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FLOOR DEBATE

April 22, 2003 LB 759

because of the downturn, we will wind up this year spending our reserve. We have to make up that reserve to start the new budget process. We've got to put 3 percent in our pocket, in our savings account, before we can have a zero percent budget. Having spent up the cushion from the last time, it will cost us \$222 million of putting money in the savings account before we can start doing an accounting for a zero percent budget. Let me just say that one more time. We got to come up with \$222 million before we can get to a zero percent budget, the same thing that we did last year. Which means there's a lot of public service, a lot of state government that's on the line in these revenue issues this year, and it's one of the reasons I'm giving Senator Brashear the benefit of the doubt. So one of the reasons why, even in the face of border bleeding, I think we can continue with the cigarette tax as it is. It's the reason why this portion of the committee amendment is a good idea, as are the other provisions of the committee amendment. And, by the way, I see that Senator Brashear is going to offer an alcohol tax measure that the committee has already reported out. I intend to endorse that idea and speak on its behalf as well. I think that's a sound thing to do and I don't mind that if it gets rolled into this bill. We need to have the engine that will get us through this coming couple of years and LB 759 is one of two options to do that. I would endorse the committee amendment with respect to maintaining the cigarette tax policy that we've changed on a permanent basis.

SPEAKER BROMM: Thank you, Senator Landis. Senator Beutler.

SENATOR BEUTLER: Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature, I'm concerned about the process here and I want to ask Senator Brashear and Senator Landis some very direct questions about the process here, because this bill, in terms of the revenue that it raises, may be critical to the mainline appropriations bill or may not be, depending on what the plan of the Revenue Committee is in terms of funding any potential gap in the appropriations bill. I assume Senator Brashear, if he was successful in getting all of the components of his people plan into place, would proceed through the process and Final Reading and passage of his bill, which would ensure to us a certain amount of revenues which would help us with the mainline appropriations