

SENATOR WITEK: Does Senator Wesely get to open on this, no?

SPEAKER WITHEM: I'm assuming you've already opened earlier in the morning?

SENATOR WITEK: Okay. Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature, I will be voting, and I'm sure this is no surprise, in opposition to the committee amendments. I feel it's wrong to make a decision at this time. We do not have any of the fiscal, or very little of the fiscal information on this, and I understand that they can't give it to us formally out of fiscal until something is adopted, but I think something along the lines of telling us how many people that might be...how large we're expanding this pool as far as numbers of people and attaching it to the Consumer...when we attach it to the Consumer Price Index, what kind of a change that will make on the child care issues. We did have some numbers on that and that was in the millions of dollars. This is going to be a very expensive expansion of the welfare reform if these committee amendments are adopted, and Nebraska, to me, seems like the only state that is expanding welfare instead of reforming welfare. Other states are moving to reform welfare. The federal government is moving to reform welfare. We, in Nebraska, now are choosing, if this amendment is adopted, to expand welfare and I think that's the wrong direction. I think the whole reason that we've even gotten into the subject of welfare reform is because of the cost and I know people have said that, you know, it shouldn't come down to the fiscal, but it is coming down to the fiscal because that's essentially what we are here for is to find some balance in these types of government program and the growth in this area has been tremendous and beyond anything that the taxpayers in Nebraska can afford to sustain. And if we continue along this lines of expansion like are in this committee amendment, we will not be able to sustain this kind of a growth and I hope that people will think very carefully before they choose to adopt this committee amendment. It substantially expands the welfare reform that is in the green copy. It is ideas that, as far as I know, did not receive public hearing because this was adopted after the public hearing. I've talked to members of the Health Committee and it was discussed after within the committee itself and I think that's it's the wrong way that they're going with welfare. This, to me, you can't even call this welfare reform. This is welfare expansion. It will, I think, be very costly even though we don't know that yet and I hope people will vote