

was asked, why did you look at this program and not other programs and why did you pick this program out? One of the initial philosophical hurdles that I went over was looking at all of the state government operations and other costs of state government, what had not received, what type of operation or what type of appropriation had not received cuts over the last biennium and state aid was obviously one of those areas that had not received a cut in the last biennium. Obviously we passed LB 1059 which increased substantially the amount of state aid that was paid out to school districts across the state, so even though this is a cut, it is a cut of a program that is part of the general state aid package and the general state aid package was not cut over the last couple of years but was obviously, as we all know, increased substantially. And then I looked at the four criteria that I started talking about in trying to decide what programs are we going to look at when we decide whether we're going to cut back a program, eliminate a program and, Senator Robinson, just as an aside, you mentioned that I had never voted to cut any other programs. I think the Appropriations Committee substantially cut the budget last year with the 2 percent cut and the 3 percent cut for this year, so it's not very pleasant to come to the body again and suggest additional cuts. But what are those criteria that we need to look at? The first criteria that I looked at was what was the public policy for this program initially? The legislative history is clear. The public policy for the wards of the court program, as I said on the committee amendments, was to help reimburse the cost that a school district incurs in educating students who are housed not with a property taxpaying resident, but a group home or a facility that is not a property taxpayer. It is, in a sense, a kind of impact aid and I would agree with those who support that type of impact aid. That's good public policy. I endorse that. However, what happened, as I said, is that the program moved beyond that initial public policy and where I...the decisive point for me was this. And this is another misconception that I think we have to squelch right off the bat and that is I know the foster care people are opposed to this amendment, but none of...this amendment does not, in any way, shape or form cut back aid to the foster care program whatsoever. I say there is some concern that school districts will not take foster care children if this aid is not there. That, to me, is a red herring, that's a red herring. I would suggest to the members that they go back and ask for proof of that and if there are school districts that are discouraging foster care children from going to their schools, let's find out