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FLOOR DEBATE

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take the leave did not do so because they could not afford the loss of the wages. Since then, many states have tried to establish a funding mechanism, but only California has been successful. In California, they simply expanded their long-standing program that provided for workers who have had a non-work-related illness to include other family members. Before I get into the specifics of this bill, I think I need to clarify a key difference between the federal law and my bill. The federal act is a mandate; my bill is not. The federal law says that if you work at a place with 50 or more employees, you may take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year to care for a sick family member or to recover from your own illness. My bill doesn't touch this area at all. If you work at a place with 50 or more employees, your right to take time off is already covered by the federal law. If you work at a place with less than 50 employees, you will have to get your employer's permission to take the time off. My bill is modeled after the concept of the Nebraska College Savings Plan. You can invest in a fund administered by the State Treasurer's Office and then draw on your investment when you need it. Like the College Savings Plan, the inducement is a tax deduction. However, the deduction in LB 37 would only apply to state taxes, since federal law doesn't provide a tax deduction for this purpose as it does for college savings. As far as I know, no other state has attempted this approach. However, because of the overwhelming success of the College Savings Plan, I am confident this approach can work. I also like the fact that this encourages people to be self-sufficient, even under the difficult circumstances they may be facing. Let me, in closing, repeat how this differs from the federal Family Medical Leave Act and Nebraska's College Saving Plan. Number one, this is not a mandate requiring employers to give their employees...excuse me. This is not a mandate requiring employers to give their employers time off. The federal Family and Medical Act is a mandate for employers with more than 50 employees. Point number two, this provides for a state income tax deduction only, while the Nebraska College Savings Plan provides for both a federal and state income tax deduction. As you can see from the fiscal note, this bill has a cost, both in terms of expense to operate the program and in reduced tax payments and revenues. In view of our uncertain economic situation, this is probably a very