

do when we look at the budget on the biennial basis and put those priorities at that time. I bring this up as maybe a methodology, something that we look at and really consider if this is the right time to do it. What has been proposed by the Appropriations Committee is increasing the provider rate from 75 percent to 80 percent. What that is, is about a \$1.5 million in terms of dollars. I am proposing leaving that at the 75 percent rate for this year and I think it needs to be handled next year possibly raising that to 80 or 85 percent during the normal biennium budget, the need there. I am not reducing the budget by that amount. I wanted to bring this up as I feel that it's a lot more important to provide some services to individuals versus taking the small increase, which is a 5 percent spread over several thousand workers in the regions, and take that money and provide those that are on the waiting list some services. Now, they haven't been providing enough services for them all and one of the arguments against this is they didn't provide the services before and they're going to start now. I think this \$1.5 million can be better used providing additional services to those individuals that won't have it. It's an important...I think it was something that needed to be brought up to the floor in light of the small amount that would actually be for pay increases and in terms of equity for those individuals that aren't receiving any services. And I do realize that, in order to provide adequate services, we need to raise the level of individuals providing so we do have people out there that will take care of the public that is in need of the services that are being provided by the regional center areas. It is important that we look at this policy, and I'm actually looking for some discussion, because this small 5 percent increase is worthy, but I think it is such a small amount that that \$1.5 million will be and can be used for someone that isn't receiving some services to date. Right now, bottom line is I think it's a timing situation. Let's wait on the pay equity side. Let's make sure we get the individuals into service and having some services versus taking this small amount and divvy it up across the state for pay equity amounts that would be just pennies to those individuals in terms of a pay equity standard. With that, I would hope you could support this and actually see what some of the discussion would be. Thank you.

PRESIDENT ROBAK: Thank you, Senator Avery. Senator Brown.