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

May 31, 2005 LB 645

areas of many different utilities. The leverage of purchasing a private system that wasn't functioning properly was put into the statutes, as you saw with the county telephone statutes, and with what we currently are advocating for our gas systems, gas utilities. So we reached a kind of balance in things, and I guess I would ask you, what's been wrong with this balance? Have you perceived that Nebraska is worse served than other of the country, in any of these areas where the traditional balances have prevailed? Are we doing worse electric utility, where we've taken it over entirely, publicly? Certainly not. We seem to be as good with our gas system -- where there's a balanced system -- as anyplace else in the country. Our telephone systems are excellent. We've reached to 99 percent, I think, coverage in the telephone system. We've done that in a little bit different way--through public subsidies--but it's, again, a balanced kind of system, involving both public and private. And now, here comes this bill which, to me, for no reason at all, the suggestion out there that somehow we aren't getting the proper investment. But I haven't noticed a lack of investment historically, as compared to other states. I haven't seen that argument made. I don't think it's true. To me, the broadness of this bill, shutting down public involvement, retail level, in all four of these broad categories of usage, is a reversion back to the mistakes we made in the late nineteenth century, of relying, in these areas, totally on the private sector. History has demonstrated to us clearly that government has to play a role, and we should review and argue always about the size of that role, the appropriateness of that role. But to simply roll back and prohibit the role at the retail level, and prohibit it temporarily at the wholesale level, to me is a large-scale, thoughtless reversion to a mentality that existed at one point in time in our history, and failed. I think it makes great sense to go more slowly here, and to be sure that there will, in fact, be competition, or where there will not be competition, to be sure there is some regulatory authority with some jurisdiction over, for example, Internet services where they may not be competitive, or video services where they may not be competitive, over which there is no regulation currently in our law. So I would encourage you again to think carefully about the broadness of this matter, and whether ...