

SENATOR WITHEM: Madam Chair and members of the body, as one of the two senators representing the Douglas-Sarpy County area and served on the Government Committee, I just wanted to make a few comments as much for the record as anything regarding the committee amendments. As a member of the Government Committee, I support the committee amendments and feel that although, obviously, when we're redrawing 49 legislative districts we're not going to please everybody. I think that this plan does as good a job of meeting the interests of the people of the state as anything you could have. We have received some correspondence from some areas of the state that don't like what's being done in their areas but you're never going to please 1.6 million people when you start dividing the state up into 49 different districts, particularly with the sorts of requirements that we have to live under from court history of making those districts as equal in population as possible and as contiguous as possible, when you have the type of population shift that we've had in Nebraska over the last ten years there are going to be some problems. One thing I think it's important that we remember, the purpose of redistricting is not...it's in our guidelines that it is not to protect the incumbents or to be damaging to incumbents. Our purpose is to create 49 districts so that the people can have some community of interests that live within those districts and allow them the opportunity to elect their representatives. And a lot of the talk you've heard and a lot of the criticism you have heard of the committee amendments talks about how it treats particular incumbents. That's not to be one of the things, at least in theory, that was one of the things we're not to be dealing with. In the Omaha-Sarpy County area, one thing I did want to visit with just a little bit deals with the question of minority representation because we did have a plan forwarded to us that was not a complete plan, it was merely the drawing of two specific legislative districts and it did not go into how the rest of the Sarpy and Douglas County would be affected by drawing those districts but we did have a plan that would have created two districts purported to be minority controlled areas. As the committee, we looked at that and came to the conclusion that they probably would not be two areas where you would be guaranteed minority representation. As a matter of fact, if we had adopted that plan, we would probably have put the one minority controlled district that we now have in existence at risk. So what the committee chose to do in drawing the lines in Douglas and Sarpy County was to assure ourselves that we did have one minority district that we did not dilute that minority