

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

March 23, 2006 LB 1060

correlation, actually, among all of the various agencies. I think that the discussion of this issue is pretty well encapsulated in an editorial in the Journal Star here in Lincoln several days ago, and I'll read it to you: Governor Dave Heineman is taking heat in the Republican gubernatorial primary for supporting a review of the state's child welfare system. The issue came up again during the first debate Sunday between the three GOP candidates, with contenders Tom Osborne and Dave Nabity siding against Heineman on the issue. No \$500,000 expenditures should ever be made lightly, but the child welfare review is warranted. The review, which won support from the Appropriations Committee, should be approved by the full Legislature. Opponents of the study point to the previous studies and ongoing studies of the child welfare system as evidence that another study is unneeded. While it's true that previous studies exist, they focused on only parts of the system, not the whole. The review now pending before the state senators would be comprehensive. It would search for ways to make different parts of the complex system work better. It also would cover certain aspects of the system that have not been studied. In addition, the review would be done by an outside independent consultant. Previous studies were often done by people who had a stake in one part of the complex system. An outside voice would be a more credible advocate for a change. It may surprise some how many different parts there are to child welfare system. The scope of the study would go beyond a single agency, as pointed out by Nancy Montanez, director of the state Department of Health and Human Services. Our county attorneys are part of the system. So are judges, police officers, guardian ad litem, State Foster Care Review Board, the relatively new Child Advocacy Centers, the HHS Department of Regulation and Licensure, and other agencies in state government. Deficiencies in the state's child welfare system are widely acknowledged. The state's child welfare system is the target of a lawsuit which charges that Nebraska has failed to provide adequate care for 6,000 children in foster custody. Nebraska ranks number one nationally in the rate at which children are taken from their homes and placed in foster care, but Nebraska's foster care system is overloaded. Too often children are moved from one placement to another and never find a stable environment. The state has begun to address some of