

SPEAKER BAACK: Thank you, Madam President and colleagues. This is...the amendment that I'm offering here is to strike an amendment that was...I'm asking to return this to Select File to strike an amendment that was offered by Senator Horgan on Select File on LB 207. LB 207 is the clean-up bill on the open enrollment program, here in the state, that we passed a couple of years ago. The reason that I offer this amendment is that there were a number of...there were some comments made on the floor of the Legislature that I think need to be cleared up for the record more than anything. What happened was is on the floor of the Legislature, none of this was done with any malicious intent or anything like that, it's simply a matter of understanding Omaha's deseg. plan and being involved in the process of open enrollment as we went through it the last couple of years, and Senator Horgan would have not been aware of some of the things that went on in the last couple of years. As we passed open enrollment, a couple of years ago, we had to provide some exceptions, an exception for the Omaha Public Schools because they do operate under a desegregation plan. And in order for open enrollment to be constitutional, we simply have to provide them with some real leeway in the way that they have open enrollment applied to their district. And the Omaha district has worked very, very diligently on this and have come up with a plan that...as to how they will implement the open enrollment plan. And they've done an excellent job of that. I made a presentation to the board last fall and visited with the board about their plan, and their plan certainly does follow the letter of the law, as well as it could be done. One of the things that I wanted to make sure didn't happen with open enrollment was I did not want the open enrollment to be construed as being something that would promote white flight from the schools that do have desegregation plans. And so in order to do that we had to provide Omaha with a lot of leeway as to how they implemented their program. There were some things said on the floor of the Legislature that the students that were asking here...What the amendment actually did was said that there were a number of students who have been attending the Westside Schools for a number of years, and those students have been paying tuition all of this time, and now they want to use open enrollment instead of paying tuition. And these are all students who actually live...reside in the Omaha Public Schools. This amendment said that if you paid tuition in the last two years, then you could use the open enrollment over the next couple of years, and that provides them with that...with the...the parents with that educational opportunity choice.