

base for a specific project. And as I told Senator Warner it reminded me of my economics professor in college who kept persuading me that my answers were ridiculous and that I'd better go back to the drawing board, but in any event, I appreciate Senator Warner's challenge and the cigarette tax as a means of funding this project has been a suggested means since the Nebraskaplex study was completed. In fact, at that time the study recommended cigarette tax as a component of the funding source for this project. So I'm glad that we were able to place cigarette tax on the table at the appropriate time and combine it with the auditorium and the eventual Nebraskaplex project and that is an appropriate source of funding and as the Nebraskaplex study indicates, there is a significant statewide purpose to going forward on this project. Lastly though, I just would say again in answer to Senator Wesely's concerns, and I'm glad Senator Wesely and I just chatted and he had an opportunity to review the bill again and felt more comfortable with the fact that a convention center was the ultimate goal of this project and it is. He asked me whether or not the city would be back for state funding for it, I think, or something to that extent and I think the intent here is this, Senator Wesely, as the Nebraskaplex study clearly stated, the arena, we didn't need to build a huge arena in Omaha, that we could meet the demand by refurbishing the arena we had and then the next step would be the development of a convention center. I'm absolutely convinced as we've seen already by the commitment of Peoples Natural Gas to build a garage next to the auditorium which could also serve a convention center, that this is the first step in what will be a very exciting opportunity for the largest city in our state. Omaha has a lot to offer to the State of Nebraska, but it needs the tools to do it and I think that we can, through this complex of buildings, convention center, hopefully and certainly the arena, add to the quality of life in our state. And I don't think, Senator Wesely, I can't promise what the city will or won't do in the future or what the Nebraskaplex Commission will do in the future about...

PRESIDENT ROBAK: One minute.

SENATOR ASHFORD: ...funding for a convention center, but what I can tell you and what I predict and what I believe to be the case, is that with the development of this arena and other exciting things that are happening in downtown Omaha, that that will lead to substantial private investment in a convention center complex and it will not be 20 years down the line, but