

PRESIDENT: Senator Withem, are you handling those? All right.

SENATOR WITHEM: Yes, Mr. President, members of the body, LB 651 is an Education Committee priority bill brought to us by Senator Hall. The purpose of the bill is to clarify or clarify, if you're on one side of the issue, change, I guess, if you're on the other side of the issue, the manner in which SSIG monies are to be distributed. This is a pot of money that comes, some from the state government, some from the federal government for purposes of providing financial assistance to students that are in need. This issue always brings about heated discussion between representatives of the private postsecondary institutions and the public postsecondary institutions. When 651 was referred to the Education Committee and at the hearing, by the committee statement, you can see that the same sort of dispute continued with those from the independents in support of the bill. Those from the publics were there in opposition. The committee amendments, I do not want to characterize as removing the opposition from the bill, from the privates. They can speak for themselves as to what their position is on 651 with the committee amendments. What the committee amendments do though is they answer...they are the Education Committee's response to the legitimate concerns that we heard from the public institutions. They were concerned that the bill would not allow part-time students to qualify any longer if it had passed in its original form. Committee amendments make it clear that part-time students are, in fact, eligible to compete for and be considered for the SSIG. Number two, there was a concern that poor individuals at ending public institutions would stand behind middle-class individuals in line from attending private schools in line, that all of the money under the way the bill was written would go to people attending private schools. That was not the intent of the bill, is not what the Education Committee wanted to see happen anyway, so we indicate that when the Coordinating Commission sets the guidelines, they may take students financial abilities into consideration. In other words, they may set a cap that if you make...have so much resources personally available that you don't qualify for this program. That makes if somewhat more of an acceptable sort of bill. And we also put in the committee amendments that they shall consult with the Nebraska Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators in determining the award priorities. In other words, that they will take into consideration input from the professionals that really understand this area of student