

SENATOR FOWLER: Mr. President, as a member of the Appropriations Committee, I obviously support the override. A lot of figures can be thrown around, a lot of percentages and it is easy to talk about eighteen percent over two years. That looks very, very large until you begin to look at what the rate of inflation could be which is eighteen percent in just one single year. When you start talking about the rate of inflation the past year, you are talking about twelve percent so if the Appropriations Committee had tried to keep up with the rate of inflation, we would be talking about a two year average of thirty percent but we didn't do that. We didn't use that sort of indicator. Rather we went to a salary survey not developed by us, developed by the State Department of Personnel, trying to look at the market's prices around the Lincoln, Omaha area and across the state. That study indicates the figures that Senator Warner provided. The three percent salary base adjustment is not near the five and a half percent gap that was determined but it is at least a step to try and catch up. Now I think that if we want to try and keep our salaries competitive, we should rely on tools like the salary comparison done by the Department of Personnel and try and use those as an objective standard. Now as to the question as to whether or not there is enough funding for this proposal, last December the Appropriations Committee chose a budget figure of an increase of seven percent above last year's revenues. That also is equivalent to existing tax rates and the Appropriations Committee has presented to you a budget that is about eight million dollars below existing tax rates assuming a reserve of six percent of dollars. There was quite a bit of money provided there using the projections from the Department of Revenue. In no way has the Appropriations Committee exceeded the existing revenues for existing tax rates but, in fact, as you know there has been a good deal of discussion as to whether or not refunds are going to be at the level that has been suggested. It looks currently looking at the trend of refund that there will be at least another twenty million dollars available that will not be refunded based on the rate at which refunds have been made to date. So I think that there is ample revenue within existing tax rates to provide this salary adjustment and, in fact, deal with some of the other issues. One of the reasons this is being provided to the Legislature first is a concern by the Appropriations Committee that perhaps for one year we should consider state government as our prime responsibility, try and meet the needs of state government and state salaries and state employess, try to help them catch