

of Health can come in and make a strong case either for or against the project. I think that this will make them do a better job of justifying the rationale as to why a project should or should not be built and that is why I think it is a good move. Now Senator Wesely talked about letting the experts in the Department of Health make the decisions, and I guess that Senator Wesely who knows those people probably has a good deal more respect for them than I do. I think that probably we will have to see some personnel changes there some time because we are going to have to have people that learn how to honestly make strong presentations and defend the consumer interests in the State of Nebraska. I am not sure that that has always happened in the past. I don't think that the letter that Ken Diamond sent to Senator Exon which indicates the \$10 million savings in certificate of need represents the kind of staff work or expertise that we need there. In that particular letter, as I mentioned earlier, he indicated that we saved the State of Nebraska as far as health care costs \$471,000 by turning down the Hastings Regional Center certificate of need, when we all in this body know and anyone who knows anything about health care knows that the reason that project didn't go forward and that certificate of need application wasn't pushed was because the Legislature didn't close Norfolk and so we didn't have to move patients from Norfolk and Lincoln to Hastings, and there are other examples I could cite of what I think are not good staff work. And I hope that this process will make the Department of Health do a much better job in reviewing certificate of need applications. And I think raising the threshold will also give them more time to do an adequate job of projects that are important. Finally, I would like to address another reason for the certificate of need appeals panel and that was the elimination of the health systems agencies. Senator Wesely has contended that the Governor and I decided to eliminate the health systems agencies. He certainly gives me a lot more credit than I deserve. I don't make decisions in the executive branch of government but I do believe the Governor made the right decision. But the main reason the health systems were eliminated in the State of Nebraska and Senator Wesely knows this is not to eliminate local input, not to change the certificate of need process. The reason they are eliminated is that they have run out of money. The federal government has pulled the carpet out from under them, and the Governor just decided he didn't want to spend a million and a half to two million dollars of state taxpayers' money to do this. Now I personally think that is a very wise decision. I don't think we can afford spending a million and a half dollars to two million dollars for health systems agencies. We can spend