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funding for student financial aid and to maintain the current number of scholarships in programs administered by the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. On the subject of higher education, Speaker Kristensen has stirred the debate regarding the future structure of governance of higher education in Nebraska. I applaud him for initiating this dialogue and I look forward to being a part of this conversation. The budget also includes increased funding of \$1.1 million Cash Funds for each of the next two years for grants from the Cultural Preservation Endowment Trust Fund to provide stable, long-term support for the arts and humanities in Nebraska. My recommendation for special education maintains the growth rate at the statutory limit of no more than 3 percent per year, resulting in increases of \$3.9 million in the first biennium, and another \$3.9 million in the second biennium to reimburse schools for special education expenses. My budget also proposes to eliminate a seven-tenths of one percent contribution to the School Retirement System which has been paid since 1984. Let me be clear, however. My willingness to eliminate this amount is dependent on placing sole responsibility for this program, including benefit amounts, with those who benefit from the program. If this cannot be achieved, I will support continued state funding. Before moving on to two critical elements of my budget package, I want to reiterate my budget is limited to 2.2 percent growth the first year and 3.4 percent growth in the second year. I have proposed limited increases in spending while funding our state's priorities. Now let me focus on state aid to education and on property tax relief. Any discussion of state aid should begin with my respect and my admiration for the members of the Unicameral for having taken on these difficult issues. Against great criticism, you moved Nebraska in the right direction. You have increased the state's aggregate share of the cost of K-12 education from about 25 percent a decade ago to about 50 percent today. And against criticism at home, you've challenged school boards and administrators to tighten their belts, to set priorities, to work together and, in some instances, caused communities to make tough, yet inevitable, decisions regarding their schools that had been put off for decades. You have done this while working to honor the concept that local school districts, through their elected boards, are best equipped to decide what is in the best interests of the children and the