

today about my no vote on bringing 700 out of the committee hearing. I think...and Senator Wickersham would know better than I, the HELP fund was originally established in the state of Nebraska before I got here. And the idea at that time was to use it as money to give to teachers for merit pay is what it was originally. Although I know there has been a lot of discussion since that time on its distribution because generally the union frowns on merit pay, I guess. So they, they kind of distributed it as kind of whatever money we came up with, I think it was originally supposed to be like \$22 million or something, would be distributed and then it fell over the years to about \$7 million. I know at one time, though, that they had looked towards the Highway Trust Fund for, for some monies for...well, not the Highway Trust Fund, but to, to put an extra increase on fuel taxes to put money into that fund. So they've been trying to fund that HELP fund for a period of years and have never been very successful funding it to the 22 million, I believe, is what it was originally. And senators who were here at the time who voted for that fund can go ahead and correct me on any of those figures. But my point is, the original intent of the HELP fund was to give teachers an incentive or a merit pay of some for, for their work here in the state of Nebraska because you hear continually that they're salaries are not adequate compensation and things of this nature. So when this bill came forward to take the HELP fund and roll it over into the retirement and use it as a cost-of-living adjustment, first of all I voted against it because I thought it was wrong for the intent of the HELP fund. If we can't fund the HELP fund, let's admit it and then do away with it because that's the reason it was originally started was to be a teacher incentive fund. And to take that and put that into a COLA for all the state employees, to me seems like you're just taking advantage of \$7 million that's sitting there and rolling it over into a COLA because you now decided that you wanted a COLA and it's totally a different discussion than what the HELP fund was set up for, which was the merit pay or an incentive proposal. So if you're going to stop with the HELP fund, that should be one thing, stop the HELP fund. And then if you want to do a COLA, or cost-of-living adjustment, I believe that should be voted on separately and funded as such. I know that seems maybe something that doesn't have a lot of validity to it because you're taking \$7 million from one place and putting into another and what difference does it make. But my point was the whole idea of setting up this fund was to have an incentive for teachers and then now it's