

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

February 24, 2004 LB 1049

replacement...and to me, this is what's very, very important of the program...and automatically stabilizing the economy by using accumulated trust funds to maintain consumer spending during an economic downturn. Can you imagine what would happen, you know, with our deficits if we did not have this program? We've got a \$215 million, \$220 million deficit now. We've had similar deficits, if not more, in the past two years. Can you imagine what would happen to our economy if the people that were laid off did not have a modest amount of income in their pockets to pay their bills? And when Senator Cunningham talks about these benefits, do you realize the average unemployment benefit is about \$200 a week, \$200 a week? How many of us in here could go 10 weeks and, if Senator Cunningham's bill passes, how many of us could go 13 weeks without having a penny coming in the door? I couldn't. He expresses indignation about the woman who absconded with pharmaceuticals and he said, she got unemployment benefits after eight weeks. Well, I would suggest that the eight weeks was the punishment. She lost 8 weeks of benefits, so she'll qualify from week 9 through week 26. And we don't know her situation. Maybe she's a single mom with a couple kids. Should the kids suffer? Should the kids be without a home, be without food, without clothing? Should they suffer because the mother absconded with some drugs from the nursing home? I'm not sure they should. And, Senator Cunningham, you know, it is frustrating. It, in a sense, the way he makes it sound, that she was rewarded. Okay, she stole. She stole these drugs from this nursing home and yet some...and then we're paying her benefits. Well, we don't know her situation. We very well could be paying benefits for the sake of her children, I don't know, and if that's the case, I'm not willing to change this program to put her kids on the street. I don't know that situation. But, while it might be offensive to some, to me, she was punished. She was punished by having to wait eight weeks. And I would suggest to you, and I'm not sure, maybe Senator Chambers would comment on this, but I would imagine there are criminal statutes in our state that would deal with her stealing from an employer. And if there are, she should be prosecuted. She should not get a free ride. But we don't know her situation. Maybe her children shouldn't be punished because of her misconduct. Let me go on. Virtually every dollar of unemployment insurance benefits is immediately spent by laid-off