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FLOOR DEBATE

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LB 126

provided some transitional replacement for federal REAP funds, and we should not have suggested the state offer a small incentive to encourage local elementary bond issues in communities where a large percentage of ELL and poverty students are being served and buildings are desperately needed. None of these provisions were provided, as you recall, when the bill was brought to General File. They were added in a spirit of accommodation and I believe to smooth the transition while preserving the key objectives of the bill. The net gain in cost efficiency, even given these accommodations, likely exceeds \$10 million per year. I don't want to believe the Governor is suggesting that we need not worry about equitable treatment of students. We have ELL and poverty students in a Class I elementary that are being funded at less than 60 percent of the funding rate of non-ELL and non-poverty students in Class I's in the same Class VI system. And when you consider the valuation per student that supports building construction, the disparities are even worse. I'm going to assume the Governor simply doesn't know these facts. If he did know them, I can't think he would endorse this arrangement and result. The Governor made reference to, "quality of education that the students in our small schools receive." We do not know that students in these small schools receive a quality education. Most of these districts do not ever report their assessment results to the public. They can't. The small numbers do not allow reporting without violating confidentiality. If these schools are in K-12 districts, someone would be able to analyze the results and detect if there is a problem. The loss of the school boards is one of the primary objections to LB 126. However, there would still be a school board and the parents and taxpayers are not losing a voice in their children's education; just the opposite. They are maintaining a voice in their elementary education and gaining a voice at the high school level. And from everything that I have seen, those school boards will act responsibly and in the best interest of all the children in their district. The Governor talks about the impact of forced consolidation. What about the impact of forced nonconsolidation on the majority of taxpayers and students? There are far more taxpayers and students who are negatively affected by the constraints on the efforts of their school boards to maximize the quality of education while holding property taxes to reasonable levels.