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FLOOR DEBATE

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federally qualified health center, numerous hospitals and a myriad of other public and private healthcare providers, all of whom could readily offer these services, HHS contracts with only one provider in Lincoln. And if a woman in Lincoln doesn't want to go to that particular one provider, her next nearest option would be in Beatrice, 43 miles away, or Tecumseh, 50-some miles away. That's not fair. Contrast this program with the Every Woman Matters Program, where there are 450 providers throughout the state, so that no one woman has to travel any great distance in order to find a provider. The amendment before you is simply a rewrite of LB 1242, and substantially opens up the number of eligible providers of services under this program, without prohibiting any of the current providers from applying for a continuation of their existing contracts. Hospitals, certified rural health clinics, local public health departments, Indian health service facilities, federally qualified health centers, public health clinics, and private healthcare providers could all apply to HHS for a contract to provide services under this program. The amendment would operate the program with funds already appropriated, and I'm not in any way tampering with that appropriation set by our committee. The amendment is supported by the Governor's Office, it's supported by the Health and Human Services Department, it's supported by the Public Health Association of Nebraska, and the amendment, by the way, is very timely, because HHS is now at the point where it needs to go out and solicit for providers under this program. The existing providers' contracts are coming up for renewal. It's time for HHS to go out with a new bidding process. They're about to do that; they're looking for guidance from the Legislature. In summary, this program simply opens up the number of eligible providers who could apply for funding under this program, so that women don't have to travel 50 or 100 miles to receive a fundamental health service like a Pap smear. It does not tamper with the Appropriations Committee work, in terms of appropriations level. It keeps that right where it is, although truthfully, I'd support a higher appropriation, if that were before us, but it's not, and I ask for your favorable consideration of AM2441. Thank you, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT SHEEHY: Thank you, Senator Foley. You've heard the opening to AM2441, amendment to committee amendment. Senator