SENATOR MAURSTAD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you also, Senator Kristensen. Things worked out pretty good, the system does work. Catch my breath for a second. First of all, I'd like to thank Senator Schellpeper and the General Affairs Committee for their work on this bill and I would also like to thank Senator... Senators Kristensen and Hudkins for introducing LB 418. I chose LB 418 as my priority bill because, as a former mayor, I understand both sides of the issue which this bill raises. First, I would like to let the Legislature know why this bill is needed and, second, I would like to walk everyone along the path that this bill has taken from the introduction to the committee amendment to the amendment now being offered. LB 418 increases the publication rate newspapers are allowed to charge political subdivisions for legal notices. These rates have not been changed since 1989, six years ago. Since that last change, newspaper publishing costs have shot up dramatically. Increased newsprint costs are squeezing the profit of many small town newspapers and have forced a number of newspapers out of business. In 1965, there were 302 newspapers in Nebraska. In 1995, there are 192 newspapers in Nebraska. It is good public policy to ease the burden on these newspapers by increasing the rate they can charge political subdivisions for legal notices. In communities without television and radio stations, newspapers are often the only reliable source for local news, local sports, funeral information, wedding announcements and et cetera. Hometown newspapers provide businesses with an economical means to reach their local consumers with advertising. We should all agree that newspapers serve an important service and a vital service to their community. Now let me make one point clear. I am concerned about unfunded mandates forced upon Nebraska by federal government, but this issue rises above such comparisons. I have to agree with what Senator Kristensen said in his testimony to the General Affairs Committee committee. His statement was I can see no more important expenditure of such funds than to inform the public as to the operation of government at all levels through various legal notices that are required by law. I hope the members heard what Senator Kristensen had to say. If not, let me restate his testimony in my own words. The publishing of legal notices is a service to the public and the newspapers have borne some of that burden for publishing those notices. However, the proportion of that burden has increased since 1989 and we cannot expect newspapers to lose money in order to comply with our statutes. That is why 4...LB 418 was introduced by Senators Kristensen and Hudkins. You should have