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FLOOR DEBATE

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LB 548

In one category, it was just recently rated as one of the 50...the top 50 highest emitters in the nation. So, yes, it's cheap. But, no, it's not even close to being one of the cleanest. So the two don't necessarily go together. That could be one of the reasons that this bill is here, is that they're looking at mandates to clean up some of the emissions. I support cleaning up the emissions. We've got a serious mercury problem in this country and in this state. We've got water bodies that we can't eat the fish out of, because there's too much mercury that has gone into the air and fallen into the water body, been consumed by the organisms into the fish, and the fish contain so much mercury that it's a threat, particularly to pregnant and nursing mothers. That's a concern to me. So keeping more of that mercury out of the air...and coal is one of the leading contributors of putting mercury into the air in our state, so we have that direct link to our coal-fired power plants. And Senator Janssen was absolutely right yesterday when he said, we do need to do more with renewable energy. We have tremendous potential for wind here. We don't have to worry about mercury emissions from wind turbines. We don't have to worry about environmental regulations and cost when we talk about generating from wind turbines or other renewable forms. So I continue to support doing things for efficiency, doing things for renewable energy, but particularly efficiency. If we reduce the need for generating electricity, we don't have all of these additional costs that require mandates that then we have to float bonds on, and the ratepayers have to pay the cost of those bonds. If we sell bonds, somebody has got to pay for that. And what concerns me about doing this is the fair, equitable nature of paying that back. I haven't heard it stated empirically that it's going to be rate-based, that it's going to be based upon the kilowatt-hours that somebody uses so everybody pays a proportionate share. I'm not certain that that's how this is going to be done. I expect it will be a charge on each utility bill, and the senior citizens that I represent and the customers paying low bills and on fixed incomes are going to pay a disproportionate share of that cost, and that concerns me. I'm not sure how this is actually going to play out. That's an issue that I'm concerned about. And the fairness of doing that, I think, is what Senator Beutler is attempting to address. For