

I work in the personnel department there and there I have been able to work on questions like benefit policies and the cost involved and so I know the problems that this causes for employers. I have had that perspective. Nevertheless, I come from a perspective that says the employee ought to have a minimum level of protection when they have health concerns that affect them either directly, themselves or with their family members, either a child or a parent or perhaps through the birth of a child. So there are two ways to look at it and I think if you want to characterize a vote for LB 145 as antiemployer then I certainly would want to categorize a vote against LB 145 as antiemployee and antifamily. I don't think this Legislature is. I think we need to look at both sides on this issue. Now let me also follow up on Senator Bernard-Stevens' amendment where I think Senator Withem and Senator Bernard-Stevens may have not been as clear about his amendment versus LB 145. In their comments, they tended to characterize Senator Bernard-Stevens' amendment as taking LB 145 and only applying it to state employees. And if that's the impression you got, it's wrong because what LB 145 does is provide unpaid leave without benefits. That is currently provided for to all state employees. That is part of the package of benefits that are now available to state employees. So what I am asking for, for all employees, in businesses with more than 100 employees, is at least that minimum benefit of six weeks unpaid leave over a two-year period. Now on top of that state employees have paid sick leave and paid vacation leave and some comp time and some other benefits that maybe some other employees in other businesses don't have. But the negotiation question is not applicable here because we have already negotiated and established among the benefits a six-week unpaid leave. What Senator Bernard-Stevens was trying to do was add onto that a paid parental leave with paid benefits on top of the pay and that is not what I'm asking for in this bill for their employees. So please understand that they're not the same and the difference is vitally important. When you talk about paid leave, and I think that is ultimately something we want to see provided for in a benefit package, you do have the option and potential for abuse, much more than you do for unpaid leave. I mean, one of the big concerns out there is, well, people will take advantage of this benefit and it will harm the employer. Well, in fact, when you talk about unpaid leave with no benefits, you're not going to have somebody taking that option without thinking about it very carefully and choosing it because it's absolutely the best interest that they have for themselves