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FLOOR DEBATE

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Senator Wehrbein, because he really was the...Senator Wehrbein and I believe Senator Vrtiska were the originators of this concept back in 2000. And in the year 2000, it was passed. It was a four-year bill, to sunset in 2004. Yes, as I stated in my opening remarks that we always learn by experience, and the former bill was completely under the administrative responsibility of the Department of Agriculture. This bill states that there will be a joint venture between the Department of Economic Development and the Department of Agriculture. The Department of Economic Development will use their skills and expertise in the area of awarding grants. They do this much more frequently than the Department of Agriculture, so they will be the lead agency in the administration of this proposal. Yes, there was the one instance and I have shared that with you because things are not always perfect. But, as I said, we have made provisions in this bill to try to look at those areas where there was some areas to...for improvement, and that is what we are attempting in this bill. There was wide support for the bill, because it is something that works. It provides small grants, up to \$75,000, for various small enterprises, and these are particularly needed in rural areas. And I wanted to share with you an article from January 1...or January 18, and it talks about the 3rd District. Fifty of the sixty-eight counties in the 3rd District are labeled as out-migration, meaning they have lost at least 10 percent of their population in the last two census counts. And this bill just proposes to offer some opportunities to enhance small enterprises and also the opportunity for people working together. This grant cannot be used for a single individual, a single farmer or a rancher, but what it is promoting is the partnership, the networking, the cooperative efforts of people working together to try to add some value to the products that they produce. And the blue sheet, I think, will give you a very good background. As I said, there was support from Farm Bureau, Farmers Union. Sometimes organizations are on opposite side. Everyone is together in supporting. You have received a letter from the Cattlemen's Association. All of those letters I think have been delivered to your office, but I knew that you would not have time to see them before this discussion started. So I hope that that answers some of your questions. I believe that...