

April 3, 1979

LB 143

SPEAKER MARVEL: Do you want to read the amendment, Mr. Clerk?

CLERK: Well, Senator, they are several page amendments. They are on page 1096. I will be happy to.

SPEAKER MARVEL: Mr. Sergeant at Arms, will you see if you can locate Senator Johnson please?

CLERK: They are on page 1096, Senator, of the Journal.

SENATOR JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, members of the body, if you would turn to page 1096 of your Legislative Journal, you will see a fairly lengthy set of an amendment to the utility shutoff bill, that is, LB 143, and I will tell you what I intend to do in the amendment and how I think it affects the bill and I would ask for your support of this amendment. LB 143, as you well know, is a very important piece of social legislation in our state. It deals with the utility shutoff problem that all of us certainly can face in our lifetimes given the high cost of utilities and the fact that sooner or later we may be living on a fixed income, to wit, social security and find ourselves in a winter month unable to take care of a utility bill at the time required. When I read LB 143 carefully, because I am very interested in this subject, I noted that it had a couple of omissions that I think that we ought to deal with. One of the omissions which I am not dealing with in this amendment is the problem of the cold weather shutoff. Senator Simon did not deal with the cold weather shutoff and I am not dealing with the cold weather shutoff either in the amendment. I think that is an issue that basically requires a considerable amount of committee hearings and debate but the other issue that I am dealing with in the amendment, which I think is a very important issue, is that of disconnecting utilities that are paid for by a landlord and in the name of a landlord but in effect affect the tenants of a property. As we all know, there are many rental units across this state and in some of those rental units the landlord includes as part of the rent price the utilities. That is, the tenant pays a flat rent of say \$200 a month and that includes utilities which means simply that the landlord has the utilities in his or her name and the landlord has got to pay for those utilities on a monthly basis. There are occasions, and I know from my personal experience in Omaha, that there have been occasions when the landlord has defaulted with the utility company in making those payments and the upshot of that default is the utility company turns off or terminates services to the landlord, but the ultimate harm is not worked with the landlord but