

SPEAKER WITHEM: Senator Chambers, followed by Senator Hillman.

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Mr. Speaker and members of the Legislature, there is no requirement in this bill that new employees be procured as a result of a loan or a grant, none. A company can come in here and it hires 250 people so it's a large operation. They probably have accountants, they have access to grant writers, they have people on their staff who can give them a leg up in putting together an application, in the first instance. They know how to put the best foot forward, present the most attractive package and snatch their \$500,000 out of the fund. Then we have all these other littler companies scrambling and perhaps there will be something left for them and perhaps not because you still have companies which can hire from 100 up to that 150. So you can have a few companies taking 25 percent of the money overall. One of them can get as much as \$500,000. Depending on what is in the fund, that could constitute more than 25 percent of what is available. Now my amendment is not touching on those factors directly, but what it says is that I'm taking at their word the first word they gave us, the people who say they're for this bill, and that word is that it's to help small businesses, and I heard talk about rural areas. So in these rural areas and small towns the money would be available for them to get the help that this bill supposedly is supposed to provide. If we are going to require new employees, that should be put into the law, but there is no intent that new employment be a factor. This bill still can function to a degree as a slush fund. You can say, like the house in a gambling operation, we're going to take our 25 percent off the top and let the others scramble and fight for what is left. Maybe some smaller businesses will get some of the crumbs, maybe they won't. But based on the representations made about this bill, all of the money, whatever that amount turns out to be, should go to companies that hire no more than 100 people. I would like to see the number lowered from that, but that apparently would not meet with as much support as even the amendment that I'm offering here. I don't think Senator Engel has given a good argument against the adoption of this amendment. The discussion of the bill up to this time gives the rationale for it. Either we mean what we say or we don't. For my part, I don't think it's a good bill, I don't think it's good economic policy and I don't think the way it's being drafted now, based on the amendments, it's even going to achieve the goal we were told was the purpose.