. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker and members of the body, I am one of the urban senators who basically defers to my rural senators with respect to all agricultural policies in the state mostly because I have very little knowledge about agriculture. But there are some things in general policies that I am concerned about and I think the thing that concerns me more than anything else is who owns our land? It's the issue of the ownership of the land itself. In a study that was done before the Select Committee on Small Business by the United States Senate, 1980 study entitled Ownership and Control of Farmland in the United States, the study says this. Existing census data show that 37.7 percent of all farmland is owned by landlords but an additional undetermined amount is owned by individuals, partnerships and corporations who hire managers... who hire managers to run their farms. The Department of Agriculture estimates that 54 percent of our farms are now owned by those that farm them. A bare majority of our farmland nationally is operated by the owners. Now I am going to support Senator Schmit's amendment because it is my opinion that the higher equity called for by Senator Schmit's amendment will allow an existing owner and operator of farmland where necessary to acquire more farmland so that that land will not go into the hands of the city investor, the doctor investor, the lawyer investor, the person looking for a tax dodge or a tax angle, and I think it is very important that we keep our farmland in the hands of the people who are going to work that land, and so too do the experts in the area. Experts in the area tell us that greater stewardship practices of our land are maintained by the owner operator than by the absentee operator. Why? Because the owner operator hopes to pass that land on to succeeding generations and by virtue of its holder the owners hope to pass his land on to succeeding generations, he is more careful and she is more careful with the nurturing of the soil and the maintenance of the land, and that is an important quality. So it seems to me that you and I as legislators need to make certain that we have responsible programs in this state designed to protect owner occupied land and designed to inhibit and designed to inhibit absentee ownership of our land. Now Senator Schmit's initial amendment, his initial amendment that we approved this morning assures these kinds of loan funds will go to those persons who are going to operate directly the enterprises involved. I think this new amendment calling for a net worth of no more than \$300,000 is designed to benefit not just the