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FLOOR DEBATE

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through the E-rate program, one of the schools, and a couple others are about 60 percent, which is, you know, about \$16,000 to \$20,000, and they said that that has to be the cheapest or they cannot get that money. Is that true?

SENATOR RAIKES: The E-rate is a federal program, Senator, and part of their requirement is that you have to, I think, if you're going to get E-rate on...or an E-rate payment on your telecom costs, you have to demonstrate that you have done a good job of searching the market and making sure that that's a good deal, yes.

SENATOR COMBS: Okay. Because they were afraid that they would lose that funding if the required network that's to be used, the Nebraska network, the Network Nebraska, if that is not the cheapest. Could that funding be jeopardized?

SENATOR RAIKES: I don't think so, Senator. This is something that we...that we spent a great deal of time dealing with on the Distance Education Task Force, and I will tell you that one of the efforts of that task force, and it's reflected in this bill, was to make sure that school districts had plenty of options to pursue as far as filing for E-rate. In other words, they can do it as individual school districts if they choose, they can do it through the ESU if they choose, or there's a...they can have the chief information officer, Brenda Decker, do the filing. So there's great flexibility and I think no danger, I will just say, as near as I know, that they would be ineligible for E-rate because of this organizational change.

SENATOR COMBS: Okay. Thank you. One other concern that we were discussing was the bill calls for 85 percent of the ongoing...the fees to be paid, less what you get from the feds in the formula. But there are schools that are not equalized and I don't think that they would have any funding extra to pay for the mandate. Could he yield to one more question, Senator Raikes, please?

SENATOR RAIKES: Yes.

SENATOR COMBS: Yes, is that...would that be true, that if they