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FLOOR DEBATE

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moving this debate forward to resolution. My proposal for increased investment in higher education extends to an initiative I support to significantly bolster world-class medical research at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Creighton University, Boys Town Research Hospital, and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. If you visit these facilities, you will be enormously impressed by the cutting edge research that is currently underway. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dramatically advance medical research by committing additional resources to these efforts. Together, we should formulate a rational approach for utilizing the proceeds of the tobacco settlement. I propose that a major endowment be dedicated to biomedical research at these facilities while leaving the majority of tobacco funds for significant public health needs. We are so close to solving, once and for all, the riddles of many diseases with this research. These funds can offer a new day and a new life for Nebraskans and for people around the world. In addition to this research, there are many needs to be funded with the remaining portion of the tobacco settlement. You know as I do that there are many health care needs in Nebraska that are not being met. I would submit, however, that there is no, and I repeat, no greater priority for funding than in the area of mental health. I've met families from across the state with heartbreaking stories of loved ones who have no services, no hope, and no future. Their issues are very real to me. To the many families throughout our state who long ago gave up hope, we say our prayers are with you. But most importantly, I want them to know that help is on the way. Therefore, I propose we significantly boost funding for mental health. First, let's agree to make mental health funding the highest priority with the remaining tobacco settlement dollars. Specifically, I propose dedicating \$6 million in tobacco settlement funds for mental health over the biennium. Second, let's join together to increase General Fund support for mental health. Including the tobacco settlement funds, I propose increasing mental health aid from \$28.5 million in the current fiscal year to \$33.6 million in Fiscal Year 2002, and \$38.7 million in Fiscal Year 2003. This represents a more than 35 percent increase over the biennium. I recognize that even more needs to be done and so I pledge to do what I can to help Senator Jensen and the Health and Human