

nature of the world in which we live. Nebraska right now has an aging population. Senator Wesely, I am not sure what percentage of Medicaid dollars is spent on the aging, but I know that will go up more and more and more. I know we have this sense of Medicaid being a welfare program that poor people are on, and the huge sums of dollars and the biggest growth in Medicaid comes from taking care of our elderly, and we are getting an older population, people are living longer. Health care costs are continuing to increase. We do have more teen mothers. We do have a higher and higher percentage of our population taking more and more of these services, and the cost of delivering these services are going up. And I don't really think it's an option to simply say we are not going to offer those services any longer. Particularly in the area of the aging, we are not going to shut down our nursing homes, we are not going to say we're not going...not going to spend these dollars. Heard a figure this morning, and, Don, I forget what year it was, but I know one of the reporters was talking to us and talking about Medicaid, itself, under current growth rates will be about 22 percent of our state budget in not that many years down the road. We are not going to be able to continue the way we have in the past. juxtapose that some changes going on in Washington, DC, where things are stalemated at the moment, but I don't think anybody has any sense that we are going to continue to receive the same level of federal support that we have in the past. What we are going to have to do is run just as hard as we can under the current system to stay in the same place, and then we are just not going to be able to do that. In order to meet these needs then, we've got two choices. Choice number one is acquire more dollars and, as we all know, our citizens aren't willing to do that. They feel that they've reached the end of where they are in terms of the number of dollars they are willing to pay in taxes. That's not really an option. The only option we have is current...using the current dollars that we have in a more cost-effective fashion. LB 1044 begins to move us in that direction. Are there any guarantees? Obviously, there are no guarantees. Are there guarantees that if we don't do anything, though, the cost will go up? I think they are there. I think those guarantees are there. So I think that this bill, by taking the most expensive, the fastest growing programs in state government and puts those under a different management system, a system whereby we can look at individual needs as opposed to continuation of programs, is the only way to go. For that reason, I support 1044 and would urge the rest of