

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE
Transcriber's Office
FLOOR DEBATE

April 23, 2003

LB 759

I came to the issue from that perspective. But this year and last year, we have had budget crises and we have to have a lot of options to be able to figure out how we're going to get our budget to balance and be able to do that without affecting...ways to do that that don't necessarily affect everyone. So we get two for one on this one. We get a tax that the public supports and we get a tax that helps our public health goals. I passed out to you, and one is scientific and one is not, the yellow piece of paper is what we would call a scientific survey and it was just released a couple of weeks ago. It was commissioned and paid for by Voices for Children in Nebraska, looking at various taxes and what the public's reaction is. And the results of that survey to increase the cigarette tax is 73 percent yes, 25 percent no, 25.8 percent no, and a half of a percent undecided. I also asked the same question on my constituent survey and got remarkably a very similar answer; 73 percent yes, 24 percent no, and some that were undecided or didn't choose to respond on that. And I think we have an opportunity here and one tool that we are definitely going to need to be able to balance the budget. And as someone on the Appropriations Committee, and I think my colleagues would agree, and I know our chairman has stated, when we get to that budget piece and you see what the cuts already are, and what you will have to do, this tax increase will be a lot painless than what you would have to do in that budget because we're down to the numbers that we can get to and they are education. So the policy choice that you have here is to keep this piece of the revenue options alive on General File, keep this idea alive, raise revenue from cigarette taxes. Last year it was about 1.2 cents or 1.2 million percent. You're going to hear that we've had border bleeding, that we've had some issues since we raised the cigarette tax. Other states surrounding us are considering it. Iowa is considering right now going to \$1. And we have a little volatility in what's happening with the cigarette tax coming in over the last few months since we raised it. It's too early to be able to assess exactly what's going on. But I can tell you one thing, if we don't raise the cigarette tax, we're going to have even more...even less revenue to deal with in our budgetary process. So I offer this as an opportunity for this body to discuss a cigarette tax increase this year. And this will be our opportunity on a bill that it's