

March 8, 1976

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Mr. Chairman and members of the Legislature. This is a simple amendment. It does not touch what LB 665 is designed to do. I think it's related to the bills subject matter generally enough so that it can be attached as an amendment. This amendment would prohibit public power districts and public utilities from paying memberships for its employees to private organizations. Currently in Omaha every year OPPD and MUD will pickup half of a cost of a membership for the employees. Since these two are public utilities and the money that they take in comes from the rates they charge their customers, I think it is improper to use this money, which in a sense is a form of taxation. It's a public utility charging you for an essential service. I think it's improper for this money to be used to subsidize a private organization. That is the purpose of the amendment. I ask that you adopt it.

PRESIDENT: Senator Frank Lewis.

SENATOR F. LEWIS: Mr. Chairman, I've worked very hard to make this noncontroversial. I would like for it to remain the same. I don't want to comment, Senator Chambers, on the merit of your bill. I'm trying to be fair to you. I'd just as soon see him do that on somebody else's bill. I like mine the way it is right now.

PRESIDENT: Senator... Apparently.

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Members of the Legislature, I don't know whether the lack of discussion is because you favor my motion, or because you're unaware of what it does, or because Senator Lewis has persuaded you that you ought not participate on this vote. I'm going to be very brief and say again what I said already. MUD and OPPD, one of them has in excess of 300 employees. They take the money that the rate payers pay for service and use that ... part of that to pay half the membership of these employees to Ak-Sar-Ben. Now, regardless of what you may think of Ak-Sar-Ben, we're talking about the use of money that customers must pay to these public utilities for the service they receive. This money, I feel, is not being properly expended. To show that OPPD, MUD and Ak-Sar-Ben have their doubts themselves, Ak-Sar-Ben has set up an indemnity fund so if at any time this contribution is ruled illegal then the money will be returned to OPPD and MUD. Rather than have this issue continue to hang in limbo, rather than to require a private citizen to go to the personal expense of filing a suit to have a determination of this issue, I think it would be appropriate for the Legislature to take action and lay it to rest once and for all. I believe this never should have been done by these two utilities. Now that they're continuing to engage in it, as is evidenced by the article that I handed to you, I think it should be brought to an end at this time. That is the purpose of my asking that you return 665 for this specific amendment. As for Senator Lewis' concern about his bills controversy ... controversy ... being noncontroversial, this particular amendment is not going to cause him to lose any votes that he has already, and it may pick him up one or two. I ask that you return the bill.