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FLOOR DEBATE

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2006-07 levies would fall below 6 cents per \$100 of taxable valuation. This amendment also eliminates language giving the community college the authority to exceed the levy limit to compensate for shortfalls in state aid appropriations, as compared to statutory computed state aid eligibility. Currently, this exception is only available through 2007 and '08. The amendment would eliminate this exception sooner, and the state and the Legislature will appropriate \$24.6 million in fiscal year '06 and '07 and thereafter. Back in 1999 and 2000, when we put cash reserve funds into property tax relief through the community colleges, property taxes fell around 43 percent of the total funding of community colleges. And in 2001, it was nearly 18...down to 12 percent for the total funding. These are figures from the community colleges' web site. We have not funded our aid program to community colleges for the past three years. As a consequence, levies are getting higher and they're also getting farther apart. In the west, which is Western Nebraska Community College, the levy is 9.82 cents. In the east, Metro levies are at 5.64. If you noticed the handout that went around, you can see by the valuations of the Western Plains...Western Nebraska Community College valuation compared to Metro's valuation, billions of dollars' difference. We use state aid to education to equalize funding among our K-12 districts. Omaha Public Schools receives \$139 million, the Lincoln Public Schools receive \$47 million, the Grand Island Public Schools receive \$30 million, and so on. By statute, community colleges are to be funded to a prescribed level, which in 2006-2007 needs an additional \$24.6 million. Western Nebraska Community College district is a poor district, meaning their valuation is insufficient to fully fund their needs with a 6 cent levy. Therefore, if the state is going to aid schools, then there must be money appropriated to fund the statutory level of community colleges, or the statutes are, in effect, meaningless. The way that the formula is set up, 40 percent is to be funded by the state, 40 percent by property tax, and 20 percent by tuition. At the present time, the state has not funded their 40 percent for the last about three years or so. This, by adding the \$24.6 million, will increase the funding to the 40 percent level which is statutory. As has been mentioned in some of the other debate on LB 968, the state, when times were tough, as they call it, took away some of the money.