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February 11, 1999 LB 514

PRESIDENT MAURSTAD: Time.

SPEAKER KRISTENSEN: ...bill attempts to take the next step.

PRESIDENT MAURSTAD: Thank you, Senator Kristensen. The Chair recognizes Senator Bromm for discussion on LB 514.

SENATOR BROMM: Thank you, Mr. President. To...to continue to respond somewhat to Senator Beutler's questions, which are very good ones, we need to double-check on the data exactly, but what we're being told by the Public Service Commission is that we have consistently in the recent years been in the top three states in the nation in terms of penetration. Penetration means number of households, percentage of households with telephones, and the most...the latest quarterly report was 95.7 percent in August of 1998. This is...and I don't know how far back this goes, Senator Beutler, but I think we have had relatively good penetration for awhile, and I don't have the history right at hand, but it's a very good percentage, and it's one that we, you know, we don't...we certainly don't want to have deteriorate with what is happening. In fact, we want to...we prefer to even see it enhanced, but I'm convinced that if the Public Service Commission does not continue on the course that they've attempted to start and if we don't provide them the tools, that that penetration rate, if we had...if we had just deregulation and more competition and nothing to assure the continued availability of phones at a reasonable cost, our penetration rate would go down, and that is an ironic result that there could be from deregulation, but I very much think that could happen. So I...I feel our mission is to place again in the hands of the commission the necessary tools to do their job, and then the ball is on their back, the ball is in their court. It is up to them to do the job, and there may be questions about particular decisions that they make, but I certainly hope that overall they will attempt to achieve the goals that we all have, and that is to...we have to encourage rate rebalancing, and we have to initiate the Universal Service Fund. We have to use the fund in a prudent way to provide a competitively neutral basis for these companies to operate in, and that is part of our goal. I would...I would point out a significant few words in this bill that I can tell you caused heartburn to some of the companies.