

PRESIDENT: Thank you. Senator Withem, did you wish to speak on the suspension?

SENATOR WITHEM: Yes, very briefly. Now we are on a suspension motion, I think it is proper to talk about whether you agree with the amendment or whether you don't, and I would like to speak on the relative merits of the amendment. I have no problem with members of the body who have ideas on which we can do a better job of assuring that those people that are teaching our young people are, in fact, qualified to do so. There are probably a number of ideas out there. The Speaker has one and we are going to be debating that a little later on in the session, about beefing up our Professional Practices Commission in the area of teaching. Legitimate ideas in this area ought to be considered. They ought to be considered the way that LB 575 was considered, a bill introduced, a public hearing in front of the Education Committee or Government Committee or the Business and Labor Committee, if that is where it should go, lots of public input, the committee considering the pros and cons, and a proposal being advanced on to the floor. It ought not to be... a major change like this ought not to be added to a bill on the floor of the Legislature. What does probationary status mean? What probationary status means is that an individual can be discharged for any reason or no reason. No reason has to be given, if you don't like the color, literally, if you don't like the color of their hair; literally, if it was a basketball coach and the coach lost the big game. Literally, if a school board member doesn't like a grade that a teacher gave to a particular student, the teacher can be discharged because there need be no reason given. In one of my trips a couple of years ago looking at some schools in the state, I found that it is common practice in some school districts to automatically discharge teachers before their probationary period is extended, just automatically get rid of them, and they do that, and there is no recourse by the teacher. What this amendment will do, it will say that up through five years a person can be discharged for absolutely no reason. They do not have to give rationale as to the teacher is not doing a good job; the teacher is not meeting his or her duties; the teacher maybe did a good job before but isn't doing a good job now; the teacher was insubordinate. None of those reasons have to be given. After probationary status is extended, then a teacher can be discharged but they have to give good reasons, they have to give good sustainable reasons for discharging the teacher and they do that. There are a lot of teacher discharge hearings around the state today, and many