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discussion of AM1431 to Appropriations Committee amendments, Senator Smith.

SENATOR SMITH: Thank you, Mr. President and members. We have some issues facing education today that I believe are some challenges, and I believe that we can overcome those challenges. But among those challenges, I believe, is community support. And I believe that this amendment would lead to less community support of the concept of public education. Now in my own district, or in my own legislative district, not my home school district but my home legislative district, that a school district is now even hiring a public relations officer. And these will be dollars not spent in the classroom because of some public relations, and that's certainly a local decision and I won't criticize them for that. What I'm saying is we need to develop relationships that don't cost local...that doesn't cost local school districts a lot of dollars. And we have a program here that I believe, number one, helps to educate students, no other questions asked, helps to educate students. There's not a movement afoot in here to even expand this program or create new programs to take dollars out from public education and put them into private education. There's no movement afoot to do that. But the first thing we need to do all the time is ask, are these dollars educating students? And quite frankly, I don't care in what context. But we have the dollars here that I believe are wisely used, wisely applied, and they help families and they help students, and I think that's what we should be about. I cannot support the amendment because I think it would, as I stated earlier, lead to fewer community partnerships that leads to the education of students, and I think ultimately gives a boost to public education, because public education is vital to Nebraska as well. But we know that not everyone has opted for public education, for several reasons. It might be a religious belief. It might be a concern of academic rigor. It might be lack of a program for gifted students or special needs students, whatever the case might be. Many parents, thousands of parents across Nebraska, have chosen to not participate with their children in the public education system, while they are paying taxes. The book loan program, the textbook loan program, I think is a good thing. And I don't seek to double the funding. I just seek to keep what we have here, and I think that we