

taxes to support education then not have the money go into education. I have always been one that supported highway building. I supported the accelerated program, one of my first bills in here was to add a penny to the gas tax to put more money into the counties and the cities and I believe we need to do that and I believe highway building is a main priority in our state and I've always supported it, particularly in the good times when the money is flowing in. We're not in the good times now. We are in a situation where we don't have the money that we think we need to fund ongoing state government programs. Every time we do that we do across the board General Fund cuts. I think our Appropriations Committee is recommending a 4 percent across-the-board cut. Will our highway building program suffer any restraints in this time? I haven't seen a proposal out there yet that will lead you to believe that it will, that the highway building is going to continue on, good times or bad times. We, in this Legislature, have caught a lot of flak, probably some of it justified for our refurbishing of the Capitol. You go back home and you hear about the \$1,400 chairs you've built. Has anybody heard about a \$3 million cost overrun on a highway building project that many of us drive back and forth every day between here and Lincoln? It has come to my attention that we spent about \$3 million more on the Exit 426 exit than was originally planned. Is that where we're going to be tightening our belts? No, we won't have to tighten our belts in the highway money. I think we need to bring this bill out for two reasons. Number one, the programs that Senator Rasmussen talks about are good programs. For years we stand on this floor and pontificate about improvements in education.

PRESIDENT MOUL: One minute.

SENATOR WITHEM: And when it comes to actually doing something about it, we're not there. Another little item buried in the Governor's budget is last year we funded, we proposed early childhood grants and passed that legislation. Now this year the proposal is after we've got school districts out there in our state, bringing in programs to provide early childhood education, we're being asked not to fund that in its second year. We're always talking about quality education programs and we never do anything about them, so that portion of the bill deserves to be on the floor. But the other portion of the bill where we're saying this time around when we're putting the squeeze on state government, are we going to ask our highway program to be part of that? Ironically, it's about \$9 million a