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February 24, 2005 LB 71

recognized to open on LB 71.

SENATOR STUHR: Thank you, Mr. President and members of the body. I come before you today to introduce LB 71, which would reenact the Agriculture Opportunities and Value-Added Partnership Act. This act was originally passed in 2000 and was scheduled to sunset in 2004; however, funding was only received for two years and then was cut because of our state budget problems. You do have a green handout that enumerates some of the key provisions of the bill, so you could look at those as I go through some of those also. I do believe that there is a need for rural Nebraska to create economic opportunities that enable people to improve their income, to build assets and develop their capacity to contribute to the betterment of their communities; also, to build strong communities, which enable local residents to be more self-sufficient, which contributes to the overall strength and well-being of Nebraska. And it's also important to add value to ag products, offering farmers and ranchers the potential to obtain a larger share of the food dollar. The purposes of this act are detailed in Section 4 and enumerate some desirable economic outcomes to be attained. Basically, the main purposes of the act are: to enhance the opportunities in the development of small business enterprises for agriculture and rural communities; to encourage partnerships, networks and cooperative efforts for the promotion of value-added initiatives. This act would provide grants of up to \$75,000 to entities listed in Section 6, and among those entities eligible to apply for grants include communities, counties, agencies, educational institutions, economic development providers, nonprofit corporations, ag associations, and other groups that meet the purposes specified in Section 4. Grants may not be used to assist only one enterprise, business, or single individual. A 25 percent match is required. A recipient shall not receive more than one grant in any one calendar year for the same project. Grants will be awarded on a one-year basis and for no more than three years. Some projects and activities that the grants can be used for are found in Section 7. Mr. President.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Senator Stuhr.