

at the issues of indigent care and the problems there, and there, and there, and we didn't do much. It wasn't until we went to the DRG system that we really saw the effects on indigent care. The DRG system ended up not allowing for the cost shifting in care that once was available when there wasn't that restriction on federal Medicare payments. Now we are seeing the consequences of that tightening up of the federal Medicare program, and you don't see the funding flexibility that was once there. Hospitals are not able to charge adequately for...or more than adequately for some individuals in order to cover the cost of those who have no money, have no resources to pay for their hospital care. And so we do face a dilemma, and it is a dilemma that is only going to get worse, as Senator Johnson and I and others already know. Senator Pappas has worked a great deal on this issue as well. LB 126 is an attempt to try to work with the hospitals and the counties to get data, uniform data, usable data. The counties have been sending us information. We tried to get some in the past, and what we get is so hard to understand and so not on an equal basis that we have no way to know exactly what the real costs are. This is a problem recognized by the hospital association and they have taken some leadership. Last year they started working on a primary health care network up in Douglas County where the indigent care problem is most acute, and they have sat down over the past year and worked on a data collection system, they, the hospitals, that is, in Douglas County. The problem in Douglas County is mostly focused on St. Joe's and the Medical Center, but the private hospitals there have realized their responsibility and in the last year and a half have taken on that responsibility quite well. They have been meeting together, and with the county, to come up with a way in which to get the information to know how much does it cost. That is the bottom line, how much does indigent care cost in Douglas County, how much does indigent care cost across the State of Nebraska? Until we get that question answered, I, and Senator Johnson, and Senator Pappas, and others that want to see a solution to the problem, are going to have a tough time coming to you asking you for funding either through the counties or the state to deal with the issue. We must know how much it will cost, and there is a lot of bills before us this year that are going to cost a lot of money that we don't know exactly how much it will end up costing and we are likely to pass, but I think most of us feel much more comfortable with an issue when we have a grasp of what the total fiscal impact will be. So that is what the intent of LB 126 was. Now we have sat down with the hospital association and have worked with them, and it is my understanding that they