

SENATOR WITEK: Mr. President, members of the Legislature, I hadn't really intended to talk on this amendment but people keep referring to an amendment of mine that will be coming up probably on Select File that has to do with electronic benefits transfer program so just to answer maybe a few questions and to give a little background information, even on cash vouchers. My first awareness that Nebraska was going to do this was last year in the bill. And we gave permission to the Department of Social Services to look into both cash vouchers and electronic benefits transfer at that time. They went ahead and looked into both programs, well, they had looked into them before, and had decided at that time to go with cash vouchers. And they applied for the cash voucher waiver and just within the last period of months received it. So they intend to go to cash vouchers in the State of Nebraska, I guess unless we would adopt Ray's amendment that, Senator Janssen's amendment to take that out of this implementation bill on the welfare reform. And I was concerned, I wanted to know a little bit more about both areas and looked into both areas and put in a bill early this year in the Banking Committee to have a study done on electronic benefits transfer. A lot has changed within the last two years even on the electronic benefits transfer program. And the idea that we're discussing right now I want people to understand though is on the cash-out program. We have a waiver to do the cash-out program in Nebraska, Department of Social Services is going to implement that program, and unless this amendment is adopted, that's the way things are going to be in the State of Nebraska. My amendment that's coming up would simply ask to put a task force together to look at how Nebraska would possibly implement an electronic benefits transfer program, it involves the Governor's office and people from the private sector who have concerns in these areas. It wouldn't tell us to do electronic benefits transfer right now. So what we're discussing now on Senator Janssen's amendment, on whether to go ahead and allow Department of Social Services to implement cash vouchers or to retain the food stamp program is what we should be talking about today and what we should be talking about on passage of the welfare bill. And electronic benefits transfer, although it's very important to discuss I believe because of the changes that are coming about at the federal level on these programs and because the block grant program is being tied to states implementing electronic benefits transfer, that's why I want my amendment to be adopted at a later time. But right now, talking about the cash voucher program, there's two reasons that people have given to me to go to the cash voucher program. The