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FLOOR DEBATE

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discussion? Senator Schrock.

SENATOR SCHROCK: Mr. President, members of the Legislature, first of all I want to thank Senator Beutler for his interest in water. And I think your interest has had a positive impact on our water policy in this state. Senator Beutler, fees may be appropriate at some point in time. I'm not ready to go there. And one of the reasons I'm not ready to go there...and, of course, you refer to the Republican River Basin which is represented almost inclusively by Senator Baker and I, and Senator Pederson has a little strip down there in southern Lincoln County, but it doesn't amount to much of his constituency. The farmers in Nebraska, especially in that basin, would be glad to move their land into Kansas or Colorado because they would reduce their property tax bill by 30 to 40 percent and in some cases almost 50 percent. If we had a low property tax structure for the state of Nebraska for agriculture, I would be more inclined to agree with you. But we've had some tough issues down there, and we did not address the issue soon enough. And I think part of that goes back to the state policy on water and the attitude we had by the former Attorney General. Irrigated agriculture adds \$4.5 billion to the economy of this state, and yet we don't give them any tax incentives. We don't...I do appreciate the Revenue Committee willing to move ag land values from 80 percent of market value to 75 percent. But the tax burden on agriculture is rather large. And when we have some decent revenue times, it seems inappropriate to do this, to try and put a fee on irrigation water. Senator Beutler, I pledge to work with you to solve the issues. I think we've gone a long ways toward solving the issues. I think the CREP program that Congressman Osborne was able to get money for, that's idling 70,000 acres. That has an economic impact in that area of the state when you idle 70,000 acres. And I do think the river will flow better. I do think we'll get water in Harlan County, not only for irrigators but for recreation, and it will help the overall economy. So there's trade-offs here. But when you've had the kind of problems they've had in the last few years with the drought, and we wouldn't be talking about this now if it hadn't been for the drought. There would have been enough water to go around. We wouldn't have our water-short years with Kansas. But it's kind