

SENATOR JONES: Thank you, Madam President and members of the body. I am the one impacted the most here because my districts, most of them are out there, and I have got a little map that just shows you that the Valentine School District, with a Class VI system, is 3,600 square miles, and that's a big area for one Class VI system, and they are a long ways from town. My son lives 50 miles from Gordon and my two grandchild drives 50 miles each way, so it's a hundred mile trip a day, just to give you a little idea of the distance they are traveling. But I guess I want to thank Senator Withem for coming to this because I think it's something that we really need to do is look at the sparsity issue, and let's hopefully that we can come out of this with the recommendation that we can put it in the school finance fund, so that we can figure this out. And this is something that they are really concerned about up there because I went up to a meeting in Valentine, just a couple of weeks ago, and the court house was just clear full of people that was really concerned about this because a lot of the ranchers, their real estate taxes increased 61 percent in one year. And so they are some upset people up there, and I've been getting a lot of phone calls in the office, just this morning, wondering what's going to happen to this. So I am trying to explain to them that this is probably the right way to go this year, and try to get something done that would help them up there. But, of course, you know, I would have liked to just repealed the common levy, but that's not in the cards this year. So let's hope we can do something with that along that line maybe another year, or at least part of them for something on the sparsity issue. Again, I want to thank Senator Withem for working with me on this and bringing us this far. Thank you.

PRESIDENT ROBAK: Thank you, Senator Jones. Senator Bohlke, to speak to the Withem amendment.

SENATOR BOHLKE: Yes, Madam President, members, I rise in strong support of the Withem amendment and, in fact, as I had indicated to Senator Jones, as we have talked about the sparsity factor, I introduced a bill this year to the Education Committee dealing with school finance that uses sparsity as a factor, and so as I have traveled across the state with the Education Committee, I have realized that this really is an issue and something that I think we need to address. So not only will the Finance Review Committee be addressing it, but the bill that I am talking about that I introduced this year, I hope to have as an interim study