

April 16, 1981

LB 266

SPEAKER MARVEL: Motion is carried. The committee amendments are adopted. Senator Wesely, do you want to explain the bill?

SENATOR WESELY: Yes. Mr. Speaker and members of the Legislature, I am very pleased to present to you LB 266 which I believe to be a very important bill. It would adopt for the first time in the State of Nebraska statewide high rise fire safety code bill. This code would apply both to existing and new buildings which would be over five stories high or seventy-five feet or higher. The impetus for this bill quite frankly came not from the Towering Inferno but, in fact, from some real life disasters that struck our nation last year, and as you recall, I did pass out a handout which lists for you a number of those disasters in Las Vegas and New York where high rises were struck quickly and violently and disastrously by these fires, and what the finding was in those states was that they just didn't have a very good code, and when that happened there, I sat down with the State Fire Marshal and said, "Well, how about Nebraska? Could it happen here?" The answer was "Yes, it could." We have very light standards. We have no statewide high rise code and it is quite clear that after this experience we should see the light and adopt a code. Now in developing this legislation, we made it rather broad. We did list for the Fire Marshal a number of things we wanted him to look at but our primary purpose was to mandate that he sit down with a review and technical board of the experts in the state, develop the specific rules and regulations to adopt a high rise code, make that code one that is fairly strict for new construction but a little more lenient, a little more flexible for existing buildings, and to come up with that code over the course of about a year, and then have the new buildings come into compliance about a year from now and existing buildings have another close to about nine months to further refine their building and then come into compliance with existing high rise fire code rules and regs which he would adopt. Now Omaha and Lincoln, specifically, do have a high rise code. They adopted each in the early 1970's a code that would apply to new construction in those cities. Unfortunately that did not apply to existing buildings and by far the most buildings that we need to look at are those that were built prior to the new codes that were adopted in Lincoln and Omaha. We did get support of Lincoln and Omaha city fire offices and the cities themselves. The firefighters in both cities support this bill. They recognized the fact that they need to apply standards to existing buildings, that is, in fact, the existing buildings, the existing high rises in this state pose the greatest danger and the greatest potential for fire, and it is in