

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

April 5, 2005

LB 709

problems. Now, I don't know what the correct answer is. I put in a request for a study before the Insurance...Banking and Insurance Committee, but they either wanted to do it in a different way or they didn't think the timing was appropriate for a study. The study was directed directly at this problem of employer health-care coverage for employees, and I would hope that members of the Banking and Insurance Committee would engage in a conversation on what they think the state can do with this problem. I mean, just as we cannot wait to resolve the fiscal side of this because it's getting too close to us, catastrophe is getting too close to us, I don't think we can wait for this federal government to act with regard to some of the problems that are causing our Medicaid fiscal problem. In fact, the federal government, with regard to Medicaid, has simply made things worse in the last couple years with the prescription bill, and they're threatening to make it even worse by cutting back on federal funding of Medicaid. So I think we need to talk about health-care coverage and what we can do, and obviously related to that is the separate problem of health-care costs, not as it's associated with more individuals or more eligibility, more people being on the program, but as it's associated with simply the rising costs of healthcare which affects Medicaid consumers and other consumers equally. In fact, as you've heard in the debate yesterday, Medicaid is doing better in that regard than is the general consumer in society. What can we do to address those health-care costs? What more can we do? Are these two things that I just talked about going to be a part of the study or not? I think it's important that they be a...that they be a part of the study. I think another part of the study should have to do with a separate point, and that is just examining what part of the economic cycle we're in. We know that there are some continuing problems, but we also know that the problems are cyclical, in the sense of when economic times are worse we obviously get more people on welfare programs of one type or another, on Medicaid programs, and we should have some examination built into that study as to the effect of simply the cyclical nature and which part of the cycle we're in now and what's likely to happen in the future. Third, minimum wage: The minimum wage continues to deteriorate. Its purchasing power today is less than it was in 1973. Its purchasing power today is less than it was in 1973. And the