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FLOOR DEBATE

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SENATOR RAIKES: Thank you, Mr. President and members of the Legislature. This, LB 66, revisits an issue that we've dealt with as recently as the special session we had last August. What it does is expands the number of school districts or yeah, I guess I should say the dates, application dates, for grants that could come for school technology improvements. There is a fiscal note, which I'll refer to, and I'll also try to give you some background information on this. First, there was money for weatherization loans that was put together at some time in the past, and I am told by Senator Baker that it was related to an excise tax on gas and oil...severance, severance tax on minerals. That fund then was loaned out to school districts to make efficiency improving investments in their school systems, items or projects that would save energy costs. That project or series of projects was completed. So, again, these were loans. As these loans were paid off, money came back into the state, was put in a School Technology Fund. Now, the idea for a School Technology Fund was school systems could apply to this fund for grants to do various technology projects, and these would be such things as wiring a building for Internet use and, of course, several other technology related issues. The design of this project is important, I think, for these purposes. It was that a school system would apply for the grant. If they were accepted there was...and they received notice that they were accepted, then the school system would go ahead, make the investment called for in the proposal. Once they had completed the proposal, they would submit a bill to the School Technology Fund to be reimbursed for the work that they had finished, so that's an important thing. It was a project of the type where you do the...you, the school system, does the work, does the project; once it's completed then you let the department know that it has been completed and you will be reimbursed according to the cost you present. Well, if you remember, the second special session, I think it was the second, the one last August where we dealt with budget issues for the current fiscal year, the one we're currently in, there was a proposal offered, I think at the request of the Governor, that in effect ended this program and took the money for use in the General Fund to deal with the budget situation we face. It amounted to a series of payments over time, in effect, as these weatherization loans were being paid off. The initial proposal was simply to take