

SENATOR MCKENZIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and members of the body, I rise to share a point I heard this morning on, I guess, Good Morning America, about the number of employees in this nation who are working at minimum wage. Two-thirds of all employees in this country who are able to work at minimum wage are women. And it seems to me the debate continues about whether or not we can increase minimum wage and its impact on business. So, in light of Senator Maurstad's arguments, if we cannot provide through the wage we offer to those people who are willing to work a standard of living by which they can survive on, and then we say we are not willing to adjust for cost of living in terms of eligibility for programs such as welfare and ADC, then it seems to me that we're giving those people a double whammy. We tell them business can't afford to pay you more and we tell them we aren't going to even consider the cost of living that we allow for people who are above minimum wage in considering whether or not you're able to feed your family and your children and clothe them. And I think that that's another part of the argument that has to be considered in light of this section that Senator Witek is attempting to remove. The other point I want to make, Senator Chambers mentioned, and that's that the cost or the Consumer Price Index is used in this state to adjust many different levies or lids, and just as an example it is the...one of the factors used when we adjust the allowable growth rate for cities, for counties and, more importantly, for schools, that allowable excess cost rate, the allowable growth rate that we provide to schools each year, that four to six and a half percent is adjusted based on recommendations from the School Finance Review Committee using the cost of living increases. It is an important factor. It's used to measure whether or not we are keeping pace with inflation and the cost of living, and I would hate to see us not consider it in something as important as ADC payments. Thank you.

SPEAKER WITHEM: Thank you, Senator McKenzie. Senator Wesely, followed by Senators Crosby, Witek, Chambers, Jensen and Maurstad.

SENATOR WESELY: Okay. Let me just make a couple of quick points. And, again, there's been...this is not a simple issue, the standard of need and its relationship with other programs, and there's been some confusion with some of the exchange with some of the individuals on exactly what's going on, and I will attempt to answer questions as best I can. But, again, the point I want to make is that currently, because we have not