

be moving forward and doing things we really need to do in the area of education, early childhood education, restructuring projects, scholarships for kids to attend private colleges and universities, funding research, these other sorts of things, we are going to have to find it in areas of existing state government spending. We are not going to be able to just reach into the growth of the economy and pull it out, and I think where I really came down in saying that I have to support Senator Ashford's bill is when he started ticking off what is currently in the budget that I think is vital to the future of education in our state. Things like the early childhood education programs have far, far higher preference in my mind than this particular program. So for this particular reason, I am not going to be supporting Senator Robinson's amendment.

PRESIDENT MOUL: Thank you, Senator Withem. Senator Hefner. Senator Ashford.

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you, Madam President and members. A couple of points that I would like to make at this point in the debate. Obviously, the debate, as Senator Withem says, has now shifted back to LB 1272 as originally introduced, and a couple of points need to be made. One, if, inasmuch as this is an amendment to the amendment, all that is needed to strike LB 1272 is a majority vote so, hopefully, you will be cognizant of that when you do vote. Secondly, Senator Withem, his second point is the point I would like to make again, and that is that there was a very carefully balanced budget put together in the committee that is out here in front of you. There are extremely important programs that need to be funded out there now and I would suggest to you that you look into yourselves and make your own evaluation as to whether these programs are worthy of consideration. Certainly early childhood education and domestic violence and libraries and EPSCoR are programs that are needed programs. They are programs that should be in our budget and should be passed. If we vote to strike LB 1272 as it now sits without the teacher amendment, and we just go to the teacher amendment, those programs are in jeopardy, and that is, in my view, a very, very unfortunate and would be a very, very unfortunate occasion. Thirdly, I think we need to, even though we are now debating the teacher pay bill and LB 1272, as it was originally introduced, in the same bill now because of the overruling of the Chair, I would...and now Senator Robinson has brought 1272 back into the middle of the debate on the teacher bill, which is unfortunate, I still would ask you to try to look