

SENATOR RASMUSSEN: Mr. President, members of the body, I think we have to be careful here. Just because we both use the terms 185 percent of poverty does not mean we're talking about the same thing. What Senator Crosby is proposing here is that you add up all the benefits and it takes people to 185 percent of the poverty level. What we have offered with the child care already in the bill, as well as what we'll offer in the amendment in terms of health care, is that we offer assistance to people up until 185 percent of the poverty level. It's my understanding that the working poor exist around 133 percent of the poverty level, and so what Senator Wesely is saying is probably true, that we are suddenly making it a lot better to be on welfare than not, and that we'll have people saying either begrudgingly, how come I get considerably less, and here both of us in our family are working, than somebody who is on welfare, or we'll have people actually applying to get on welfare because it's a much better deal. There's a very real difference here in terms of saying we are going to give you a minimum benefit and wage package of 185 percent poverty, or are we going to give you assistance with a support system, such as child care and health care, up to 185 percent of poverty level. What we have attempted to do philosophically with this legislation is to put pressure on the existing systems out there rather than creating something that is unique just to welfare. And I would support greater amounts of child care support and health care support for all people, but we don't want to lose sight of the goal of making it better to be off welfare than on welfare. So, although I cannot quibble with the concept of 180...185 percent of poverty level being the decent place for people to be in terms of their wages and their benefits, I would urge you to oppose this particular amendment and examine the kind of support systems we're offering to people on a sliding fee basis as they move off of welfare into total independence. I also want to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about the two-year limit. I hope we have extended debate on that later. But I think it's important for people to realize we're not talking about sitting around waiting for two years and then looking for a job and trying to get off welfare. We're talking about the moment you get on welfare you begin to try and get off. And so we have 2 years of the 60 percent disregard, which means that it's possible to work minimum wage at half-time for a family of 3 and end up with the same cash subsidy as a person is getting from the state. In other words, we're trying to say you get your cash from a paycheck instead of from the state welfare system. So with that 60 percent disregard, during the first 2