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Services Committee and Senator Wehrbein and the Appropriations Committee to identify mental health needs, to prioritize them, and to fund them. Maybe we can do more than what I have proposed today. Altogether, I am submitting a biennial budget with a two-year average growth rate of 7.4 percent. It's a rate of growth that I am not comfortable with. I wish it were lower. There are three items in my budget recommendations that influence this calculated rate of growth: financing the operational costs of a new prison at Tecumseh; continuing the \$30 million increase in community college aid for direct property tax relief; and providing state funding to school districts when the maximum property tax levy is reduced to \$1. Without these three items, the first year increase would be 3.2 percent, and the two-year average growth rate would be about 4.7 percent. Medicaid, property tax relief, and education funding are very high priorities for our state, but they are not inexpensive to finance and they are driving the growth in the state budget. Consider the total state funding on K-through-12 education, including special education. It will grow from \$708 million in this current fiscal year to \$807 million next year, and to \$846 million in the following year. Any way you look at it, this is a tremendous amount of money. A tremendous amount of state sales and state income tax dollars are being distributed to our local school districts across the state. As I said earlier, no legislative session is entirely new. We do build upon the choices of our predecessors. This legislative session is no exception. In 1996, the Legislature adopted, and the Governor approved, proposals in the areas of property tax relief and state funding for K-through-12 education, and a very deliberate, conscious decision was made to set K-through-12 funding above other state priorities. Education has always been a priority for funding in our state. The facts demonstrate our commitment. Nebraska ranks twelfth nationally in pupil-teacher ratio. We have more teachers per student than 38 other states. Nebraska ranks tenth per capita in state and local government expenditures for education. Educating kids is the higher budget priority per capita in Nebraska for state and local government combined spending than in 40 other states. Nebraska ranks ninth per capita in local government expenditures for elementary and secondary education. Educating kids is a higher spending priority at the local level per capita in Nebraska than in 41