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FLOOR DEBATE

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LB 759

debate on LB 1436, Senator Bohlke's bill, year 2000, that it was kind of the beginning stages of this program, and the debate was not necessarily how the money would be spent but where the money comes from. And I remember very vividly the strong opposition to that bill because of the source of the funds. I realize that times change but I so vividly recall the very strong opposition coming from folks that are now supporting this today. Even though now we look back at LB 1436 and I think a lot of folks could concur that it has been somewhat effective. I would maybe not agree with all of the numbers there because I was being told in 2001 that the number of youthful smokers was on the rise, not the decrease. But I also remember very vividly the first two years I was in the Legislature when there was a proposal to raise that tax without any plan for using those funds that were generated by a lot heftier tax than what we have now. So then that was followed up by a proposed increase in the tax and certainly a more detailed plan for how to use those funds. When I'm out in the community around my district, one of the toughest questions is, what is our cigarette tax policy in Nebraska? Why do we have the tax and where do we spend the funds? That can be a difficult question to answer I must say. And when you look at the tobacco settlement and really the function of those dollars and the intended purpose of those dollars should be at tobacco prevention first, sometimes that issue gets a little clouded. The one thing I've appreciated through involvement in the legislative organizations, is talking to some folks involved in government, provincial government in Canada. They have a very high cigarette tax and the member of the government straight north of here in Saskatchewan explained how so many people drive to North Dakota to obtain cigarettes because they are more expensive. And I know this is only 3 cents, and I would seriously doubt that 3 cents would do that much in terms of habits. But I think Senator Janssen explained it very well when he talked about the snowbirds packing up in Texas several cartons of cigarettes that they would now purchase up here. Then we've lost money for our buildings, too. When we talk about the advertising and the mixed messages that those can send, but sometimes the tax dollars, they go to a great purpose, and I just struggle with increasing another tax that really does maybe not only continue a program but certainly starts a new program because of the way it's funded. And I want to do all