

May 8, 1989

LB 814

SENATOR HARTNETT: Mr. Speaker and members of the body, this section would strike program number 913, construction of an adjustment center at the State Penitentiary which is for the fiscal year 1989-90 of 454,120 of General Funds and in the fiscal year 1990-91 of \$4,087,080 of General Fund money. I would like to give the rest of my opening to Senator Chambers.

SPEAKER BARRETT: Senator Chambers.

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Mr. Chairman and members of the Legislature, thank you, Senator Hartnett. What we're talking about doing is spending several millions of dollars for prison construction. Now this amendment, I think, is one that should be voted in the affirmative. We should take this money out of the budget. There should be a study as to whether it is needed, the expenditure for the purpose that the department asked, and whether it's going to at all impact on the overcrowding. For the information of those who may not have followed this issue, this is to build a new adjustment center. The inmates call it "the hole". Currently, they have space for 36 people. This will add 44 new slots. But the overcrowding that occurs that is justifying all of this money to be spent is not occurring in the adjustment center. It's the rank and file type person who is sentenced. So why are we going to make the largest expenditure in the area that is not causing the overcrowding? It doesn't make sense. And if they need 44 more spaces, because that facility would house 80 people, the one they want to build, what are they doing with those 44 other people now? If they have more space, they give more bad write-ups, they take more good time, they send more people to the hole. There is no oversight of the institution of any kind in terms of their internal operation. And one of the bitter fruits being borne is this proposal to spend \$4,541,000 to build a new hole, not for rehabilitation, not adding to prison industries, not to give training or any of the things that we would hope a Department of Corrections would be about, but to create a thieftom. This is a power play by the Director of Corrections just like the construction of a multitude of buildings on a college campus would be by a university administration or its president. This facility is not needed. A person can be sent to the hole for next to nothing and, again, even in the prison there is an arbitrariness that you find when you review who they charge, what they charge people with and how they sentence them. Some of the problems that contribute to overcrowding, the Director had to admit this when he came before the committee, their