

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you, Mr. President, and members, going back to last year and actually if you go back a few years before that an issue before this body has been the question of prenatal care for our poor women in this state. We did have, for a couple of years, initiatives to provide for a high risk pregnancy program in Nebraska. In the meantime, the federal government, the Congress adopted an option under the Medicaid program to provide a targeted program in this area. And so we dropped that other initiative and went last year to adopt the option to provide under our Medicaid program coverage for these poor women who have less than 100 percent of poverty and also for infants under one and three and under as well for children, to provide for in the case of the women prenatal care so they could bring their baby to term healthy and also for the kids, under a poor income household, to have adequate health care. We did adopt that last year but as we were adopting that legislation the Congress, recognizing the wisdom of this program, changed from 100 to 185 percent as to what they would allow the states under this option. So this bill would take us to that 185 percent of poverty level. What this would do is provide for approximately 3,000 more Nebraskans to have, in the case of women, prenatal care; in the case of children, adequate health care. Both are very targeted needs in Nebraska and elsewhere in the country. Pregnant women need prenatal care. It's important. It helps to bring babies to term healthy. It saves money in the long run as you don't have babies born with low birth weight, then at that stage they need excessive care, expensive care and then this will help through prenatal care to keep that from happening as much as we can. In terms of kids, and we have talked a lot about children in this Legislature recently, I think we, obviously, see the need for children to have adequate health care and then when they're born to poverty and they're born to households of low income those children deserve adequate health care. It's important to them and it's important to us that our children have decent health care so they have healthy lives and can grow up strong and live to a...healthy lives. Now, in addition, we also provide aged, blind and disabled coverage going from 85 to 100 percent of coverage. Again, dealing with the aged, blind and disabled this would provide another 186 people with additional coverage. This is really, you know, simple in terms of what we did last year, just extends it beyond where we did last year. I want to emphasize a couple of points. Number one, it's targeted. It's targeted to aged, blind and disabled. It's targeted to kids in poverty settings and it's targeted to pregnant women who are poor, all very