

SENATOR WIITALA: That is right, Senator Pirsch.

SENATOR PIRSCH: Which requires transportation, which requires notification of the recipient of the cornea?

SENATOR WIITALA: Yes.

SENATOR PIRSCH: And that is probably the most time consumed by that, is that...?

SENATOR WIITALA: That is right. I think one of the reasons that we are importing presently 80% of our eyes is largely because we just can't effectively take corneas. That is it. Pure and simple. It doesn't make any difference whether we have 90,000 donors or 150 or 250 thousand donors. It is a matter of logistics. It is a matter of getting permission. It is a matter of this very delicate tissue degenerating over a few hours.

SENATOR PIRSCH: I guess I can't understand why it is faster to get them from out of the state than it is from in the state.

SENATOR WIITALA: Well, they use a freeze process. I really can't explain it to you but modern medical science has a technique where they can freeze those eyes but I understand it takes special equipment and so forth. If someone dies in the rural areas or a small city or town and they don't have access to that equipment, they are really handling a perishable commodity that is going to be useless in a few hours.

SENATOR PIRSCH: So part of the problem is that while there are cornea donors there that we do not necessarily have the equipment or the immediate transportation and facilities to keep these corneas whole?

SENATOR WIITALA: That is correct.

SENATOR PIRSCH: Probably in my case it would work the other way. I am an organ donor and have signed up to donate my corneas but my husband does not really approve, and if they called him, he may not give permission. Has that occurred to you?

SENATOR WIITALA: If you have given permission, I think it is there but I am not...

SENATOR PIRSCH: If they are aware of it.