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FLOOR DEBATE

March 10, 2004 LB 869

SENATOR KREMER: Okay. (Laugh) Thank you, Senator Cudaback and members of the Legislature. I'm pleased to bring LB 869 to you. It culminates a project that I inherited from Senator Dierks, my predecessor, who was the Chairman of the Ag Committee, and it essentially has two main objectives in the bill. The first, it provides additional cash-funding support for the Department of Agriculture's ongoing responsibilities under the Noxious Weed Control Act; and secondly, it provides additional authority under the act to be applied toward protective and preventative activities to address new invasive plants that have potentially destructive environmental and economic impacts. Traditionally, the...which it kind of seems to be typical the last few years, the funding for the noxious weed program has come from General Funds and \$30 of fees that were...that are charged to the, what, pesticide registration. And over the years, a little bit of history, the...in about 2001 the Legislature passed a law that said that we did not have to fund all that. Then in, I think, the next year, all the funds were taken away...or \$100,000 was transferred from the pest...from the noxious weed program to the livestock waste program. The next year, the General Funds were all taken away from the noxious weed program, and the next year, I think in 2001, later on were...or 2002, there were some of the funds provided back to the pest...or the noxious weed program. But I handed out a handout here that shows what's happened over the years and you can see that the funds have been depleted to where now the cash funds are not keeping up with the expenditures, and even on a slight growth of expenditures each year. There was always some money coming in from interest, and as there's no cash balance in there, there's no interest money coming in. And you can see the money coming in from the pesticide registration is consistent and the last few years now it's been consistently General Funds, but somewhat less than what it was at one time. So in the task force that we studied this on how we can find some funds and how to keep the program going from the state noxious weed program, which really helps coordinate the county noxious weed program, the...most of the noxious weed program is carried out by counties with county funds. But the state coordinates and gives education and help to them. I think they, what, have five, five people I think that are involved in the...five, five and a half that are hired