

SPEAKER BARRETT: Thank you. Discussion, Senator Withem, followed by Senator Hefner.

SENATOR WITHEM: Mr. Speaker, members of the body, I was not going to speak on this issue, I was just going to vote on it. But as the debate on the committee amendments went along I didn't hear anybody speaking on the things, I guess, that I wanted people to think about. This is just more something to think about, a thought process in making a determination on the bill. Maybe Senator Rod Johnson, who started to raise the questions of how does this fit in with everything else that we're doing, was the beginning of asking the right, proper questions. Unfortunately, from that last vote, it's pretty obvious what is happening to this point, that in...and some of you look at me shocked, like I'm saying something that nobody had noticed. But it's probably a great shock to people that there were...most of the Republicans in here voted against the committee amendments, most of the Democrats in here voted for it, and I'm sure that's a pure coincidence at this particular level, but I just pointed that out to you as an observation. Basically, my thought process has been on this bill because I am not one of those partisan Democrats that began, early on, bashing on 773. I supported 773. I did not join in, last year, as the revenues started coming in, bashing the Governor, bashing other people for the tax increase. I want to do what I think is good public policy. I think what you have to do is start with a basic set of facts. The one fact is we have a surplus in our budget, that seems to be the biggest, dominant political factor hanging over our heads this session, a surplus, the likes of which very few of us can remember ever having had. How did we get that surplus? We got it through two factors. We got it through a lot of growth in our economy. If there had been no 773, we'd still have a surplus, I think that's fairly obvious. There has been a lot of growth in our economy from the depths of the recession, some four or five years ago, to where we are now there's been a lot of growth. We also got a surplus, part of that surplus is because we changed the rates in LB 773. We are collecting more dollars in taxes than we would have had we not passed 773. I think it's pointless at this time to blame the Governor, to blame Vard Johnson, to blame anybody. There is no blame. We, in good faith, thought we were passing a bill that was...that was revenue neutral, with the exception of a fudge factor. It didn't happen. Based on the knowledge that we had we did that. As a result of that a lot of people in the state have been suffering politically for this. The Governor is the