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Committee amendment to the permanent rules.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, members of the body. As a member of the Rules Committee, I thought I would just tell you a little bit about the process that brought us to bring this here, and also to give you some of my personal observations on why I think this rules change is important. First of all, we spent a lot of time talking with all of you. The Rules Committee members divided up the list of the members of the Legislature, we talked to all of you at least twice, and many of you many times more than that. And I don't bring that up just to make a point, I bring that up because I think one of the things that we asked was, should we even attempt to make this rules change? Do you want the issue brought before you? And that's why we're here debating it today, because for years and years and years the problem of the overload of the Judiciary Committee has been out there. We talked to people to get your best ideas, best input, and we have brought unanimously to you what we think incorporates the best of the ideas that were out there. I first want to comment on the fact and on the concerns from the agriculture community about merging the Agriculture bill...or Committee in with another committee. And I would point out that for many years in this state agriculture did not have a committee of its own; it's been a recent phenomenon. It was called Agriculture and Environment, and it was split for the last decade or so. This just takes us back to a position that we had before. And it was no attempt on the part of the Rules Committee to make statements about a particular industry in the state, more it was taking a look at all the committees, what their workloads were, and what made the most sense. In my discussions with some of the people that I talked to on this issue, there are people who feel that this enhances the...you might call it power of the Agriculture Committee, but at least the bills that are of interest to agriculture in the state, many of which get referenced to other committees, such as Natural Resources, now all those bills, there would be an opportunity for a look at those bills by people from...who have been serving on Agriculture, but also would now be serving on Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, that that brings a lot of perspective to those bills and would enhance the ability of agriculture to have input on some of those other issues. I would also like to not dwell on that, but talk about the way the