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FLOOR DEBATE

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criminal conviction disproportionately affects African-Americans and Latinos. The average disenfranchisement rate is nearly five times higher for blacks than nonblacks. According to a study by Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza, the percentage of disenfranchised African-Americans in Nebraska is close to 19 percent. A report by the Human Rights Watch in the sentencing project puts the figure at 10 percent. Either figure is significantly higher than the rate of disenfranchisement for the majority population. Nationally, it is reported that about 13 percent of African-American men in the United States are disenfranchised. The fourth reason you should consider this is because of its impact on veterans. More than a half a million military veterans are unable to participate in the electoral process due to felony disenfranchisement laws. Numbers estimate that a half a million, 585,355 veterans, are unable to vote. This means approximately one out every eight disenfranchised persons is a veteran. And if you have any trouble thinking about those kinds of numbers, you should visit the Vietnam veterans club out at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. They are out there. We had a very good hearing on this bill, as I mentioned, in the committee. We advanced it to General File on a 6-1 vote, with 1 person absent. If you will look at the committee statement, you'll see that among those supporting the bill were the League of Women Voters; Friends and Families of Inmates; Coalition for Voting Rights; Coalition of Religious Denominations through Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Omaha Alumnae Chapter. Election Law Committee Clerks came in in favor of this very strongly. They served on the Vote Nebraska Initiative, and said that the way it is is just very difficult, from their perspective. Plus, they believe that a person ought to be restored to the right to vote. We had the NAACP of Omaha come in; OASIS, Inc.; the NAACP of Lincoln; people who came in on their own behalf, some of whom were ex-felons; Nebraska Voting Rights Coalition...I think I just mentioned them. But you can see there was a long and very impressive hearing that we had on the bill. The only thing I would like to add in my opening comments is that I've just had a sheet distributed that shows you the categories of felons disenfranchised under state law. And if you will notice that there are only, I believe it's six states--it was seven, but now it's only six states on this chart actually totally