

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE
Transcriber's Office

March 16, 1999 LB 179

we'd adopted weren't appropriate; that, in fact, the income levels were cutting people out of the program at a point in time when they weren't able to afford to pay their taxes and still remain in their home. Now I will agree with Senator Coordsen that the Homestead Exemption Program is kind of a muddled program. Most people think that it is property tax relief. It doesn't work very well as a property tax relief program, if you want to be hard-nosed about it. It doesn't really work very well in that context, but that is the context that most people think about it in. The other context is as kind of a social program and if our objective, as a social program, is to allow people to remain in their homes, albeit because we subsidized them staying in their home, they probably don't like that word, by paying their taxes, that's a social program, and our social objective at that point is to have people remain in their homes because they are able to maintain a better lifestyle there, it costs them less to live there and they don't place as heavy a burden on other public resources or other public services. Absolutely legitimate objectives in a social program. And, to my mind, the homestead exemption has a large component of that in it, even though most people, as I'll state again, think that it's a property tax relief...

PRESIDENT MAURSTAD: One minute.

SENATOR WICKERSHAM: ...program, because we pay property taxes. But our objective in paying property taxes is to allow people to remain in their homes. That's what the committee heard when we heard all of those bills, those six bills that wanted to change the income amount. You've set, they said, all of them, you have set the income levels too low; we don't have enough resources at that income level to pay our property taxes and stay in our homes. So that's, I think, part of the issue that Senator Beutler wants us to focus on. I'm perfectly comfortable focusing on that if it allows us to discuss and make a little bit more clear what our objectives might be with the expenditure of sums that are suggested. I, obviously, support the committee amendments. I don't think that we can afford to ignore the evidence that we heard from the people who came before the committee that we have gotten the income levels too low...

PRESIDENT MAURSTAD: Time.