

SENATOR WESELY: Madam President and members of the Legislature, the amendment before you is a modification of LB 1234, a bill that I introduced this year dealing with school reorganization. It's a fundamental issue to me, one that as we talk about property tax relief, which was the subject of LB 299, we need to spend more time on than we have, I think, this session and on the debate on this issue. The point I'd like to begin with is that as we talk about levy limits and levy caps, as we talk about budget limitations, expenditure limitations, as we are with this bill and the previous legislation in this package, we have a opportunity to talk about generally where we'd like to see spending go in terms of various government services and different types of governmental entities. But in the end there's a consequence for those decisions. And one of the things I've always argued against petition drives for is that whenever a petition drive is put out, talking about, as Mr. Jaksha loves to, putting limits on spending and putting limits on government, the questions that are asked about, well, what will that mean, what will be the consequence, always gets answered with, well, we'll work that out later, or the Legislature will make that determination. And so I don't want to see this Legislature likewise following that pattern of taking the so-called easy path in terms of addressing government spending. The easy path is the one where you have just a general sort of a limit that says, as this bill does, we'll have a 2 percent budget lid or a 0 percent budget lid or the mill levy cap that we talked about with the previous bill. Those are abstract, they are distant, they are not real and concrete. We don't know ultimately, perhaps, what the consequence will be of those proposals. I am proposing to you an amendment that will, at least in my view, indicate what one of the consequences will be as we move forward on various budget limits and levy caps. And one of those consequences will be, I think, greater school consolidation, school reorganization. And when I talk about that it's not so much that we will see schools get bigger, but I think the districts that we have in our state, we have too many of them and they are too inefficient and we need to find a way to reorganize our education system in this state to reduce the overhead cost of our education system. Madam Chairman, if I could, I'd appreciate the conversation, but (gavel) I know we've all got a lot to...on our minds, but I think at the same time, as we talk in general about budget limits and levy caps, I'd like to talk specifically about the largest expenditure that we have with property taxes, that's our schools and the system that