

SENATOR SMITH: Madam President and members of the body, I feel very intimidated at this moment but almost rather honored. We have a distinguished figure in our midst seated right ahead of me. I think we have on the floor with us this morning, Senator Winston Churchill, not senator, the Honorable Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and I would like to introduce you and have you rise and show them that you even know how to smoke a cigar. Do you have anything you would like to add to my point of personal privilege, Winnie? He says, no, I don't think so.

PRESIDENT MOUL: Thank you, Senator Smith. I'll recognize Senator Lowell Johnson.

SENATOR L. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam President. My thanks to Senator Pirsch, of course, for designating LB 742 as her priority bill. Very quickly, 742 is a reintroduction of what we considered last year as 1091. Briefly recapping that, LB 742 would seek to amend the Uniform Controlled Substances Act so that crimes and punishments for selling or distributing illegal drugs distinguish between drug offenses involving a minor. My bill amends Section 28-416 by providing that any person 18 years of age or older who either distributes drugs to a person under 18 or uses a minor in a drug operation shall be punished by the next higher penalty classification that would otherwise be the case for such an offense. The bill also provides that it is not a defense that the defendant did not know the age of the victim. LB 742 then codifies existing federal law into Nebraska statutes thereby providing Nebraska prosecutors the same authority that exists at the federal level in prosecuting drug offenses involving minors. This bill makes a clear and logical distinction that corrupting and intoxicating our youth with and through the drug trade is a particularly heinous practice and should be distinguished as such by our criminal justice system. Everyone here, I am sure, is aware of the tremendous social costs and individual destruction associated with the prevalence of drug use in our society. The question before us and all Nebraskans is what we can do to protect and safeguard our youth. Many knowledgeable people argue for tougher laws, more law enforcement officers, while others believe greater emphasis on education and rehabilitation is necessary. An honest evaluation of this problem would probably indicate that both views have merit. Both are correct and neither can be mutually exclusive of the other. The bill I have offered for your thoughtful consideration is a small but could be a significant contribution