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very much sought after position. And judging by the last...we just had a series of vacancies in the judiciary in Douglas and Sarpy county, and judging by the number of applicants, the quality of them applicants, I can assure you we are not at a critical mass relative to attracting qualified individuals, qualified attorneys to the judiciary. We are, indeed, having the best, the cream of the crop, the most qualified attorneys apply for these positions at this time. So that's the amendment I offer. It's based on some questioning, some fairness issues. It's questioning some process issues relative to how we're handling this issue for the judges. I think it deserves some level of debate. I don't think we need to have a long-winded, ongoing debate relative to this. It's really simple: Do you want to extend to the judges a collective bargaining agreement, in terms of raises, that were extended to our state workers, who earn, as you are very well aware, a dramatically lower set of raises? And my pitch to you would be, is if the judges embarked upon a collective bargaining process--which, of course, they can't--that the resulting negotiation would not have been a 3 and a 3.25 result, particularly when you take into account that the deficiencies in the retirement are being handled through a third party, if you will, and that's our citizens that access the court system. Whereas, that's not the case with our other two defined benefit plans--our teachers, our hard-working teachers, and our state troopers. Thank you, Senator Cudaback.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Thank you, Senator. On with discussion of the AM1675. Senator Bourne.

SENATOR BOURNE: Thank you, Mr. President, members. As Chair of the committee from which this bill came, I felt like I had to at least explain a few things, or you know, make the members aware of a few things. The last time the judges had a salary increase was 2002, and so they have not had a salary increase since then, July 1, 2002, so almost three years. They did increase some fees in that year, and they...but as part of the budget process, they agreed to forego a salary increase until now. And what we are giving them is 3 percent, starting on July 1, 2005, and 3.25 percent increase on July 1, 2006. This does mirror, as Senator Synowiecki mentioned, it does mirror what the state employees are getting. And Senator Synowiecki indicated that,