

SENATOR HARRIS: I'll go ahead. Mr. President and members of the Legislature, I rise to call your attention to this bill because there has been agreement reached between the county folks and the folks that are affected by the systems change, and that is basically what we are talking about here. It would bring all Nebraska counties into the statewide retirement system by January 1, 1987. It is a very significant move on the part of the counties. Under current law Lancaster and Douglas counties are authorized to establish a separate retirement systems for their employees. All other counties may join the statewide county employees retirement system, established in 1965. To date 34 counties have opted to join the county retirement system, leaving county employees in 57 counties with no retirement plan at all. The bill would give these counties, remaining outside the county retirement system, until January 1, 1987 to join the system. This statewide system is administered by the Public Employees Retirement Board. I move that we advance the bill.

PRESIDENT: Chair recognizes Senator Wesely.

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you. Mr. President, members, I appreciate the opening comments of Senator Harris and would like you to also know that this is a very significant bill. It is one of those that finally I think we've broken the impasse and moved forward in a fashion in which all sides can feel very good about. You know over the years, those of you who have been in the Legislature know that the county retirement system has most come under question from the county sheriffs. We've had several bills dealing with the county sheriffs, and we've fought, and fought, and fought over that issue in committee and on the floor. We never have resolved that. But in a sense this bill does deal with that problem. What we are attempting to do is to recognize a fact that of all public employees in this state there is really one gaping hole in the retirement system and that is for county employees. All other public employees are assured of a retirement plan, with the exception of very small villages and municipalities. Those are all locally operated, so they may not have a retirement plan, but they also don't have very many employees. For the larger employee groups, public employees, the only one that has yet to be under a mandated retirement plan is the counties. That is why the sheriffs have been so concerned. They are