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FLOOR DEBATE

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as well, in other facilities with low wages, high turnover and, consequently, low morale for both employees and patients. We have reported that in the year 2000 the Thomas Fitzgerald Home in Omaha had a 79 percent turnover rate, where different caregivers were...were giving care to patients every night. People wouldn't know the person that they were...that was giving them pills or helping them, and their level of care went down. I appreciate Senator Schimek's work on this. The administration has done some work and...and with eliminating staff Care Tech I's ,and replacing them staff Care Tech II's. But we still have a tremendous amount of contract employees in these facilities that are costing the state more money than the state employees, and I think we need to raise pay so that we eliminate these contract employees that aren't saving us any money, that are actually costing us more, sometimes twice as much money for a contract employee to do the same job as a state employee would do, but because of turnover rates we're...we're not able to do that. I think this is our responsibility to staff and care for these patients at the highest level we can. And I thank Senator Schimek for this, at least for discussion purposes.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Thank you, Senator Connealy. Senator Tyson, on the Schimek amendment to LB 543.

SENATOR TYSON: Thank you, Senator Cudaback. Members of the body, I rise in support of the Schimek amendment, although I do so with some...some reluctance. The...the thing that bothers me is something that Senator Schimek said about having a discussion. I don't want to have a discussion. I think that we should move forward on this as if we really mean it. Now, it has been stated that direct care staff will not be affected; there has also been a statement by one of the parties involved that they have a memo stating that it will be affected. What I want, and I'm very concerned about this, what I want is I want some assurance that it won't. Now one of the things I have here is a list of vacancies at the Beatrice State Developmental Center. And we talk about the most vulnerable citizens of our state; that's where they are, folks. These aren't people that you can turn out and make homeless, like has happened to a good many of our mentally ill people. These people are entirely dependent on our care. And if this paper that I have here in my