

currently have. And I think it will lead to the kinds of problems that we had many times frequently prior to the enactment of LB 661 a few years ago. So regardless of how you feel on this issue, I would strongly urge that you do not begin a route of that kind of intrusion because of what it will inevitably lead to. Fringe benefits run about 35 percent, rule of thumb, of the cost of employees, whether it's the private sector or the public sector. We used to run those comparisons annually and I'm not sure if it's still done or not, but I assume it is, and it varied a little bit but the state was not significantly different within a percentage or so but it is an integral part of the salary benefit or the employment benefit of the employee and is a significant part, fringe benefit, of the cost to the employer. And as long as we have collective bargaining, it ought to be a balanced collective bargaining from both the employee's viewpoint and the state's viewpoint. And I just cannot too strongly urge you not to start down a path where we will return to the Legislature attempting to resolve those issues. And it has worked. You will recall that we had a handout the other day which indicated a comparison of state employees and there were some asterisks on that handout which indicated where some of those benefits had been negotiated. And that's how it should remain. I think it's to the benefit of the state and it's to the benefit of the state employees as well to allow that system to function without the intrusion of legislation to try and restrict the bargaining of some of those employment benefits. And I would hope the body would reject the amendment.

PRESIDENT MOUL: Thank you, Senator Warner. Senator Moore.

SENATOR MOORE: Madam President and members, I, too, rise to oppose Senator Bernard-Stevens' amendment. And I know he said in his opening it was not his intent to do an end run on the bargaining process and I know he is sincere in that, but nevertheless it is. As very eloquently stated by Senator Warner, this Legislature set up LB 661, a bargaining process for our state employees. This is something that I think should be in that process as we bargain those salary and the benefit increases this summer and fall in preparation for our next biennium. I think that is the proper time to debate this and I'm not saying it's all wrong at all but I think that's the time...that is the time to debate this on that process because it, obviously, does have an impact on that total benefit package. And I think that needs to be discussed in conjunction