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FLOOR DEBATE

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federal government. If this is what you want to do, let me repeat a couple of points. We will be using the only money available to us for other than our current teachers. The loan forgiveness program is based on a policy that assumes we will attract teachers into our state with loan forgiveness. In my view, this is not a realistic approach to the problem, because it assumes a prospective teacher will come to Nebraska for loan forgiveness even if the salary here isn't competitive. Loan forgiveness is, unfortunately, more of a gimmick than a meaningful salary enhancement. Concerning private and parochial school teachers, I am certainly not against private and parochial schools or their teachers. I think they make a valuable contribution to the state's K-12 educational system. But that contribution that they do and can make is closely tied to their financial independence. They have to be allowed to do the things they can do without being tied to restrictions that go with public tax funding. This is an important precedent we would be setting. And it certainly violates something you hear often, namely an urge for smaller government. We are going into an area here that we are not required to do, with limited funds. The loan forgiveness program doesn't concentrate funds where they are most needed. In my view, there's a better way to address the cost of college. It's not my idea, it's Senator Kristensen's bill, LB 708. The bill provides tuition reimbursement for teachers who agree to teach in a public school in Nebraska for five years. Under the proposal as described in LB 708, a teacher eligible for tuition reimbursement would hold a bachelor's degree from a teacher education program of any four-year college or university, hold a teaching certificate issued by the State Department of Education, and teach in a public elementary school in Nebraska. The teacher reimbursement program would be administered by the State Department of Education, which would prescribe procedures for the program. As proposed in LB 708, the funding would come from lottery proceeds. However, the program could just as easily be funded with the \$5.4 million that is associated with the loan forgiveness program. In addition, the tuition reimbursement program doesn't get the state involved in trying to track down individuals who default on loan payment. In my view, we need to take another look.