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government means regulatory overkill. It means inflexible, unfunded mandates. Government has a bad habit of telling us what to do and how to do it. It's costing state and local taxpayers billions of dollars each year. We spend so much money on mandates, we don't have dollars left over to spend on our priorities. The federal government has more power over our state budget than we do at times. The balance of power intended by the drafters of the Constitution is no longer in place. It's time for Washington to stop playing big brother, time to start playing fairly. We have already been fighting against unfair federal mandates and we will continue our fight on two fronts; one is long term and the other short term. To accomplish a long-term change in federal government, Nebraska must come together with other states as partners and respectfully nudge Congress away from unfunded mandates. In the past four years, we have made progress. I have testified before Congress several times, led national committees on mandates and cosponsored a push for a Conference of the States. Our efforts are beginning to pay off. Representatives from every state will meet this year to draft a firm message to Washington. We will no longer tolerate unfunded mandates. We must restore the balance of power. The states and Congress must return to our work for America as equal partners. Just as when our founders convened a Constitutional Convention more than 200 years ago, this Conference of the States shows we mean business as well, and others from every state in the nation agree. We all agree this process must be bipartisan and without influence of special interests. If either of these conditions is not met, we will stop our progress until they are met. I'm not exaggerating, I don't believe, when I say this Conference of the States will make history and Nebraska is leading the way. The second front of our attack against unfunded mandates and inefficient government is right here at home. We have the power to make change happen now, on our turf, in our own state. We will make sure that Nebraska communities, businesses and citizens have a say in rules and regulations that affect them. The executive order that I signed last year was a beginning. It requires state agencies to bring communities into the lawmaking process early on. Our negotiated rule-making process supports that effort. Change doesn't always happen overnight. The spread of railroad tracks into the heart of our nation took a little time, but when many people who built the railroad were inspired and challenged, they worked fast and hard, and when they were finished, a great length of steel from coast to coast would outlive their own generation and carry a message into the