

SPEAKER BAACK: I suppose so, yeah, go ahead.

SENATOR WESELY: (Laughter.) Thank you. Mr. Speaker, members, the issue of childhood immunizations is one that's been before this body for a number of years. It originated with a piece of legislation that came before the Banking, Commerce and Insurance Committee introduced by Senator Smith dealing with the mandated benefit of providing coverage in our health insurance plans for this activity. Rather than mandating that benefit, it was felt that the better course of action was to set up a state program just as we did in the mammography area to try and attack this very important problem. And so LB 1046 was introduced by myself and Senator Smith in 1990 to establish such a program. In the fall, on October 16, 1990, of that year, a number of different representatives from the various departments of health, social services, the Academy of Family Physicians, the Academy of Pediatrics got together with myself, Senator Smith and others to discuss how we might address the issue of immunizing our children. Out of that, LB 431 was drafted and introduced by myself, Senator Schellpeper and Senator Smith. And Senator Smith did leave us at the end of last session, has been replaced ably by Senator Bohlke; and Senator Bohlke has added her name to the bill and has now picked it as her priority bill. The question before us and the issue that has been raised deals with the whole overall concern that our preschool children are not being adequately vaccinated. Studies have indicated that only about 60 percent of the children in Nebraska, preschool age, are adequately...appropriately vaccinated. That means about 40 percent of our young children are not appropriately immunized and thus they're exposed to a number of childhood diseases. Those include the measles, mumps, rubella, diptheria, tetanus, pertussis or whooping cough, polio and bacterial meningitis. These various diseases, through vaccination and immunization, can be avoided. The threat of this disease can be eliminated and for the most part we've seen a drastic reduction in exposure to these diseases which were once quite common in our country. But we have seen, as a result of this, a drop in young children being immunized an increasing number of cases of measles. There were 250 cases each in 1989 and 1990, and an additional concern that as we see immunizations drop the cases will increase. And the potential is there again for these diseases once thought to be eradicated could return. There are a number of reasons in the original bill of why we tried to see some program put in place. It was indicated to us early on that the state can buy