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starts with McPherson County, which has the lowest average annual wages at \$12,427 per year. And if you just quickly run through that, you will find that many of the counties listed have an average annual wage for all employment in the county somewhere in the area of 16 to 18, 19 thousand dollars a year. But if you jump down to the last four or five counties you will notice that the average annual wage for employment in Lancaster County is \$26,000; Washington, Sarpy is \$27,000; Douglas is \$29,000. So in the metropolitan areas what you're finding is the average annual wage of employment is between 8 and 10 thousand dollars more than in the rest of the state, and it is this imbalance that this act will seek to address. The Rural Economic Opportunities Act encourages closing of the wage gap by offering income tax credits to businesses that pay new employees at least a required threshold amount. The wage must first be an average of at least 125 percent of the average annual wage in the county or state. In other words, this bill is not designed to create minimum wage jobs. It is designed to create good-paying jobs that can support families at an average of 125 percent of the wage paid in that county or in that region or in that state. The act groups Nebraska's 93 counties into 7 regions. This was done by the committee amendments actually to better justify and coordinate the standards which must be met, and the wages that have to be paid have to be greater...the greater of the regional average wages or 125 percent of the lower of the county or state average annual wages. That results from the committee amendments. Businesses could convert savings from the tax credits into higher wages and salaries...

PRESIDENT MAURSTAD: One minute.

SENATOR MATZKE: ...for employees. This is increasingly needed to encourage residents of counties with small populations and economies to continue to live and work in those counties, as well as to attract new residents and new businesses to those counties. Now the committee amendments would have been explained by Senator Wickersham, except he's snowed in in Harrison, and so the committee amendments, as I understand it, will be dealt with by Senator Coordsen. I have had two handouts and I have considerable additional information and analysis on this bill. It is a bill that I introduced at the request of the Governor, but it is a bill and a concept that I, personally...