

this. It was formed last year, it issued the report. I think, if you haven't got a copy, we've got extra copies, called "Two Decades in the Light". And I want to thank every task force member for the work they did. I want to also particularly thank Senator Byars, a member of the task force, Senator Lynch as a member of the task force, and Senator Wehrbein, who was a member of the task force from the Legislature, all of whom put in long hours, as did all task force members. There were a large number of recommendations from the task force. We adopted the vast majority of those. We fall short in the question of the state taking over the system versus the regions and counties. That is a battle that could not be fought this year and may not need to be fought if we make the changes included in the rest of this bill. And that is because the bill does provide a number of enhancements to the current system that will better serve persons with developmental disabilities and provide greater oversight by the state to these programs. Why is this bill important? And it is a very important bill. There are 2,700 Nebraskans now served by community-based mental retardation services. There are 651 Nebraskans, as Senator Robak said, on a waiting list waiting for services for our community-based mental retardation regions. There are 300 other estimated developmentally disabled individuals in Nebraska not even able to be waiting for services in the system. They don't get included, they're left out even though their developmental disabilities are similar to that of a mentally...those with mental retardation. And so those individuals would now be included into the system under this bill. In other words, there are 3,651 Nebraskans, at least, that we know of directly affected by this bill in its attempt to open up services and improve services for these individuals. There are 2,000 employees, as we count, employed by these six regions serving the mentally retarded. There are over \$87 million spent currently by state, federal and county governments on services to people with mental retardation in Nebraska so the taxpayers have a great interest in this as well. This is a big bill dealing with a lot of people in a very important way. We have attempted to compromise, as I said, we cut out the funding in the entitlement. We also did not create the new department we wanted to because of the costs. We also did not advance other legislation dealing with salary and training of staff, a very important topic. We need to do much more in this area. But, again, because of the money we did not move forward in that area. We will have to at some point in the future. What does the bill do? I have given you a summary. I will go through it