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LB 845

of the time, and to get it a woman must have a prescription. I believe LB 845 is a measure that will help remedy the inequity in insurance coverage for women. The committee's action spoke volumes to the many women who must spend their hard-earned wages to buy prescription birth control. Last week, there was an article in the Lincoln Journal Star that said Nebraska ranked 32nd in the nation in equal pay between the sexes. Women have...make 72 cents for every dollar men earn; that's \$147 less per week than men, the national average is 74 cents. The gap is even wider for the state's minority women, who earn only 59 cents for every dollar men earn, this is \$221 a week less. The average annual earnings, in 1990, showed women at \$12,118 less than men did. Furthermore, only 20 percent of the women received pensions, compared to 47 percent of the men. The number of elderly women living in poverty is two times the number of elderly men living in poverty. The state of Nebraska takes great pride in reducing our welfare rolls. It provides ways and programs to assist women to become self-sufficient. An important aspect of self-sufficiency is the postponement of pregnancy until a woman is financially capable of supporting children. She finally gets a job and has health insurance, but it doesn't cover contraceptives. She is probably not making a huge salary, certainly only 70 cents of the dollar her male counterpart is making. She then spends 20 to 30 dollars a month, or 240 to 360 dollars per year for her birth control. I have received letters from employers who tell me they can't afford LB 845 because it would increase the benefits they must provide. However, a comprehensive study by the Health Insurance Association of America, in 1995, stated that adding contraceptives to the prescriptive benefits would increase the overall insurance cost by a mere six-tenths of 1 percent. I've also heard from people who are members of the Catholic church. They object to the fact that the bill does not address prescription drugs used for fertility, which I'm certainly willing to include. They complain that there is no conscience clause for those companies who view contraception morally objectionable. I told the committee on the day of the hearing that I would be willing to submit two amendments, one that would clarify some language, a conscience clause amendment, and I had already spoken with several of my colleagues about an interim study on this issue, including fertility drugs. I urge the body to give this serious consideration. Amendments can be put on it