

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE  
Transcriber's Office

March 11, 1999 LB 514

as a credit onto their phone bill for being low-income. Senator Chambers, I know, has had some questions about, why shouldn't we maximize that? Why can't we do that now? And that's the purpose for this amendment this morning, to put into the record, at least...I know Senator Chambers ran the Lifeline amendment last year. The committee last year dealt with this, we dealt with it two years ago. The ability to put in Lifeline is in the statute already, Section 86-1410 talks about the commission shall establish a universal Lifeline Service Program for Nebraska, that it should be supported by federal and state Universal Service Fund mechanisms. It is very clear in the statute. It's our intent in the statute that the commission has the authority, the power and the duty today to maximize those Lifeline Service Programs; that means accessing more federal money, using state universal service money, when it's collected, to go up to the maximum amounts, to give universal service to those Lifeline people. The other issue becomes, what happens if they don't do it? And, Senator Chambers, I'd like you to respond to this, because if you don't run the bill next year, I'll run the bill, or the committee will run the bill, I would hope, that would maximize Lifeline. And that that should be an affirmative duty that the Public Service Commission should do. And then, in effect, you can get both elements of this; one, you could get so the surcharge isn't paid and charged to those people on Lifeline; and, two, they get the maximum amount allowed by the federal government. You will see figures that will show, well, if they don't make any phone calls, long distance phone calls within the state of Nebraska, they're not going to have a whole lot of relief from the Universal Service Fund, because they're only going to be charged 5 percent of their basic telephone service. That's under the temporary rules. Those rules are not final yet. They could go and be permanent, and instead of doing 5 percent, they could say, well, it's just easier to charge everybody 5 or \$10 per person. Well, then that would have a huge impact. The principle, I think, we need to do, the Chambers amendment is a good principle to have, is that we're just not going to assess people that Universal Service Fund charge if they're receiving Lifeline. It's like taxing benefits, it makes no sense to do it. And so I'm going to leave this up for just a moment. Senator Bromm, I'm going to yield you the rest of you my opening, if you want to talk about the importance of 514, and would hope that if anybody else has