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FLOOR DEBATE

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after the report of that task force to the Legislature, which is what LB 1208 is. The task force had a dozen members of so. It was specified in the bill. There were four members of the Legislature that served on that task force: Senator Stuhr, Senator Baker, Senator Don Pederson, and myself. The task force met several times this past summer, had very strong support from a staff group here in the Legislature, involved a number of Education Committee staff people, as well as Fiscal Office staff people. We addressed the issue, I think thoroughly, and have come up with a recommendation. As I mentioned, that recommendation is LB 1208. I'll try to summarize quickly what I think are the main features of that. First, there's substantial reorganization involved. Right now, there are distance education consortia, as organizational units throughout the state, which are primarily responsible for providing distance education services. Those are phased out and the responsibility transferred to ESU, educational service units. Those educational service units, by the way, do have as a part of their mission statement the provision of technology service, so it is, I think, a good fit, and also one that eliminates some duplicative organizational structure. Network Nebraska, the statewide backbone, is a key part of this proposal, as is the Chief Information Officer. Basically, what we're suggesting is that--in LB 1208--is that school districts would participate or have the opportunity to participate by joining Network Nebraska. That opportunity would be provided with the assistance of the Chief Information Officer. This is not something that is subsidized by the state; this is something that school districts would have a great deal of flexibility. They could choose what they wanted to do, but Network Nebraska and its services would be made available to them. There would be a Distance Education Council created to coordinate the activities of different school districts in exchanging coursework between them, and I will just mention at this point that a main emphasis of this whole approach is to encourage school districts and financially incent them to share academic coursework amongst themselves. Right now in Nebraska, we do have a number of school districts that use distance education, but the number is small. We would like very much to encourage more of that, and particularly to get more of the school districts in the state involved. There is, I think, strong incentive in this bill for school districts to