

PRESIDENT ROBAK: Thank you, Senator Witek. Senator Withem.

SPEAKER WITHEM: Thank you, Madam President. Two points to make regarding Senator Witek's comments. Number one, I was hoping we were going to be able to adjourn, but I think you just doomed us to stay here until 10:30. I hope that wasn't...wasn't the case. Secondly, Senator Witek, a tip from a veteran legislator. When you want to speak but you're concerned about having your light on too quickly after a previous speaker, shut your light off and turn it right back on again. That's what I did to you so your speech would be between mine and Senator Bernard-Stevens' here. So it's another thing that we can do. My guess is we're probably winding down here for the evening and...and that's okay. This is obviously an issue that's going to go on for some time more and that's okay, I guess. These are tough issues. They're not meant to be...to be easy issues. And I think it's kind of sad because I don't think distancewise there's as much room between Senator Bernard-Stevens and Senator Witek as the emotion and the rhetoric may have led people to believe. First of all, Senator Witek, I agree with a lot of what you had to say emotionally because, as I see special education growing, I'll use your number, I haven't checked it lately, at 12 percent, that's way too high. That's not sustainable. We cannot allow a single program in state government to grow at a 12 percent rate when the rest of state government is growing at less than half that rate. That program will cannibalize the rest of the budget and we have to bring it under control. You're 100 percent right in what you had to say. We do need to find a way to cap and I have been around here long enough to remember Bob Kerrey special sessions when Tom Vickers back there was leading the charge on bringing special ed under...under control. We did a few things and came back the next year or two and repealed those and the middle of my legislative career we established the Special Education Accountability Commission and I've been disappointed with that. And, yeah, we do need to do something this session and I don't think the debate is over do you need to cap special ed or do you not. The question is at what level, and that's where I'm beginning to become concerned because I don't think anybody knows. Everybody right now is operating under an intuitive basis. Some people have said, you know, trust us, we can find the room in the budget to squeeze moreso than the bill currently has, hence the Bromm-Bohlke amendment. Others are saying that we've probably squeezed as far as we can for one year, and it's all based on intuition. It's not based on fact.