

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

April 7, 2004 LB 1091

honoring an old friend. And I returned to the Chamber just in time to vote a no on Raikes' amendment. And the reason that I voted no on the Raikes amendment is that 390 students. It sets the bar too high to allow the small schools in our states to take advantage of the reorganizations incentives. As we've discussed schools reorganization the last few years, the emphasis is always on reducing the number of small K-12 school districts through merger and consolidation. There are costs inherent to school consolidation, including statutory requirements that teachers be offered retirement incentives and staff development assistance if the number of teachers is reduced in a merger. There's also the cost of changes in the school logos, equipment, supplies, and so on, required by the new combined district with a new name. Without access to reorganization incentives, the statutory requirements for teachers' retirement and staff development assistance are nothing more than unfunded mandates for school districts looking to reorganize. We've discussed that in the past, with reorganization incentives promoted by Senator Coordsen. We'd probably still be offering those incentives to the schools if this nasty financial crisis had not forced us to use that money elsewhere. Unfortunately, we are not offering school reorganization incentives now. So Senator Raikes has a great idea to take up some money from the lottery funds and use them to provide school reorganization incentives, and I don't object to that idea. I think we must also reorganize incentives if we want schools to consolidate. I object to the number of students that must be in the new school district. The new district must contain more than 390 students to qualify for the incentives. I have two counties in my district that have only one school system in the entire county. Garfield County has a Class VI-Class I school system, with 352 students in the whole county. Wheeler County has a Class III school system with 190 students in the county. Greeley has 550 students in their four schools, and two of these schools are consolidating next year, but will only have 221 students in the new combined district. One of the other schools in Greeley County is 21 miles from the new consolidated district, and the other one is over 14 miles away. Now, that's just from the school. Those children live a greater distance than that. Sherman County has 476 students in two schools, with the largest school with 347 students, and the