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April 5, 2002 LB 1085, 1149

SENATOR JENSEN: LB 1149.

SENATOR SYNOWIECKI: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Jensen.
Thank you, Senator Cudaback.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Senator Byars, on the Jensen amendment.

SENATOR BYARS: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to stand in strong support of Senator Jensen's amendment, AM3503. And certainly I'm...Senator Synowiecki, I'd like to see the statistics that you have. I hope you will share them with us relative to what your findings are. Every statistic that I've seen, and...and, actually your testimony even supports my feeling stronger, as you look at those individuals who are smoking, who have lower incomes, who have incomes below the poverty level, typically those are the same families who have no insurance; they have no means themselves to pay for tobacco-related illnesses and...and the tragedy that tobacco can bring to them. And what happens in that case is that it continually becomes an ever-increasing drain on those of us who are paying, through taxes, for the healthcare for those individuals, whether it be on Medicaid, or on Kids Connection, or on other...other state-funded health programs. And...and I think the empirical evidence that I have seen, the projected numbers that I've seen in the state of Nebraska, I...I haven't...I just haven't been able to find anything that refutes that every 10 percent increase in the real price of cigarettes reduces overall cigarette consumption, overall, by 3 to 5 percent, and reduces the number of kids who smoke by approximately 6 to 7 percent. And if you look at that decline, and you look at the cost relative to that in the terms of health-related...tobacco-related health illnesses, I think it is absolutely imperative on us that make public policy, that we attempt to do everything possible to try to reduce that consumption. This is probably one area where, if it's a regressive tax on people that are poor, I'm willing to do that. Because if I help save those individuals' lives, I think I'm doing the right thing as far as public policy is concerned. If I'm doing everything I can to improve the health of all Nebraskans, that's my job, that's what I'm here for. I stand up