

PRESIDENT MOUL: Thank you, Senator Bromm. Senator Wesely?

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you. I appreciate Senator Bromm's concerns. I do think in terms of getting the hospital billing changed, I think obviously the idea would be for the Health Department to sit down with the hospitals and find a way to accommodate what their systems are and simply to work with them to...it doesn't necessarily have to be that there be one form, although we do include in there a desire to look toward eventually getting to one billing form and we need to do that nationally. There are too many hundreds and hundreds of different billing forms and the costs of trying to comply with all that needs to happen, but that probably ought to happen at the national level. So I think there's a way to accommodate the concerns you have, Senator Bromm, and do it in a way that is reasonable and rational. Back to the funding source issue, that was raised by Senator Byars as well, but I clearly see the logic in looking at the cigarette tax to pay for health care. Twenty-seven cents in the cigarette tax, currently, one cent goes to cancer research. Now we've got another bill to do two more cents in cancer research, but take that aside we're not putting cigarette tax money into health care. That is logically where it should go. Cigarette tax...cigarettes have a health care expense. They're estimated to cost, in terms of medical costs, over two dollars a pack in additional health care costs. If we wanted to have a user fee on cigarettes we ought to be charging two bucks a pack and then turning around and putting all that money into our health care system. That's a sensible thing to go. Now, that's why I've selected that as the funding source and we have cut this down from a twenty-five cent cigarette tax increase, which is what was proposed in the initiative last year, down to one cent, a very, very modest proposal. And even with that I'd...some have raised question, I don't think there should be any question. I think the cigarette tax ought to have more money going into health care and that clearly is a logical thing to do. Now, as for the stability of the cigarette tax, is any tax stable anymore? The overall budget is having its own difficulties and cuts are there and I just don't know that you can look to any funding sources being ultimately stable because of the volatility of the economy. But if we do get into that I still think, as a priority, we need to fund this. When you talk about public health services, you're talking about heading off problems. You're talking about investments in health care that will save money long-term. When