

Bernard-Stevens.

SENATOR BERNARD-STEVENS: Thank you, Madam President, just a couple of comments. First of all, I cosponsored the bill with Senator Schrock as soon as he brought it to my attention he was going to do so. I mentioned to Ed, whatever I can do to be supportive of this bill I certainly would. And I haven't needed to do anything particularly because Senator Schrock has done a magnificent job of working with the committee, of getting the bill to us, getting it on a priority basis and I think he needs to be commended on that. And the point that the people that are going to be hurt by this are the people who are not responsible for what happens I think has already been made and I don't need to reemphasize that. This bill is to protect those people who, by no fault of their own, have been put in a very difficult economic situation and I say economic because many of them, in fact, most of them would not be able to continue their livelihood that many of them have been doing for generations, and that's wrong, that's wrong. And this body is doing, I think, a service to Nebraskans who are asking for help and I think this bill is a step in a positive direction. However, there are some things I think the body is going to have to deal with that we've put off far too long. The 33,000 acres is only a part of the puzzle as to some of the problems Nebraska has in water policy. We also have had over 14 years of trying to get a for-free licensing program. We've had over \$18 million spent of ratepayers' money and we've gotten for the most part nowhere. And I think the Legislature is finally, this year, going to take a look because we're saying that this water we're talking about, the 33,000 acre feet of water, is intimately connected to the Platte River system, to the environment, to wildlife, to power, to Lake McConaughy, to natural resources, to recreation. All of these things are interrelated and Nebraskans are beginning to ask themselves, have we managed our resources wisely? Is there a better way to manage our resources wisely? Can we do a better job? And can we have some type of water policy that just isn't some flimflam resolution brought out that says, all the laws that we've passed on water for the last 100 years will constitute our water policy. Nebraskans deserve better, they are demanding better and this Legislature this year finally is going to begin asking some of the difficult questions and we not only deserve the answers, we will get those answers. Senator Schrock, I commend you on your bill. It's a good bill in response to good people and I urge its advancement.