

SENATOR MORRISSEY: Thank you, Senator Robak. Before we go to our next speaker, I would like to announce that Senator Schrock has some visitors today. In the south balcony, we have 19 seniors from Loomis Public Schools, with their sponsor. Will you folks please stand up and let us welcome you to the Legislature. Thanks for coming. Our next speaker is Senator Johnson.

SENATOR R. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, members, I rise to oppose the Schmit amendment. Between the debate we had on General File and now on Select File, I took some time to try and find out how the \$25,000 figure was reached, and as I understand it, it was an arbitrary figure, when they were drafting the original language to the bill that authorized this program. And I guess what Senator Schmit is doing is saying, well, that arbitrary figure should be lowered, at least for the smaller operators. Now this program is designed principally, or this bill, I should say, is principally designed to generate dollars to put into the Petroleum Release Action Fund for cleanup. What Senator Schmit's amendment does is take us in the opposite direction to some extent. It will cost us money, more money out of this fund to make up the difference in what the petroleum operator or the petroleum marketer out there pays in sort of his up front fees, and what this fund will take over and pay from the consumer program that we have set up. Now I am all for a social program to help our petroleum operators out here in the State of Nebraska, but I am not ready to pay all of it for them, and if we go down this path for our petroleum marketers on the one hand, should we not do the same for fertilizer operators and anyone else handling hazardous substances? It seems to me that we have to ask them to contribute something, and I just feel like this amendment goes too far. In fact, I have been told, I don't have any verification of these figures, but I have been told this amendment could place another half a million dollar drain on the fund, and that is why I say we are actually going in the opposite direction. The purpose behind 409 was to try and set up a funding mechanism where more funds would go into the program when the funds are needed, and in fact, we are going the other way, we are creating a bigger drain on the fund by lowering this deduction that the operators have to pay. So from my perspective, this is an amendment that I understand where Senator Schmit is coming from and where others are coming from but I am also somewhat defending the fund in that it just seems like we are asking the fund to pick up too much of the cost of