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SENATOR RAIKES: Thank you, Mr. President, members. I'd yield my time to Senator Beutler.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Senator Beutler, you have almost five minutes.

SENATOR BEUTLER: Senator Cudaback, members of the Legislature, I understand we're trying to work something out. I hope we're making progress. And to that end, I don't mind talking a little bit about the issue, even though I'm probably going to succeed in making myself unpopular here. But I want to talk about one particular dimension of the debate that we've had. By and large, the debate has been on the subject of education. And that's, obviously, as it should be. And in my opinion, that's what the debate should be about entirely--how the existence and functioning of the Class I schools helps or hurts the overall education system in the state of Nebraska and the local communities. But there's been another dimension that has been spoken of on the floor, several times, by several people. And I think it is a large unspoken element of this debate. And that is the phenomenon of the deterioration of our rural communities over the last...decade by decade, over the last century, really, and the fixation on preserving different types of government infrastructure for the purpose of preserving an economy in a town. That, I think, should not be a part of the debate, because when you do that, you're saying government is the business of a community, not government is there to support the private enterprise endeavors of a community. But in this bill we have provisions preserving small schools if they're in a small town, just because they're in a small town. Let me drop back a little bit more and tell you why I don't think that whole thing is healthy in the long term for the rural communities. The rural section, all of Nebraska, is caught in a great transformation. That transformation was the transformation that the great agriculturists of this state brought forth, in terms of animal livestock production, in terms of crop production, in terms of machinery that allowed you to have bigger and bigger farms, which meant smaller and smaller towns, fewer people to run the farms. That transformation continues. And if you thought that it was going to end in the next five or ten years, you might say, yes, let's preserve our schools, because we'll