

deduction over time, the Legislature can always increase the premium tax. Senator Higgins notes that we have not increased the premium tax rate since 1945 and I certainly can attest to the difficulty in increasing premium tax rates because the Revenue Committee has considered bills on that issue for a long period of time. Senator Wesely notes that the premium taxes that we collect are increasing annually by virtue of increased premiums, though the rate hasn't changed premiums paid have and, therefore, there has always been an increase in revenues over the last four to five years. That is absolutely true and it is quite possible that that increase in revenues would more than offset whatever this deduction was that LB 391 contemplates. Senator Hefner I think notes that...Senator Nichol notes that the costs of this program will ultimately be passed onto the insurance consumer, that, in fact, the insurance industry will not be compelled to share in any of the costs. I suspect that the insurance industry is highly competitive and my guess is that sometimes costs are not passed on directly to the consumer, but, in fact, are used to reduce the profitability of an insurance company. But irrespective of where the costs are, the real question is, in a program that has been official to the state, to certain members in the state and also to the insurance industry, should the tab be picked up totally by the state? Or should it be shared by the insurance industry, the state and also by those to whom it benefits because of the higher premium rates required by the bill? I think it should be shared. Senator Hefner notes that the bill itself is a needed bill. If we put this amendment on, it may kill the bill. I certainly would not want to kill the bill. I will vote for the bill with the amendment on. I suspect there are plenty of votes on this floor to pass the bill with the amendment on. I think that what we will have started though is we will have established a reasonable policy to deal with a major social issue and to require the financing thereof to be shared by state taxpayers and by the insurance industry and by the premium payers for the high risk coverage. I do not think this amendment will kill the bill. Senator Chizek indicates that we are moving prematurely in this area, that we ought to wait...or Senator Lynch indicated that we ought to wait for one or two or three years to see exactly how much the assessments against insurance companies are before we make a decision. I guess it is better to make the decision before we go down the path than after we're down the path to decide later on we need to reverse courses. It is so rare that we