

close to where it ought to be. Now, frankly, I can understand the political realities of the times which says sometimes you give up a little to get a little or etcetera, and I might well understand that. If I thought we could not pass this and we could get Medicaid reduced the entire... down to 10 percent this year at a cost of \$6 million or \$7 million to the state, I would say that would be a fair trade, because, frankly, that provides for property tax relief and maybe the people of the state can wait one more year to try to get up to where they ought to be. But, frankly, the proposal that Senator Maresh offers is a \$1 increase this year and a \$1 increase next year which will dilute the opportunity to come back next year and try to raise that no matter what the revenue situations are. So what we are really being asked to do here is say as we have been asked so many times before that we will give special interests a little help and we will do this and that and the other for other groups or interests, but for the average individual we are not going to be able to help them, and not only that, but we are also going to make it very difficult to help them next year because we are going to give them a very token amount, \$1 increase next year. Had I known that this was going to happen and there wasn't any corresponding sort of proposal here, I would have prepared my amendment to eliminate the sales tax on food and put that on the bill. As Senator Maresh and I have discussed, I felt that maybe this was not the time for me to be pushing that on the floor of the Legislature. But I assure you, Senator Maresh, and the other members of the body that if this bill should come back to be amended, that the amendment to eliminate the sales tax on food will be offered the next time it reaches Final Reading, because, in fact, if we are going to make a sham of the credit system and if there is going to not be any resulting understanding of providing for basic property tax relief or something else with those dollars, then I see no reason to try to be restrained in this regard, and I don't think the rest of the members of this Legislature should either. If the credit isn't going to try to keep pace with inflation, if it is not intended to do that, that signal ought to be made very clearly so the people of this state can recognize that what we have to be about doing is eliminating the sales tax on food and giving the average individual an exemption like every other special interest group in this state has been able to manage to get from this Legislature in recent years. I would very much oppose bringing this back for this amendment, and if it does come back, I want to promise this body that they will have an opportunity to eliminate the sales tax on food the next time it comes up for Final Reading.

SPEAKER MARVEL: Senator Chambers.