

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

March 4, 2004

LB 962

water, whatever form that looks in, whatever regulation would be put on it, the loss of that water does a couple of things. One, it devastates the local economy. The valuation of that land that goes from irrigated to dry land is unbelievable. Now you want to start talking about how much money we send to western Nebraska or rural Nebraska from Lincoln. And ironically, right now the state basketball tournament is going on. Ironically, a lot of people from out of Lincoln come to Lincoln to spend their dollars in housing and other areas, and those dollars are collected through sales and lodging tax in this city. It happens in Omaha as well. I hope we don't go down that same path. But when we get back to talking about that availability of water and what that looks like, the availability of water in McConaughy is going to show up when we do studies and we determine what percent of water is used for what purpose as ag. You know why? Because McConaughy was built as a reservoir for irrigators. So when we start saying, well, 88 percent of the water, or 97 percent of the water is used for agriculture, only this percentage used, sure. You can't tell me that that's not used for recreation. You can't tell me that that's not economic development for the communities around it. You can't tell me that that's not environmental use. And you can't tell me that there's not an environmental reserve at McConaughy to provide for instream flows to go down the Platte River to reach the critical habitat area. I think it's healthy that we have this discussion. I'm going to be a part of it. I'm going to be as active as I need to be to ensure that I...that what we are doing is fair. Because here's the other thing, when LB 962...if LB 962 would pass, the provisions in LB 962 relating to western Nebraska are almost immediate. Fortunately for us, we have entities out there that are already making responsible decisions on part of the governance of our water, and that is the ground water. The NRDs are making difficult decisions now. We're going to continue to be forced to make those difficult decisions for two reasons; one, to benefit those of us in western Nebraska who have to live in a sustained system, balancing all interests between domestic, or municipal, and ag, and industrial. But here's the other reason why we have to do that--because we have to send you so much water. We have designed systems, as Senator Loudon pointed out earlier,...