

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you, Madam President and members. A couple of points I would like to make in the initiation of this debate. I, at least in my case, since the very beginning of this legislative year, there have been three initiatives that have been proposed, that though they have never been linked together in one bill, have been periodically discussed in the context of some sort of linkage. What my position has been on all three of them is I support the Omaha sales tax issue because it is an issue I have been involved with for five years, long before even Mayor Morgan got involved in it. I was involved in it. Senator Will was involved in it. There are others of us who wanted to do something meaningful for downtown Omaha. So it is not really so much Mayor Morgan's initiative, it is really the initiative of a lot of us, Senator Chambers, not including you I admit, from the Omaha delegation that wanted to get something done. Secondly, on...but at that time and throughout this session I have said that I had an open, at least I had an open mind on the other two initiatives, whether it be the fertilizer tax or the breeding livestock tax for a couple of reasons. One, the fertilizer tax being an issue that we addressed only two years ago as a way of dealing with property tax and that gave it somewhat of a unique status, and I was certainly willing to look at it. As far as breeding livestock, the same thing, those are two issues which I felt stood on their own merits. There were good arguments for them and I was certainly and am certainly willing to listen to both, to those issues. As far as the rural senators who voted last week, every single one of you who voted for that amendment last week had told me at some time during the year that you would vote for it. There was no one who voted for that amendment last Friday, that I know of, who had told me they would not. I did not know before the vote was taken who was going to vote, I wasn't sure who was in the body at that time. It was two o'clock on Friday afternoon, I wasn't sure who was here, so I wasn't sure whether the votes were there or not. Throughout this whole session, people have said to me from the rural areas, from areas outside of Omaha, we can support Omaha if it is for one year, for one year only, and that has been the discussion that we have had. And the support that I got on Friday, that we got on Friday was much appreciated, and I certainly hope as we go through this discussion that none of the individuals, rural or urban, would vote to reconsider a vote that they made last Friday, and also a vote that was consistent with discussions that we had had throughout this legislative year. As far as the issue of taking the sales tax base away, the points are relatively