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Last year in the budget we put a dollar amount plus a percentage. This year, if we use a percentage, we tend to re-establish the gap between the high paid employees and the low paid employees. If you continue constantly with the dollar increase for all employees you have a leveling of the wages where the high paid employees actually get a reduction. Maybe we have hit on a tune in this inflationary spiral where one year we'll be using a dollar amount plus a percentage and the next year we'll be using the percentage. We'll tend to have some reasonableness in how the state employees are getting their wage increases.

To give 2 percent of the payroll to the administrators to do with as they please is utterly ridiculous. Let's support Barnett's amendment in this instance.

PRESIDENT: Senator Frank Lewis.

SENATOR F. LEWIS: Mr. Chairman, I agree absolutely with Senator Kelly. We've been down this road before. I wish that those that support this concept would put the right name on it instead of merit. The term used to be, as I recall, brown-nose. You'll understand that concept.

We stood on the floor and we debated this same issue before. We said what's the criteria. So they brought us in a little criteria from the Personnel Department. I understand that hasn't changed. It says things like "Does the employee look good? How's he doing? How's his relationship with others?" There is no criteria, there is no evaluation of significance. Senator Barnett is absolutely correct, merit raises go to those that are the most affluent and that's wrong.

Someone suggested to me yesterday, and hear me out. Someone suggested to me yesterday that that's where it belongs. It's the high priced employees that are hard to replace. Everybody else is worth nothing. The guy that does the road work to make sure we can get down here ... it's not important that he shows up at 7 o'clock in the morning, understand his job and does his job.

The whole thrust of this merit pay has been to thrust more money and those people who make more. That is inherently wrong. First of all I assume that we give the money in terms of cost of living. First of all a five percent cost of living increase for a \$600 employee is almost criminal. So instead of putting the maximum amount of money we can into those employees, we give them five percent which reduces their purchasing power ever more significantly. Then we want to take five percent and put it on top of a guy who makes \$25,000. That means he just picked up a good \$1250 raise. On top of that, Senator Rumery, we want to give the department chairmen the authority to give him another \$1250 so that he's got \$2500. The low salary employee we've given him a hell of a deal! He got \$300.