

Transcript Prepared By the Clerk of the Legislature
Transcriber's Office

Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee
May 30, 2007

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Government, Military and Veterans Affairs met at 1:15 p.m. on Wednesday, May 30, 2007, in Room 1510 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing regarding a gubernatorial appointment. Senators present: Ray Aguilar, Chairperson; Greg Adams; Bill Avery; Mike Friend; Russ Karpisek; and Rich Pahls. Senators absent: Mick Mines and Kent Rogert.

SENATOR AGUILAR: (Recorder malfunction) ...chair up here. We'll make some brief introductions and get going. Welcome to Government, Military and Veterans Affairs. My name is Ray Aguilar. I'm chair of the committee. Senator from Grand Island, District 35. On my right is Christy Abraham, our legal counsel. On my left, Sherry Shaffer, the committee clerk. Proceeding around the table is Senator Mike Friend from Omaha, Senator Rich Pahls from Omaha, Senator Greg Adams from York, and Senator Wild Bill Avery from Lincoln. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: Well earned. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: And coming in the door is Senator Russ Karpisek from the big city of Wilber, Nebraska. Welcome, Russ. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KARPISEK: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Okay. We're here for the approval of Amber Brown to the State Personnel Board. While we get started...excuse me, one more thing. Our pages for today are Joe DiCostanzo from Columbus, Nebraska and Kate McClymont from Novi, Michigan. Thank you for being here today, folks. Okay, Amber, we're just going to start off. It's very, very informal. We'd like to have you tell us a little bit about yourself and then if any of the members have questions they are allowed to ask you questions. [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: So proceed. [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: (Exhibit 1) Okay. My name is Amber Brown. I work for the city of Kearney. I'm the assistant to the city manager there and one of my hats that I get to wear there is the director of Human Resources, and I've been there and in that capacity for two years now. Personal side, I have two daughters, ages three and five. I like to read and go camping and that's about my hobbies. I don't know what else you want to know. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Okay. Anybody have questions for Amber? This...okay, Senator

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Adams. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: Amber, specifically, you are the assistant city administrator or city manager in Kearney, I think it is? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Right. Well, my actual title is assistant to the city manager, and basically it's a progression. I'm doing the duties of assistant city manager. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: And what would those be? That's my follow-up question. [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Okay. I get to do a lot of responsibilities with the city manager. One of the things I'm working on is we're building a new Harmon Park Activity Center, so I am the budget person for that, making sure that we stay on budget, on track. Human Resources director. I'm the downtown liaison, so they do events and we do facade updating, renovation. I work with the neighborhood associations, go out and meet people. I work with the old town. I write and administrate grants. I have five pending grants, one of which we just received from the state of Nebraska was the highest funding awarded from the Department of Roads was the Safe Routes to School program. So I wear those hats, too. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: What about...may I ask a follow-up question? What about dealing with personnel? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Okay. Personnel, I do a lot of the policies. Not so much the procedures, but the policies. I assisted in rewriting the personnel manual and the benefits manual. When we did that we changed a lot of the benefits that the city employees received and changed it to an accrual system. Made it more professional, I think. We really got it out of the kind of the old ages and kind of brought it up to new where people had to wait for vacation, and now they get to accrue it as they go on. I meet with employees. If, you know, any kind of discipline, I'm involved with that at all levels of management within the employees. Writing policies, pretty much everything. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: Okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Senator Pahls. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR PAHLS: Thank you, Senator Aguilar. Amber, I have a question. I'm looking at...is this a reappointment? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: No, it's a new appointment. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR PAHLS: Okay, because on the first I saw reappointment. Then I see new on the other one. This is just my question. I do notice, to be honest with you, that you've had some issues with the law. And apparently everything is set aside right now, as I'm reading? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Correct. I did. And kind of low points in my life. First things, you know when I was 18 and got those cleared up, and the last one is pretty serious and got it cleared up and don't intend to ruin my chances of my career. Really, you know, learned a big lesson from that. So wanted to be honest with you and put it down there, but... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR PAHLS: I appreciate that, because you know sometimes people aren't as honest and that tells you something about their character. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Senator Avery. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: I see that you attended the University of Nebraska-Kearney? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: I did. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: In political science? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Correct. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: That's a good thing. [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: I don't see though that you indicated whether you earned a degree. [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Oh, I did. I have my bachelor's of science in political science with a minor in public administration. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: I hope you studied with Peter Longo. [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: I did. Actually, he was the one that convinced me to major in political science, so yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: He was a student of mine. (Inaudible) [CONFIRMATION]

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AMBER BROWN: Really? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: Tell me something about Leadership Kearney. [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Oh, I just graduated. It's a program that picks leaders throughout the community and organize...we tour the businesses. There's different sectors like education, industry, agriculture, social services day, local government, state government day, and then we basically meet with the leaders there and they kind of coach us on how to be leaders. It was a great thing. So this next year I'll be involved to the point where I'll actually be organizing it and helping with the class below me. So... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: How did you get selected? Do you know? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: I was nominated by a person in the previous class and was fortunate to have the mayor and city manager both write me letters of recommendation. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: We have, what I now know to be a similar program in Lincoln and I was just curious as to whether or not it was similar. Do you think that that in any way prepared you for what you're about to do here with the Personnel Board? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Oh definitely. Yes, definitely. You know, we made all sort of networking contacts, but taught me leadership skills, what it really means to be a leader. You know, it was just a great thing just to be exposed in the community and see how businesses operate differently, you know, as compared to local government. So... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: Can I just do one more question, Senator? If you had a conflict of interest how would you approach it? How would you handle it? I can't imagine what one would be, but you might be able to. [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Sure. I would state that I had a conflict of interest and abstain from any type of discussion or any, you know, any involvement in that. So I wouldn't try to influence it in any way. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: You didn't provide a financial statement. Is that normal that we not get a financial statement for nominees to public boards, Christy? [CONFIRMATION]

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: I think we normally do, don't we? [CONFIRMATION]

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SHERRY SHAFFER: Sometimes we do, sometimes we don't. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: Oh, it's not routine. [CONFIRMATION]

SHERRY SHAFFER: Whatever the Clerk's Office provided us. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: Okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: With your involvement with Leadership Kearney were you able to come to the Capitol this year? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: We were. Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Did you hear any interesting speakers? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Yes. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: But not any at this table. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Any further questions? [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Yes. Of course, we heard Senator Chambers so...we heard Senator Chambers and then the...I'm on the legislative committee for the city of Kearney. I actually represent for the city manager and I enjoy that very much, and I've gotten to come to the Capitol many times this year and have just really enjoyed that. That's another one of my jobs is following the Legislature very closely, keeping up on all the bills and making sure I that communicate to the counsel daily, weekly on the progress of bills that we like to keep track of. But I got to do that and one of the fun things that we got to do was listen to the Supreme Court, so I thought that was pretty interesting. I had not done that before. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AGUILAR: That will come in handy. Further questions? Seeing none, thank you. Thanks for coming today, Amber. [CONFIRMATION]

AMBER BROWN: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

Chairperson

Committee Clerk