

SENATOR WITHEM: LB 259 deals what has historically been the most contemptuous issue in the Nebraska Legislature, at least since I've been here. And my understanding of the history of it is it goes back considerably, that is the question dealing with school district reorganization. The existence of different levels of classes of school districts in our state, the Class I districts that offer only elementary education, the Class VI's that offer only high school education and the various categories of school districts offering kindergarten through twelfth grade education. A little bit of the chronology of the issue, most of you recall, I think, that the Nebraska Legislature, in 1985, I believe it was, passed LB 662. This was a bill would have mandated school district reorganization, would have forced Class I districts to lose their independent identity and merge with existing Class II or Class III school districts. This bill was passed by the Nebraska Legislature. It was significantly amended to include an increase in a sales tax. The bill was brought before the Nebraska voters, via petition, and was repealed. The message from the voters was not a particularly clear message, because the bill itself was garbled considerably with the fact that there was the tax measure included within it. We, as the Legislature, came back then, in the 1987 session, with a number of other solutions to the school district reorganization question. Among these was reintroducing of 662, the bill that Senator Lynch brought to us, that was a...would have required one county, one school district; a bill of mine, LB 444, that would have provided a change in the local reorganization process. LB 444, in the 1987 session, found its way through the pack, was sitting on Final Reading and was frankly ready to be passed. Our vote count showed that we had anywhere from oh 27 to perhaps 32 votes in support of that bill. Governor Orr, at that time, invited me into her office and said, isn't there something different we can do with this school district reorganization question? Her concern was that it was very divisive and was causing the state a great deal of friction, and isn't this something where we can get people with different viewpoints to come together and talk about their problems and reach some sort of solution. I attempted to do that. I put a bracket on LB 444, asked that it be held on Final Reading, and we pulled together a group of people who became known as the Ad Hoc School Committee, people from all different facets of the school reorganization question. We had farm groups, we had education groups, we had groups representing rural schools, urban schools, large schools, ESU's, teachers, administrators, and we worked through the summer of...and fall