

Senator Vrtiska waives. Senator Wesely. Senator Wesely waives. Senator Beutler.

SENATOR BEUTLER: Senator Will, members of the Legislature, I've heard a number of arguments today. Everybody or several people have gotten up and argued strenuously, but, you know, I really haven't heard any good arguments. It is curious to me that there have been so many complaints about mandating this and mandating that. The only thing this mandates is a process--have a public hearing, do a fiscal estimate, that's the only mandate. But the irony of this kind of thing, to me, to complain about that kind of a mandate, when what this whole package is about is the hugest, biggest mandate we've ever laid on the school districts. Mandates are to do and mandates are not to do, and this huge one we are laying on them right now is that you will no longer have the property tax as your source of revenue, except in a limited fashion. Thou shalt not levy a property tax above 1.0 or 1.1, as far as school districts are concerned. Now can you imagine a mandate that affects school districts more than that? We haven't passed a mandate like that since I've been in the Legislature. We haven't done anything that even comes close in terms of saying to them what they can do or what they can't do from their traditional practices. It is like we complain about minnows when we are feeding a whale. So I don't think anybody can really, with a straight face, stand up and complain about this mandate. There was a complaint that this was about counties, that the concept is too broad for this bill, which is about counties. My gosh, folks, what we're talking about is this huge package and something that fits together in terms of how we are going to make these property tax levies fit altogether. One property tax levy is related to another because, in the end, they all have to come under a total levy lid, for example. All these things relate together because they are all part of a total property tax cap. To then suggest that because a particular bill is here that only deals with counties, we should only deal with counties, I think makes no sense whatsoever. We are here to deal with all those things that are important, and there is nothing more important in terms of looking at consolidation and savings in the school districts because, as Senator Pirsch pointed out, therein is roughly, depending on where you are, 60 percent of the property tax levy. It makes more sense to focus on school consolidation than to focus on consolidation for any other political subdivision or governmental unit. Therein lies the greatest possibility for