

teacher, maybe, in the whole lot that I didn't get along with or didn't have a warm feeling for. So taking it from there, some of the comments that have been made, I am going to vote against this amendment. I just have a feeling about this amendment that we are getting away from what I thought originally was the purpose of the bill, even when we started with the \$150 million was for incentives for teachers to stay in the teaching profession and keep up their relationship with our children that has paid off here in Nebraska. And Senator Abboud already read those statistics to you. Our graduation rate is 85.4 percent. We are sixth in the nation in graduates from high school. We are third among our neighboring states, the fifth highest in the ACT average of the 22 states that use the test. That is the third highest in our seven-state region. The teachers who work as professional teachers every day have that special relationship with the students. They spend hour upon hour after school in volunteer projects to help in school organizations, and that kind of thing. Now when they got the money over the past two years, and this is another point I want to make, the money doesn't go to NSEA. It goes to the teachers. It goes to the individual teachers, and I have had a lot of letters from teachers in my district and all over the state of how they used that money. A lot of them used it to further their education. Well, who can argue with that? That is really one of the best uses that they have told me about. And going back to school to work for a higher degree costs a lot of money. I don't know how many of you have seen the hypothetical case about how much it takes to get an advanced degree for a teacher or for anyone else, but by the time you pay for a graduate credit at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, for instance, and this would hold true in some of the other state colleges as well, except for the lower tuition, by the time you go through all that, you can spend two or three thousand dollars just to get one hour of graduate credit. With the books, and the time it takes to go, and the mileage and so on, it really adds up, and when these people tell me that they have used those increments that they received the last two years to further their education, for me that is a most telling and compelling idea and the dedication and devotion that these teachers give to their profession. I do not like the idea of coming along and saying, well, now we are going to use part of this money and for performance-based. I may later on take another look at it. I am going to vote against it today because one of my questions, and this is a rhetorical question. You don't have to answer, Senator Withem, or anyone else. Who is going to decide who the best teacher is?