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Education Committee  
October 02, 2013

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[LR182]

The Committee on Education met at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 2, 2013, in McCook, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LR182. Senators present: Kate Sullivan, Chairperson; Jim Scheer, Vice Chairperson; Bill Avery; Tanya Cook; Al Davis; Ken Haar; Rick Kolowski; and Les Seiler. Senators absent: None. Also present: Mark Christensen and Tom Hansen.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Hi everyone. Thank you all for being here tonight. I'm Senator Kate Sullivan from Cedar Rapids, Legislative District 41, which is a nine-county area in central Nebraska. And we are here to deal with LR182 a public hearing on that legislative resolution. First, though, I'd like all the senators who are on the committee to introduce themselves. I'll start with the Vice Chair.

SENATOR SCHEER: I'm Jim Scheer from District 19, which is Stanton County, a little bit of Stanton County and all of Madison County up in northeast Nebraska.

SENATOR DAVIS: I'm Senator Al Davis from District 43 which is 21 percent of the state of Nebraska from Springview and Ainsworth on the west to Crawford and south almost to North Platte.

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: I'm Senator Rick Kolowski from District 31, the southwest part of the Omaha area with the Millard Public Schools and the Elkhorn Schools, a piece of that in that location. Thank you.

SENATOR SEILER: I'm Les Seiler. I'm from District 33, all of Adams County and all of Hall, but excluding the city of Grand Island.

SENATOR COOK: I'm Senator Tanya Cook from Legislative District 13. It's in northeast Omaha and northeast Douglas County.

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SENATOR HAAR: I'm Senator Ken Haar from District 21, which is northwest Lincoln and part of northwest Lancaster County.

SENATOR AVERY: I'm Bill Avery. I represent District 28, which is really south-central Lincoln including the Capitol and all the fun places in the city.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: We also have two additional sitting Senators with us, Senator Mark Christensen; this is his territory, District 44, so welcome. And Senator Tom Hansen from North Platte, representing District 42. Also a former chair of the Legislature's Education Committee, Tom Vickers. So thank you for being with us as well. (Applause) I can only hope that someday maybe somebody will clap for me like that. I would also like to recognize the staff that is helping with this tonight. To my immediate left is Tammy Barry, the legal counsel. Also another legal counsel for the committee, LaMont Rainey at the far right, and next to him is Mandy Mizerski who is the committee clerk and she'll be managing the recording of tonight's hearing. With that, I'd like to also recognize and thank the McCook Public Schools for hosting us tonight, and let's hear a welcome from Superintendent Norgaard.

GRANT NORGAARD: Well, I just want to...I do want to take an opportunity here to welcome all of you and thank you for coming. This is an extremely important issue obviously and so this turnout is a nice surprise. I'm glad that we had to grab extra chairs so that everyone would have a good place to sit. And I also want to thank you, Senators, for coming out to McCook. I know that you probably spend a lot of time here on your free time in McCook and visiting our sites. We do have a beautiful town and a wonderful place to live. And while we don't always get attention, so when we do we really appreciate it. So I want to thank you for all coming out to southwest Nebraska.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you very much, Superintendent.

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GRANT NORGAARD: Thank you.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: I want to just set the stage a little bit and give a little background about LR182. I know that all of you probably are pretty familiar with it. But we did get the charge from the Legislature at the end of the session that the Education Committee needed to take a very close look at how we fund and deliver public education K-12 in this state, and so that's what we've been doing. When the committee met for the first time one of the things they wanted to do first of all was start with a blank slate. In other words, not necessarily stick with what we have and pick that apart but just look at a variety of different alternatives, perhaps even look outside the box. And so that's what we've tried to do so far with people who have presented before the committee and people that we've heard from. And also, that's the purpose of these public hearings. So we're not coming to you...even though with the press release we identified several talking points, the committee has not reached any consensus. We have not issued any recommendations. We are truly here to listen; and so that is our job. We aren't here to really question or delve into anything in specifics nor are we expecting you to question us, but we like ideas and that's what we're hoping to hear. So just as far as a few logistics, we ask that when you do come up and testify there is a green sheet for you to fill out. We'd like you to fill that out in its entirety; and also when you sit down at the chair to state your name and spell it. And those green sheets...do you want to...LaMont, do you want those given in a right way? And we do need to be also a little sensitive, apparently, on these microphones. These are not to be heard, they're to pick up the comments in terms of transcription and recording. And so it does pick up some extraneous noise so if you can keep any background noise down to a minimum. If you have your handouts, we'd like you to have 12 of those. If you don't, at least we'll make sure we have copies later on. But if you do have multiple copies, we'd appreciate that. As I said, when you come up to testify, speak clearly, state your name and spell it. And...oh, and cell phones. Please, shut those off. We do have one up here but it's only to serve as a timer. I don't think it will be a big issue tonight but just so that we have a level playing field, we are going to limit testimony to five minutes. And I hope you can

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adhere to that. We'd appreciate that. So with that, I think I've covered everything. And, again, I thank everyone for being here tonight. I look forward to your comments. And with that, we'd like to hear from the first testifier. [LR182]

GRANT NORGAARD: Well, being the host community, I guess that I will go first. Sorry, Stuart. [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: You know what? I was just going to break the ice, that's all I was going to do. [LR182]

GRANT NORGAARD: I'm going to start with an apology. I made 10 copies and I did not read my instructions very well so I apologize. Fill this out first, correct? [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Well, actually, if you promise to fill it out after you testify, you can go ahead with your testimony right now. [LR182]

GRANT NORGAARD: (Exhibit 1) I promise. My name is Grant Norgaard. I am the superintendent for McCook Public Schools. I spell my name, G-r-a-n-t N-o-r-g-a-a-r-d. And I just wanted to, you know, give you a little background on who I am so it helps put my testimony in perspective. I have many of my peers here today who know a great deal more about state aid than I do, so I'll admit that right at the front. I'm not an expert in our state aid formula. So where my field of expertise is, is in learning, it's in student achievement, assessment, curriculum, and instruction. So when I go about the business of doing my job as what I believe in myself as being an educational leader, there are a few things about state aid that stand out to me, some things in the past that are more anecdotal than necessarily specific. And I know that you've planned on the superintendent from McCook solving this problem. And I apologize, I don't have the solution. The first thing that I did want to really kind of talk about is one of the concerns that I have is I think about TEEOSA and state aid for schools. McCook Public Schools relies very heavily on state aid. It is more than half of our operating budget on a yearly

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basis. And so knowing that, one of the problems that we often have here is that there's this ebb and flow, the hills and the valleys of state aid and how that has affected our planning from year to year as we move forward. And like I said, I don't have a solution for how we fix that but...and I know that you do do this already. But I want you to encourage you to continue to work toward stability within our state aid formula, to somehow, when we consider the changes that we are looking at making, changes that are going to reduce the ebb and flow of money to the school districts across the state, because I don't believe for one second that McCook Public Schools is the only school that experiences the highs and the lows of the state aid formula. And so it is troublesome and it's hard to plan. And I know what I can do for my kids this year, but I don't necessarily know what I can do for my kids next year. And that is a concern to a superintendent as we plan for the future. And I gave away my own notes, so the next bullet is... [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Accountability and school funding. [LR182]

GRANT NORGAARD: Yeah, accountability and school funding. And I know that you've heard many of these arguments before but, again, I'm going to probably reiterate them for you. You've heard these before, that we have a greater desire. And it's absolutely a necessary desire for students to achieve at a higher level. I believe in that. And you're not going to...this isn't a superintendent that's going to back away from higher expectations as far as student performance is concerned and the expectations that you have for educators as well. But I think at times there's maybe a bit of a mixed message sent to a person like myself when we have these high expectations for student performance. But we are cautious with the ways in which we fund schools. I guess I look at it more along the lines of that this is such a huge investment that we make into our children's lives. And I believe that every dollar that we spend on our children is an investment that we're going to recoup some day, 10, 20, 30 times over. And so again, I don't have a solution for that. But my concern is that I want to make sure that if we really hold education at that high level and we value it the way that we say that we value it and

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we add expectations to our teachers and to our students' performance, then we have to be willing to hold ourselves to that same expectation when it comes to what we're willing to invest. And that's just another concern that I have as a superintendent. One other anecdotal observation I've made maybe more on rumor than anything else, because as I said, I don't really get involved with these discussions very often as far as formula. I have a business manager who is marvelous at these things and he can probably talk for hours on it. I've asked him not to just for...(laugh) and you're welcome. But some of the rumors I hear when I go to my associations and my groups is that there's, at times, conflict. And it seems like there's conflict between districts when we are working against each other within our own educational world for dollars. And that's a concern of mine. I want the best things for McCook Public Schools and my students. I want my kids to have everything I can possibly give them. But I want everything for Omaha Public Schools, Hastings, North Platte, Benkelman, Dundy County, Stratton--I got them all, didn't I Jim--and Medicine Valley; all the school districts. The idea that we would work against each other is disturbing to me. And so a state aid formula that enables us all to think about our kids and what we can do for our kids based on what those dollars mean to us. Umm, that doesn't make much sense. But what I'm trying to say is that so we don't have to fight against each other. And then the last thing, I know it's a complex problem that we have here. It's not easy, and that's why we're doing these hearings. I don't think the solution is going to be an easy one. I don't think that a simple formula is probably in the mix. It's a complex issue. It's going to require a lot of thought, a lot of energy, and probably a formula that's fairly complicated. And that is the end of my testimony. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Superintendent Norgaard. Are there any questions?  
[LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Yes. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Haar. [LR182]

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SENATOR HAAR: Yes. How long have you been the superintendent? [LR182]

GRANT NORGAARD: I've been...this is my ninth year as a superintendent. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. So one of the things that I'm not sure is on our list but some people have brought up occasionally is the way the calendar works and your planning. Could you talk for just a minute about that? [LR182]

GRANT NORGAARD: Oh, as far as how we plan our education...well, when our school calendar we plan on a yearly basis. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Sure. [LR182]

GRANT NORGAARD: But when we talk about where we want to take our kids from point A, where we are now as far as achievement to where we want to be down the road, that type of calendar can be...well, actually, I think I've been talking three to five years. I always talk three to five years with my staff because the change process takes time. It takes time to build cohesion within a staff itself, it takes time to work out all the wrinkles, so to speak, and get everybody on board the bus. And it's my belief in any quality change system where your staff has really bought into that change, it takes at least five years of education and implementation for that change to do the full turnaround that you're expecting and also five years to observe data how your change process is affecting student achievement. One year's data--and I know you've all heard this before from educators--but you can't make decisions based off one year's data. You need at least, bare minimum, three years and preferably five to make decisions about what you're doing and how what you're doing is affecting student achievement. I can provide evidence right now we're doing a great job and our changes have really affected student learning. But is it concrete and solid? Not yet. I've only got a couple of years of data. As far as how that affects as far as the budget, we need to know what type of

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staffing we can put in place. We need to know what dollars we can spend on professional development and those types of things. I think I can plan that out a year in advance but beyond that you struggle. And so that's probably where a lot of the struggle is with the ebb and flow of state aid as it currently is. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony. [LR182]

GRANT NORGAARD: Thank you. [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: (Exhibit 2) I go to board meetings and I always have to follow somebody like Grant and so it's really hard for me. But I'm Stuart Simpson, S-t-u-a-r-t S-i-m-p-s-o-n, and I'm the business manager from North Platte Public Schools. And I'll just read what I...I left you a copy over there with my green sheet. But Honorable Chair Sullivan and the members of the Education Committee, my name is Stuart Simpson. I am the business manager for North Platte Public Schools. And I thank you for continuing to include stakeholders in your consideration of school funding. I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on behalf of North Platte Public Schools and really the larger school districts in the state of...I mean, the larger Nebraska...all the school districts of the state of Nebraska. When we look at this, the TEEOSA formula is basically at the heart of everything that we do which is really a simple formula as Grant was mentioning on being simple. But it is needs minus resources equals state aid. And the complexity is added to accommodate the differences between each of our districts. We're talking North Platte, McCook, Dundy, Stratton, everybody around us. Each of us have a unique need within the districts and communities as well to equalize our state funding. When considering changes to the TEEOSA formula, the committee should examine both the needs and the resources individually. We do look at that as a whole, but we have to see what is affecting each of the individual formula needs. When considering the needs of a school district, the first priority of the TEEOSA formula should always be meeting each district's Rule 10 requirement. And North Platte went through a budget task force. And that's the first thing we pulled out was are we doing



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what is right and proper to educate our students in North Platte? These fixed expenses are required to open and operate a school and required to equalize the funding across the district due to size. Basic items include a superintendent, a principal for a certain number of students, teachers, counselors, specific classes for students to meet graduation requirements, textbooks, and many more that are in Rule 10. Secondly, the TEEOSA formula should focus on equalizing the needs variables that districts cannot control. Districts cannot control the membership needs of the community they support. Currently, the TEEOSA formula uses participation rates in free and reduced lunches, ELL or English language learners, and special ed programs as metrics for additional needs funding. These programs are vital to helping all students have equal opportunities for learning--but they came at a cost that all of us districts must bear depending upon size--depending upon the complexity of what we're trying to educate in our communities. Thus the TEEOSA formula must continue to provide support for these programs while equalizing the need differences between districts due to student diversity. My recommendation to the Education Committee for improving the needs side of the TEEOSA formula would be to remove variables that are within a district's control to change. Two such variables would be instructional time allowance and the teachers education allowance. While both these features address noble causes, both issues are items districts have some control over and therefore can create an unfair advantage between districts. When considering the resources of the TEEOSA equation, the committee must take into account the effect of including the local effort rate and property taxes. But I really do want to strongly encourage the Education Committee members to work directly with the members of the Tax Modernization Committee to fully understand and evaluate the effects of including these two resource variables in the TEEOSA formula. Attempting to minimize revenue inequities due to property wealth is a necessary requirement of an equalizing formula like the TEEOSA formula, but the impact on all school districts--regardless of size--needs to be considered. Finally, the TEEOSA formula may be complex, but at the heart must remain a simple calculation of needs minus resources equals state aid. Equalizing the variables that districts cannot control while still assisting schools with maintaining adequate support programs should

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be the focus of the TEEOSA formula. Including variables that are within a district's control only muddy the waters and open the door for further inequities between districts. Thank you very much [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Simpson. Any questions? Senator Avery. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm interested in your comments about teacher education allowance and the instructional time allowance. [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: Um-hum. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: We're hearing that a lot today. We heard it in Hastings this morning. By my estimation, it looks like you would lose about close to \$135,000. Are you willing to give that up for (inaudible) policy? [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: I think when we examine the whole state aid formula, those are one of the variables that we're willing to look at giving up because it's a variable that, yes, it helps us, but it also helps all the districts. But it's a variable that we control by the type of teachers that we hire. So, yes. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: If you were hiring teachers and you were claiming this allowance for teacher education, what would you say if we required that each teacher that you claim that allowance for would have to get their advanced degree in the area in which they teach? [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: We modified our master agreement for that because we said, teachers, right now, we want to make sure as they progress on our salary schedule have to be in a program. We would prefer them to be in the area that they're teaching would be our first and foremost choice. But we also want to say is that you can't move

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on the salary schedule unless you're pursuing an advanced degree. So right now we haven't looked at that but that would be one consideration we'd want to take into account. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: So if someone is seeking an administrative track that has no real contribution to make in a substantive area, you might consider that not to qualify? [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: If...that was part of the TEEOSA formula, and that's what we had a discussion in our negotiations about--that would be one variable that we would surely discuss; but we don't have that right now but we could discuss it. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: We've been talking about that. [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: Right. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Davis. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: I've got a couple of questions. First of all, what is the trend line for your state aid at North Platte? [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: It's been, as Grant mentioned, an up and down cycle. Three or four years ago we really hit a downward cycle. We had...we lost about \$1.7 million in state aid. Some of it was due to some miscalculations, but in the process really did put us one year ahead of the curve of all other school districts because then that allowed us to go through and reduce staff that were...they're always needed but we evaluate it based upon student size what we needed in the classroom. And first and foremost were the teachers and then paras and then after that what didn't affect the classroom. So we were able to at least take that hit first. And then as we built back up, we evaluate where we are with our class sizes and what we have in the classroom for teacher support such

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as paras. But we evaluate that accordingly. But we've been on the cycle looking at it over the last couple of years, but we're starting to flatten out from a couple of factors. Number one, our enrollment has been flat over the last four or five years. Second of all, our valuation has been flat, maybe 2 percent, 2.5 percent growth. So we really haven't seen a whole lot of growth. So our state aid is now starting to just somewhat flatten out. We don't get a lot of re-spin on prior year adjustments. So for our purposes, we've been able to plan a little bit better as we go into the formula. This last year we were pleased as you went through the valuation of the state aid formula and added some additional dollars into the overall state pool, which helped North Platte Public Schools. But otherwise, we know where we're somewhat standing because of our flat enrollment. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: Do you know how much TIF property is in your district, any idea? [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: We had a lot of TIF property and they just came off the rolls this year. So we realize, going into next year's cycle for state aid, that we're going to be seeing a dip in our state aid just because of the increased property valuation. So we know that. We had already had that discussion with our county assessor because of the amount of money that was coming on our rolls, so we knew going into next year where our valuation would be and where we would probably anticipate possibly our state aid would be from the standpoint of knowing that it's going to be dropping because of that increased valuation. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: So any new TIF projects coming up? [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: Nothing that I know about at this point in time; I haven't heard. But a lot of the TIF projects that we had over the last 15 years have just come off. But I'm not aware of anything. And I've been at a couple of chamber meetings but I have not heard of anything. [LR182]

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SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: Um-hum. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LR182]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just for the record and a point of clarification, Senator Avery and I go back and forth on our discussions of teacher time and...excuse me, the instructional time and the teacher longevity as far as the programs that they're in and the degrees they receive. We had people this morning speak on both sides of that. I want you to know that there were comments on both sides of that issue and it was presented that way. And I think one of the things that we're hearing more importantly than anything else is give us the lead time so we know when this will be sunsetted so it doesn't have the immediate impact of all of a sudden to just pull out the rug underneath us and it's gone and it hits us as a district. I know from my own years as a principal it was extremely important to get qualified people in the assistant principal's role with that kind of degree work or whatever else. So it's not an academic area, but it's the support staff for your own building that you're building. And I think it's extremely important that we keep in mind your needs from the impact that we don't hurt you on an automatic basis by pulling something out so you know when it will be sunset and when that would take place. And that's part of the conversation we'll continue. [LR182]

STUART SIMPSON: I appreciate that because, with the elementary class size, that was...we knew that was coming off. We knew that was sunsetted and everybody was being able to prepare for that. So it's the same way on this piece. So thank you. [LR182]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Right. Thank you. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you Mr. Simpson. [LR182]

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STUART SIMPSON: Thank you very much. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: One of the comments that you made, made me think that you referenced the Tax Modernization Committee, and both Senator Hansen and I sit on that committee. And as you all know, we started our hearings on that subject as well. And funding for our public schools came up a lot in all of the hearings that we've had. And there will be communication between the Education Committee and the Tax Modernization Committee because I think we'll not only need to communicate on what we're hearing--both hearing--but also, perhaps, that will bring about some of the recommendations that we might come up with. So I just wanted to mention that as well. Any other testifiers? You can wait and fill that out later for us. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: Okay. I'm Shad Stamm, S-h-a-d S-t-a-m-m. I'm president of the Dundy County-Stratton School Board. And I'm, by no means, an expert at state aid. And I guess fortunately or unfortunately we're in a land-rich district right now where state aid probably doesn't affect us as much as it once did. I was just talking to Mr. Kent back here, our superintendent. I believe we get about \$60,000 this year and it's strictly on teacher education and instructional times is pretty much what we're getting it for. But that being said, I have had quite a few conversations about equitable and fair. I think our state constitution says provide our children with a fair...or a free and equitable education, I don't...or something to that degree. And we've sat around and had a conversation about a curriculum-based, which I'm sure you've probably heard that before, providing a curriculum-based type formula where every school in the state has come up with whatever somebody probably smarter than me determines is a common or equal curriculum--and fund that. And then anything you have or do beyond that, I guess is kind of on your own merit in what you do with that. Some in this room have probably seen me on some of the water task force and stuff. I'm kind of a gunslinger and I don't like a lot of government intervention. I do like a lot of local control. And my belief is if you would implement something like that, that would lead to some local

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control because your public or your voters or people you're serving are usually more than willing to tell you what they'd like to see in their school district. So if you had a common curriculum funded across the state, I think maybe your public could tell you what they are willing to pay for and what, you know, what they want beyond what's being funded. And I know there's probably some ins and outs. And I said I'm not an expert on the subject, but to me that makes some sense that if there's a common curriculum funded across the state for everybody that that's...I don't know if that's exactly fair, but it would be maybe something equitable I guess is where I'm coming from. So I guess that's about all I had to say. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any questions for Mr. Stamm? Senator Davis. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: A few. How many students at Dundy-Stratton? [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: K-12, we're like three...what are we, Jim? [LR182]

JIM KENT: 350. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: 350. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: And state aid or TEEOSA funding is nonexistent now? [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: Yeah. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: How long has that been the case? [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: What are we...I think we're in about year three of that or year four. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: What about property valuations in your district? [LR182]

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SHAD STAMM: They exploded. I mean, I don't know. They've...I think they were...I'm going to refer back to the...what were they? [LR182]

JIM KENT: \$650 million this year. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: This year...and you had numbers. Where were we in prior...because we have just merged... [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: So you were up \$650 million? [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: No. That's what our valuation is. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: That's what your valuation is. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: Well, we were up how many this year, Jim? [LR182]

JIM KENT: What did you say? [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: What was the increase? I'm going to refer to him. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And then maybe you can come up to testify on that as well. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: Yeah. [LR182]

JIM KENT: We went up \$75 million this year. We've gone up 88 percent since 2007, which was when we quit getting state aid. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LR182]



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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Stamm, thank you for your comments. And I think there is some real wisdom in some of the things you're talking about as far as some of the conversations. When we're driving around the state you're kind of a captive audience. You listen to each other and it's good to get a lot of things talked about. And I think the idea of...of course, the State Department of Education through Rule 10 sets the bar as far as where we are... [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: Right. [LR182]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...and different courses or what must be required of the student for graduation purposes or at all grade levels as they move through. But I think we're on to something as far as the modifications or adjustments that we might look at in different school districts with different needs and what the standards might be. That bar for Rule 10 is set at lots of different places over time. It's been added to and subtracted from; all those kind of things have happened. And I think we need to look at all those variables and see what we might be able to do. And I appreciate your mentioning that. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: Yeah. And with that being said, if you look at...you know, where Mr. Davis, my wife is from Hay Springs so I know I'm fairly familiar with Hay Springs and the size of that school. The size of...I mean, we're now a county and a half school. You know, and whether we have 5 or 6 kids in a class or 10 or whatever it is, you know, they should be...in my opinion, they should be offered the same opportunity as, you know, Omaha or Lincoln schools where... [LR182]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: I couldn't agree more. [LR182]

BRAD STAMM: ...you know, and it's going to cost...obviously a teacher is going to cost...is a teacher is going to cost a teacher, whether they're teaching 30 kids or they've got to teach 10. And you know, how to balance that, I don't know. But I mean, in my

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opinion, I want my children to have just the same kind of educational...basic educational opportunities as, say, someone in Lincoln, Omaha, or the larger districts to the east. [LR182]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And those opportunities can be delivered in lots of different ways. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: Right. That's true, that's true, that's true. [LR182]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And in this world today we have a plethora of choices. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: Right. [LR182]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: So, thank you. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Haar. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: First of all, thank you for serving on the school board. You get paid less than we do. But we're all aware of that when we go into these jobs. Since you're elected, what do you hear from people that elect you? Is the top concern the taxes, the education of the children? Or what are the expectations you hear from your constituents? [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: You do hear about taxes, but I'm glad you asked that. And I did not...I'm a farmer/rancher and was busy and did not make it to the Tax Modernization Committee. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Sure. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: But I own property and I am a property tax owner. Our levy this year is

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going to be mid-60s is what it's going to be. I will say this, and it's probably totally opposite of what a lot of my colleagues in agriculture and whatnot are saying. I have yet to go to a land auction where I've ever heard anybody ask what the property taxes are before they buy it. Someone once told me that's the privilege of owning property is property taxes. And when I go in to pay, there's people that come into the treasurer's office, you know, and there's always joking back and forth and I say I'm going to say nothing because I sit on a board that sets the majority of what you're paying today. But I realize there can be some misuse of tax dollars and whatnot. But, like in our district, I think we do a fairly good job. And I am not going to go down the road that says we just need to totally wax and get rid of property taxes because that's...I mean, in our area that is the resource we have to provide funding for roads, schools, whatnot. So that being said, that's where I stand on that. But that's commonly what you hear is people...and I don't know. I don't hear a lot of complaining and pitchfork, fire, and ice, you know, we're going to do whatever type thing. But, obviously, it's a cost and farmers like to complain about costs. So that's just something you hear. I will say I have my own...and you can...I...that's another topic. I have my own opinions. My wife is a sixth-grade teacher and I have a lot of opinions on assessment and the road we've went down with that. But I will save that for another day because I could talk for hours. If you don't believe me, ask Jim because I've drove clear to Lincoln complaining about it. So...but anyway, I don't hear much said about test scores. They want education for their children. And I think more of it is the fact that it's interaction with the teacher and, you know, how is my child doing and whatnot. I don't think they pay a whole lot of attention to Dundy County-Stratton is either proficient or not proficient in reading and writing assessment based on the way we're going about it. I think it's more local interaction. But I do think people are truly...my patrons are truly...they care about the education of their kids. Probably, I'm sure, we're not immune or a unique district in this fact. But sports...coaching and sports bring up a lot of what I get to hear about. And I'm sure we're not unique in that. But that seems to be a lot of what I hear about. I don't hear a whole lot about taxes, just conversation. And I think most people think we're doing a fairly good job with their children because I sure don't hear a whole lot about the

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educational experience that we're providing. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Well, one of the topics that comes up sometimes is through what we do we not only provide funding but we also set lids on how much can be levied and so on. Do you find that restrictive? Do you think that... [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: The lid? [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: ...or do you think that that needs to be in place? [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: You know, we've operated so much below a lid, I've just never had to deal with it. But I have had conversation with that, and I guess I've got mixed emotions about that. I understand that the lid is supposed to protect property tax owners from excessive property. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: And I, you know, I've had conversations with older gentlemen that own a majority of property, have no kids, no grandkids, or anything in school. And, of course, to them it means a whole lot different than, say, someone like me that's got young children in grade school. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Sure. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: But honestly, I guess...I don't know. I guess I could talk out of both sides of mouth on that issue. It probably is restrictive, but there's also methods that people can use to go beyond. I mean, there's a levy override. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh, sure. [LR182]

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SHAD STAMM: And honestly, I mean, that's kind of the American way, an election. And if the majority of your population believes it's that important and you need to do it, probably that's maybe the best way to do it is go through and just have the lid, and you have to go through a levy override to get there. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: It probably creates a lot of politics. I've never been involved with it, but I'm guessing there's some serious politics getting involved. But I don't know that it's probably that restrictive. But it's just because maybe because I haven't had to ever deal with that in my years on the board. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. Have you had any bond issues any time lately or... [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: We haven't had a bond issue...I was in...our grade school was built on a bond issue, I believe. We have never had a bond issue. It's been the philosophy...the superintendent, Mr. Watkins, we had prior to Mr. Kent that we levy some money into a special building. And if it takes us five, six years to come up with the cash to do the project...we've done quite a bit of structural project done at Dundy County-Stratton. We have not had a bond issue because our belief is that it's not worth the politics. We might as well just save and pay down the road. So we've never had a bond issue. We just save and if it takes us four or five years, then that's what we do. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Good. Thank you. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you so much for your testimony. [LR182]

SHAD STAMM: Thank you. [LR182]

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JULIE NIELSEN: I'll talk but you can't ask questions. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Welcome. Thank you for coming out here to the wild west. We appreciate that so we don't have to drive so far. My name is Julie Nielsen, J-u-l-i-e, last name is N-i-e-l-s-e-n. I'm a school board member from North Platte. I've been on the board seven years, not quite seven years. I've also been a teacher in the classroom as a substitute and done many other things. Right now, I'm in banking so that's an interesting turn. I know the TEEOSA formula. Stuart walks us through it. We look at all the changes that have happened over the past seven years and class size, you know, trying to keep class sizes between 10 and 20. That was great, but then the next year it's a moving target and it's something else. It's instructional time or it's the teacher education which you talked about previously. I will say that while it would be beneficial for our district to have teachers maybe focus on the area that they're in a classroom with, we also out here like to kind of raise and groom our own administrators. So it is beneficial for us to have people not only...they might be a third-grade teacher but they're working on their principalship and administrative degree or maybe in curriculum. And that's real important for us because we need to grow our own out here. And so that's an important area. So when you're looking at teacher education, I wouldn't want a lot of restrictions on what that looks like because it's different out here for us than it would be maybe in the Lincoln/Omaha area. I also know that, you know, we formulate ELL poverty. But one of the things that we don't talk about or I don't think has ever been in the formula as far as I'm aware of is the mobility rate. I think North Platte--and I haven't looked at our recent statistics--but I think when I did look a year ago, it was one of the higher mobility rates in Class A schools. And I don't know the reason why. I don't know if it's because we're close to Kansas, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Colorado and people come to the railroad looking for a job or the Walmart Distribution Center and then they can't find one. But we do have a mobility rate that really makes it difficult because when you're bringing students in from other states, especially, they may move

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in as a sophomore but they really aren't a sophomore but we have to take them a sophomore. So we have some issues, I think, that might be unique. And maybe there's some other schools out in this area too that are looking at that. But when you're looking at the state aid formula, that might be something you would consider is, you know, is it more difficult to teach a child that's moving around from district to district? Well, of course it is. So that would be something I think that maybe you could consider down the road. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Um-hum. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any questions? [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Yes. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Haar. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Again, thank you for your service. When various...when I got on the committee five years ago, you know, I looked at this and thought it's so complicated I'm never going to be able to understand it. And there's still some corners of it I don't understand. But as a school board member that's been there for quite some time, do you find TEEOSA too complicated, too simple, just about right? I mean, not necessarily the factors within it, but just understanding the formula. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Right. Well, you know, Stuart does a good job of talking about needs versus resources. And I think for me the complicated part is how it changes and when it changes. And then it takes a year for us to catch up and figure out how to make those changes. For example, when they changed the teacher education and made that as part of that TEEOSA formula, our negotiated agreement kept teachers from pursuing a

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master's degree because they could only move so far on the scale so many credit hours per year, and they didn't get a raise. And so that kind of held them back. So what we had to do a year afterwards is then remove that barrier so that it wasn't holding people back from getting a master's degree... [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: ...which should have probably been removed a long time ago. So, you know, in a way it's kind of like well we...we're not playing a game but we have to figure things out on how to best improve our school district. And, you know, you have to maneuver around the TEEOSA formula to do that to some degree. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: And especially when it changes constantly. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Especially when it changes. And then, you know, you're kind of a year behind because you're like, oh, okay, well, now we have to teach longer days or more days or whatever. And Stuart mentioned about when we got the \$1.7 million cut in state aid that year and part of it was for an error, what we did instead of letting go staff is we cut back the amount of days they worked, I think. But now to build that back in would be very costly I think, if that makes sense. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Sure. And then the question I asked of Shad. Do you...the kind of pressure you get as a school board member, is it mainly around taxes, is it around the quality of the education of kids? What kind of pressure do you experience as a school board member? [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: You know, I think over the seven years probably the most pressure I've received is more from the staff maybe because of the changes that we have to make. So especially with NeSA and NePAS and just making some instructional decision changes, the push back has maybe even been more from the staff than anybody else.



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[LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. And usually they're fairly organized, right? So. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Not always. Sometimes they use other avenues to talk to you besides the organized avenues. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. They know where you live. Good. Thank you very much. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Your comment about mobility was interesting. Sometimes we make the connection between poverty and mobility. But perhaps you have some unique circumstances in North Platte being a railroad community. There's no clear indication that (inaudible). [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: No. You know, people I've talked to, they'll have relatives move here thinking there might be a job with the distribution center or the railroad. And then they're here a couple of months and nothing pans out so then they move on. I don't know how much of that, you know, is really what's going on. But I just know it is there. And I think it is true that it is tied to the poverty rate but I don't think that's it exclusively either. But it certainly makes teachers' jobs more difficult when you have students that are moving in and out from other districts and other states. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Kate. [LR182]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Oh. Senator Cook. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you, Ms. Nielsen, for your service and for taking our questions. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Thanks. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: You mentioned the issue of poverty as it relates to potentially ELL and the mobility rate and how that might be reflected in TEEOSA. Could you speak to the rural poverty or the poverty that you see versus the poverty that I, as somebody who represents the Omaha Public School District... [LR182]

JULIE NIELSON: Right. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: ...might observe... [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Okay. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: ...on a day to day basis... [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Sure. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: ...and how we can potentially reflect support for addressing each of those kinds or all of those kinds of poverty issues? [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: The poverty rate in North Platte versus free and reduced lunch I think is around 41 percent. Okay? [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Wow. [LR182]

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JULIE NIELSEN: Yeah, that's amazing. I think there's a lot of people in North Platte that...what is it? [LR182]

\_\_\_\_\_ : Julie, 44. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: Forty-four. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Forty-four percent. I don't think people in North Platte understand that. We have a backpack program. We send 210 backpacks home every weekend to children to feed them because they're not eating. We have a big meth problem in North Platte. And I think one of the things that probably infuriated me the most was when I read a letter to the editor in the Omaha World-Herald about how their poverty is worse than ours. And poverty is the same. It's generational, it's ugly, it looks just the same. So it's just as ugly in North Platte as it is in any part of Lincoln, Omaha, anywhere else. And rural poverty...I mean, we don't have a lot of options for jobs in North Platte other than the medical profession, the teaching profession, and the railroad. If you look at some of the other big employers in town, those are part-time jobs with little benefits and not very high wages. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you very much. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Did I understand you to say when you were talking about that, that you have a math problem? Is that what you were saying? [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Meth, methamphetamine. We have math problems too, but...yes. But we're sending our teachers to learn more about it. [LR182]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Avery. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for being here. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: You mentioned predictability. We hear that a lot and we've discussed that issue in the committee. I don't know if you're in a position to answer this but I'll ask it anyway. If you can answer it, please do. But don't be embarrassed if it's not something you work with. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Okay. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: One of the parts of the equation in predictability, I believe, is not just when we get our budget out and your certification date. But it also involves when the county assessors provide you with the valuation numbers. We have the authority, as the Legislature, to change that. Now I know the assessors would just raise holy hell. But we still... [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: ...we could do that. What do you think that would do to help you with predictability if we moved it up to, say, March? From...it's August now, I believe. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Right. And it...I think Stuart talks a lot to our assessor so he kind of has a feel what's going on. For example, he mentioned that we knew certain properties were coming off the TIF financing so we know that those will be on the, you know, that side of the equation next year. So we're trying to kind of figure things out so we're not sitting in very dire straits. I don't know about moving the valuation or, you know, the

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assessor equation of it. It was difficult for us when the Legislature changed, when they gave us the state aid. When they moved that from March till July, that is past the date where we have to notify teachers of whether or not they have a job. And that's very difficult. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: We knew what we were doing... [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Sure. Sure. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: ...but we did it anyway. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: But that puts us in a difficult position. But on the other hand I guess it makes us really look at our books and know what's going on as well. So that's a difficult situation. And I think right now, you know, since 2007 we're just in difficult times right now. And you look at one end of the state that has, you know, their lid. They're at 95 cents because their valuations went up 88 percent on ag land. And then you have Omaha and Lincoln where properties tanked in 2007 and they're at \$1.05 knocking on the door wanting to raise their lid. And that's hard. So you had asked earlier should we change what the lid is? And, you know, maybe that's a possibility. Maybe by lowering it to 93 cents you're going to let ag land that has gone up so high off the hook a little bit because you're lowering that end of it. And then on the Omaha end, maybe you raise it 3 cents. And then, hopefully, in the next, you know, ten years the economy is going to straighten out and valuations will be more stable across the state. But right now you have such a variety. I mean, I own property in Lincoln, I own property here. You know, we bought in Lincoln because prices were cheap. And it was cheaper for me to buy a condo for my kids to live in to go to college than it was for them to pay room and board at UNL. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: Yeah, I know. I'm doing that right now. [LR182]

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JULIE NIELSEN: Yeah. So, you know. And then we're hoping that by the time they're out of college--which they seem to be on the six-year plan--that the properties will rebound and we can do okay. But, I mean, there's...you know, Nebraska is so different from one end to the other--I mean, it's amazing--that maybe you do need to change it from 93 cents to \$1.08 instead of 95 cents to \$1.05. I don't know. [LR182]

SENATOR AVERY: The students refer to that as the super senior semester. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Oh. We're getting up on that. So. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Davis. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you, Madam Chair. We're sort of going around with a bunch of different issues here. But I'm just remembering things that we've talked about. Dr. Breed talked to us when we met with him about the condition of some buildings, which I don't think needs to maybe be a part of state aid. But I wonder how your structures were. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: We're doing pretty good. We did pass a school bond issue. My son graduated in 2008 and he was the second freshman class, so it's a fairly new high school. And that was a great asset to North Platte. But it took three times, you know, and that's a tough deal and keep it in good shape. We're just...I think our middle schools are both doing really well, but we're looking at putting sixth grade in one and seventh and eighth in one so that we don't have a division in our community anymore because that carries on into high school and on into life. So we're looking at that issue. And those schools I think are both in pretty good condition. We upgraded, I think, one of our grade schools--heating, ventilation, air conditioning, that kind of thing--and then we're doing a study to kind of see what needs to be on the next burner. I think one of our issues too is, you know obviously, a Class A school, we're traveling a lot so we had to put money away in our depreciation fund to buy some new buses just because we can't even lease

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them because nobody is out here to lease them. So, you know, we have to purchase them. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LR182]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chair. Ms. Nielsen, thank you for your straight talk and your honesty. It's really refreshing, it's great to hear. I know much about North Platte because I had one of your excellent assistant principals, Dr. Kathy Ryan, as one of my assistants at Millard West High School. I was the founding principal there. And as we listen to you talk about the mobility rate and the poverty issues within our communities, we just need to be really honest with each other as to what is taking place because the state poverty rate went up at least 5 percent these last four years or five years since 2007-08. And unbeknownst to most people, like your rate in North Platte, just in the Millard Schools that I spent 38 years in we went from in the last four years from about 10 percent free and reduced lunch to now approaching 21 percent. People don't understand that in Millard. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Right. [LR182]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And that has to be understood across the state because it's endemic to the nature of the families and the issues that we're dealing with. And the amount of poverty has to be understood for the social impact that takes place. And I hope we can continue to have our discussions around those educational and social issues rather than fighting over TEEOSA dollars. I hope we get the formula where it needs to be so we can truly impact kids and families. Thank you. [LR182]

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JULIE NIELSEN: Thanks. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: I have another question since we have you in the seat. Thank you. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: As we have discussions in the committee we don't all agree, obviously, on everything, but one of the things I'd like to ask your opinion on. My opinion is that we take TEEOSA and ultimately we adjust...we tinker with it till we can fund it, and then we say we're fully funding. Another way to do that would be to work harder and harder to develop what we think are true needs. But then we might have to come to school districts and say, you know, we can't fully fund. Does that make any difference to you which? [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Some schools have different needs than others, so when somebody puts a swimming pool as a need in their formula, for me...we have a city pool, that's what our kids get. So how is that equal when other school districts around the state, even--you know, and we're a Class A school--our kids have to find their own ride. I don't think they're bused over to the rec center, are they? [LR182]

\_\_\_\_\_ : I'm not quite sure. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: How they get there I'm not sure. They go to the city rec center for swimming, you know, if they're on the swim team every year where other school districts have swimming pools in their buildings and that's part of their need. So, to me, that's not equitable. Does that answer? [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. Okay. Yeah. [LR182]



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JULIE NIELSEN: I mean, that's my only example. But we're not, you know, we're not all going to get what we want all the time. And you guys have a...you know, the thing that I appreciate about Nebraska is they may say it's not a great place to retire or they may say a lot of things about it. But we have a balanced budget. And I think if I was to look at where I'm going to retire, do I want to go to a state that's in the red very deeply because they don't have to have a balanced budget or do I want to look at a state that plays fair and has a balanced budget? I appreciate we have a balanced budget. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. When I was on the Lincoln City Council I had a discussion with a constituent one evening and he was complaining that he didn't have children but he had to pay property tax for schools. And, of course, when I asked him where he got his education it was from Lincoln Public Schools. Do you find that people--you know, and this would be people with kids now that are older and so on--support the schools in North Platte? Do you find across the board or... [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: I think we do. You know, there's a small vocal group that may not, but I think by and large everybody knows this is how America was founded. It's essential for our community for kids to get a good education. So I don't really hear a lot of negative of that. I mean, that's just something we need to do. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: For the question I didn't ask him either is whether he realized we need these younger people coming up to pay his Social Security. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Yeah, and be their doctor and their lawyer and their banker and all of those...the nurse in the nursing home and all those things too. So. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Yeah, all those things. Good. Well, again, thank you for what you do. [LR182]

JULIE NIELSEN: Sure. Thanks. [LR182]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you very much. Anyone else wishing to testify?  
Welcome, Senator. [LR182]

TOM VICKERS: I'm sorry, Senator Sullivan. I couldn't resist. First of all, my name is Tom Vickers, T-o-m V-i-c-k-e-r-s. I'm an old guy so I need to go back a few years. I was just sitting here thinking that I wonder how many people in this room appreciate how much the state has done for education. When I first went to the Legislature in 1979, state aid was \$20 million. That's all. Today it's, what, \$1.2 billion almost? Also, there's some talk about what the levy should be. At that time, the levies ranged from \$4 down to about 15 cents. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Wow. [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: Be careful when you start fooling around with the levy limitations. There was a reason they were put there because if you want a revolt in property taxes, you don't want \$4 levies. That's about where we were at back then. The other thing that I wanted to mention--and I understand the budgetary problems. I understand how it works. I've been on both sides lobbying for and against, and I've been on your side of the table as you well know--the formula: needs minus resources equals state aid. The way it's been done the last few years reminds me of how I used to do my algebra problem. I knew what the answer was, I just had to figure out how to get that answer. If the needs formula is anywhere near close, the answer should always be fully fund it, it seems to me. If you can't fully fund it then change the needs and leave them changed. But don't change the needs just to meet whatever dollars you think is available, okay, because I don't think that's fair to any of the schools no matter what size. I don't have any answers in how you change the formula, I hardly understood it myself when I was there. But I will tell you this, it's human nature, I guess. Back when it was like \$20 million or less or a little more, there wasn't too many people showed up to worry about how much dollars they got from the state. Now that it's a billion dollars, you can fill the room.

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We fight more over large amounts than we did small. Anyway, I just wanted to give you a little history, if you will. And I wanted also to thank you for coming out, and thank you for your service on this committee. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: One of the things that we heard at the Tax Committee hearings was how there needs to be more state aid for education partly as a way of (inaudible) property taxes. [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: Right. And that's...again, when I ran in 1979, property taxes were a big issue. And I'm guessing that if somebody would run for election today, property taxes are still a big issue. And the interesting thing is those people who were paying 15 cents, they thought their property taxes were too high too, so. I'd be happy to answer any questions. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Davis. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: I could ask you a whole bunch of questions, Tom. But one of the things I've talked about a lot with regard to property taxes is the fact that in this day and age land is not just the only wealth people have. There's a lot of untaxed wealth outside which is an intangible tax, and that that might be one thing that ought to be considered. Do you have any opinion on that? [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: That's not the first time that I think that issue has come up. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: Well, I thought I was the first one. [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: It's difficult to find it. Property is pretty hard to hide. And you have an assessor who...and the state has done a really good job in making sure the assessors are pretty uniform across the state anymore. If you are looking at other

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resources, it's pretty difficult to know exactly where they're at and how much there is. I think that would be the major problem. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: And to a point, I think that's more solvable today than it was 30 years ago... [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: That's probably true. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: ...because of 1099s. [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: Right. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: We've talked a little bit and Ms. Nielsen made reference to it, we have ag values that have skyrocketed. Lincoln and Omaha have tanked. So they're up against their levy lid... [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: Right. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: ...and need the revenue. So we've talked a little bit about maybe trying to do a local option sales tax, which would be good for cities. Obviously it wouldn't generate a ton of revenue in Trenton, for example. But any opinion on that? [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: Well, again, you would...it seems to me you would...it would be very difficult. Maybe you could tie into the formula somehow in terms of the needs side. But, again, you know, in a lot of our area up here, a lot of school districts would have virtually no sales tax. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: Right. [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: I mean, if you were in North Platte or McCook, you might have.

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And then the argument I think would be that every time I come to McCook or North Platte to buy something, I'm helping their schools but who's going to help mine? I think that would probably be the next argument you could hear. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: Okay, thank you. If I think of anything else, I'll bring it back up here. [LR182]

SENATOR VICKERS: Thank you. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you, Tom. Anyone else wishing to testify? We've got plenty of time. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Good evening. My name is Alan Garey, A-l-a-n G-a-r-e-y, superintendent of schools, Medicine Valley Schools in Curtis, Nebraska. First of all, I want to thank you for coming out to southwest Nebraska. I make a lot of trips to the east. It's always nice to have a short trip to see some familiar faces. Couple of things: Medicine Valley, small school district, 200 kids, in the middle of Frontier County. One of the things, I am past president of NRCSA, the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, which I think you've all been apprised of our work in the state. A couple things that have come up in our discussions is apprehension for superintendents or school personnel from school districts of our size to sit at this table and discuss with you our specific plight for my district. The apprehension comes not so much that we don't have issues, but I sit in the middle of Frontier County. There's three school districts in Frontier County. I am an equalized school district. Both districts on either side of me are nonequalized. So it ends up at times sounding like I'm sitting here almost bad-mouthing, bashing my neighbors. And that is not what I'm about. My paycheck comes from Medicine Valley District, but at the same point in time in southwest Nebraska we're a pretty tight-knit group. We do a lot of things together and we try and all pull in the same direction. The one thing that we have heard from constituents whether it is in Medicine Valley, southwest Nebraska, is the fear that the current TEEOSA is balancing on the

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backs of the property tax people out here. And it makes it difficult for me to stand up and tell you that that is happening when I'm getting about \$750,000 of my \$3 million budget from state aid as an equalized district. But I feel it's important to share that with you tonight, that there is reason for the apprehension of some of my colleagues to step forward and maybe give you the specifics of what is going on in our districts. It's...I grew up in southwest Nebraska. I'm very proud to say that. And I've had my professional career of 26 years has been pretty much all in southwest Nebraska. It's a great place to raise kids. And we have some quality school districts out here. But it does take money to run the school districts. And what you've heard tonight is a nice cross section from both non-equalized and equalized districts and what we're trying to do out here for our kids. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: What's happening with enrollment both in your district and the other two districts in your county? [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Decline. When I went to Medicine Valley--it would be ten years ago--we were 275 students and this year we'll be at 200. We experienced back in about 2001 we had a drop of about 50 students, and that was foreseen. We were going from classes of 30 down to classes of 15. And that's a hard thing to try and explain to your public, where did everybody go? Well, it doesn't always happen that there's been a flight from the community when you are graduating 30 and bringing in 15 kindergartners. It's just a matter of time and it catches up with you. We are seeing the ag economy being strengthened. We're seeing some growth back with farms starting to add some labor. The issue with that is, is that is not a high paying position a lot of times. And with the low pay comes high mobility. We tend to see those positions change quite a bit, which as you've already heard tonight are issues that are not alone to the Medicine Valley School District. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. [LR182]

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ALAN GAREY: Um-hum. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Senator Haar. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Yes. One thing some of us have talked about is that Nebraska has such a huge range of size of school districts all the way from...and you're not even the smallest. I think it goes down to almost 90 students all the way up to, you know, OPS... [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Correct. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: ...with 50,000 students. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: I remember your graph that you rolled out for us at the TEEOSA meeting. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Well, good. Thank you. I have some along, but anyway... [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: Don't get him started. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: So how...you know, are there models? We talked about that on the way down here this morning. Are there models of education? You still want the same kind of outcomes... [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: ...you know, in terms of subject matter and all that sort of thing that kids know. But one-room schools weren't all that bad where there weren't grades. And I went to a two-room school through the eighth grade. But we all seem to have the same kind of models going now of, you know, kids in grades and sitting in rows and so on and

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so forth. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Right. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Do you see some possibility or other models so smaller schools can achieve the same kind of quality? What's going to make some difference? I mean, you can't have a high school physics teacher and a separate chemistry teacher with your size school. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Well, of course, we start with Rule 10. I mean, that's the home base that we all start with that we have to provide that education. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: And, you know, if you're talking about changing up what we're doing, I think there have been some things that, you know, longer school days, shorter school weeks. There's been some attempts to do that out here with a four-day school week. Distance learning: southwest Nebraska was kind of the beginning of that. We rode that wave, it's still very much a part of what we do. In terms of completely bringing something different, I don't think that there's anybody that would be opposed to it. The conservatism of our public at times, it would be a hard sell to the parents to completely go a different route... [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: ...than what we...but I think we'd be allowed the opportunity to do that in this area. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: But so part of it would be allowed to do that... [LR182]



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ALAN GAREY: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: ...but maybe we should be incenting those kinds of experiments as well to...and then not everything is going to work. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Certainly. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: But some things are going to work. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: And I think you would have to, in your position, to incentivize it, it would have to have the research backing behind it that it's got a sound base to it to show the taxpayers that their money is going to something that's got some basis to it. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: So if we were able to make that a possibility under some kind of, you know, temporary this-and-that around Rule 10 so that school districts could try some different things, do you think we'd have takers? [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: I think you would. I think you're going to hear in the next four or five years, with low enrollments, people will get inventive and people will be trying new things. And I think out of necessity you're going to see some changes occurring, so. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Well, not right now because it's probably longer than that, but I'd like to hear some of the things that we would have to do to enable districts such as yours to try some things. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Well, right off the top of my head I can't think of something that would be...because I've grown up for 26 years working under Rule 10 that we make everything fit under that and build off of that. You know, for me to say that I've got something up my sleeve that I could propose, I don't think I do. But I think, as I say, you know in mid-'80s I

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grew up east of McCook and played in a 16-school conference that those 16 schools don't even exist today. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Change has happened in this area. Now that's not saying that the curriculum, the buildings and that, have changed. But the 16 towns that had schools in 1983 and '84 no longer have those schools. And so change has happened here, and it didn't always come easy. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: There's still some divisions in school districts that are together but still not together. They were forced together by various political or monetary issues. What's going to happen is, is dollars and student numbers drive those decisions. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: And the dollars right now are in the districts in southwest Nebraska but the enrollments continue to decline. And as those numbers decline, we're going to have to become, as you say, more maybe modernized or come up with something outside of the proverbial box. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: One of the things that we've started to say that is very important to student achievement is early childhood education. What's going on with your district and as well as maybe some of the others in southwest Nebraska? [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Well, at the current time we do not have a preschool in our community.

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Maywood, which is seven miles west of us, does. And many of our preschool-aged children attend that preschool in Maywood. At this point in time, my budget would not be able to handle that--a preschool--because I don't have room in my building. We've looked at trying to do something. In order to have a preschool I would actually have to go out and acquire property or put up a building somewhere and it has been cost prohibitive at this point in time to do that. I will say that the winds of politics probably will make it to where we have to look at doing something like that. And I'm not saying that's not the right thing to do because the earlier we can get our kids that education, the better prepared they are to succeed once they enter our building. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Cook. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you... [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Uh-huh. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: ...for coming tonight. My question is sparked by your comment on Rule 10 as well. And I managed to muster the courage to print the table of contents for Rule 10 and have wondered ever since--because it's come up in this committee many times--under what circumstances might a district like yours seek a waiver for any of the waivers that they might be eligible for... [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: I think you're going to see it...oh, I'm sorry. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: ...and just along those lines as another idea to think laterally about how to address these issues of declining enrollment. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: I think, again, as your enrollments decline, you're going to have to try and find personnel. We struggled to find an English teacher two years ago. I hired an English teacher who ended up being provisionally endorsed. I hired her on the 15th of

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August, which was a stroke of luck. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: You just skidded into home plate. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: You know, it makes it really difficult when you have the English department being one teacher. And I'm held to have that teacher be certified and rightfully so. We want quality instructors in front of our kids. Attracting those quality instructors to a Curtis, Nebraska, becomes very challenging and proved to be very challenging because we started in March. We were turned down three different times for various reasons: employment for a spouse, housing. A huge issue for us is housing, I mean, and that's a different time, different place. But for us to attract teachers we end up sometimes teachers living in North Platte and McCook in order to get them to come out here. That's one of my monumental challenges in attracting staff, especially if I'm talking to students coming out of a UNL, UNO, eastern part of the state. They have a certain idea of amenities required for living that Curtis doesn't offer, quite honestly, so. Your question about waiver, I foresee school districts having to start looking at what can we do without and ask for that as an opt out. You know, and I don't know where to tell you to start, Senator Cook, you know. Guidance counselors are difficult to attract. Possibly sharing a guidance counselor with another district becomes an issue. We've tried. We've reduced administration. That was a place that we...when I went there, we were a superintendent and building principals in an elementary building and a high school building. And we're now down to the K-12 principal and myself as superintendent and we just covered the tasks that are necessary. And that's where I see things headed to. We're not going to get bigger. [LR182]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you very much for your response. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: And then going sort of back to Senator Cook's issue earlier, what is the face of poverty in your district? [LR182]

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ALAN GAREY: I'm glad you asked that because when that discussion came up that's something that is near and dear to me. We are a district of about 43 percent, currently, of poverty. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Wow. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Is that true indication of the poverty in my district? Absolutely not. Absolutely not. I cannot get people that I know are living in poverty to apply for free and reduced lunch. Multigenerational people do not apply for free and reduced lunches. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh-huh. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: What is the true indicator of poverty? I can't answer that, but I get very frustrated. I know that 43 percent is not indicative of the district that I reside in. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Yeah. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: And quite honestly, when we have students walk through the door and to enroll, they with their enrollment papers get a free and reduced lunch application. And they're asked to fill that out, regardless. Just fill it out, please. I put it in my newsletter at the beginning of the school year; poor, poor returns. Poor returns. And as I say, this is...I've lived in southwest Nebraska for 20-some years. It isn't just a Curtis-Medicine Valley issue. In every district I've been in I know there are kids out there that are living in poverty but their parents will not apply. So it does not reflect on my district. You know, would I give you...hazard a guess? I wouldn't. But I would say that we could possibly be well over 50 percent. And that 43 percent, that doesn't sound like a lot. But for 200 kids I'm saying that over half my kids are living at a poverty level. Now their parents are thrifty, they do without, but they view that as a program and they're very much against being labeled with something like that. And so we can't get them to fill the paperwork

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out, so. [LR182]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay, good. Thank you. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Davis. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: You know, I come from Hyannis, so we're obviously quite small. I served on the board there for a long time. A lot of the things you say I completely agree with. We always said the same thing about our poverty students. They didn't really reflect the number that were really there. We did the same thing as you did and didn't have good results either. And I'm not sure how we solve that problem. But, you know, I represent essentially 11 districts that are about that particular size so I think I have a real interest in how we're going to solve some of the problems. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Sure. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: At one time there was funding available through the formula for unified districts which were not actually consolidated but sort of a pre-merger. And we've talked a little bit about some kind of assistance if consolidation was something that people wanted. Do you think that's anything that we ought to look at? [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Well, I do have a little background in that. I have worked in a unified school district west of McCook that was Culbertson, Trenton, and Stratton. For three years I was a building principal there. And the way that that went together was unique at that time. The political winds kind of pushed it for various reasons: one district was short kids; another was short money; and the other one was geographically in the center. So the fallout from that since is that it's two of them that probably at the beginning we would have never guessed they'd stay together, are together. And the one that came in at the beginning ended up opting out and is with another district. So the predictability of that probably is not...I don't think anybody can predict where that goes. My school district is

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intertwined with another school district. We're seven miles apart, and our districts look like a checkerboard with pieces and parts all the way around. I've grown up--as I say, 26 years--my parents are farmers, ranchers, and school teachers. So my dad always said that consolidation is driven by student numbers and money. And when somebody runs out of one or the other or both, consolidation will take place. As long as somebody has those two factors, it's going to be pretty difficult to make change. I don't think that people are against it so much but they're afraid of what they're going to lose--identity, community--makes it a tough sell. And especially somebody coming from the outside. And that ends up usually being the superintendent of schools that's the salesman pushing it. And our tenure is not real great to start with, so we can become kind of pawns in that game. Are we done with consolidation? No. There will be more yet to come, especially with the declining enrollment. Even with valuations where they're at, student numbers are going to drive it. And that's a personal opinion, so. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: In reference to some of the questions Senator Haar asked about how do you educate and give a quality education with skeletal staff--and I think that's another problem that I see in all the small schools is you can't have two English teachers, like you said--so I think that...I'm going to ask you how you think that affects your high-ability learner students. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: High-ability learners can suffer. I mean, you've got to really go out of your way to try and create something for them because they do what they're asked to do. And usually unless you are stepping out and really preparing something and pushing it at them, they're going to be okay with getting by. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: What do you do for high-ability at Curtis? [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: We try and identify at an early age and then try and promote higher achievement. Try and get them to be interested in trying to do more than what's asked and to foster that environment to try and get more out of them. It becomes difficult when

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you have that one teacher that can be overloaded. We have the ability of having a media specialist full-time that can also help with some of those projects to try and bring in some other things. But we also don't want to make it like it's being penalized for being high ability, which sometimes it can seem that way when you're doing so well, here's more. So we try and incentivize it that this is really something that can help you and further use your abilities. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: And are there things that small schools can do together? I know we've got... [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Service units. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: I've never thought distance learning reached the potential that it really had. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: No. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: How do we make that better? [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: First of all, to try and help our...the ESUs are huge in being able to help with the high ability because that does give us the opportunity to take high-ability students from other districts and put them with mine. So, hopefully, that maybe answers your question a little bit there. Distance learning, you know the more that we can do bringing the community colleges in, the better, because they're a great partner. They bring some abilities, some staffing that we would not have access to otherwise. And like I say, you know, it sounds like a broken record, 20-plus years of doing it, I've worked with distance learning all those 20 years. And, you know, I've got to say that our McCook and North Platte community colleges have been great at working with their staff to get that Nebraska teaching license so that we can use them in our buildings. And that...because early on that was a real struggle. You would get a class, have it



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ready to go, and then find out that teacher doesn't hold a Nebraska teaching certificate. It doesn't do you any good, and that's frustrating. But I've got to say that the Mid-Plains group has really worked hard to try and get teachers in those positions with Nebraska teaching certificates. [LR182]

SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. [LR182]

ALAN GAREY: Yep. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Well, any other questions? Thank you so much for coming. Any other testifiers? [LR182]

ANDREW LONG: I'll fill out the green sheet. But I'm Andrew Long, A-n-d-r-e-w L-o-n-g, and I'm the vice president here at McCook Community College. And so thanks to Mr. Garey's talks here, I thought I might jump in here. I've been here about three months, but I grew up in Grant, Nebraska; taught in Big Springs and Cozad; worked for the Gallup polls in Lincoln. I spent the last five and a half years in Colorado at Northeastern Junior College. And from the outside looking in, we do a lot right in Nebraska, you know, just overall as a system. I look at our K-12 system and I look at our higher ed system and we're doing a lot of things right in this state. That's one thing I'm excited about moving here back with my young family. Just one thing to touch on, one thing (inaudible) I saw that Colorado I thought did a little bit better on was how they did dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment because one of the great things about Nebraska is the local control. But as we get into exploring more dual enrollment options, it's a little bit of a wild west in some areas where you have different colleges that can provide what the dual enrollment offers. And if you look at it right now--and this is a limited understanding from what I know right now--but, you know, you have the state colleges can provide some dual enrollment, you have the university system providing some dual enrollment, and the community colleges that can provide some dual enrollment. And it is a great opportunity for our students because the high school students that take dual

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enrollment, they do better down the road and the college success and down there. So it's a great chance for these high-ability learners, and it's great we have a system with a lot of schools here and the distance learning there. But, you know, you have the different standards from the different colleges where the state colleges usually require a master's plus 6 hours in that subject area to do the dual enrollment classes, whereas a lot of the community colleges and university are on the master's and the 18 credit hours. And so sometimes if they take the dual enrollment classes at the state colleges, there's a chance that those credits might not transfer to a university system later on there. I think that's a challenge for our parents, our public, and our students that think they're taking these dual enrollment classes. And so one thing I saw at Colorado that I thought was a plus was there was a little bit more guidance, I think, from the state on their dual enrollment policies and procedures. And it just put everybody on an even playing field. And what I saw really encouraged the growth of dual enrollment in that state. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your comments. [LR182]

ANDREW LONG: Thanks. [LR182]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Going once. Anyone else wishing to testify? Well, I would like to say, and I'm sure I speak for the committee, that we really do appreciate the fact that you all have come here tonight and those of you who testified. This is an ongoing process and so if you have thoughts you'd like to share with any of us on the committee, I hope you'll reach out and do so. And if anything else comes to mind, we've got other hearings in other locations. So we're keeping the door open. We're far from coming up with any new recommendations in this process. So again I thank you, and good evening. [LR182]