

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you, Mr. President, and if the body would just bear with me for at least a few minutes to just get the gist of what the amendments are to LB 642, and then you can go on about your business after that, but I think it is important to just get an idea of what we are trying to accomplish here in these amendments. First of all, let me just make a couple of preliminary comments. This bill, LB 642, was on General File for a long period of time, for over a year. We had a couple of hearings on it, discussed it thoroughly. We went over the discussion of the constitutional amendment and whether or not this bill would be constitutional or not, and that was discussed at the time of the last debate. Then in the last couple of months this bill has become sort of a tennis ball in a tennis game between the National Rifle Association, on one side, and the handgun control people, on the other side, and that has been extremely unfortunate. I know that I have been called everything from a Communist to an Orwellian to an effete liberal snob, to everything else that could be dreamt to call me and that goes with the territory, but I think there are some things I would like to mention. One is that, and, of course, this bill has become the focal point of lobbying by both groups, very strong lobbying by both groups, and I know Senator Smith and Senator Wehrbein were the beneficiaries of letters to the editor in their paper concerning this issue. And I believe Senator Bernard-Stevens was as well, maybe others were, and I think that is extremely unfortunate that that happened. Because what we are trying to do here in LB 642 is, and Senator Chizek, I know, will talk about this later, is we are trying to craft a bill that will address problems that have been brought to us by Nebraskans, problems that have been brought to us by the people of Nebraska overwhelmingly supporting some sort of waiting period for the purchase of handguns, problems that have been brought to us by law enforcement across the state, by medical personnel across the state, by the teachers across the state, by the retired citizens who have said to us, we want you to do something about violence in Nebraska, not just in Omaha, not just in Lincoln, but all over the state. And I said the other day when Senator Abboud had his bill on the drive-by shootings, and when I supported that bill, I said to the body that that is one part of the puzzle is toughening up the laws for firearm related felonies. But there is another side or piece to the puzzle and that is why this bill is before you. There are three problems that have been identi...or three guidelines or standards that have been identified to us by Nebraska citizens,