

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE
Transcriber's Office
FLOOR DEBATE

May 1, 2001

LB 305

worked diligently throughout the summer and fall of 2000, and finally, school board members, school administrators, teachers and representatives of school districts of large, small and medium-size across the state. To quote from the Teachers Salary Task Force Report: "Nebraska's teachers are one of the state's greatest assets. While the task force report acknowledges that family relationships are a strong determinant of student success, it also points out something that I think most of us agree with. Teachers exert profound influence on students. Graduation rates and student achievement scores in Nebraska are among the highest in the nation. Now we've heard quite often this session that teachers salaries in Nebraska rank 45th nationally. While this statistic is compelling, there is much more to the story than this one piece of information. For instance, almost 40 percent of our teaching force will be eligible to retire in the next decade. Who will replace these veteran teachers? In addition, schools across the state report significant reductions in the numbers of applicants for teaching positions, and in many cases the quality of applicants is less desirable than in previous years. Where are the high quality teachers applying for jobs? If we look at our most obvious competition for high quality teachers, our neighboring states, the regional picture is not good. We have fallen behind our neighboring states in the rate of increase of teacher salaries. In order merely to fall no farther behind, Nebraska salaries will have to grow more than 4.5 percent annually. All of these trends, low number of applicants, lower quality of applicants, a large percentage of teachers who will be eligible to retire in the next decade and a rate of salary increase that is substantially less than our nearest competitors are clear indications that we are in danger of losing our best teachers. That puts our public school system at risk. LB 305 is the Education Committee's response to these troubling trends. Before I describe the specifics of LB 305, I'd like to provide a brief history of what brings us to this point. Let's look at what our options were coming into the session. Number one, we could do nothing. We could simply declare that there is no problem or we could declare that it's not the state's problem. Number two, we could do something within our means. This option shifts the focus so that it isn't on teachers salaries but, instead, is on not raising taxes. There are 20,000-plus