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FLOOR DEBATE

March 14, 2006 LB 1060

PRESIDENT SHEEHY: Please record, Mr. Clerk.

CLERK: 25 ayes, 11 nays to cease debate, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT SHEEHY: Call of the question is successful. Senator Foley, you're recognized to close.

SENATOR FOLEY: Thank you, Mr. Lieutenant Governor. Let me just summarize where we are with this amendment. Again, the program started in 1991, when some language was inserted in the state budget that year, and each biennium thereafter the program was reappropriated. But it exists only in budget language. The Legislature never gave discretion...or direction, I should say, to the Department of Health and Human Services that this program should be directed toward low-income women. My amendment takes care of that question. It says, yes, this is for low-income women only. We also never gave direction as to who the providers would be. HHS on its own, many, many years ago, decided on its own that we would have only 14 providers under this program. And as a result of that decision, which they cannot now defend, we've got women traveling 91 miles to get a Pap smear. That's a fundamental, routine service that ought to be readily available throughout the state, not 91 miles away. The amendment before you simply says to those 14 providers, when we issue the new solicitation in the next few months, you can come in. You can come in with an application. You can continue to serve as you have for 15 years, but you're not going to be alone anymore. We're going to break up the monopoly; we're going to open this program up to more providers. In Lincoln, Nebraska, Lancaster County, you've got one provider serving a quarter of a million people. That's not right. My amendment would open up this program to the local health department, to the federally qualified health center over on North 27th Street. They could come in and now offer services, in addition to the existing providers. I know there are senators who are trying to put a spin on this amendment. They're trying to spin this thing as an anti-family-planning amendment. Read the amendment. Look at the list of eligible providers. Every one of those eligible providers offers family planning services, every one of them, no exceptions, and they can all come in and offer this program, as