

Department of Economic Development is coming back with improvements, with better leadership, with a more determined effort to help the people in the State of Nebraska in finding funds for economic development in this state. Governor Orr asked, in her State of the State message, that four of the original offices be put back in to the appropriations budget. The Appropriations Committee did not include those four in LB 813. This amendment quite simply would put the four back into LB 813. There will be a lot of discussion. It will be an interesting amendment on the floor, and I hope I can respond to all of the discussion points as we go on. I would like to say one particular thing, and then I will give the rest of my time to Senator Schellpeper. Economic development is obviously important to the state. There are a lot of ideas that are out there already. When the branch offices closed, many of the areas became regional. Many of the areas had to do for themselves. We have a lot of different areas in different...even within the regions, different entities that are each trying to do what they feel is necessary in economic development, and it has taken on a life of its own. Some would say there is no need anymore for branch offices because we have regional areas going, and that will be an interesting discussion as it goes. I would say that the branch offices are, in fact, even more so needed, but they may take a different role. Their role and mission may change somewhat. The branch offices are needed for two particular points; one, to be able to coordinate with all of the developer corporations and all of the development entities out there to make sure that they all are working together, or if they are not working together, to be the liaison to try to see what they can do to help each other. Instead of having region fight region, we should have region working together, and the branch offices can help do that. It could be a focal coordinating point that is necessary in what we have at this point. And the final point, before I give the rest of my time to Senator Schellpeper, would be branch offices are in themselves not going to help a great deal with one exception, and I say that somewhat tongue in cheek. I don't mean that to be negative against the amendment, it is a positive thing. People in western Nebraska have difficulty contacting...in fact, anybody outside of the governmental process, has difficulty finding who to talk to, and on any given day, if you call a Lincoln agency or bureaucracy, you may talk to a different person who has a different understanding, and you may get three different answers. It is always helpful in rural Nebraska, it is always helpful, in fact, essential that they feel