

January 20, 1982

LB 375

I think it is our responsibility as lawmakers to take affirmative steps to make those aquifers last as long as possible so that in many areas of the state we are not going to continue to use up all of the water in this generation and not have any water left for future generations and compel the return to dryland farming in many parts of the state. Now there was a major study done recently which indicated if current water use continues at the current rates and at expected growth rates, over one million acres, irrigated acres, are going to have to be returned to dryland farming in the next 30 or 40 years. That is going to have catastrophic results for agriculture in Nebraska and there are strong effective measures we can take today to prevent that reversion of dryland farming 30 or 40 years from now if we are willing to do it. LB 375 does not do that. LB 375 is a smokescreen. LB 375 is presented as a bill that is going to significantly advance the efforts towards preserving our underground water supply and that is wrong. If LB 375 passes, we are going to go backwards. If right now on the books of the State of Nebraska we have 12 percent of the water laws we need to deal effectively with the water problems in Nebraska, if LB 375 passes we are going to have 8 percent of the effective laws that we need. And it is very important for members of this Legislature to recognize and understand that. Now I am from Omaha. I don't have a lot of agricultural people in my district. I have no agricultural people in my district. I don't have the vested interest in this issue. I can stand up here on the floor of this Legislature and I can tell you what is going to happen out in central and western Nebraska if we pass this bill. This bill is a step backwards. It is not a step forwards in spite of what everybody may be telling you about this thing. Now we spent days and days and weeks and weeks in the Public Works Committee last year analyzing this and we analyzed it from one side to the other, and, yes, that is true, and we are adamantly opposed to this bill because we don't think it is going to be an advance. This bill is going to result in the NRDs being tied up in litigation when they try to set up management areas. If they do get their management areas set up, they are not going to have any effective tools to do anything. Now one thing that this bill begins to do a little bit of is it gives the NRDs the authority to manage water to a very limited extent and that presupposes an ability to predict what water use is going to be and what water reserves are going to be. There is absolutely no reason that we cannot put in a minimum aquifer life goal. It is perfectly consistent. And if a 100 years will not satisfy members of this body, I have another amendment up that puts that number at 30 years.

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