

highways and the way they were constructed, blocked off some of the north side areas of our city, and some of the same kind of blockages and obstructions occurred on the south side. So as I viewed that downtown environs, and something, an area, as I have said, I have a great deal of love for, I've tended to work on projects that would enliven that area. The Omaha Civic Auditorium renovation is one of those projects. It is, in my opinion, the renovation of that facility and the eventual construction of a convention center in downtown Omaha is the key that will unlock the door for economic vitality, further economic vitality of the downtown area, as well as the city as a whole. And, furthermore, it will be an attractive portal to those who are arriving in Nebraska from the east, as they come across the river and see a vital downtown area that they can be in, spend their money in, and get a feel for Nebraska by seeing a real vibrant downtown area. And it is an issue which I care deeply about, and I know most of my...all of my colleagues from the Omaha area, and many of those who are not from Omaha but have traveled to Omaha for various reasons, agree with me, that we need to renovate our downtown part of our city. The second principle that guides me in bringing this matter to the Legislature is that of voter approval and voter consent. I thought it was rather remarkable that the citizens of my city were willing to, in effect, tax themselves for a limited period of time, albeit, one year, to do this project. As I travel around my city, I am...often am faced with frustration by the people certainly that I talk to about the lack of opportunities and things to do in Omaha. And I think a lot of that frustration came out in the vote to tax the citi...by the citizens to tax themselves to do something really neat and exciting for Omaha. The renovated auditorium will be a substantial improvement over what it is now. It is, and it can be done, as I am sure you've read in the press, at a relatively low cost, between 15 and 20 million dollars. For that amount of money, the arena, itself, will be a much more attractive facility, a much more comfortable facility. The needed electrical HPAC, and plumbing work will also enhance the building significantly. There has been an argument raised that, well, why don't we just patch it up and wait for another arena to come along. Well, that's sort of the story that I've heard in Omaha for the last 20 years, since I moved back here from Washington. Well, we can just sort of patch something up or not, and then wait for the next project to come along. Well, that simply just has not happened. We need to kick start our city and our entertainment and convention facilities in Omaha,