

February 26, 1974

six congressional districts. And those lines and those districts stayed pretty much in the same shape until 1971, when a bill was passed to make the Supreme Court Districts conform with the one man one vote principle. In so doing, this Legislature passes which today is doubtlessly the worst case of gerrymandering in the entire State of Nebraska. There is one judge from Omaha who represents everything east of 77nd street. Which is Crossroads, from Crossroads down town. Everything from Crossroads, or 77nd street west in the city of Omaha lies within the Judicial District of Lancaster County. Which in effect means that every lawyer who lives west of 77nd street in Omaha. If he would want to become a candidate for judge on the Supreme Court has to compete with the lawyers who live in Lincoln. For what has traditionally been the Lincoln seat on the Supreme Court. The third district in Omaha, runs roughly Pacific and Woolworth street, which and represents approximately the south half of the city. And that district runs all the way down to Rulo, Nebraska. Which means that any lawyer who seeks to be a candidate for the Supreme Court of Nebraska, who lies within the south half of the city of Omaha, must attempt to compete with the traditional seat that belongs with southeast Nebraska. Senator Syas has his own views, which we all know he is very capable, and adept at expressing. Those include disgust with the bar association for doing nothing two years ago when this matter went through the Legislature. I wasn't here and can't take credit or blame for being within the Legislature. I was a lawyer two years ago and can take my small degree of responsibility for not doing anything at that time. I think generally it slipped by and nobody paid any attention to it. I don't really know why forces could not be mustered at that time in this body to do what should have been done. This whole situation became apparent a couple months ago when one of the Judges on the Supreme Court, who is represents the Omaha District, Judge Robert Smith, announced his retirement. It lead many of us to pull out the Blue Book and look at the districts to determine what exactly where those district lines went. And where they began. We then discovered, what I think everybody agrees, gerrymandering system that has no place in current legislation. We thought that it might be solved one of two ways. One would call for constitutional amendment. And the amendment that was proposed would have made the Supreme Court Districts the same as the Congressional Districts. This bill was killed and I can't really agrue with that because the names of these lines to coincide with the congressional district lines would, if and when the congressional district lines would change, cause problems and require some subsequent constitutional amendments. The other alternative which was presented in LB1033 would have merely redistricted within the present constitutional requirements. Senator Syas prepared a fascinating report to this Legislature on the action of this committee in rejecting and killing this bill. It says in essence that he agrees with the principle, and would like to see something done. The Supreme Court Administrator came to the committee hearing and said the Supreme Court agreed that the district line should be changed. It seems to me that this subject should be opened up. Should be brought to the floor of this Legislature. And that action should be taken. There have been questions raised, as to whether this particular amendment doesn't leave some problems and have some problems with it in terms of language relating primarily to the designation of district numbers and of some technical problems with the composition of the Supreme Court Nominating Committees, the Commissions. I would suggest that appropriate amendment can be drawn, and we can do that on Select File, as Senator Carpenter