

followed by Senator Langford. Senator Withem, please, and Senator McFarland is third. Yes, Senator Withem, please.

SENATOR WITHEM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought I saw somebody else push their light before mine. I didn't realize I was first up. LB 247 is my priority bill. Some ways I'm somewhat frustrated with the fact that the Kearney issue has really overshadowed the remainder of 247. My interest was, when I introduced 247, was to do a strategic plan, a look at higher education because of broader frustrations I have about higher education than those surrounding the Kearney issue. That is the reason, because of those concerns that is the reason I supported adding Kearney to the bill. That is why I stand today saying you should not take Kearney out of the bill. I'm going to leave it up to Senators Langford and Kristensen to defend why Kearney should be in the system, I am just going to indicate that they convinced me along with the folks from Kearney that Kearney does belong in the university system. Let them give the justification for it. But let me tell you my thought process on why I think it is appropriate to do this action while we are looking at higher education. It is not a study to look at Kearney. I mean a lot of people...and I think conversations I've had even with individual regents have led me to the conclusion that that is what they may think it is, it's a study to look at what we do with Kearney State. And if that were the case, yes, Senator Wesely's logic would be accurate. You don't do something and then study whether it ought to be done. That's not what this study is for. The study is to look at our broader concerns of higher education, the type of concerns that were mentioned in this report that Senator Wesely is passing out, I'm pleased he did that, toward the twenty-first century, the Strauss Commission's recommendation. It's to look at if we didn't need to make changes in governance of higher education, if we need to make changes such as looking toward a different way of choosing those that govern higher education, whether we need to do more coordination, whether the role and mission of our institutions is proper, whether our institutions of higher education are in sync with our goals as a state, the New Horizons concepts, the New Seeds concept. That is what it's all about. I supported adding Kearney because I'm...I've concluded at the hearing that any plan for revising higher education in our state will include Kearney State becoming a university. If it's going to become a university, it ought to be part of the university system, I'm convinced of that. I think the data is in and I'm convinced that that is the case. I also think making