

# Nebraska legislator fought to retain bill's provisions

by Warren Jarvis  
for the Tundra Times

The Unmarked Burial Site and Skeletal Remains Protection Act, a precedent-setting Nebraska law dealing with human remains and burial goods, was sponsored by Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha.

Chambers, Nebraska's lone black legislator, fought hard to keep the bill from being diluted as it passed through the legislative process.

"What we are talking about with this bill is nothing less than com-

mon dignity, and what we are asking for is common decency," Chambers proclaimed at one point in a floor debate. "We must be able to conceive of the idea that to Native American people there can be as much concern on their part for their ancestors. . . as we have for ours."

Chambers also led the fight against those who tried to put the bill on a scientific and historical basis, saying, "We didn't need a

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bill like this to protect the ancestors of white people or any other group . . . They should not be required to prove every tenet of their creed, as no other member of any religion is required to do so before he or she is allowed to say that, 'I reverence and respect my dead, and I want the same respect from you.' "

The bill was passed after two unsuccessful bills had been introduced in 1987 and 1988. It was heard by the Government, Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee.

The bill passed by a 30-16 margin, easily attaining the 25 votes needed for passage. It was signed into law by Gov. Kay Orr on May 23, 1989.