

February 13, 1996 LB 1050

SPEAKER WITHEM: Thank you, Senator Brown. Senator Bernard-Stevens.

SENATOR BERNARD-STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature. I, too, rise to support the amendment and I appreciate Senator Brown's comment because I know how involved and important, not only this particular section of the committee amendment and the bill, but also how much she's involved in education for all children in the state and I have a high respect for that. I rise to support the amendment for a myriad of reasons, but the ones that I will mention, at least at this point, are it's very consistent with the choice discussion and policy that the Legislature made a few years ago. I remember it was a bill that was introduced by Senator Baack, he came to me and asked if I wanted to cosign, and I read it and said, absolutely, it looks great. And after I signed it then he told me that I was going to get just killed on the issue. And later on Senator Withem cosigned it as well, as later I think others may have. But it was one of those issues that we thought would take five years before we thought the concept was actually accepted, but to our surprise it was accepted that year. The whole underlying factor was trying to give parents a choice for the best education for their child because they were absolutely captive of the public schools, unless there was a private school in the area they could choose to go into, such as in North Platte where we have a fine, fine Catholic school, North Platte St. Pat's. But in most of the state you had one district, and if a parent or child was having difficulty with a principal, or with a teacher, or the child was in a bad environment, there was no way for them to get out. In fact there was no real incentive for school districts to make any policy changes, because they didn't have to. And so the overall idea of choice was that if there was a better environment for students, if they felt they could get a better education, the parents could opt, one time, into a different district. And, of course, we put limitations, you only have one option. And then if that doesn't work out, you can obviously go back to your home district, but then your option is used up and that's the end of it. The idea was to put some accountability on school districts. If they saw a migration outward the school district would need to evaluate why; what are they not doing that the parents in the school district wish to have their children in that school district? And they would need to respond to that type of parental outcry, if you wish, concerning the school district and try to improve