

SENATOR SCHMIT: Mr. President, members, I believe it's significant that LR 3 zeros in on the Public Service Committee, and also that the language of the resolution specifically mentions the deregulation of the telephone industry as one of the reasons why we might want to reduce the size of the commission. As you know, I vigorously opposed the so called "deregulation" of the telephone industry. That industry was not really deregulated, it was cut loose in several areas where it is now allowed to function in a totally different manner than it is in the other 49 states. It's also true that the commission has some oversight authority, but they have no regulatory authority. And I guess I would just like to say this, that I wish at this time that the...for the record that in the process of examining the commission we would discover whether or not the commission does have any possible ability to perform the kind of services, relative to the telephone industry, that they used to in the past, before the passage of 835. I think all of us know what has happened in the industry. I don't see any possible chance of changing that in the future. But the facts are that the telephone industry today is virtually cut loose from the Public Service Commission. It does not mean that they do not have some other functions to perform, but any illusion as to what the commission can do toward regulation of the telephone industry ought to be dispelled. I know that there are those here who are new and have not been involved in what took place back in 1986, but I well recall that the Villages of Ceresco and Ashland, who became the first communities in my district to live under LB 835, found that the commission can be of no help to them and that they had to fight it all alone. And as I predicted on the floor of the Legislature when the bill passed, this Legislature here may one day become the repository of all complaints relative to the telephone industry. In fairness to the industry I want to say that the industry has gone through this new period with some restraint. They have, in cooperation with the Villages of Ceresco and the community of Ashland, worked out some arrangements and they may be able to continue in that manner, and I hope they do. But the cost of your phone bill, ladies and gentlemen, has increased and will continue to increase along with the cost of all the very attendant services. But if you are looking for something for the commission to do, or if they have any responsibility I want you to know that as far as the regulation of the telephone industry is concerned their duties are minuscule.