

very briefly and we will go on from there, please.

SENATOR SMITH: Oh, I still have eight minutes, okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You all have copies of the amendment that have been distributed on your desks now, and what, basically, I will just kind of review. The Conway amendment removed Phase I, a distribution for teachers below \$18,000, if their district did not elect to be a part of that, and it reduced the total figure in the bill, itself, to \$20 million, which would be the total pool which would be distributed over all the teachers, and then he changed the distribution formula so that before that time, he went like from 16 to 19 thousand, you ended up with a little higher FTE, from 3.3, I guess you could call it, to .6, and up to the next three categories, the same way with the .6. Anything above that remained the same. I guess the two-thirds in the 19 to 20 was the same, only there is a difference in the way it was broken down. According to his amendment, no distribution will be made to teachers below \$16,000. The district would have to elect to bring their teachers up to that level before they could participate in the pool. My amendment supports the concept of raising the minimum required to get distribution over a three-year period, letting them phase in, because I have a concern that those teachers that are currently below \$16,000 are the ones that are going to fall through the cracks, and they are the very ones that really need that increase that we are talking about that is so important for teacher salary enhancement. So I support the basic idea that increases the rural percent of the pie, is I guess what I am being very open and up front about, still will encourage rural districts to raise the salaries, will provide an incentive to increase education for teachers and, in the meantime, it is going to give them something to get them up to that point in time if their districts that are really, in fact, districts that are having a struggling time trying to meet their teacher's salaries because of their low valuations, so that is the gist of the amendment, and I realize that this amendment comes...some people don't want to see it, but this is a concern that I have had from the beginning, and I know that a number of people have talked about this formula over time. We have discussed this over and over, and we haven't seen any effort made to try to do anything to, I guess, slant it a little more toward some more of the money going to those smaller schools and those lower paid teachers, and that is my total reason for introducing this amendment is so that we do provide more money and more opportunity for those lower paid, lowest paid, I should say,