

SPEAKER BAACK: Senator Lamb, to open on your bill.

SENATOR LAMB: Thank you, Mr. President, and members. This is a bill which is designed to set up a mechanism to save some of the railroads in this state if they possibly can be saved. It sets up a council which will be appointed by the Governor to look at these railroads in a businesslike manner and decide what can be done without costing the state a lot of money, any money, probably. It has been, of course, brought about specifically by the Chicago Northwestern Railway in the north part of the state which has threatened to abandon that track, 317 miles from Norfolk to Chadron. This is a vital transportation link in the northern part of the state and we will try to present evidence that with some help from the state in a manner not necessarily financial but possibly some other types of assistance that that line can be made viable and it does several things. It helps the local economy. It is important to rural development in that area and it also would reduce the wear and tear on the roads if the rail line is advanced...or is abandoned. I am indebted to Senator Wickersham for taking this bill as his priority bill. And so, without further adieu, I would give the rest of my time to Senator Wickersham.

SPEAKER BAACK: Senator Wickersham, you have about eight minutes.

SENATOR WICKERSHAM: Thank you, Senator Lamb. Mr. Speaker, members of the body, Senator Lamb has given you a brief introduction to the bill and it is really an extension of existing law. In 1980, the body passed the Agricultural Industrial Branch Line Act. That has been in place. It has not been used to any great extent, I think, primarily, because it had a mechanism for setting up local councils to deal with these problems. I have circulated to the body a handout which illustrates that this problem that we're having with the C&NW line between Norfolk and Chadron would not be susceptible of handling at the local level. We would affect seven counties and 27 cities or municipalities. Essentially, the extension of law that is embodied in 783 is to allow the state to play a greater role in those actions where it is necessary to save what we used to call branch lines, what we occasionally called short lines and now what we're going to call light density rail lines. There should be no illusions about the impacts that can be brought if one of these lines closes. And, again, if you will refer to the fact sheet that we have distributed, we had a study