

these years. We have said, hey, it is okay, alcohol is okay, marijuana is okay, but time after time after time, surveys, psychologists, drug abuse counselors discover that marijuana and alcohol are those entry gateway drugs for our young people. Now you talk about \$100 being such a terrible fine. Hey, \$100 today won't even buy you a pair of jeans or a pair of shoes. I hate to tell you this, guys, but the Governor did not bring this bill to me. I have been involved in a course of study at UN-O on Youth and Crisis, and during that course of study, there were several seminars held across the City of Omaha in the various high schools, and time and time again, we heard both in those seminars and also in my course of study of the youth at risk, those who commit suicide, those who go on to destroy their lives with drugs, it can start with that simple joint of marijuana. I mean, what can that hurt? It is exactly that kind of mindset that I think we need to counteract by making this a more serious crime. Again, there is still the educational courses and I think we need more money for educational courses, and we need to have more prevention. And I commend the law enforcement in Omaha and I think they are spreading across the state also with their DARE, with their intervention and their education programs. Felonies have no minimum fines. That hasn't seemed to stop judges from using their good sense on how to apply fines...

SPEAKER BARRETT PRESIDING

SPEAKER BARRETT: One minute.

SENATOR PIRSCH: ...as well as punishments. The minimum is nothing now, even under the federal law, and again we have to bow to the courts to make those decisions. As far as Senator Wesely saying that the public has not spoken on this issue, I disagree. We passed around a poll on the tougher drug penalties for marijuana and 78 percent favored it, 76 percent, excuse me, and 21 percent opposed it. I guess my whole feeling is, and this is strictly a personal feeling, nobody tells me what amendments to introduce or what bills to introduce.

SPEAKER BARRETT: Time has expired.

SENATOR PIRSCH: I feel very strongly, but with that, Mr. Speaker, I am withdrawing my amendment to make possession of one ounce of marijuana a misdemeanor.