

SENATOR WITHEM: Yes, Mr. Speaker, members of the body, I'd be happy to kick the thing off for this afternoon. Not an awful lot to say on this issue because this issue is in many ways a philosophical issue on how you think government operates the best. I have always been, from being a student in college of government to a teacher of American Government to high school students to now a senator, believe that the district concept is a much more effective way of providing representation to individuals. Senator Labeledz may use an anecdote a couple of times to talk about her support for the bill, or for her amendment, her support for the amendment and, again, I know it's a strongly felt philosophical view, again, on how government operates the best. It just happens to be different from mine. But she made reference to a particular problem in a particular part of the county, and when there are five individuals on the county board and all five of those people represent all of the county, that the citizen can contact all five of those representatives. Now that's true, but all five of those representatives can ignore that constituent and can ignore that particular problem because they have a strong enough base of voters in the rest of the county that they can allow a problem to fester in one part of the neighborhood, particularly if that part of the neighborhood happens to be an area with low voter turnout, low political participation as many parts of north Omaha happen to be. They can ignore that problem and they still have a strong enough base around the county based on name identification and raising money for campaign funds that they can continue to be reelected. There is one individual that has...represents that particular area where the problem exists and everybody knows that that individual represents that. It might be akin to the situation we went through here this morning. We have a problem in this state that the Legislature made a decision, at least tentatively, on how we want to deal with it in saying we don't want to deal with it this year, but we have a problem where a large number of citizens in Lincoln, Nebraska feel as though they were treated unfairly by one of the financial institutions. More importantly, they think they were treated unfairly by the state government. They didn't have to send a letter to 49 different senators, hoping that they'd catch somebody's attention. They knew that those senators that represent the Lincoln area would be responsive to their concerns and they had to be and they have been, and they've done an effective job of representing the local concerns to the whole body. That is what district representation is all about.