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LB 348

SPEAKER BRASHEAR: Thank you, Mr. President, members of the body. Good morning. Thank you, Senator Bourne. I appreciate your work and the work of the Judiciary Committee staff. I rise in support of the committee amendment which adds three important bills to LB 348. As Senator Bourne has described, the amendment will provide for an increase in judicial salaries, a comprehensive revision of filing fees in the judicial process, in order to provide funds for the judges retirement system, and a revision of archaic law regarding notaries public, so as to eliminate powers that are no longer appropriate or justified for notaries public. The increase in judicial salaries is a very important matter to be addressed this year. At the outset, I want to stress the importance, as you all know, of an independent, well-qualified judiciary. The independence of the judiciary is enhanced when compensation does not become a political issue but is provided as a matter of recognition of the importance of a coequal branch of government. The judiciary ought not need, I would respectfully submit, to feel as though it has to come to us with hat in hand, in order to be paid. And clearly, our ability to attract people of talent and accomplishment to the bench will depend on our ability to provide adequate and appropriate compensation. AM1332 will recognize the value of our judges and the justice of providing them with an increase in compensation. It is important to point out that during the prior budget cycle, during which, you may recall, things were somewhat tight, the judicial branch opted to forego salary increases. I would note that AM1332 will not, I repeat not, nor should it--I'm not suggesting it should--make up for that forbearance by the judiciary. That was their decision; that was done. But this bill will increase the percentage of...compensation by the percentage that has been provided to other state employees. That would be an increase of 3 percent in the first year, and an increase in the second fiscal year of 3.25 percent. The best way to assess the impact of AM1332 is to examine where Nebraska judges rank nationally. In national terms, Nebraska judges are, in fact, below the median salary for state judges, currently ranking 29th among the states. Even with AM1332, Nebraska salaries would remain below the median salary, and the median is expected to increase, as other states adopt salary adjustments. Clearly, this bill is therefore, we would respectfully submit, not overly generous, when we compare