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FLOOR DEBATE

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a bigger burden on our rural schools to utilize distance services. We're needing more dollars to upgrade those, so what we're doing is we're taking bits and bits each year. The next year it's \$500,000. The next year it's \$750,000. And then years 2009-2010 to 2015-16, \$1 million each year and thereafter. So what is happening to our long...or our distance learning funds, they are continuing to decline. Now, once the structure is in place maybe that's not a problem, but we're going to be looking at increased transport costs to be billed to the users, and the total billable costs estimated to be about \$2.34 million in 2006-2007, and \$2.31 million in 2007-2008. So we are going to have increased costs, number one, in the equipment and, number two, in the transport fees. So we're taking from that fund to do teacher excellence when we really haven't totally funded the program. I don't have a problem with this. I'm not sure we need to implement at this point in time until we realize that the structure of the long distance learning is in place, and then implement the program. So maybe we need to have a later implementation date for the excellent teaching program fund. That's my concern. Is now the time to take the money when it definitely was used or to be used for the long distance education fund, and implement at a later date? Thank you.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Thank you, Senator McDonald. (Visitors introduced.) On with discussion of the Smith amendment, FA621. Senator Combs.

SENATOR COMBS: Thank you, Mr. President and members of the body. I was talking on a conference call that I have every week with my school superintendents this morning, and we were discussing LB 1208, which was before this amendment came up, and we were concerned then, as Senator McDonald is, about the funding that is available for the mandate. And I just wondered if Senator Raikes might yield to a question.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Senator Raikes, are you available?

SENATOR RAIKES: Yes.

SENATOR COMBS: They were saying that the E-rate, in order to keep their funding, right now their IT is funded 74 percent