

in the north balcony. First, Senator Brown has 60 fourth graders from Hillside Elementary School in Omaha, and their teacher. And Senator Owen Elmer has 12 students and four adults from Beaver Valley School, and their teachers. They're also in the north balcony. Would all of you please rise and be recognized by the Legislature. Thank you all for joining us today. Senator Beutler, your light is next.

SENATOR BEUTLER: Senator Hall, members of the Legislature, I would reiterate opposition to the Dierks amendment for the reasons given previously. However, I wanted to take a moment just to restate a couple of the basic premises of this welfare reform because I think continually, continually in the press in recent days it's been advertised that this is a two-year deal and, by golly, they're cut off and that's it. And I wish the press would publish exactly what we wrote, what we have in this bill. It's not a strict two-year cutoff. It's a two-year contract. It's a two-year effort to make people...to encourage people to respond to meaningful suggestions, both with regard to work opportunities, with regard to work experiences and with regard to seeking work opportunities. But here's what it says with regard to the two-year time limit. And I wish people would get this accurately. The self-sufficiency contract shall be revised in the two-year time period, this is the two-year cutoff period, for cash assistance extended when there is no job available for adult members of the recipient family. So I wish we would stop talking about the strict two-year cutoff, it's not. If there's no job available, they're going to continue to receive assistance. Secondly, even if there is no job available, and, by the way, it says here it is the intent of the Legislature that available job shall mean a job which results in an income of at least equal to the amount of cash assistance that would have been available if receiving assistance minus unearned income available to the recipient family. So it even gives an explanation of what is meant by an available job, which is very liberal. Beyond all that, beyond all that, even if they refuse to take an available job, it says the department shall develop policy guidelines to allow for cash assistance to persons who have received the maximum cash assistance provided by this section and who face extreme hardship. Okay. So even if they refuse to accept a job, there is still another out for families that may deserve that other out. This welfare reform is not Draconian, it is reasonable but it's going to increase our spending in the short term and we are going to need to explain to the public why we are increasing our spending in the