

opposed to the amendment for some of the reasons that have been indicated by some of the previous speakers. My opposition to this aspect of the committee amendment is more rhetorical in what's the point. I can understand that we want to provide some policy direction. We could do that on any number of bills that are coming forth. I know that there certainly is a tie between welfare and health care. We try to address that with Medicaid and with some other bills and policies that are on the books. I think that everybody can agree that there are certainly times when health care is a serious problem and health insurance, as this amendment deals with, is certainly in some people's minds not affordable, not accessible. In other people's minds it is. It has been an issue that has been hotly debated for the past 18 months. I believe, at this particular time, the American public has spoken on government's answer to the health care crisis if there, in fact, was a crisis. And so my point is that we can banter this back and forth as has been done on a lot of occasions. I would prefer to see this taken out of the Welfare Reform Act as it was not included in the original bill and we get on to the provisions of what this bill directly leads to. You know, we can talk about the tragic circumstances that are out there. We all have empathy for that and we can talk about the responsibility of parents and what their highest priority in their budgeting process is. I'm one of the few in the body that have sat down with people also and discussed this particular issue on the affordability of health care and the premiums and where it can fit into their budgets. And many times people consciously make decisions to not purchase health insurance when they can and then they go down and buy the new pickup or they buy a house a little larger than maybe what they could otherwise. For every story of tragedy out there, there is also a story out there relative to people that can afford it that decide not to choose to purchase it. This situation, as I indicated before, is not that I don't feel that the issue ought to be discussed, it's not that we shouldn't work on it. There are a variety of bills out there, a variety of senators that have a great deal of interest in this that will continue to work on this. My support for the Witek amendment is that I would rather have this discussion in a comprehensive fashion on how we can work towards making our overall medical care system better and not as a feel-good intent amendment to the welfare bill. Thank you.

SENATOR CROSBY: Thank you, Senator Maurstad. Senator Witek.