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tradition by recommending a growth rate for the following biennium of not more than 3 percent. In my judgment, these are achievable targets. The second principle my budget recommendation addresses is the increased commitment within our limited resources of providing services that ensure a continued quality of life for our citizens. The spending targets I have proposed are achievable without sacrificing our shared priorities or walking away from our responsibilities to Nebraskans. The third principle is tax relief. Spending restraint and a growing economy will enable us to provide significant tax relief to Nebraska taxpayers. Along with this budget I am recommending a permanent mechanism for providing property tax relief so that tax savings produced through greater efficiencies of government and excess tax receipts generated from a growing economy will be reserved for direct property tax relief and not used for continued growth in state spending. Let me outline some key elements of my budget recommendations. My commitment to protecting Nebraska families is demonstrated by the priority I've placed upon effective law enforcement, because safe communities are strong communities. Last week, I announced a resolution to a two-year labor contract impasse with the state troopers, which had resulted in no pay increases since 1997 and created severe recruitment, retention, and morale problems within the Nebraska State Patrol. I'm very pleased that the dispute has been resolved and that a new contract has been reached. This settlement and the new wage contract are included in my budget plan. My predecessor also reached a formal agreement with the public employees' unions to establish increased hiring rates for nearly 700 correctional officers, corporals, and sergeants beginning January 1st of this year. In addition, current employee salaries were increased at the Department of Corrections to solve recruitment and retention problems. These items are included in my budget plan. My budget also includes funds for initial staffing and operating costs at a new prison in Tecumseh and the incarceration work camp in McCook. And, in accordance with a program adopted by the Legislature in 1998, I have included funds to reimburse counties for the cost of incarcerating state prisoners. Today, I ask our county governments to return this savings to taxpayers in the form of dollar-for-dollar property tax relief. The number of families requiring public assistance has been declining, reflecting our strong economy and Nebraska's