

February 19, 1980

LE 319

it and it can become an anti-union argument to say that the unions are opposed to a convict's being allowed to work, but I think it is a legitimate principle to say that people doing similar work should be paid the same wages regardless of their particular status as a free or unfree person and they are unfree because they were convicted of a crime and sentenced to the penitentiary, or some other institution. That is about all that I have to say, and the reason I am raising the issue again, Senator Schmit...the other day when I offered an amendment to that effect there were not very many senators here. If you advance the bill, I would still have the opportunity to move on it. But I wanted to alert you to what my intention is prior to the time that this bill is voted on for final passage, and that will also explain why I will not vote to advance it at this point.

PRESIDENT: All right. Senator Schmit.

SENATOR SCHMIT: Mr. President, and members of the Legislature, I understand, and of course Senator Chambers has been very frank with you in explaining why he prefers not to readvance the bill. I understand my good friend, Senator Keyes, also has an amendment which would strike the enacting clause, and I think it is about time we make up our mind here whether we really want to address the issue of rehabilitation in convicts or not, and I say, convicts, I do not say, ex-convicts. Until the time that they are back and out in the open again, they are still convicts. I want to make it very clear to you and to everyone here, you can drag in the issue of union labor if you wish, and there are people who have discussed it with me, but I want to say there are many factors that determine the fair wage rate to be paid an employee. I think the Director of Institutions is capable of making that decision. I want to say for my good union friends that I have no qualms about trying to protect jobs, but anytime in Nebraska when the rate of unemployment is below three percent and legitimate employers cannot find people to work, and that includes those of us who operate farms, and if someone wants a job on a farm now I have got one for him...I don't care what he is, who he is, if he can drive a tractor or ride a horse I will put him to work, and I think it is high time we lay it on the line and let people know that it is a matter of rehabilitation for people who never learned to work properly in the first place and who ought to learn to work as a condition of being returned to society, because if they don't learn to work before they get back out, the odds are they are not going to learn to work. My principal purpose