

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

March 23, 2005 LB 273

all of our rural areas, and I feel that LB 273 does just that. Of Nebraska's 532 cities, municipalities and villages, 499 of those have fewer than 5,000 residents. Of those 499, 483 have fewer than 2,500 residents. Two years ago, annual wages in metropolitan Nebraska were \$32,609 per year compared with \$22,233 in rural Nebraska. More critical yet, the average wage in the central Sandhills region was \$11,714. In order for our rural life to be sustainable, we must be innovative and we must take risks. We must try new ventures, we must encourage entrepreneurs. Research has shown that providing educational and technical assistance is of utmost importance in developing businesses in rural communities. LB 273 would provide funding for educational and technical assistance, a key factor in helping our rural areas with development. Under the bill, the grants would be given to those areas with the most needs. Leadership development is a critical ingredient in communities being successful and growing. One of the functions of this bill is to help promote leadership skills for adults, both male and female, and our youth. One critical issue rural areas are facing is the transfer of businesses to new owners. It is a challenge to ensure that a business continue in operation with the retirement of the previous owner. This bill will also assist in that aspect. Community colleges in Nebraska are very interested in stepping up and filling a void in local economic and community development projects by providing leadership, training and entrepreneurial workshops, exactly the type of programs and collaborative efforts that this bill is designed for. I'm sure you've heard me mention many times how a few jobs in a rural area are equivalent to hundreds of jobs in urban areas. A few jobs can be the difference between a strong and prosperous community and...than the one that's battling to survive. More than 80 of Nebraska's 93 counties lost population in the last census. In many counties, retaining just 10 to 12 high school graduates each year would actually lead to population growth. South Dakota, Kansas, Colorado and Wyoming are all ranked ahead of Nebraska on a recent list of top states to start a small business. Nebraska ranked 44th. LB 273 could help Nebraska progress by assisting communities in supporting entrepreneurs, which can lead to the creation of new small businesses. I realize this bill will cost some money. However, I believe that these incentives will provide much needed