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LB 155

are a good benefit, and they determine that it's an adequate benefit, they have chosen to reduce the contribution that's required from the members and the school districts, instead of increasing the benefits to utilize the increased assets that they are realizing from the phenomenal earnings that we've had and growth that we've had in the last...the last few years. It's important that we think about that because, as I mentioned when I began to introduce my amendment, once we have promised a particular retirement benefit, the Legislature is constitutionally prohibited from cutting that benefit. In other words, it's easier to change the contribution rates up and down than to take back a benefit already promised. The argument, of course, against cutting the contribution rate is that schools or contributors will get used to contributing less money leading to difficulty in the future when more contributions are necessary. So if I were arguing this bill from the ground floor, I would say the policy choice is, should the excess assets of the plan be plowed into benefit increases or should we look at reduced contributions to the fund? The assets are there. There has been an actuarial study based on last fall in the Omaha system and those increased assets can be used to pay for today's benefits based on the actuarial study. Now,...

SENATOR CUDABACK: One minute.

SENATOR BROMM: ...I have...I should, I won't have time to go into these questions on this go-round but let me say that I have had a number of e-mails and cards and letters questioning why I would even want to produce an amendment on this bill, that it's...that it's not...it's just not understandable why I would do this. Well, I'm doing it because I think that this sets a policy course that this body is going to be looking at again as soon as next year, if not the year after, with respect to retirement benefits for the rest of the state system and that will impact state dollars, will impact school dollars, and we will have...we will have choices to make. I received one...one e-mail from a pers...

SENATOR CUDABACK: Time. Thank you, Senator Bromm. We are discussing the Bromm amendment, AM2549, to LB 155. We're now open for discussion. Senators wishing to speak are Senator Wehrbein, Kiel, Stuhr, Bromm and Bourne. Senator Wehrbein.