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FLOOR DEBATE

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a bill in here, and the bill that's in front of you right now, if I'm reading it correctly, would allow the biggest hog operation in this state, even though they might employ 15 or 20 people, not to pay workers' compensation...not to cover their workers with workers' compensation, so long as they own all of the hogs they're processing. If that's a correct reading of the bill, and I think that it is, this is a vast, vast expansion of the exemption...of the current exemption with respect to workers' compensation that's in the law right now. And I think that's the wrong direction to go. And the direction that we should be going in is to cover all of these workers. It shouldn't matter, as a matter of basic fairness, whether you live in the country or whether you live in the city, with regard to the social policy we've had in this state of protecting workers with workers' compensation. And one of the ironies of this situation is that workers who are in the most hazardous industry in this state, which is farming and ranching, are the ones who are not covered. Isn't that somewhat ironic? The ones who need the coverage most are the ones who are not covered. I passed out to you a Cooperative Extension piece, which actually gives a very good summary of the recent court case and change in the law which is easy to read, for anybody that wants just to read a couple of pages and understand what's going on. But it starts out with this notation. Agricultural workers comprise 6.6 percent of the Nebraska workforce. Yet 33 percent of the Nebraska workplace fatalities over the latest time period measured, were agriculturally related. That means that agricultural work-related fatalities were 500 percent of agriculture's proportionate share, as comparing the number of workers there with the number of workers in other industries. Obviously, agriculture is a hazardous activity. It used to say in the workers' compensation law...and I think this bill strikes it...but it used to say agriculture is not a hazardous occupation. And one of the Supreme Court judges commented, even along...many years ago already, that that was one of the serious notations that ever appeared in a statute, one of the most erroneous, silliest notations that ever appeared, because the agricultural industry is hazardous. This piece goes on to point out a number of things. It says, the rationale for the 1913 farm labor exemption may have been that most farm labor was provided by family members in those days. So it wasn't such a