

SENATOR McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. President. LB 177 is designated as the Protocol Act for the State of Nebraska. You may recall that this act was passed last year by a majority of the members of this legislative body late in the session. It was passed at the urging of Senator Vard Johnson who has, as you know, resigned and is not present with us today. But it was vetoed, I believe, even vetoed after the session was over so there was no chance for reconsideration on the bill. As a result of that, I had become interested in this particular area of our state courtesy and hospitality because I have hosted foreign visitors to our state, primarily through the Mayor's office. They have a program for international friendship and, as a result of that, many of the foreign visitors are interested in visiting the Legislature to find out about our Unicameral form of government and I have participated in that program and I voted in favor of the Protocol Act last year and, for that reason, I have reintroduced the same thing this year again to be considered by this body. I have passed out a number of handouts for you to consider. I trust that you have had the chance to survey Secretary of State Allen Beermann's memorandum. It is rather lengthy so you may not have read all of it. But if you are interested in all the various problems that have occurred because we do not have a protocol office in this state, you can read his memorandum. I can tell you that almost all of the states in our country have a protocol office established to host foreign visitors and I can tell you also that there are approximately 20 to 30 of the largest cities in our country have a protocol officer as well. Our state does not have a protocol officer, has never had a protocol officer and I think we have suffered for that. You might read Secretary of State Beermann's memo for that explanation. Basically, this LB 177 would promote international exchanges between foreign countries and the State of Nebraska. The exportation of Nebraska products is critical to the health of the state's economy and to successfully promote Nebraska products in international markets the state must pursue an aggressive policy in international exchanges between foreign dignitaries and state officials. This bill, as I said, would create a protocol office for the state to coordinate visits between state officials and foreign visitors. Historically, such visits have been planned on an ad hoc basis with little coordinations between the agency and offices involved. There have also been problems encountered with payment for entertaining foreign dignitaries and the purchase of appropriate gifts or mementos for the state visits and this bill would attempt to alleviate this problem since successful visits are