

we need to kick start it with a good solid project that the citizens can get behind, and the auditorium project is such a project. It is, in my opinion, just a start. I know Senator Hall is very concerned about and supportive of building a convention center in downtown Omaha. I am as well. I don't know what the cost would be for that, whether it would be a hundred million or 50 million. I am firmly convinced that a convention facility would enhance Omaha, and as the Nebraskaplex study that the Legislature did do shows, it would enhance the whole state. So I agree with Senator Hall on that, on his theory about a convention center. Things are happening at Henry Doorly Zoo, obviously. Those of you who have been there have seen that Henry Doorly Zoo is one of the, if not the finest attraction, one of the finest attractions, at least in eastern Nebraska, for people to come to, and with the Lied Jungle and other plans, it is going to ever increase in size and popularity. Two million dollars out of this fund will go to enhancing parking at Henry Doorly Zoo. Lastly, let me make...Mr. Speaker, may I...Mr. Speaker...

SPEAKER WITHEM: Yes, Senator.

SENATOR ASHFORD: Could you tell me how much time I have left in my opening?

SPEAKER WITHEM: You have about two, a little more than two minutes.

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you. I just want to make another point about the process. When this issue came to us, really inadvertently, I guess, or circumstantially, when five or six years ago the Legislature sort of got caught in between an internecine battle between the City of Omaha and Douglas County over whether entertainment facilities should be at Ak-Sar-Ben or whether they ought to be downtown, and there is the controversy about buying Ak-Sar-Ben, and whether the Legislature should be involved in the county buying Ak-Sar-Ben, and that was a tough battle for Omaha because it stopped us for a period of years from doing anything. The Nebraskaplex study, which we commissioned in this Legislature and paid for, came back with a, I thought, a very optimistic message, and that is that Omaha can serve the rest of the state as an entertainment and convention center, and that, as such, it should be developed that way, and should not...we should not turn our back on the opportunities that Omaha can give, in effect, to the rest of the state. The