

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you. It has been a long discussion on the committee amendments, but those were the longest committee amendments that we'll ever see. I hope, in this Legislature. Let me...let me begin by thanking a lot of people that have worked very hard on this, and also thanking those who had questions in the debate on the committee amendments, and then I'm going to defer to Senator Klein after...after some discussion of the issue. As somebody who has been involved in this area now for 18 years, as I indicated, I have been on the Health and Human Services Committee for that long a time, this is the major step I have seen taken to try and address common problems that all of us through our work in the Legislature have seen either to some small degree or to a large degree, in some cases, as we've had agencies that have not always worked together well, computer systems that have not meshed well together, caseworkers that duplicate work, administrators duplicating work. We all know it's out there. We think that this is the way that we can make change that will, number one, improve efficiency and cut down the cost, and, number two, we should be able to do a better job of serving the needs of people in need in our state. That is...that is ultimately a double win for all of the state of Nebraska, and for those of us concerned about adequate services, I think this will help achieve that. Those of us concerned with the cost of government, I think this change will help to achieve that. Now the genesis of this idea, it takes many forms, but I should say that I think the Health and Human Services Committee last year finally reached the end of our rope with some of the problems that we saw with Medicaid, lack of cooperation that needed to exist in that particular field, so we had legislation to shift that out of the Department of Social Services. And that generated a great deal of interest, and the administration, the Governor, took an active interest in the need to address the problems they were aware of, and so our Lieutenant Governor, Kim Robak was put in charge of a study. There was a great deal of time spent with agency directors and Lieutenant Governor Robak on how we might address the problems. And they took what we had as an initial idea and expanded it in a much more comprehensive fashion which will bring together the pieces of human services across the state of Nebraska under an integrated system. I think that this is an attempt to evolve in a way that I think all of us know that we need to. It will be a struggle and there will be more steps that will have to follow, but I am absolutely convinced the direction is right. I also want to note that part of what we