

January 22, 1973

(Start Belt #5)

Sixty years ago we had a tremendously large district. It was, perhaps, as large as Lincoln is today and at that time a great number of buildings were built all over the city of Omaha and most of these buildings now are quite old and quite dilapidated. The heating and cooling, rather the heating costs alone are astronomical. Many of these buildings are in disrepair and in need of replacement but if that weren't enough, we have an additional problem in that to meet the space needs of the students, the school board has been adding on temporary structures and by these I mean a single room structure equivalent to a small house where they conduct a classroom and it is not unlike a small school building out in the country. Well, the needs are so great that we now have over a hundred of these, so called, temporary wooden structures scattered around the city of Omaha and, in fact if this bill were passed, with the proceeds of the money it would take seven or eight years just to replace with decent school buildings these over one hundred temporary structures that we now have in the city. I'd like to point out to the members of this body that the Omaha school district is now carrying a large bonded indebtedness, is spending over three million dollars a year for bonded indebtedness and this is no small item in itself and many of the people in the city are not in favor of adding that much more bond costs on to the schools and are, in effect, asking that the schools be built and funded more on a pay as you go. But, unfortunately, with the tremendous need on one hand and the four mill levy limitation on the other the balance need of pay as you go cannot be met under current circumstances. As a former member of the Omaha school board, I would like to point out to the members of this body that in my estimation it is, perhaps, the most frugal board in the state. We have historically had the largest class sizes in the state and still do. By anyone's definition, the per pupil expenditures in Omaha are less than almost any place in the state. So I think this is a very frugal board and they have not operated in any fashion to throw money around, to say the least. But I would point out that the need is here, the need is all over the district, in the expanding western fringes where we have temporary structures, in south Omaha where we have many old buildings and in north Omaha where we have many old buildings and I would like to point out to the members of this body that in all discussions of state aid I think we all know why mutual understanding that costs of school buildings are not going to be included in any state aid bill that is likely to pass here. That being the case, it is up to the members or up to the citizenry in the local district to supply the need for these buildings and I'm not making a push here as much as I would like to, if I thought I could get it passed, I would definitely, of course, try to get school buildings included in the state aid bill. But I don't think this is likely to happen and I'm trying to be realistic and face up to the needs of these children. My own children are now in temporary structures and I know of many who are in these older buildings and as I pointed out before the maintenance and the heat cost, we are wasting more money than we're benefiting by not having this leeway. So for that reason, I would say that the need is here now and I would urge you to support me in moving this bill to E & R Initial. Is there any questions?

SPEAKER: Is there any further discussion? Senator Stromer. If there is no further discussion, you have heard the motion to advance the bill to E & R Review, are you ready for the question? Senator Stahmer, have you concluded?

SENATOR STAHMER: Well, just in closing, I would like to urge the members that this is very important for good education and safe, well being of our citizens, the young children in our city and I have a suspicion that if something is not done soon to