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LB 348

SENATOR CUDABACK: Senator Synowiecki, you are recognized to open on AM1675 to LB 348.

SENATOR SYNOWIECKI: Thank you, Senator Cudaback, members. We had some discussion relative to this on the General File debate, relative to the portion of this bill that deals with judges' salary increases. This amendment essentially...I base this on the sense of fundamental fairness, and it's really a principled argument. The amendment simply delays the implementation of the judges' salary increase until after we can take a much more close look at, and provide a further analysis of the approach we're taking here. Essentially what the Judiciary Committee did relative to the judges' salary question was to extend to the judges what was negotiated with the state workers in our state. This agreement, the agreement with the state workers, was tailored to a group of employees whose average salary is at or around \$30,000, whose beginning salary is at or around, I believe, \$23,700. So I think fundamentally there might be some flawed logic in attempting to group a group of employees, our judges, with that of our state workers, in terms of bottom-line salaries, and in terms of how this interprets, then, to monetary gain, if you will, relative to an increase in pay. For example, a district court judge, under this agreement, for 2005, will receive a \$3,310 increase. A beginning state worker, under this agreement, receives \$712. I think that a much more logical grouping for our judges, perhaps, in an analysis of where we're at in terms of salary, would be our other constitutional officers. Our Governor currently earns \$85,000; our Attorney General currently earns \$75,000; Secretary of State, \$65,000; our Auditor of Public Accounts, \$60,000; Treasurer, \$60,000; Lieutenant Governor, \$60,000; and our Public Service Commissioners earn \$50,000 a year. If you compare and contrast that with our judges' current salary, you'll notice that a county court judge in the state of Nebraska--the lowest level in terms of jurisdiction and so forth--a county court judge earns some \$20,000 in excess of what the Governor earns in our state. So I think perhaps a more appropriate approach would be, rather than to incorporate what we have given our state workers in terms of the collective bargaining agreement, a more appropriate look, or a more appropriate analysis, perhaps, would be with our