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Transportation and Telecommunications Committee
February 13, 2007

[LB93 LB360 LB419 LB421 LB437 LB570 LB598]

The Committee on Transportation and Telecommunications met at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 13, 2007, in Room 1113 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LB598, LB360, LB570, LB419, LB421, LB93, and LB437. Senators present: Deb Fischer, Chairperson; Arnie Stuthman, Vice Chairperson; Ray Aguilar; Carol Hudkins; LeRoy Louden; Mick Mines; Dwite Pedersen; and DiAnna Schimek. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR FISCHER: Good afternoon and welcome to the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee. I am Senator Deb Fischer. I represent District 43 in the Nebraska Legislature and I am chair of the committee. I apologize for the late start. There was a ceremony upstairs honoring our National Guard soldiers, and many of us were there and some are still there. So I do apologize for the late start, but I know you all understand the importance of what we were attending to. We do have a quorum here. And I would like to start by introducing the senators that are present. To my far right is Senator DiAnna Schimek from Lincoln; next we have Senator Arnie Stuthman, he is the vice chair of the committee, and he is from Platte Center; to my immediate right is our committee counsel, Mr. Dustin Vaughan; to my left is Mrs. Pauline Bulgrin, she is the committee clerk; next we have Senator Carol Hudkins, she is a senator from Malcolm, Nebraska; and on my far left is Senator LeRoy Louden, and he is from Ellsworth, Nebraska. Our pages today are Adam Morfeld from Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and Michael Schaeffer from Lincoln. We will be hearing the bills in the order that they are listed on the agenda. Those wishing to testify on a bill should come to the front of the room and be ready to testify as soon as someone finishes testifying in order to keep the hearing moving. And please complete the yellow sign-in sheet at the on-deck table so it is ready to hand in when you testify. This year we do have a new transcription program that's computerized, and so you need to follow the directions on that sign-in sheet, please, and hand that to our clerk, Mrs. Bulgrin, before you sit down at the table to testify. For the record, at the beginning of your testimony, please spell your last name and also your first name, if it can be spelled in several different ways. Please keep your testimony concise and try not to repeat what someone else has covered. If there are large numbers of people to testify on any bill, it may be necessary to place some time limits on the testimony, and as chair, I will be the one to do so. If you do not want to testify, but you want to voice your support or opposition to a bill, you can indicate so at the on-deck table, on the sheet that's provided there and this will become part of the official record of the hearing. If you want to be listed on the committee statement as a testifier at the hearing, you must complete a yellow sign-in sheet and actually testify, even if you just state your name and your position on the bill. If you don't choose to testify, you may submit comments in writing and have them read into the official record. Please try to relax and don't be nervous. And if you need anything during your testimony, just let me know and we'll take care of it, and you are on camera. (Laugh) Please turn off all your cell phones now. We don't allow cell phones during the

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hearing. And at this time I will open the hearing on LB598. And I see Senator Karpisek is here to give us the opening statement. Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR KARPISEK: Thank you, Chair Fischer, and members of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee. My name is Russ Karpisek, K-a-r-p-i-s-e-k, and I am Senator of the 32nd District. I am here today for LB598, the Shriner's license plate bill. And I know that this bill has been before you many times. And I am not a Shriner, but I think that the Shriner's do a great job and great service to our state and also to the kids and families of people who need their support. So I am happy to be here today to try to ask that we get a license plate for them. For over 80 years, the Shriner's Hospitals for Children have provided some of the best medical care in the world, totally free of charge to over 770,000 children with orthopedic problems, severe burns, and spinal cord injuries. Founded in 1922 and today supported by more than 434,000 members of the International Shriner's Fraternity, this network of pediatric specialty hospitals is located across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Since the first Shriner's hospital opened in Shreveport, Louisiana, there have been approximately over 9 million radiological visits, over 7 million outpatient and outreach clinic visits, over 1 million braces and prosthesis applied, about three-quarters of a million operations performed, and over 16 million physical therapy treatments. I took a quick note of the fiscal note that I recently got, and by that it shows that the Shriner's would impact our revenue by roughly \$20,000 in the first year, if as many Shriner's came forward on the plates as they think. On there they have 5,000 sets. I did not give them that figure for the fiscal note, but I just wanted to point that out that we are maybe looking at a money-maker, especially if we would look at FY '08-09, we would generate maybe about \$85,000 for the DMV. I think that says a lot. Again, I think that these people, if they want the plates, if we can make some money on it, and I'm not limiting my bill to only Shriner's, that is what I have, but I would be in favor of other groups coming forward also. If we would have a minimum number of plates before we would start to make them, I would be willing to work with other senators on their plates and amendments. With that, I know I have some people that will be behind me to talk to you. And I would take any questions, if the committee would have any. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Karpisek. I would like to note for the official record that we have been joined by committee member Senator Dwite Pedersen. Does anyone have questions for Senator Karpisek? I see none. Thank you. [LB598]

SENATOR KARPISEK: Thank you. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Will you be staying for closing? [LB598]

SENATOR KARPISEK: I will stay for close. Thank you. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay, thank you. Next I'd like to see a show of hands on those of

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you who plan to testify on this bill? I see two. Thank you. I will open it now for proponents of the bill to come forward, please. Good afternoon. [LB598]

WILLIAM NELSON: (Exhibits 1 and 2) Good afternoon, ma'am. Thank you, Senator. Good afternoon, members of the Transportation Committee. I am Bill Nelson, N-e-l-s-o-n, potentate, or chairman of the board of directors of Sesostris, and that's spelled S-e-s-o-s-t-r-i-s Shrine, here in Lincoln. I have the singular honor to represent nearly 1,900 Shrine Mason's in the Lincoln and surrounding area. Our thanks to Senators Karpisek, Gay, Pahls, and Rogert for introducing this bill on our behalf. In Nebraska, we have three Shrine centers, located in Omaha, Lincoln, and Hastings. Collectively, we have approximately 8,000 Shriner's in Nebraska from all walks of life. The Shrine of North America, as stated, is a fraternal organization of nearly 460,000 members. As Senator Karpisek stated, our major philanthropy is caring for children. We operate 22 Shrine Hospitals in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Children who are seen at our hospitals receive all their care at no cost to the family. Locally, we have approximately 300 Shrine kids, as we call them, who are patients in the Twin Cities hospital in Minneapolis, or Chicago, or St. Louis. We have a very dedicated group of Shriner's who we call our roadrunners, who transport their Shrine kids and their families to their scheduled appointments. Who are these Nebraska Shriners? We are all members of the Masonic Fraternity; we're from all walks of life, from bank presidents to blue collar workers, from senators, to truck drivers. We're all equal in the eyes of each other and what we do, we do for one purpose, to care for our kids. I'm here today to testify in support of the Shriner's license plate bill. I know there are other numerous bills before you for speciality license plates, seeing from the agenda here when I walked in. And I honestly believe, as Senator Karpisek said, we could probably combine all of them into one super bill, if you will, to allow specialty plates for all groups. I know I've been here before this committee before, a number of years ago, testifying in support of National Guard plates, and we're still looking for them to be approved. I know you're inundated each year with a group or groups asking for special plates. We're no different. Everyone wants that special recognition and also to be able to proudly say that we are from Nebraska where the state supports our group or groups. A specialty license plate is an advertisement for who we are and where we're from. What better advertisement could there be for Nebraska's good life? Numerous other states have Shrine license plates, as you can see before you the handouts, which all have the same message, Shriner's help kids. It's an advertisement for us more than a message that we are Shriner's. It offers an opening for a family, who may have a kid that needs help, to ask the question about our care. Will we be upset if the bill does not make it out of committee to General File or doesn't make it on the floor? Sure, we will, who wouldn't? However, we Shriner's will continue to do what we do best, work quietly, calmly, and efficiently behind the scenes to take care of our kids and have fun doing it. No one can ever take that from us. This license plate would be fitting recognition for those Shriner's who have gone the extra step to proudly proclaim they help kids and are willing to do so without any hesitation. You may ask, how many Shriner's will want a specialty plate? I'd

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hazard a guess that every Shriner in Nebraska who has a vehicle will want one or more to be able to proudly say, I'm a Nebraskan first, and a Shriner second, see my license plate; my state thought enough of me to allow me to showcase where I'm from and who I am. Members of the Transportation Committee, I see this as a potential for the state of Nebraska to do the right thing, to not only allow the Shrine to have a personalized license plate, but to allow other groups to do the same. I know there are detractors that will say, well, if they get a plate, then Aunt Sally's sewing club will want one. To that I say, what difference does it make? If the state can make some money doing this, and I think that's the bottom line, then I'd say let's do it. Numbers should not be the determining factor. We have a specialty license plate right now honoring our Pearl Harbor survivors. Their numbers, sadly, are dwindling, but we still honor their service for oh so many years ago. I thank you for allowing me to come before you this afternoon. I respectfully request your support in taking this bill from committee and advancing it to General File. At least give it a chance to be heard on the floor. Thank you. This concludes my testimony. Are there any questions of me at this time? [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Nelson. Appreciate you being here today. Are there any questions from the committee? I see none. Thank you so much for being here. [LB598]

WILLIAM NELSON: Thank you, Senator. And thank you once again for what you do for this great state of Nebraska. Again, I firmly believe the Shrine license plate is a good thing, and I ask for your support. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: You've made your point. Thank you. [LB598]

WILLIAM NELSON: Thank you. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Next proponent, please. Welcome. [LB598]

ANDREW BORSKE: Good afternoon. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Oh, at this time I'd like to say that Senator Aguilar has joined us. Please continue. [LB598]

ANDREW BORSKE: Good afternoon, Transportation Committee. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak. My name is Andrew Borske, B as in boy o-r-s-k-e. I am a member of Sesostris Shrine, which has been mentioned and spelled earlier. I wanted to just take a few minutes to give you a personal aspect of what the Shriners do. I was a Shrine child for the first 19 years of my life. I received excellent medical care at absolutely no expense to myself. Any time I wanted to do anything, any challenge I had before me, the Shriners would help. I wanted to play tennis, they got a local tennis pro to help design a serving ring that could be attached to my right arm, so I could throw

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the ball up. When I was in high school I wanted to be on the gymnastics team. And, incidentally, I ended up getting five-tenths of a point extra by doing one-armed vaults, which was kind of nice, because that's the only way I could do them. But again, I had a prosthetic hand and I would damage it severely because when you do handstands on a prosthetic limb, they don't hold up very well. And instead of being a typical situation where the doctor or the insurance company would say, well, stop doing that, that gets awfully expensive, the Shriner's, on the other hand, said, you keep doing what you do, you break them, we'll replace them. There was never any question. They want to see the fullest potential that a child can be and help them in any way possible. So what does this have to do with the license plate bill? Very simple. We are always on the outlook, I mean look for children in need. And one of the best advertisements that we can have is something that clearly shows that we are a Shriner, that we are someone that they can talk to. I can't tell you how many times, when somebody finally knows that I'm a Shriner either because I happen to have a little Shrine pin on, or through conversation, they say, you know, we know somebody that might need your help. Well, the Shrine license plate would be an excellent avenue for us to advertise, to let people know that there is a Shriner or someone that is related to a Shriner in that car. And I believe that this would be an extremely useful tool to help us help our kids, because they can...it's seen, you can see it, it's in front of them, and they're more likely to come up to you and ask you a question about it. So I do believe that these plates would be a useful tool for us to help kids in need, and that's why I'm here today to speak on its behalf. I thank you very much for your time and your consideration. And if there's anything else, any questions, I'd be happy to answer them at this moment. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Borske. Are there any questions? Senator Hudkins. [LB598]

SENATOR HUDKINS: Thank you, Mr. Borske, for being here. My husband is a Shriner, so I'm very familiar with what your organization does. Two questions. Can you still do a one-armed handstand? [LB598]

ANDREW BORSKE: (Whew) You know that was about 20 pounds ago (laughter), so if it will work to get the bill on the floor, yeah, I'll give it a shot. (Laughter) [LB598]

SENATOR HUDKINS: And of the examples that we were given, does the Sesostris Shrine group have a favorite? [LB598]

ANDREW BORSKE: You know, once we get to that point, we would pick one, I do not know if we have a favorite at this point in time. [LB598]

SENATOR HUDKINS: All right, thank you. [LB598]

ANDREW BORSKE: Thank you. [LB598]

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SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Senator Stuthman. [LB598]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Mr. Borske, I want to thank you for what you do for the children. My family has personally experienced it; I have a grandson that was born without a hand, and he received services there. The question I have is, do you feel that all Shriners would apply for a license plate, if they had an opportunity to? [LB598]

ANDREW BORSKE: Not only Shriners, but their spouses. I know for a fact that yes, they will. We've been trying for over five years, and I've been in front of this committee probably four of those five years. The one year I missed, I was actually out of town. But we're all excited about this. We constantly talk about it. And it always comes up, well, when do you think we're going to get our plate? So, yes, I do believe that you would easily find at least 5,000 sets of license plates. [LB598]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: And your group, you know, you're very serious about advertising what you do and how you help children. [LB598]

ANDREW BORSKE: Yes. [LB598]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, thank you. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? My husband is also a member of your Shrine. That doesn't mean anything, though. (Laughter) [LB598]

ANDREW BORSKE: Well, it's just...we appreciate hearing all that. But what that does show is that we make an impact on the community, someone knows somebody, and this is just another way that we can make ourselves known and either grow, not only help kids, but hopefully grow in membership of a philanthropic organization. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Yes, and I appreciate that. Thank you very much for coming today. [LB598]

ANDREW BORSKE: Thank you. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Are there other proponents? Do we have any opposition to the bill? Would anyone like to testify in the neutral capacity? I see none. Senator Karpisek, would you like to close, please? [LB598]

SENATOR KARPISEK: Just real quickly. Thank you, Senator Fischer. I don't know if that was good or bad for them, for your husband to be one. This is the plate design that I was given. I don't know...Ron Hoffman gave me this. I know him from my mayor days.

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I don't know if this is the only one. Anyway, thank you for hearing our testimony. I know that is a big bill for you that has caused some turmoil in the past. But I do appreciate your hearing, and I do think that we could make some money for the state and make a lot of people happy. So if there are any other questions, I'd be glad to take them.
[LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Thank you, Senator. [LB598]

SENATOR KARPISEK: Thank you. [LB598]

SENATOR FISCHER: With that, I will close the hearing on LB598. And we will open the hearing on LB360. Senator Dwite Pedersen, good afternoon. [LB598 LB360]

SENATOR PEDERSEN: Good afternoon, Madam Chairman, Transportation Committee and colleagues. For the record, my name is Dwite, D-w-i-t-e Pedersen, P-e-d-e-r-s-e-n. I represent the 39th Legislative District, and I'm here today to introduce to you LB360. This bill simply changes the statutes to allow for a qualified Purple Heart recipient to purchase Purple Heart license plates for more than one vehicle that they own. Current statutes allow Purple Heart recipients to purchase a specialized Purple Heart license plate upon payment of the regular fee plus \$5. The statutory language states that they may only purchase one license plate, regardless of the number of vehicles they own. Most people these days own more than one vehicle, and this bill would simply allow a qualified Purple Heart recipient to buy two plates for vehicles that they own. I see no problem with allowing this privilege to those who have earned the prestigious Purple Heart award and I urge the committee to support this minor change in the statute. This is not authorizing new plates, it's authorizing those who have earned them to have more than one and it would have a different number on it, obviously. I just left with most of you a very serious and heart-touching ceremony recognizing our Nebraska heroes in the war; there were several Purple Hearts. This is a very tiny, little thing that we could give them who have put themselves in harms way for our freedom and for our care. Thank you. If there's any questions, I'd be glad to try and answer them for you. [LB360]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Pedersen. Are there questions? Senator Aguilar. [LB360]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Yeah, Senator Pedersen, just one quick question. How did you arrange the timing to work out so well with that? The ceremony today and this bill?
[LB360]

SENATOR PEDERSEN: I had a deal with the Madam Chairman. (Laughter) [LB360]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Thank you. [LB360]

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SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Do you plan to close? [LB360]

SENATOR PEDERSEN: No. [LB360]

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay. Could I see a show of hands of those who plan to testify on this bill, please? Okay. I see one. At this time, could we have the proponent step forward, please. Good afternoon. [LB360]

TERRY MINARIK: Good afternoon. [LB360]

SENATOR FISCHER: Did you fill out a yellow sheet? [LB360]

TERRY MINARIK: Yes, I did, it's on the desk behind me there. [LB360]

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay, thank you. [LB360]

TERRY MINARIK: Yeah, thank you. My name is Terry Minarik, middle initial is L. Last name is spelled M-i-n-a-r-i-k. I'll be very, very brief here. First of all, I'm a combat veteran of the Vietnam War. I was wounded on three separate occasions in combat in Vietnam, so I do have a Purple Heart license plate. I'll try not to repeat what Senator Pedersen said. I'll, like I said, be brief. Normally, my wife and I alternate driving the two vehicles that we own, and therefore each...you know, most of the time, about 50 percent of the time we're each driving each of the two vehicles. So what's happening there is often times my wife is driving the vehicle with Purple Heart plates while I'm driving the vehicle without Purple Heart plates, or sometimes we're both in the same vehicle, which is the case today, and that's the all-wheel drive vehicle without Purple Heart plates. So my understanding is that other specialty plates that people are allowed to have more than one set of specialty plates. And I would hope that we could amend the law to allow Purple Heart recipients to have Purple Heart plates on more than one vehicle. And as Senator Pedersen stated, it would be a separate number on each vehicle, of course, Thank you. Any questions? [LB360]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you very much, Mr. Minarik. Are there questions? I see none. Oh, Senator Stuthman. [LB360]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Terry, the main reason you would want it is because the vehicle that you're in, you would like to have the respect of having that Purple Heart plate whenever you're driving? [LB360]

TERRY MINARIK: Yes, that's correct. [LB360]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: That would be... [LB360]

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TERRY MINARIK: Yeah. It seems somewhat ludicrous when, you know, my wife is driving the vehicle with Purple Heart plates and I'm driving the vehicle that does not have the Purple Heart plates. Thank goodness she was never in combat, didn't receive a Purple Heart. [LB360]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Yeah. But any vehicle that you're driving, you know too, the way this bill is, you would have the distinction of being a Purple Heart recipient. [LB360]

TERRY MINARIK: Correct. [LB360]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, thank you. [LB360]

TERRY MINARIK: Thank you. [LB360]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Thank you very much for coming in today. [LB360]

TERRY MINARIK: Yeah, thank you very much. [LB360]

SENATOR FISCHER: Any other proponents? Is there anyone here to speak in opposition to the bill? Anyone wishing to testify in the neutral capacity? I see none. Senator Pedersen waives closing. With that, I will close the hearing on LB360, and we will open the hearing on LB570. Senator Louden is here to introduce. Good afternoon. [LB360 LB570]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Good afternoon, Senator Fischer and members of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee. My name is LeRoy Louden and I represent District 49. And the last name is spelled L-o-u-d-e-n. I'm here to give a presentation on LB570. LB570 will allow Nebraska to issue Gold Star license plates for vehicles registered in the state. A portion of the fees will go to the Operations Fund of the Nebraska Veterinary System...the Veteran Cemetery System. Constituents in District 49 asked me to introduce this legislation. As you know, the term "Gold Star" was used during World War II to designate mother's whose sons died in the war. Since that time, the term has continued in use in subsequent wars, and is now used to designate not only mothers, but families who have lost someone in the military service for our country. There are Gold Star organizations in the Unites States; LB570 is not related to those organizations. It does not in any way require membership in one of the organizations in order to obtain a Gold Star license plate through the state of Nebraska. The bill is modeled on existing statutes that allow for other specialty plates. It directs the Department of Motor Vehicles, in consultation with the Military Department, and the Department of Veterans Affairs to design a Gold Star plate. The bill provides general design guidelines for the department. It also specifies the amount of initial and renewal fees, and designates persons who are eligible to purchase the plates. It directs the

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State Treasurer to credit \$10 of each fee to the Nebraska Veterans Cemetery System Operation Fund, and remainder to the Motor Vehicle's Cash Fund. Finally, it authorizes the Department of Motor Vehicles to adopt and promulgate rules and regulations to carry out the provisions of the bill. Persons who would be eligible, under LB570, to obtain Gold Star plates are the surviving spouse, parent, grandparent, sibling, or child of a member of the armed forces who died while on active duty. The bill follows existing statutory language on other specialty plates by stating the plates will be issued upon furnishing proof satisfactory to the department that the applicant is one of the designated eligible persons. The department would determine what proof is satisfactory during its rule-making process. It deliberately did not use the phrase "died in combat" in describing who is eligible for a Gold Star plate. There are a number of reasons for this. First, information provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs made it clear to me that it is difficult in some cases to determine whether someone died in combat. For example, if an active duty soldier dies in a plane crash near a battle, but the plane was not flying specifically as part of the battle, did that soldier die in combat? Another example, if a sailor is swept overboard and lost at sea when a ship is going to engage in battle, but the battle has yet to begin, did that sailor die in combat? These kinds of questions are difficult to resolve. Secondly, the purpose of LB570 is not to entangle the Department of Motor Vehicles in disputes about what died in combat means. Therefore, I deliberately asked for the bill to be drafted with the phrase "died while on active duty", because that can be determined more easily. The bill would provide revenue to the Veterans Cemetery Operations Fund. Currently, one cemetery is in the planning stage, and that is the High Plains Veterans Cemetery in Box Butte County, which is in my legislative district. The bill's fiscal note was difficult to write as it is not known how many eligible persons there are in the state. While I would welcome any fees from the plates, because I strongly support the cemetery, my goal in introducing LB570 is not to generate funds for the cemetery. My goal is to allow family members to use the plates as a memorial to a lost loved one. There may not be an enormous number of people in Nebraska who would obtain a Gold Star plate, but for those who do, I have no doubt that the plate will be displayed proudly. There were several people at that ceremony today that they were for fallen heroes from Nebraska, and of course any of those family members would be allowed to get a Gold Star plate. A person in the county where I live, right north of us there, the Mracek boy was lost in the Iraq war, and also there are people here today that have traveled many hundreds of miles to testify in support of the bill. And I'd like to thank them for coming and for helping to bring LB570 to you today. I hope that the committee can advance LB570. And I'd be happy to try to answer your questions. Thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Loudon. Are there questions? Senator Stuthman. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator Loudon, a Gold Star plate, would that mean there's a gold star on the plate? [LB570]

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SENATOR LOUDEN: That would be up to the Department of Roads to decide what kind of design they want. There would probably be some type of a gold star, such as they had, you know, even during World War II, when we saw the gold star in the windows of houses of people that had lost sons and that. It would be designed along that line someplace. But that would be up to the department to decide how best to design one so that they could make it easily. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: So you feel that it would be the decision of the department to design the plate? You're not asking for a certain design? [LB570]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Right and I think I said in my presentation here that it was up to the general design guidelines for the department, and it would be up to the department to decide that. We're not taking that kind of decision away from the department. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Thank you, Senator. If I could have a show of hands, please, of how many plan to testify on this bill? I see two. Thank you. And at this time, would the proponents step forward, the first proponent, please. Good afternoon. [LB570]

CHRISTINE WOLF: (Exhibit 1) Good afternoon. My name is Chris Wolf, W-o-l-f. We've traveled here from Scottsbluff. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I've had many titles in my lifetime which would include daughter, sister, student, and employee. I was excited to reach the voting age and earn the title of an adult in the eyes of the law. But the two most important titles I have now are wife and mother. All these titles were a part of the natural progression in my life, a sign of growing up and of adulthood. But as of November 6, 2003, I have added one more title to my list, that of a Gold Star mother. To give a brief history, during the early years of World War I, a Blue Star was used to represent each person, man or woman, in the military service of the United States. As the war progressed and men were killed in battle, or died of their wounds or diseases, there came about the accepted usage of a gold star. This gold star was substituted and superimposed upon the blue star in such a manner to cover it entirely. So instead of a symbol of mourning for the family, it became a sign of honor and glory to the family member who had given the ultimate sacrifice in service to his country. Our son, Specialist James Wolf, was killed while serving with the 52nd Engineer Battalion in Mosul, Iraq. This qualifies me as a Gold Star mother and our family as a Gold Star family. We are here today in support of LB570, the Gold Star family license plate bill. It is our belief that all families who have lost a family member in service to their country be allowed the chance to be recognized in this way, if they choose. We have been the recipients of so much love and support from our family, our church, our community, and many people we've never met. Ft. Carson, where our son

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was stationed, still wraps their arms around us and comforts us every time we visit. The gifts we've received in memory of James are countless, but every one is special as it was given out of love and respect to James and what he stood for. But there was a time in our nation's history, not so many years ago, when those who served our country were not treated so kindly. It's now time for all family members of fallen heroes, no matter when or where their deaths occurred, to be recognized. Give the families of all the fallen heroes in Nebraska the chance to honor their family member by being recognized as a Gold Star family. It's not a group that anybody wants to join as the membership comes in an extremely painful and life-changing cost. You may have seen the commercials on TV where a mother is at the grocery store talking to herself in a very strange manner. As the commercial ends and the camera pulls away, you see that she is talking to her child, trying to make every experience alerting an opportunity. It is my hope that when parents see a Gold Star license plate they'll take the opportunity to tell their children that somebody from that family cared enough about their country to stand up and protect it, and they died protecting those rights that we tend to take for granted every day, and they are heroes in every sense of the word. I have brought a copy of an article that was recently published in my Gold Star mother's newsletter that tells of how the state of Pennsylvania has recently granted permission for Gold Star plates, and other states have begun to pass legislation as well. I would like to see the great state of Nebraska be one of those states that has stepped up to be an example to the rest of the country that our fallen heroes are important and need to be recognized. I have met many Gold Star mothers in the three and a half years since our son's death, some in person, and some in different chat rooms. The one thing we all have in common is the fact that we don't want the memory of our children to die. Help us all in keeping the memory and the honor due our fallen children, spouses, parents, and siblings. And remember that these ultimate sacrifices are what allow us to live the life and the freedoms that we do today and in the future. Thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mrs. Wolf. And I would like to extend our sympathies to you on the loss of your son, and also express our deep gratitude to your whole family. Thank you very much. [LB570]

CHRISTINE WOLF: Thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Any questions? Senator Stuthman. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Thank you for your testimony. And this display here that has the Gold Star on it, that was what I was trying to get from the introducer there. [LB570]

CHRISTINE WOLF: Right, yes. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Would you just have Gold Star on the bottom? I know there

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are different here, Gold Star Mother, and Gold Star Father. [LB570]

CHRISTINE WOLF: I think we would like to have is Gold Star Families, if we could. I don't know, we haven't gotten to that point. But I think we'd like to be able to recognize the word families in there. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Family, that would be meaningful to you then, the family part? [LB570]

CHRISTINE WOLF: Exactly, exactly, because it's all of us. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Yeah, thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Senator Louden. [LB570]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Yeah, and I want to thank you for coming this far to testify today. I'm sure the roads weren't in the best of conditions to make it here,... [LB570]

CHRISTINE WOLF: No, they weren't. [LB570]

SENATOR LOUDEN: ...we appreciate your testimony and thank you for coming. And certainly I'll push this, do what I can for it. Thank you. [LB570]

CHRISTINE WOLF: Great. We thank you very much. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: (Exhibit 2) Other questions? Mrs. Wolf, you and your husband also sent us a letter, is that correct, on January 29? I have one to Senator Louden. [LB570]

CHRISTINE WOLF: Yeah, I think so, yes. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay, I just wanted to make sure that you folks were the same people who sent the letter. Thank you very much. [LB570]

CHRISTINE WOLF: Thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Appreciate you being here. Next proponent, please. Good afternoon. [LB570]

ROBERT WOLF: Good afternoon. My name is Robert Wolf, W-o-l-f. I want to thank the committee for allowing my wife and I time to visit with you about the Gold Star plates. These plates aren't just for the families of the fallen from the Gulf Wars, they're for all of those who have been lost in conflicts that our military have fought in. Nebraska has

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plates for the survivors of the attack on Pearl Harbor, but nothing to remember those who gave their lives there, or at Normandy, or at Iwo Jima. We have plates to honor returned POW's, but nothing to honor those who died at Kaison, Saigon, or during Tet. There are plates to honor the disabled veterans, but nothing to honor the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country at the Chosen Reservoir, Grenada, Bagdad, or Mosul. It is for the families of these heros that we ask the Legislature to allow the Gold Star family plates. We know how important this is to the families because we lost our son, Specialist James Wolf, on November 6, 2003, just outside of Mosul, Iraq. Jamie was security gunner on a convoy that day that was hit by an improvised explosive device. He was 21 years old. Someone told me it's not the amount of time in your life that's important, but it's the amount of life you put in the time that you're here. Jamie put a lot of life into a very short time. He was very proud to serve his state and his country, and very proud to wear the uniform of the United States Army. When he would come home to Scottsbluff, he would always go back to Scottsbluff High School, where he graduated from, wearing his uniform to visit with his teachers and to thank them for all that they had done for him. That's the kind of young man that James was, always smiling, always thinking of others. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think of Jamie, wishing he was here for me to tell him how much I love him, and how proud we are of him, and how much I miss him. There is nothing that will ever replace having Jamie here. I will never get to see him get that promotion to Sergeant that he wanted, to see him get married and have children, I'll never be able to take him fishing again. But I always carry his memory with me. Every day I wear one of his dog tags around my neck to remind me of him and of what we have lost. This is the pride and the pain of a Gold Star family, one that we live with every day. LB570 will give all of us one more way to remember the loved ones that we lost and honor their memory every day. My wife Chris, our son David, our daughter Ellie, our daughter Rachel would all like to thank you for letting us speak today. We would especially like to thank Senator Loudon and his legislative aide, Claudia, for all the help that they have given us. And we hope that you will consider this bill and consider passing it. Thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Wolf. Once again, we extend to you our sympathies and our gratitude. Thank you. Are there questions? Senator Stuthman. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Thank you for coming and testifying, just as Senator Fischer has said. I know you spent a lot of hours coming out here. The question I have is, are you aware of any other families that this would be important to them, too? Do you know of other circumstances, or are you working kind of on your own to try to develop this? [LB570]

ROBERT WOLF: No, we have been working with the Mracek family, out of Hay Springs. We lost Jamie in November of '03, and they lost Cory January of '04. And I know they were the ones that actually started working with Senator Loudon. Pat Mracek can't be

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here because her daughter, they just had their first grandchild, Saturday. But it's...I have spoken, and I know Chris has too, with other families that have lost loved ones in like the Vietnam War. And they're very interested in this, especially for them, because they didn't get the parades when they came home. And so for them to be able to show that they honor the memory or, whether it was a son, or a brother, or a sister, or whatever family member, I think it's a special importance to the families that lost people in Vietnam. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: So if this would become a reality that we could have these plates, you feel that there would be a lot more that would get...would apply for these plates, just from the fact that they have lost someone? [LB570]

ROBERT WOLF: Oh, I think so, I definitely think so, yes. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: You know presently people are not aware of anything that could happen. But if we could accomplish this, I'm sure there would be a lot of them. [LB570]

ROBERT WOLF: Oh, I think there would be a large groundswell. And I think, yeah, I think there would be a lot of them out there. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Thank you again for being here. [LB570]

ROBERT WOLF: Thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Are there other proponents for the bill? Any that wish to speak in opposition to the bill? Is there anyone to speak in the neutral capacity? I see none. Senator Louden, would you like to close? [LB570]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Thank you, Senator Fischer and members of the committee. This isn't about a monetary revenue source for the state of Nebraska or somebody. But these license plates would actually be a badge of honor. This is something we could do to honor some of the people that have worked and fallen to protect us. The Gold Star plates would signify that a family has sacrificed enormously for us and for our country. So this is why I would please ask for your advancement of LB570. Thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Louden. Questions? Senator Stuthman. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator Louden, do you feel this

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plate would be as important as a Purple Heart plate? [LB570]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Well, I think so because the way the Purple Heart plate is now, just the people themselves, more or less, can have it on their own car. This is a family type deal. I mean this could go back and pick up people from World War II, and Korean War, all the way through those that would have lost relatives in those wars there. So I think it's a way of showing that what some of the families have sacrificed for our country. And at the present time, you know, Memorial Day and that's about it. But this is something to be wore on your car all the time, if you wanted to. [LB570]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: You know and, Senator Louden, and I only thought of this just right now when we discussed the Purple Heart plate and your plate, and in my opinion this plate would probably be more important or as important as a Purple Heart plate just for the fact, you know, there is a family that did lose a member. So I think, you know, I think it's worthy...be worthwhile to look at. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Thank you very much, Senator Louden. [LB570]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Thank you. [LB570]

SENATOR FISCHER: (Exhibit 3) With that, I will close the hearing on LB570. I will open the hearing on LB419. Senator Erdman should be joining us in just a few minutes. Good afternoon, Senator Erdman, we are ready for you. This is on LB419. [LB570 LB419]

SENATOR ERDMAN: (Exhibit 1) Thank you, Madam Chairperson. We have a small issue in front of the Ag Committee, dealing with the state fair today, so I am trying to balance all responsibilities appropriately. LB419, and I'm going to distribute an example of what some other states have done, LB419 would create the Nebraska Agriculture Specialty Plate. This plate would permit individuals to express themselves as supporters of Nebraska's agricultural history while contributing to a newly created Ag Research Fund. This fund would be administered by the Department of Agriculture. What's being distributed to you is an example or actually two examples, one is from Maryland, another is from Virginia, probably not states that generally come to your mind when you think of agricultural leaders, but these plates have seen some success in their states. One of the things that I think is an interesting part of our state is that we have a limited number of speciality plates. Obviously, you can get your own, as they call them, vanity plates, where you can put whatever allowed statement you want on there. But we generally have them reserved to military plates, we have the general issued plates, and we have the spirit plates that are done in support of the University of Nebraska and their athletic programs. It would seem to me that there are probably no two greater areas of pride that Nebraskans take than in the university athletic programs and in agriculture, as our primary industry. LB419 would simply allow Nebraskans to display their support, as

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we allow them to display their support for our state's top athletic endeavor, and that's the University of Nebraska athletic program, as we would for the agriculture industry. The money would go to an Ag Research Fund. This bill is introduced in coordination with another bill that would try to redirect some additional funding to an Ag Research Fund. One of the things that I think is a vital part of the future of rural Nebraska is to be able to have the appropriate research dollars available to make sure that we're partnering with the right folks to see that our rural communities are successful. And so that is why I have chosen that this fund be created. It would be administered under the Department of Agriculture as opposed to an existing facility or existing research organization as to not negatively impact any appropriations that they may receive from the state of Nebraska. Just to preempt a question that may come up, the examples that I've given you are Virginia and Maryland. In Maryland they have approximately 4.6 million licensed vehicles. Of those 4.6 million they do approximately 400,000, a little over 400,000, so just shy of 10 percent of their specialty plates go towards either agricultural or conservation related funds. So it is quite popular in other states. The example from Virginia probably isn't as good because they have over 180 specialty license plates that you can choose from. Having said that, they have over 1,000 individuals that have specifically chosen their plate. And I would argue that our process would probably be more reflective of what we see in Nebraska relating to the spirit plate, as well as what Maryland is experiencing in people being willing to support their industry and agriculture and conservation. And with that, I would be happy to try to answer any questions, Madam Chair. [LB419]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Erdman. Are there questions? Senator Aguilar. [LB419]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Thank you. Thank you for coming today, Senator Erdman. I'm one of those people that, frankly, don't really care if a person wants to buy a speciality plate. I think it's good, especially if it can be a revenue source for the state of Nebraska. Have you done any specific survey as far as how many people in Nebraska, what percentage of our population would be interested in purchasing this particular plate? [LB419]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Here is the information that I have, Senator Aguilar, we have approximately 2.1 million registered vehicles in the state of Nebraska, that was as of 2005. Just, I guess, the starting point that I look at is obviously we have a farm plate that individuals that are engaged in agricultural production, they don't necessarily have to live on the farm. I was a farmer, lived in town, and I still had a farm plate on my pickup. But we have approximately 148,000 registered farm trucks. And there are currently 130 farm vehicles that have the university spirit plate. So, to start off with, that would probably be a good number is 150,000. Obviously, not all those individuals would be purchasing those. The other thing that I think is important to point out is that as I was...as we were all at a reception one evening for the Broadcasters Association, I had

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folks that were there come up to me and say that if this passed that they would also be interested, not because they are directly engaged in agriculture, but because they would like the opportunity to show their heritage through their choice, and their only options now are to the spirit plate or to the more vanity plates, I guess, is the term I use. I'm not sure if that's accurate. But I would start with that 150,000, and there are 1,600 of those that I believe have message plates that they're farm plates, but they've opted in the vanity. So that's probably a place to start. I think we probably have, and I have this for my closing, I believe I also have the number of spirit plates that have been purchased in support of the university as well. But, you know, \$9 billion industry, agriculture is our number one industry. It seemed logical to me to tie the two issues together, and one is giving individuals the opportunity to state that they are supporting that industry, much as we allow the university, and to make sure that the funding goes to a source that I think is vital for the future of agriculture. [LB419]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Thank you, Senator Erdman. I notice you provided a sample of Virginia license plates. Do you know what their primary ag product is in the state of Virginia? [LB419]

SENATOR ERDMAN: I don't, but I would imagine that being in the southern area of our great country that they probably had some early influence from the industry that we were discussing on the floor this morning. But I can find out, if you'd like know what it is specifically. [LB419]

SENATOR AGUILAR: I would like to know that. Thank you, Senator. [LB419]

SENATOR ERDMAN: I'll check into that. [LB419]

SENATOR FISCHER: Senator Stuthman. [LB419]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator Erdman, would this ag plate, would it be just one design for agriculture? It wouldn't have the Chimney Rock on it or anything like that? [LB419]

SENATOR ERDMAN: You may have to forego the opportunity, Senator Stuthman, as hard as this is for me to say, you may have to forego the opportunity in the event that the general plate would have that fine design that we now have on the quarter. But that would be done as we have done in other programs. I would imagine that we could have a contest, or we could simply choose a design. Maryland and Virginia, obviously, have what they have recommended. Those seem to be quite attractive, just from my perspective, to see if something similar to that, obviously, you know, Virginia has on theirs that they've been farming since 1614. I think there's a way to create a very attractive plate that would appeal to a number of individuals in agriculture that would be willing to purchase those. But I think that could be open to however we would choose to

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proceed. [LB419]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: But the intent is to just have one ag design on there? [LB419]

SENATOR ERDMAN: One plate, correct. [LB419]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay. [LB419]

SENATOR ERDMAN: And that would be...it would be my opinion, just as we with all other plates, that periodically they would change, just as we do the spirit plates and the other plates on a five year basis, I believe, or six years, whatever we use, that they would also follow that same pattern to make sure that enforcement and other issues are followed as well. But we would just have one ag plate, just like we have one spirit plate for the university. [LB419]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, thank you. [LB419]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Thank you very much, Senator. If I could have a show of hands, please, of how many plan to testify on this bill? One. Okay, thank you. Would the first proponent come forward, please. Good afternoon. [LB419]

PETER McClymont: Afternoon. Madam Chairman, members of the committee, I am Pete McClymont, M-c-C-l-y-m-o-n-t. I am the vice president of Legislative Affairs for Nebraska Cattlemen and I am here in support of LB419. I would like to thank Senator Erdman and the other five cosponsors of this bill. I see two main reasons for this bill, and the obvious pride we have in it being the state's largest industry, of which the beef industry would be 60 percent of the number that Senator Erdman gave. So from that standpoint this allows people to show their pride when they're driving up and down the road. The second reason, obviously, is the Agriculture Research Fund. Given the fiscal note doesn't show a great deal of impact, but to the question that Senator Aguilar brought up as to the depth of which people would buy this plate to show their pride is hard to say. So even though the fiscal note shows basically a neutral position on what it would cost the state and the revenue generated, if this was passed there could be, you know depending on the pride people have and to keep up with their neighbors, there might be more people buying it. I know the state of Colorado has them. And if you've ever been to Colorado it's a maroon plate, it's a white plate with maroon trim, so it sticks out, so you can tell people involved. With that, I would just hope, even though I know this committee gets submerged with people wanting to have speciality plates, and I know it may be difficult at times to start somewhere to allow, if you allow one, you must allow a lot, but given that agriculture is the biggest economic impact on our state, I think this would be a great way to show that. So again, I'd like to thank Senator Erdman and the cosponsors. And I'd be happy to answer any questions. [LB419]

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SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. McClymont. Are there questions? Senator Louden. [LB419]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Yes, thank you, Senator Fischer. As I look this over, Pete, what are you going to do with the research money? I mean this isn't a big bunch of bucks for research in there? That's going to take quite a while to get a fund of any kind, wouldn't it? [LB419]

PETER McCLYMONT: Sure, and with...the fiscal note showed, I think, an assumption of 2,000 purchases of this plate. So I would agree with you. Right now the dollars generated couldn't do a tremendous amount of research in the beginning. But I think in the course of time it could build up. That's all speculation. But I would agree with you, Senator. [LB419]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Okay. And then one other, as we've listened to these plates so far today, most of these plates have been some type of an honor, or badge of honor, or recognizing people that have done something beyond, I guess, revenue source or whatever. And this one gets down to more generating something for a revenue source, because I mean we have our agricultural plates. We can put them...you can put a magnetic sign on the side of your pickup and do the same thing. Is that right? [LB419]

PETER McCLYMONT: Well, I think you hit on it in your initial point, is that having these plates would be an honor. It would show the fact of peoples pride in the state and agriculture. So yes, we do have the ag designated plates right now. But this would just be another step to allow people to purchase them and hopefully gain a little more revenue. [LB419]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Okay, thank you. [LB419]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Mr. McClymont, I know four guys in my house who would support this, as long as you could make sure that "The Beef State" would be written on there. (Laugh) Thank you for being here today. [LB419]

PETER McCLYMONT: Thank you. [LB419]

SENATOR FISCHER: Are there other proponents? I see none. Anyone in opposition? Anyone to testify in the neutral capacity? I see none. Senator Erdman, would you like to close? [LB419]

SENATOR ERDMAN: I would, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I guess I'd like to just follow up briefly on Senator Louden's question. If you read the bill, we're actually creating the fund in the bill as well. I have another proposal that's in front of the Appropriations Committee that redirects some existing funding into this fund. This money would

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also...or this fund would also be available for other federal funds or other such gifts that would be deposited in this fund to build that up. So this is part of a comprehensive idea. It's not just expecting that only the license plates effort will do that. But I do think that it's a value for us as a state to look at this in a broad context. As I understand a lot of discussion that comes before this committee on the value of a license plate and why it should be granted, it has to have some value to the state in general. This is a way to accomplish that, while protecting or preserving the opportunity for people to express their pride. It would be logical to me to begin this process the way that we have started. I would be willing to work with the committee. The value of doing it the way that we have done in this bill and having that money set up at the Department of Ag as opposed to say the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is that at some point, as has been the history of this body since I've been here, you run into scenarios where somebody may get the idea that we're going to reduce funding for a certain purpose at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Obviously, we have limitations on what we can do. LB419 in partner with another bill, LB420, is designed to enhance that opportunity to provide not only those dollars to a university facility, but to folks that may be in organizations such as PEETS, that are doing research in their communities, trying to figure out how they can best survive, analyzing some of the issues that Senator Stuthman is aware of in the livestock production and trying to provide some additional incentives using footprint ideas and different things are readily recognized in other states, but may not be readily available because of limitations of the research to prove their values. So it is a start. Am I expecting that LB419 is going to put millions of dollars in the fund to start with? No. But I would bet you that if you looked at the number of dollars that are generated from some of the other plates, you don't see that either. So it's part of a coordinated effort. I'd be willing to work with the committee on any concerns that you have, but I do think it's a measured and responsible opportunity for us to try to resolve some of these issues and to provide some creative solutions for the future. [LB419]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Erdman. Senator Hudkins. [LB419]

SENATOR HUDKINS: Senator Erdman, thank you for being here. I've been looking at these two samples from Virginia and Maryland, and they are attractive. But I would suggest, since Director Neth is also in the room, that if we do something like this, that the design promoting agriculture should be larger. Because once you get a license plate bracket on these two samples, there's not much left. [LB419]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Yeah. And I think those issues can be worked out. [LB419]

SENATOR HUDKINS: Thank you. [LB419]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Thank you, Senator Erdman. With that, I will close the hearing on LB419 and I will open the hearing on LB421. Senator Erdman, would you like to open? [LB419]

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SENATOR ERDMAN: I would love to. [LB421]

SENATOR FISCHER: Great. [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: (Exhibit 1) And I do have written testimony from a constituent of mine, and I'll share that. I didn't make copies, so I apologize to the pages in advance. My name is Philip Erdman. I represent the 47th Legislative District, here to introduce LB421. It seems kind of fitting that today's afternoon activities began with an award ceremony. And Senator Pedersen, I don't know if you covered this in your opening, but we have similar legislation. But I notice that we have 18 individuals who received the Purple Heart Award this afternoon as a part of the Nebraska Army National Guard Awards Recognition Ceremony. If you also look at the individuals that were honored, there were also multiple awards recipients within those groups. What LB421 attempts to reconcile is the opportunity to recognize the efforts and the success that our men and women have secured while bravely surviving the battlefield. Simply put, LB421 eliminates the limitation that you may only receive one Purple Heart license plate for the individual who is the applicant. And it would change that to say that you may have...any number of motor vehicles or trailers owned by the applicant may be licensed at one time. So we have eliminated the high end. And it's my understanding, in visiting with the Department of Motor Vehicles, we're not requiring, as what my constituent had originally requested, that they get one for every Purple Heart that they received, which would cause some administrative problems of verifying each one of those Purple Heart awards. That we simply recognize that if this individual is a Purple Heart recipient, they own three vehicles that are licensed in their name, that would be the requirement, they couldn't be licensed in other individual's names, but instead of setting it at two, we would just simply remove that upper end and allow that individual the opportunity to have the flexibility under the law. And the testimony, as I understand it, from in the past is also available, if you would care to see that. But we're simply trying to provide a recognition of those individuals. Instead of going through the process, in the event that someone was a multiple Purple Heart winner and chose to pursue that option, to have the Department of Motor Vehicles verify that through the appropriate sources, that we would just simply eliminate the high end. They're paying the \$5 fee for the plate, as I understand it, and this would just simply recognize that opportunity for our veterans. [LB421]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Erdman. Are there questions? Senator Pedersen. [LB421]

SENATOR PEDERSEN: Thank you, Senator. Senator Erdman, I offered a bill similar to this just a few minutes ago. I'm not aware of, in the current statutes, that we can get a Purple Heart plate for trailers. I think you can only get one for an automobile. Is it your intention to include trailers in this bill, as it says, or...and if so, what kind of trailers are

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you talking about? The type you tow with a car, or a hunting trailer? [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: I believe that language was...let me look here real quick. [LB421]

SENATOR PEDERSEN: It's on page 2, line 19. [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Yeah, I'm looking to see if my notes specify why we specifically listed trailers? [LB421]

SENATOR PEDERSEN: It's not that important, but if your staff or someone has an answer to that... [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Yeah, I'll look and see if there's a reason. It may have been just a recognition of allowing that opportunity, not intended to have a consequence. But, you know, candidly the request that I received, and maybe you as well, was simply the vehicles. I would be okay with limiting it to that. But let me visit with my staff and see if there might be a rationale for it. [LB421]

SENATOR PEDERSEN: No problem, just let me know. Thank you. [LB421]

SENATOR FISCHER: Senator Stuthman. [LB421]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. That was kind of the question I was going to ask Senator Erdman is what Senator Pedersen did. The thing that entered my mind was the fact that if Crete Motor Carriers, if that individual was a Purple Heart winner and he had his whole fleet that he could have the fleet, and the license plate could be...I mean, I think we possibly might be opening up a can of worms in this. But I would like to get an answer as to, you know, what the real intent was for that. [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: And I believe, based on the previous bill, that the director is here. And they may be able to provide some insight as well. But I will visit with my staff and see if we recall any specific reason to include that. [LB421]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you. [LB421]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Senator Aguilar. [LB421]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Just to follow up on that conversation. Thank you. [LB421]

SENATOR FISCHER: For the record. [LB421]

SENATOR AGUILAR: I just can't help but wonder, maybe they weren't thinking of like camping trailers. A lot of people in that, especially retired people that's all they do is go

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camping and travel. Maybe they would want the plate designation on that. [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Yeah, it very well could be. And you know, I guess, as I understand your bill, Senator Pedersen, and what we're trying to attempt with LB421 is a similar goal, different vehicle. It would make sense to me, if it's not an undue burden, to allow them that opportunity, the flexibility that LB421 allows with the appropriate protections. And if trailers are a problem, I think we can work through that. But I think if you go and recognize those individuals for their service and the awards that they've received as we're trying to do in statute here, to limit it to a number probably creates a circumstance where somebody may have a legitimate reason why they would want more than what the law would allow, and this just simply opens that up. But let me check on the language of the trailers for you before my close. [LB421]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions. I see none. Thank you, Senator. Will you be staying for closing? [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Yes, if I can get an answer. [LB421]

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay, thank you. If I could have a show of hands on how many people plan to testify on this bill, please? I see none. Well, we'll go through this anyway. Any proponents, please step forward. Anyone in opposition, step forward. Is there anyone who would like to testify in the neutral capacity? Senator Erdman, would you like to close? [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: I would, Madam Chair. Sometimes the answer is so obvious that you miss it. It's existing law. If you read the language on page 2, starting in line 17, the existing language is, "only one motor vehicle or trailer owned by the applicant shall be so licensed at any one time". So when we made our amendment to the existing statute, we just simply changed the number from "one" to "any." And from the standpoint of whether or not it's a problem existing in the current law with trailers being licensed under this statute, I would imagine that we can probably receive some information from the Department of Motor Vehicles. But to answer your question succinctly, and if I would have been thinking on my feet, I probably could have answered that in my opening and saved you the time of closing. [LB421]

SENATOR PEDERSEN: Thank you. [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Yep. [LB421]

SENATOR FISCHER: Any other questions? I see none. Thank you, Senator Erdman. [LB421]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Thank you. [LB421]

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SENATOR FISCHER: With that, I will close the hearing on LB421, and we will open the hearing on LB93. Senator Cornett is here to open. Good afternoon, Senator. [LB421 LB93]

SENATOR CORNETT: Good afternoon, Chairman Fischer and members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Abbie Cornett, C-o-r-n-e-t-t, and I represent the 45th Legislative District. I'm here to introduce LB93. LB93 would allow the firefighters in the state of Nebraska, who so choose, to purchase license plates which would designate them as firefighters. These plates would be designed so as to conform with the standards of any other license plate issued. The plates would be consecutively numbered or could be personalized, if a person chose. Not just anyone would be able to receive these plates. Applicants would have to have a signed letter from their fire chief in order to receive the plates. When purchasing the plates, the fees would be distributed to the Department of Motor Vehicles Cash Fund, and the remainder going to the Firefighter Response Cash Fund. If the cost of manufacturing the firefighter plates at any time exceeds the amount charged, the money which would have been credited to the Firefighter Response Cash Fund will go the Highway Trust Fund. The Firefighter Response Cash Fund would be used to provide training for the Fire Department personnel and other emergency response personnel, for updating, upgrading, and establishing response capabilities for emergencies handled by local emergency response organizations. I thank you for your time and your consideration on this bill. And I am willing to answer any questions. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Cornett. Are there questions? I see none. If I could have a show of hands on how many people plan to testify on this bill, please? I see three, four. Thank you. Would the first proponent come forward, please. Good afternoon. [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm John Stacey, S-t-a-c-e-y, from Bellevue. I just finished 50 years with the Bellevue Fire Department and Rescue Squad; top responder last year. The reason for this license plate bill is, there are several reasons for it. One is we have a first responder system in our rescue. And these people come and leave their private vehicles in all kinds of strange places throughout the city. And we're talking 8, 10, and 12 calls a day, and the same at night. We answer an awful lot of rescue and fire calls, more rescue than fire. And these vehicles need to be marked so people know what they are, and even the police, so they don't tow them away when they're parked on the wrong side of the street or something. And also throughout the United States the volunteers are slipping. Our ranks are dwindling by the percentage per year. And it's kind of scary. And this is kind of a retention thing that we're doing, one little piece. And we feel that...I've been here 15, 16 years after these license plates; this is about my 16th year here, I think. I feel it would be very beneficial to the state financially, and it would also help us recruit and keep volunteers throughout the state of

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Nebraska, because we are losing our ranks rapidly. That's all I have to say. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Stacey. Are there questions? Senator Stuthman. [LB93]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. John, are we talking about just a firefighter plate, or are we talking about a firefighter, or an EMT, or a first responder? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: Firefighter/EMS, paramedic, first aid, yes, it will all be...we want it all in one on there. [LB93]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: But it would be just one plate then? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: Yes, one plate, because we have...everyone on our fire department, we have 150, 4 stations, all EMT's, everybody. [LB93]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, thank you. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Senator Aguilar. [LB93]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Thank you. Is there nothing on your vehicles now that designates you at all as an emergency vehicle? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: No, nothing. [LB93]

SENATOR AGUILAR: Thank you. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Senator Schimek. [LB93]

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Did I hear you correctly? This is the 16th year you've been here asking for this? Did it ever go to the floor? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: No, ma'am. Actually, I think I started with Senator Dale Payne, and you remember Dale Payne, the Senator, and Mr. Fenger, and all of them down the line? [LB93]

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Fenger, but not Payne wasn't here 16 years ago. [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: Payne was before Fenger, yeah. He was a nice, powerful man, but we couldn't get the license plates. And we have a lot of firemen throughout the state of Nebraska, there's thousands of firemen and we want to keep them. [LB93]

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SENATOR SCHIMEK: And this will help? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: This will help. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Senator Louden. [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Yes. Then usually these plates like this are more of a badge or something like that. But you're saying you would like to have these plates so these people could be recognized when they pull their cars up in an emergency situation and that sort of thing? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: Yes. [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Now what happens when a firefighter decides to quit, or some of these ones, and they still have the plate? Can they use that plate to kind of designate where they are? How do you plan to handle that sort of situation? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: I think the fire chief at the particular fire department will revoke the plate and get the plate back. That's what we're planning on. [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Well, the fire department doesn't have authority to...that's a state license plate. [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: No, they're working on something on there. I've asked that question myself. We don't want everybody running around with this plate on their car that is not a volunteer firefighter or a paid firefighter. It doesn't distinguish between the two. [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Well, now I thought the fire department, one or two of them where I come from they got little stickers and they put them in their windows, you know, and whatever, their pickup or whatever they use to go to work in and that sort of thing, so that when they park wherever it is they have their little stickers in the window. Would that work just as well for what you're trying to do? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: I don't know. It might, it might not. But it seems to me we've been after these plates so long it's just become a habit. And we really want them. We've talked to the mutual aids and they desire to have the plates on the car. They're a badge of honor also, other than recruitment and retention. [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Well, this is what I'm wondering, if you're going for just a badge and to honor firemen, then that's one thing. And anybody could have a plate. But it doesn't mean when they pull into an emergency place or something like that they have any more consideration than someone that doesn't have a plate, because actually any family member or something like that, or ex-firefighter or somebody like that could still

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have the plate. [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: That's something that will have to probably be worked out and tightened down. But we know right now that we've had one of our paramedics cars towed that was left in a neighborhood because they had no idea who the car belonged to. [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Now who did that, the police or who? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: Oh, yeah, we work pretty close with the police now. We got them... [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Why didn't they call that number in? Somebody should have been able to identify that number on that plate right away, shouldn't they? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: We have 150 firemen, and we change...we have a rapid turnover. It seems like when we send a man through paramedic school and through the training, we have a training site and training facilities in Bellevue. And once they become proficient, it seems like they go into the paid fire departments. [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: I see. [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: You know, there's more money there. [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: You're raising seed stock out there? [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: Yes, yes, we are doing some of that. And this is part of the things that hurt us. We have many Omaha firemen that are Bellevue firemen. [LB93]

SENATOR LOUDEN: Okay, well thank you. [LB93]

JOHN STACEY: Okay. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Thank you very much. The next proponent, please. [LB93]

GARY KRUMLAND: Senator Fischer, members of the committee, my name is Gary Krumland, that's spelled K-r-u-m-l-a-n-d, representing the Nebraska League of Municipalities, appearing in support of LB93. It goes without saying, the valuable service that firefighters, both volunteer and full-time, provide to the citizens of the state. The league is supporting LB93 because it does provide an honor and recognition to the firefighters. But as Mr. Stacey pointed out, it also can be a valuable identifier in fire or emergency situations. The third reason though, I think, is that it does raise funds for

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training that would go to the Fire Marshal. The fiscal note estimates, and this is just an estimate because it depends on the number of firefighters who would get the license plates, it has potential of over \$80,000 the first year, and probably double that years after, because it's renewed annually. This would help encourage people to volunteer and to remain on the fire departments, and we think that is important. So we support the bill for those reasons. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Krumland. Are there questions? I see none. Thank you very much. Next proponent, please. And we have been joined by Senator Mick Mines from Blair. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: Good afternoon, senators. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Good afternoon. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: And thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Micheal Dwyer, M-i-c-h-e-a-l D-w-y-e-r. I'm a member of the Arlington Volunteer Firefighters Association, have been for 23 years. I'm captain of the rescue squad, and I'm also a member of the Nebraska Volunteer Firefighters Legislative Committee and here today to testify in support of LB93. I'll make my comments fairly brief. You've heard most of the proponents on the bill, and want the opportunity to just continue to reiterate the importance of volunteer firefighters and paid firefighters in the state of Nebraska. We provide a service that typically is provided on a tax basis for municipalities, and yet most of the volunteers do that for free. We have been in front of legislative committees in the Legislature a number of times. The gentleman from Bellevue mentioned this is our 16th year to try to get support of firefighter plates. This year we proposed LB264, which would have given a tax credit for volunteer firefighters, and that won't get out committee. LB106 would simply allow us to transfer equipment between departments without the concern about liability. And it appears that will also not get out of committee. But today we would simply like some recognition, if you will, for the tremendous amount of hours, and energy, and risk to life and personal property that, not only the paid firefighters, but the volunteers of the state of Nebraska provide. So I would encourage your support of LB93. I'm going to try, if I can, to address just a couple of Senator Loudon's questions, if that's okay. You had mentioned the stickers on the back of the vehicles. And I also have one. It's a small, probably yeah big or so, Maltese cross that identifies my ability to park in one of five parking spaces at our fire hall, hopefully, without getting a ticket. The challenge with respect to seeing it is that most other people, if they didn't know what that Maltese cross was, probably wouldn't recognize it necessarily as a volunteer firefighter's vehicle. It doesn't carry any necessary authority. It doesn't give me the right to go fast, certainly, or to park in certain spots. With the exception of those limited areas right in front of our fire hall during response. With respect to the individual plates, you asked if a police officer ticketed or towed that vehicle, why didn't they run the plates? To my knowledge, there's nothing now in that registration information that when an officer

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actually runs those plates that currently identifies myself or anybody else as a volunteer firefighter. I believe that this plate and the registration that goes with it would have that kind of identification so that, if I would respond directly to a scene and I know a number of our members, and a number of other members in other departments, depending on the location and the urgency of the call, if we respond directly to a scene, this would not only give the police officers and any other departments working the scene the opportunity to look at that vehicle and quickly go, yep, that's another firefighter, I can identify that vehicle has a reason to be there. But also if the call is done and perhaps I left with the rescue squad or another response vehicle, and one of the officers was concerned about the vehicle being parked there, he could run that plate and there would be some kind of identification, or he could simply visually look at it and understand that, yep, that's a firefighter, has a need to be there. So again, thank you. I would encourage your support for LB93. And I'll entertain any questions. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Dwyer. Are there questions? Senator Stuthman. [LB93]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Micheal, I'm a volunteer fireman in the Columbus Fire Department. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: Thank you. [LB93]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: What we have as a policy is that we have a tin plate made that either mounts below the license plate, or on your grill, stating, you know, mine says Columbus Rural Fire Department. And we utilize that just to get to the fire scene, so law enforcement allows us to get there. Is this something that would be acceptable, or are you looking...realistically, you're looking at your own plate. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: It's interesting that you mention that, because our department has those as well. Unfortunately, as a member, you have to buy those, and it's a smaller plate that attaches to the bottom of the plate. For whatever reason, it doesn't work on the Tahoe that I have, it just won't physically attach there. Maybe I'm just not smart enough to be able to screw the little bolts in there or something. But in my case it won't physically attach. Hopefully, the little red lights on the top are enough. But again, in a case where the vehicle perhaps was parked where it shouldn't have been after the initial scene, it may not be enough. I hope that answers your question. [LB93]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Yes. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: I would tend to think that...I would hope to think that the contribution the volunteer firefighters make to the state of Nebraska would warrant the difference between that little attachment plate that we would have to purchase and an official license plate that identifies us as a firefighter, an EMT. [LB93]

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SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, thank you. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: I hope that answers your question. [LB93]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Yes, yes. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Senator Mines. [LB93]

SENATOR MINES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Dwyer is a constituent of mine. And thank you for your service, by the way. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: You're welcome. Thank you. [LB93]

SENATOR MINES: And I apologize for coming in late. I was introducing other bills. However, not hearing the first testimony, this isn't a mandatory, if you're a firefighter you must have it on your vehicle? [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: That's correct. As I understand the bill, that's correct. This is an optional thing. [LB93]

SENATOR MINES: Is that problematic then, given a circumstance where there's an emergency and you don't have all firefighters identified by license plates, then it's a judgment call on law enforcement. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: Sure it is. [LB93]

SENATOR MINES: Could that be a problem? [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: I don't want to overstate the problem of us getting to a scene and having a mass amount of vehicles and not being able to go through 412 vehicles and figure out who those...certainly, you can identify with that. It's not a typical situation. So I would tend to think that there's no...in my perception there's no down side to a firefighter not electing to necessarily go with those plates. It's simply an additional bonus for anyone who does typically respond. And I can think of our training officer, who lives in the country, actually three miles or so east of Arlington. So you can kind of picture that area. So anything on the eastern part of our district, a lot of times, as in yesterday morning we responded to a car accident and Dan was the first one there. And set up a little bit of road block. But his vehicle is sitting smack, dab in the middle of the road. If I, perhaps, was a State Patrol officer and rolled up on this, ah, I don't understand what this guy is doing here. Hopefully that plate would identify him. I hope that answers your question. [LB93]

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SENATOR MINES: Yeah, thank you. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: But I can't think of a down side to an individual who, you know, I live a block from the fire hall, I'm never going to take my own car. I got a prestige license plate already, I don't want to have this thing. I can't think of a down side to that. Worst case scenario, they could do the other little, small plates below, or they could do the Maltese cross that many of us have now to allow us to park. I hope that answers your question. [LB93]

SENATOR MINES: Yes. Thank you being here today. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Thank you, Mr. Dwyer. [LB93]

MICHEAL DWYER: Thank you. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Are there other proponents? Good afternoon. [LB93]

TROY SPELLMAN: My name is Troy Spellman, T-r-o-y S-p-e-l-l-m-a-n. I've been a volunteer firefighter, EMT for 16 years in Shelton. I agree with everything that's been said so far. I have a little different perspective on it as far as three years ago this month we responded to a call, a mutual aid call to a neighboring community. And in that fire we lost two close friends. So I see this as kind of paying tribute to their memory as well as acknowledging myself and my brethren as firefighters. I also believe that it would help in recruitment and retention. And financially every department, I think, will agree with me that training budgets are getting tighter and tighter, every dime is going to count. I guess that's really all I wanted to share with you. If there are any questions? [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Spellman. Are there any questions? I see none. Thank you very much. [LB93]

TROY SPELLMAN: Thank you. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Any other proponents? Is there anyone in opposition to the bill that would like to speak? Anyone willing to speak...willing to speak, in the neutral capacity? Senator Cornett, would you like to close? [LB93]

SENATOR CORNETT: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The questions that came about, about identifying a vehicle in regards to towing, were not really the intent of this bill. It was not to have the vehicles identified at a scene, per se, it was more to honor the men and women that volunteer hundreds of hours of service to their communities and to the state of Nebraska. It is something that they would like to identify themselves. And it was offered in recognition for their service. Thank you very much. And then I'd like to open on LB437. [LB93]

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SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Cornett. Any questions for Senator Cornett? I see none. With that, I will close the hearing on LB93, and we will open the hearing on LB437. Senator Cornett, welcome. [LB93 LB437]

SENATOR CORNETT: (Exhibit 1) Good afternoon again. Thank you. My name is Abbie Cornett, C-o-r-n-e-t-t, and I represent the 45th Legislative District. I'm here today to introduce LB437. LB437 was drafted by the Department of Motor Vehicles to create four new plates, these being: military plates, firefighter support plates, child abuse prevention plates, and wildlife conservation. The department has also included model language for specialty plates. This includes uniform fees, issuance processes, vehicle types, and minimum plate design requirements, and applicant qualifications. Beverly Neth of the Department of Motor Vehicles is here to testify and will be able to answer the technical questions. I have an amendment to the bill for the committee on an error found. It is strictly a change in numbering. And if you could please hand this out. It's just a technical change. There was some numbering. And I'd like to thank you for your time and your consideration. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Senator Cornett. Any questions? I see none. Thank you very much. If I could ask, I've seen people move here in the room now, how many are willing to testify? Where am I getting that from? How many are here to testify on this bill? Two, four, six, eight, nine, about nine people? Okay, would the first proponent come forward then. Good afternoon. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: (Exhibits 2 and 3) Good afternoon, Madam Chair, members of the committee. I'm Beverly Neth, B-e-v-e-r-l-y N-e-t-h, director of the Department of Motor Vehicles, here today testifying in support of LB437. In addition to my testimony, the page is also handing out a letter from the state Fire Marshal, in support of LB437, which I would ask to be introduced into the record. Each year bills are introduced to create speciality license plates representing a variety of groups and causes. As you've heard today from a lot of different entities, this year is no different. In the past, for several reasons, the creation of special license plates seemed impractical. In 2003, Cornhusker State Industries and the Department of Motor Vehicles implemented a digital plate production system which, among its many other benefits, provides design and production freedom and allows for a cost-effective method of implementing special plate designs for which there is a limited or undefined market. Prior to 2003, the production of special plates required the stocking and preprinting of a special plate design graphic, a costly proposition for producing a plate with either a limited or undefined marketability. With the digital production method graphic design can be produced on plain or generic plate sheeting, thereby reducing the costs associated with stocking preprinted graphic and making an expanded specialty plate program more feasible. Additionally, the digital plate production process has allowed us to reduce our plate ordering, production, and delivery times from 10 weeks to 3 weeks, and in slower production times, those being

years that aren't a reissuance cycle, many times we can turn a special order plate around in 10 days. This bill creates four types of government related speciality license plates and provides that the revenue generated by the sale of such plates be deposited into funds that will support the work of the state agency related to the plates. The four types created are: military plates, which will provide for six plates representing the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy, and a Support Our Troops plate; firefighter support plates; a child abuse prevention plate; and a wildlife conservation plate. The bill was drafted with the deliberation of court decisions from other states regarding the issuance of speciality license plates. In 2002, the United States Court of Appeals, I believe it was District 4, ruled in the Sons of the Confederate Veterans v. Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles that license plates, once allowed for private groups, create a forum for public speech. Prior to 2002, Virginia had issued speciality plates representing a number of private entities. However, Virginia denied a license plate for the Sons of the Confederate Veterans. The Sons of the Confederate Veterans sued to have its plate produced. The court ruled that once the state has opened up license plate issuance for private groups, the state created a First Amendment right of free speech. Consequently, private entities must be allowed to express their opinions through license plates. Once any one private group is issued a license plate, a state is very limited in its ability to deny the same right to other groups, even if those viewpoints might be considered objectionable. For this reason, LB437 is limited to plates associated with government agencies. In an effort to make the administration of an expanded speciality plate program efficient, LB437 was drafted as a model act for speciality license plates. The proposed new plate types have uniformity in fees, issuance, eligible vehicle types, plate design requirements, and applicant qualifications. All of these plate types would be open to a general application, no qualification requirements are included. This language is set out in Section 5 of the bill. The goal being the elimination of repetitive statutory language, and a consistent plate issuance process for the department to help contain costs associated with the specialty plate applications. LB437 also includes language that was in LB287, which I understand the committee is proposing to amend into LB286 that was advanced to General File. The two issues being the expansion of specialty plates to additional vehicles, those being trucks over 10 ton and trailers, and allowing non-residents access to speciality plates, generally those are individual military personnel who are stationed here in Nebraska who are not residents but do license and register their vehicles while they are here. LB437 also attempts to address a growing problem that exists because of the statutory requirement for numbers only on several plate types. The effect of these requirements is that as many as 18 different license plate types can bear the same numerical sequence. I have provided an example, along with my testimony, that is a real license plate number. It's plate number 102, that shows how many vehicles can have the same number associated with it. And the one you have, I think, does have 18 plate types associated with it. And we can certainly discuss that at the end of the testimony, if you'd like. The proliferation of electronic tolls and automated ticketing devices has exposed this problem. Individuals out of Nebraska seem to have considerable difficulty distinguishing Nebraska's various plate types. The

result has been that many Nebraskans have erroneously received tickets from other states for toll or parking violations. LB437 provides that all new plate types will have a combination of letters and numbers. This will allow the DMV to assign unique plate numbers for specialty plates. Adding letters to the plate characters to distinguish the various types of plates, will help eliminate the problem by decreasing the number of plates with the identical numerical series. On January 1, 2011, when the next six-year license plate cycle begins, currently existing speciality plates will also be issued a combination of letters and numbers. However, with respect to the Cornhusker Spirit Plate, I would like to make a suggestion that we not add letters to that plate program in 2011. The bill was originally drafted that way. But as I was reviewing the testimony and revising testimony it occurred to me that the first 100 numbers in that plate program were distributed via a lottery. And additionally, there are several other spirit plate owners who chose specific numbers for specific reasons. Therefore, I would ask the committee, and the committee may want to consider an amendment that would remove the speciality plate program from the numbers and letters combination. LB437 will provide a solid baseline for speciality plate expansion in Nebraska. Although the committee has several proposals that it has heard today, many of the other bills proposed deviate in some respect from the process outlined in LB437 and do not address existing issues with speciality plates. I want to thank Senator Cornett for introducing this bill on behalf of the department. And I urge the committee to advance the bill to General File. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you might have regarding the bill. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Director Neth. Are there any questions? Senator Stuthman. [LB437]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Director Neth, in my bill summary, first of all I guess I could start by saying it is possible that we could have a lot of different plates then. It would be doable? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: It is doable, yes. It is much more...the process that we have in place is much more amenable to an expanded speciality plate program. I do have some plate samples that the department has worked with, with the various agencies listed in this bill. These are just samples, they're not final designs. The final design, as the bill calls for, is really up to both the Department of Motor Vehicles and the agency that the plate is representing. But if the page would like, we could distribute these, and you could see how accommodating, really, the system can be to making different plates for different... [LB437]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, thank you, Director Neth. But in the bill summary that I have here it authorized the issuance of the different categories, the military plates, Marines, Coast Guard, support groups and everything like that. The Gold Star one could be added to that one, couldn't it? I mean what we discussed today? And then another

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one, there's one, child abuse prevention plates and child abuse prevention fund; that could have a Shriner one in that...it could be doable, correct, or not? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: It is doable. But with respect to the way LB437 is structured, there are no qualifications for any applicant to receive these plates that are proposed in LB437. All of the proposed plates in LB437 would be available to anyone who wanted to register a vehicle. You don't have to have any special qualifications to receive any of the plates. You just choose to support a specific cause. With respect to the Gold Star plate, as I understand it, there are some qualifications that the applicant has to meet. They have to, unfortunately, have a family member who was killed while...not in combat, as I understand it, but serving in the military. So it differs in that respect. But it's certainly up to the committee if you want to put that in. The other issue with the Shriner plate is that is a private entity, that is not a government-related plate. And as we have found in court cases throughout the country, that once a state opens up its speciality plate programs to any one private group, you are going to be very hard pressed to limit it to any group that wants a license plate. And there are times, as the case in Virginia shows, where the type of plate that the entity wants could be objectionable and the speech that they want to portray in that plate could be objectionable to people. [LB437]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Senator Hudkins. [LB437]

SENATOR HUDKINS: Thank you. Director Neth, what does law enforcement say about having 50 different Nebraska license plates? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Well, the fact is, Senator Hudkins, we already have 36 different plate types in Nebraska. As the handout shows you, the handout that was included in the packet, we have 36 plate types that exist. And so when law enforcement runs a plate, for instance if they would run plate number 102, they could have as many as 18 different vehicles they would have to distinguish that vehicle to, depending upon the plate type. And certainly when you're law enforcement in Nebraska I believe you become schooled in the plate types, you understand how to read a record, and it's much easier for you. If we were to advance LB437 and distinguish the various speciality plates with specific number and letter combinations, I think it would be helpful to law enforcement to have that piece of the puzzle. But the information is available to them in the VTR system. So it's a matter of probably working with the information that's there and becoming familiar with it. [LB437]

SENATOR HUDKINS: A few years ago, we had restrictions. You had to have X-amount of plates ordered before you would make them. Is that still a problem? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: No, it is not. Not with the digital plate production method that we have

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in place, because of the fact that a graphic designer can use the computer, and they use a computer program that allows them design a plate. The plate that you see were designed by an individual at Cornhusker State Industries in conjunction with being told what type of design to put there. And then he can use the computer software and send the information to a printer, and what that printer does is it places that image on graphic sheeting. So it's very accommodating to small runs of plates. [LB437]

SENATOR HUDKINS: Thank you. [LB93]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Senator Mines. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bev, if this were adopted, do you see this as a way to avoid the proliferation of all kinds of plates, dozens of plates, save the trees, save the whatever it might be? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: I think if your question is if we would remain focused on government-related speciality plates, I think that is certainly about the only way you can limit it. Otherwise you most likely are going to be opening the plate, specialty plates up to all kinds of groups. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: And I'm not familiar, I don't have a cornhusker plate, but is that a University of Nebraska plate? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Yes, it is. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Okay, so we're covered there. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Um-hum. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: But then we also do Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, those are not state agencies. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: They are not. They are, however, a government-related function. And specific in the bill what we are doing with the proceeds is we are funding state of Nebraska veterans cemeteries associated with the state of Nebraska, and that fund is set up in the Veterans Affairs, at the state agency here. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: And that will suffice and stand the test? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Yes, it will. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: So if we wanted a veterans plate, it's not identified here, that could be added without any problems of destroying the structure and tack of what we're doing

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here? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Um-hum, um-hum. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Okay. It's interesting. Thanks. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Senator Schimek. [LB437]

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. The ones, the plate types you've got listed here on your handout, I'm kind of following up with what Senator Mines just asked. DAV would then be lumped in under that military category? It's not a...what happens to that then? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: That plate exists in statute already. It is a plate that is issued. It is considered...it is technically a speciality plate already in Nebraska. However, the applicant has to have certain qualifications in order to obtain this plate. When they make the application for the plate, they have to give us information. [LB437]

SENATOR SCHIMEK: So what will stop some group, in the future, from coming in and saying, hey, DAV has a plate, why can't we have one if we meet certain specifications? Will this really slow down the requests what you're proposing here? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: I am not sure that it will slow down the requests, Senator. As you heard, there are a number of groups that come every year to have license plates. In my opinion, if the state were to keep its specialty plate program as closely tied as it can to government speech, then it could potentially withstand a constitutional challenge or a challenge to the types of plates that are placed into statute. Once you expand beyond the government speech into private speech, the cases that currently exist seem to say that you've opened the door wide open. [LB437]

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Which we've already done. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Well, I am not sure you have. I think that the plates that currently exist in statute are still tied to a government function or some recognition of government speech. You're recognizing individuals who served in armed forces. The ones that exist right now would be the disabled veterans, so that person was serving in the military when they were injured or suffered their disability; your Purple Heart would be the same; the Pearl Harbor survivor the same. Those would all... [LB437]

SENATOR SCHIMEK: But wasn't, excuse me, but wasn't that case in Virginia against the DMV regarding the Sons of Confederate Veterans? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Yes, but I think that that title is a misnomer. That group was...they

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were not...there was no qualification, if I understand it right, that those people had to say, their design was a confederate flag, the speech that they wanted to place on the plate was offensive to many people. [LB437]

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Okay, then one last question. And I think I know the answer to this, but I just want to ask it anyway. How do motorcycle dealers and passenger dealers fall into this group of plate types? They're not...I mean the people with those plates aren't government, but I suppose there's a government interest in identifying them. Is that how you look at that? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: I need to clarify this, Senator. This list is not technically all specialty plates. This list is a representation of the issue associated with many of our statutes that require that we put numbers only on plates. And so a plate, like a motorcycle dealer, or a passenger dealer, they are plate types in Nebraska that we issue to specific entities or specific vehicles that are used for a specific purpose, much like the farm plate or the bus plate, all of those types of things. And so...and I'm sorry that I confused those two. They're not exactly specialty plates, they're plate types. [LB437]

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Well, I understand that, and that's kind of what I want you to explain a little. So I think that's good enough. Thank you. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Okay. Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I have some, Director Neth. When you cited the court case in your testimony, you said that because of that court case you felt that these plates should be limited to...or associated with government agencies. Is that correct? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Government speech really is the term, I'm sorry, technically government agencies, government speech, yes. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay. In order to be associated with the agency, I guess what I'm hearing here is that the funds need to go to that agency. We have the child abuse prevention plates. I assume the funds will go to HHS? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: They do under this, um-hum. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Firefighter support plates, where are the funds going for that one? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: They are going to the state Fire Marshal and deposited into a training fund. [LB437]

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SENATOR FISCHER: That's right, that's right. Thank you. We have the wildlife conservation plates. Senator Erdman just came to us and wanted an ag plate. Could we have ag plates and have the money for the research go to the university of Nebraska then? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: I think that that would be a plate that would fit well into the program, yes. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: If we have firefighter support plates, can we have police support plates? Can we have teacher support plates? Can we have support for mothers? Can we have all sorts of things like that, as long as the revenue is going to go to a government agency? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: I think that...I'm not sure where the support for mothers would go. But I get your point. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: To the Highway Trust Fund. (Laughter) [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: I understand exactly what it is you're saying. I think that those would probably have to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Legislature to determine whether or not that meets the test. But I understand what you're saying. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: I would think we're going to have all sorts of groups coming before the Legislature and before this committee in the future for plates, whether it's...and it could...in my opinion, it could be a private group, as long as they were willing to give the money to a state agency. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Well, I think that there could be a distinction there. Because even though the private group might want to give the money to a state agency, the state agency may be opposed to that. The state agency itself, I think, would have to come forward as well and be a part of that plate and be there. Just because someone wants to give a state agency money, I'm not sure, certainly that's up to you as a policy maker, but you could have some push back from the state agency because funds certainly have administrative issues associated with them. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: I guess I would think once we open the door, though, which I think this bill does, how do we turn somebody down? You know, I like...I especially like people in agriculture, of course, and I'm thinking right away, well, Senator Erdman's idea could fit on this. And it goes...his idea that it would go to research anyway, so we give it to IANR. And then where do you draw the line? Is it that the majority of members on this committee would not happen to like a group or a state agency, as you said, would not happen to like a group that would be willing to have the funds go there so that they could have their own license plate? I question why you're supporting this bill? Why

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did you bring this bill and why do you support it? Is it for the money? [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: No, it's not for the money from the department's standpoint. The Department of Motor Vehicles is a cash funded agency, and we are certainly not struggling for revenues. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: That's good to hear. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Yes. The reason we have brought LB437 is we have seen, since I have been here, I have seen plate bills every year. And I have been here seven years. And we believed that in order to give the committee a model, if the committee wanted to expand the speciality plate program, this would be a model way to expand the program, because it does provide for uniformity in fees, uniformity in the application process. From an administrative point of view it is probably the most efficient way that we could expand the program. It also has the opportunity to support funds related in other agencies that have struggled to find revenue sources, the Veterans Cemetery is one of those, child abuse prevention is certainly a laudable cause that HHS would like to further support, and firefighter training is something that would be very important to continue to support. It offers an opportunity for state agencies who are looking for revenue sources to find a source to help fund some of the things that they do. But from the department's perspective, we have looked at the expansion of specialty plates as what we believe will happen is that the existing message plate program may see a reduction. People who are currently accessing the message plates will probably find some other cause that they would like to support. So we are attempting to remain revenue neutral. We do rely upon those message plate funds to help us sustain our operations, and from our perspective that is all we're looking for. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay. Thank you, Director. Other questions? Senator Hudkins. [LB437]

SENATOR HUDKINS: Director Neth, let me restate this and make sure I understand it. You would like to have all of the specialty plates be connected somehow to government. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: That is completely up to the committee, if you want to do that. I only raised the court case to let you know what is out there and to just let you know that, if you go beyond what is considered government speech, that there is a very large possibility that, as Senator Schimek says, that there will be more and more requests for private speech of some sort via the license plate. And I think it would be very difficult for you to stop that. [LB437]

SENATOR HUDKINS: Yeah. In defense of the Shriner's position, I see that as saving HHS money. [LB437]

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BEVERLY NETH: They certainly help a number of individuals with medical bills, and it's a terrific cause. I can't say that it's not. So maybe there's a way to connect the two or do something that might bring it under the egis of some kind of government speech. [LB437]

SENATOR HUDKINS: Thank you. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: And I will give committee counsel the court cases, as well, that I have, so if you'd like to see those. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions for the Director? Senator Stuthman. [LB437]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Director Neth, since I've been here, this is my fifth year in this committee, and heard a lot of plates, a lot of presentations. But now since we can go to a simpler way of manufacturing or making these plates, it seems more doable at the present time. The thing that I've been listening to is if we open this up, we're probably opening this up to a lot of different types. But if it could be a revenue generating source for organizations, in my opinion, it might be a good idea to have this. If there's a group that want to support an organization and they're willing to buy a certain type of plate, and put money like into research as the ag plate would, you know, it may be a revenue generating source that would come automatically as a volunteer program. So I don't know whether...I have to really think about this for a long time and see how broad we want to expand it. But it is possible that it could be expanded. I don't know. Could you tell me some states, how many different kinds of plates they have? Like 700 or... [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: I don't think anybody has quite that many. Virginia has well over 200, Texas has in the range of 200. Many states have a much broader specialty plate program. But I think, Senator, to your point, I think you'd want to be...I think there is a distinction between raising revenue to fund, to assist in funding what is a government function as opposed to raising revenue to support private entities in some sort. And that is the point I'm trying to make in raising the court cases. [LB437]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Any other questions? I see none. Thank you, Director Neth. [LB437]

BEVERLY NETH: Thank you, thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Are there other proponents? Please step forward. Good afternoon. [LB437]

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MARK HUMPERT: (Exhibit 4) Good afternoon, Madam Chair, committee. Appreciate the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. My name is Mark Humpert. I'm here representing the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Could you spell your name, please? [LB437]

MARK HUMPERT: The last name is spelled H-u-m-p-e-r-t. The Game and Parks Commission is responsible for the management of Nebraska's fish and wildlife and outdoor recreation resources and best long-term interests of the people and those resources. And I come here today wishing to voice my agency's support for LB437. Nebraska has a diversity of wildlife and habitats. It's the responsibility of the state to ensure that future generations have the same opportunity as the current generations to enjoy our state's wildlife resources. For game species hunters and anglers contribute millions of dollars annually to provide much needed funding for game conservation. This has led to many wildlife management success stories. Wild turkeys, wood ducks, antelope were virtually eliminated from the state at the turn of the last...at the beginning of the last century. Today we have thriving populations of those species. And that's in gratitude to tens of thousands of hunters and anglers that have contributed through license fees and excise taxes. Nongame wildlife includes the hundreds, if not thousands, of species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates that are not considered game species. Nearly 500 of these species are either rare or known to be declining in Nebraska. Adequate funding is a serious barrier to the conservation of most nongame species, especially those that are considered to be at-risk. In 2005, Nebraska's conservation and agricultural communities completed the Nebraska Natural Legacy Plan, a blueprint for conserving Nebraska's wildlife and their habitats for future generations. Biologists, farmers, ranchers and citizens collaborated to develop this first of its kind, historic plan, and they continue to work together to help implement it. Some new federal funding programs, like the State Wildlife Grants Program and Landowner Incentive Program have become available recently to help implement the Natural Legacy Plan, but these funds...these programs require up to 50 percent nonfederal match. The Nebraska Environmental Trust has been an important partner in helping to implement the plan, but additional funds, such as those generated by LB437, are needed to take advantage of the federal dollars to fully implement the plan. We could come to a point in time where we don't have the state match to even take advantage of some of these federal programs. It's estimated that a wildlife conservation plate in Nebraska would raise over \$60,000 per year for conservation. This would nearly double revenue currently generated by the nongame tax check-off program. This is a voluntary program where taxpayers can give a part or all of their tax refund to conservation. Revenue to the nongame tax check-off program has declined in recent years due to changes in refund size, due to changes in the way people file taxes, and having a competing check-off that people can contribute to. This past year donations to the nongame tax check-off program reached an all time low in both numbers of donors and

revenue. The creation of a specialty license plate to benefit wildlife is not a new idea. Currently, 42 states have license plate programs whose proceeds go towards wildlife conservation, including our neighboring states: Iowa, Minnesota and Colorado. One of the most appealing aspects of LB437 is that it allows citizens to voluntarily contribute to a vital state program without raising taxes. There is broad support for a conservation license plate in Nebraska. In a 2004 statistically valid public opinion survey 71 percent of Nebraskans felt that selling conservation license plates to benefit nongame fish and wildlife was highly or moderately acceptable. In the same poll, 65 percent of Nebraskans felt it was unacceptable to take no action to obtain new funds for wildlife. Furthermore, since June of 2006, after we completed the Natural Legacy Plan, we began to reach out to organizations. And in the six months since we began the Teaming With Wildlife Campaign, over 200 organizations and businesses representing thousands of Nebraskans have joined the Teaming With Wildlife Coalition which supports dedicated funding for fish and wildlife conservation, education and outdoor recreation. Despite limited funding in the past, Nebraska's nongame program has had several successes in helping to recover at-risk species. Through a nest box program, the once federally endangered peregrine falcon once again resides in Nebraska. In fact, a nesting pair has become established here at the Capitol, and they're probably sitting on the building as we speak. Really, a tremendous success story in the recovery of that species. River otters have been successfully reintroduced to Nebraska's rivers. And we're doing research now to try to document how they essentially spread on every usable river in Nebraska. Important inventory and research has been conducted on a multitude of species, and we provide incentives to private landowners who wish to voluntarily protect mountain plovers, or to restore prairies and wetlands. Lastly, in addition to the revenue that would be generated by a conservation license plate, a license plate would give Nebraskans an opportunity to visibly show their support for wildlife conservation. The plate can serve as a reminder to others of the diverse wildlife resources that we have in Nebraska, and it can be used as a marketing tool to support Nebraska's growing ecotourism trade. I appreciate your time, and I'd be happy to take any questions. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mark. Are there questions? I see none. Thank you. Oh, I'm sorry. Senator Mines. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. Thank you. Mark, if I do your numbers right, you're estimating that you could raise over \$60,000 a year for conservation? And that would equate to about 6,000 vehicles, exactly 6,000 vehicles. How did you arrive at that number? [LB437]

MARK HUMPERT: What we did is we looked at statistics in Iowa, knowing that there are different demographics there, we took the same percentage of license plates that they sell on a county-by-county basis, and then to be conservative we took half of that, knowing that it would take some time to promote the program. So we think we could,

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within the first couple of years of the program, sell about half as many per capita as Iowa. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Okay, so it's based on Iowa numbers. [LB437]

MARK HUMPERT: Um-hum. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Okay. Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: (Exhibit 5) Any other questions? Mark, you passed out a letter from the Nebraska Wildlife Federation. Did they want that entered into the record? [LB437]

MARK HUMPERT: They did. Angie had to leave because she needed to pick her kids up, so she asked me to give that to you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay, we will do that. Thank you very much. And thank you. Next proponent, please. Good afternoon. [LB437]

DANIEL PARKER: Good afternoon. Madam Chair, members of the committee. My name is Dan Parker, P-a-r-k-e-r. I'm the deputy director for the Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs. And I'd like to thank Senator Cornett for introducing LB437. The Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs is in support of the bill. Probably one of the main things we're here for is probably the amount of money that we would receive through this to go into the Veterans Cemetery Fund. So we're definitely in support of the concept and have been for over a decade. Although it is difficult to estimate the amount of money that the state Veterans Cemetery Operations Fund will receive, it is anticipated that should this law pass, LB437 will grow to become a small, yet significant revenue source for the operations and maintenance of the Nebraska State Veterans Cemetery System, thereby diminishing the present total reliance on General Funds. At this time, I guess, I'd like to open it up and see if you have any questions for myself. Also, Director Hilgert, he couldn't be here today. He's actually in Washington, D.C. at the National Directors of Veterans Affairs. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Parker. Are there questions? I see none. Thank you very much. [LB437]

DANIEL PARKER: Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Next proponent, please. Good afternoon. [LB437]

JEFFREY BAKER: (Exhibit 6) Good afternoon, Madam Chairman and committee members. My name is Jeff Baker and I am the Seward County Veterans' Service

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Officer. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Could you spell your last name, please? [LB437]

JEFFREY BAKER: My apologies. B-a-k-e-r. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you. [LB437]

JEFFREY BAKER: I'm here to testify on behalf of the County Veterans' Service Officers Association of Nebraska. We as an association, along with many other veterans organizations throughout the state, believe that LB437 is a bill that we can support because of its recognition and honoring of our state's men and women who have worn the uniform or remain to wear it of our armed forces and who answer the...excuse me, and who answer the call to defend the rights and freedoms we all hold so dear. In the state of Nebraska today we only have a handful of benefits that we may offer to our veterans. Some of these include the Nebraska Veterans Aid Fund, which assists low income veterans; we also provide the children of 100 percent disabled veterans waivers of tuition so that they may attend college. We have our Nebraska Veterans Home; we provide them with assistance through County Veterans' Service Officers, both with state and federal benefits. We record their discharges in the county clerk's office; and lastly, thanks to the 99th Legislature, our director of Veterans Affairs is currently in the process of designing and building our first state Veterans Cemetery, in Alliance. LB437 would establish another benefit, and a benefit that many of our state veterans would use. Currently, there are four veterans plates in circulation. These plates honor our prisoner's of war, Purple Heart recipients, Pearl Harbor survivors, and disabled American veterans. These plates cover only a small population of our state's veterans, and they are deserving of the honor and respect that these plates give them. In 2006, 120 DAV plates were issued throughout the state, many of them in a three county area: Seward, York, and Fillmore. This number has significantly increased over the 2005 numbers, and there are two reasons for this: (1) to qualify for the DAV plate a veteran must have a federally rated service connected disability at 10 percent or higher, and it must be 100 percent connected to service; and (2) over the last seven months we have been waiting for the 100th Legislature to convene and LB437 or its equivalent to be introduced so that we could show that even with limited numbers of disabled veterans there is a want for veterans plates or military plates. Many more DAV plates would be issued if all our county veterans officers would offer them and there wasn't such a stereotypical perception of the word "disabled". LB437 offers this through its creation of military plates and its availability to everyone and anyone who wishes to purchase one. Many states in the United States have veterans plates, in addition to those honoring their POW's, Purple Heart recipients, etcetera. In fact, all states have veterans plates, some more than others, some more specific, ranging from a generic veterans plate, to branch of service plate: Army, Navy, Marine Corps, to period of service plates, like World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf, and some a combination of the two or three, all

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except the states of Wyoming and Nebraska. But Wyoming offers sticker decals, sold by the state Department of Veterans Affairs, decals like branch of service, period of service, or the all-encompassing veteran. I have here a list of the web sites, if you'd like to distribute those for me, if you want to verify my research. In closing, as an association, we support LB437 because of its creation of military plates and also because of the proceeds of these plates will go towards the construction and maintenance of our new State Veterans Cemetery. It's a way for our veterans and supporters of the armed forces to show their support and allow a sense of pride for those who have served, but it also helps our state veterans benefits grow in the process. Veterans supporting veterans. Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Baker. Are there questions? I see none. Thank you for coming today. [LB437]

JEFFREY BAKER: Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Next proponent, please. Good afternoon. [LB437]

MARY CAMPBELL: Good afternoon. Senator Fischer and members of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee, my name is Mary Campbell, C-a-m-p-b-e-l-l, today providing support testimony for the Nature Conservancy, to that portion of the bill dealing with funding to be realized for wildlife in the state. TNC shares a similar goal of Game and Parks, and that being their mission to preserve and protect game and nongame wildlife in the state. I note one thing that G and P shared, and that is in the Iowa example, Senator Mines, they report that currently Iowa citizens are voluntarily contributing \$500,000 through these conservation plates. If the Iowa equivalent of our Game and Parks has a similar track record, that could possibly mean a doubling and tripling of that amount through the matching grants able to be secured federally and privately. And again, I just note that for the record that Game and Parks in this state has a really commendable track record in generating such matching funds. And so I would hope that the modestly estimated \$60,000 could really leverage a whole lot more for the state for these purposes. I think it's certainly worth a try anyway. And with that, I'd take questions. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Ms. Campbell. Are there questions? Senator Mines. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I've been waiting to get you in the hot seat for years. [LB437]

MARY CAMPBELL: Oh, dear. Oh, no; am I going to get in your newsletter? (Laugh) [LB437]

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SENATOR MINES: Here is the perception, and that's all it is, is perception, and you just happen to be in the hot seat. And I think everyone that would receive money, that they're laudable causes, and I think it's worthwhile, I think so. But I also believe that there's not that much money that would funnel through to specific organizations. As an example, the Husker plates, I just found out that we've got about 6,000, 6,200 of those plates. And there's nothing bigger in Nebraska than Nebraska football, and we've got about 6,000; the same number that I heard the other gentleman say, that the nature folks would get. Now...and I think that's a lot of plates. But grand scheme of things, \$60,000 is two people, it's not a lot of money. And do we balance that, and it feels good to do it, but do we balance that against perhaps other issues that complicate that process with hundreds of plates in Nebraska? And what might that cost? Senator Hudkins brought that up. I don't know? What do you think? [LB437]

MARY CAMPBELL: I would obviously defer to Director Neth as to the logistics and the difficulties that may or may not result from this expanded possibility. Sixty thousand dollars, albeit, not a grand sum. Mr. Humpert did state that that is double what we're already devoting to this effort. So if...you know, it's a starting place. And we may be underwhelmed ultimately by the results. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: We may be underwhelmed, that's my concern. And I would hope that if this went through, that we would be overwhelmed. I just believe it's maybe not as big a deal in total, I mean to the general population. It's a big deal to those of us that are here today. In total I don't know that it's that big a deal. But thank you. [LB437]

MARY CAMPBELL: And again, I would just fall back on the track record of Game and Parks of being able to double and triple state funding amounts through grant monies and private donations. And, you know, just having to keep the faith that we can build something which doesn't generally get the highest of priorities in the state funding situation. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Yeah, exactly. [LB437]

MARY CAMPBELL: So if we can find free, voluntary monies to do that... [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Okay, good answer. [LB437]

MARY CAMPBELL: We'll try. Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Thank you, Mrs. Campbell. [LB437]

MARY CAMPBELL: Thank you for your attention. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Next proponent, please. Good afternoon. [LB437]

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ERIC WILLIAMS: Good afternoon. My name is Eric Williams, E-r-i-c W-i-l-l-i-a-m-s. I'm the Fillmore County Veterans' Service Officer, I'm also the District 16 Veterans of Foreign Wars Service Officer, District 11 American Legion Service Officer, EMT with Geneva Rescue Squad, and Hunters Education instructor for Fillmore County. The reason I'd just say I want to commend Mr. Baker for picking this up, because a lot of veterans have given up on this, all right, trying to get a veterans plate. And the reason there's probably not 1,000 here is because I heard somebody say that we've been trying to get a fireman EMT plate for 13 years. I'm 39 years old, and I imagine the veterans have been trying to get a veterans plate for at least that long. I realize, because I'm also on the city council in government, that everything has its time. And now we know we have the technology to make it happen at little or no expense. I know there is some concern about everybody getting a plate and all of that. And I think...I have enough faith in the senators to address that issue. I've been a service officer for five years and I've heard lots of reasons why we don't have veterans plates to the point that there's a couple of senators that don't believe in them, don't want them. I think that's fine. They can speak their voice, but a majority should have the right to vote, so I would request that you move it to the floor. I really don't know what else to say that I can encourage you to do this, other than the veterans support it. And we have a funding source for it, and we know that we can do it through the DMV for little or no expense. And I'd hope you guys try to do it and gals do it. If not, I think...you know, I had talked about a petition process earlier, a few years ago, and was told to wait, we've got a whole new crop of senators coming in and they're going to look at it differently, which they can look at a lot of different issues differently. I think that's something we may have to look at if we're going to make this thing happen. So we're willing to go to the mat for it. So, any questions? [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Williams. Any questions? I see none. Thank you very much. [LB437]

ERIC WILLIAMS: All right. Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Next proponent, please. [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Senators, my name is Jerry Stilmock, J-e-r-r-y, Stilmock S-t-i-l-m-o-c-k, registered lobbyist and testifying on behalf of the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association in support of LB437. We, like the others who have spoken before, are very much in support of having a firefighter plate. The only distinction that I would ask the committee to consider is in LB437 it's generic, as Ms. Neth described it. If you're in support of a firefighter plate or if you are a firefighter that would be the concept used in LB437 as compared to the bill that Senator Cornett brought to you, where you would actually have to be a firefighter in order to qualify under LB93. If LB437 were advanced, we would still like, respectfully request to have a

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plate designated for a firefighter, separate and apart from a supporter of firefighters. I hope that made sense. And I appreciate the committee, once again, considering this issue. Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Stilmock. Any questions? Senator Mines. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: I'm sorry for piping up all the time. Jerry, but your request flies in the face of this bill. I think the department drafted this to contain the issuance of plates to government agencies. And if we carve out the firefighters only to those that participate as firefighters, wouldn't we then be opening it up to everyone else that would only want a plate that Shriner's can buy? You know what I mean? I think it's...I think the request is contrary to the actual intent of this bill, is it not? [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: In the sense of a private function and staying away from that level of speech, I believe it would still be okay because it's still...it's a public service, it's a public need, and the funding is going to go to the state Fire Marshal under either bill. That would be my thought, Senator. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Interesting. All right, but secondly, how many volunteer firefighters are there in Nebraska? Do you know? [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: In a reporting process to the state Fire Marshal, in 2005, there were 13,200, last year, in 2006, there were 12,600. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Okay. So if they all got license plates, we're talking \$120,000. [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Yes, sir. [LB437]

SENATOR MINES: Okay. Thanks. [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Yes, sir. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? Mr. Stilmock, I have the same question Senator Mines has. And I guess my understanding was in a bill such as this one that individual groups could not be singled out to qualify for these plates, that you have to be a firefighter, that you have to be a member of the armed forces, you know. This was my understanding on this. Because then you're designating a special class of people that can only apply for that plate. [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Yeah, I agree with what you said. And I wanted to make sure at least to get our request to you and the members that it was still our desire to have that separate status. [LB437]

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SENATOR FISCHER: Okay. So you would still prefer the previous bill,... [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Yes. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: ...where you would have... [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Yes. Beggars cannot be choosers, after 13 years. (Laugh) [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: You would have to be a firefighter in order to obtain a plate designated for firefighters? [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Yes, Senator. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay, thank you. [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Yes. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other questions? I see none. Thank you very much, Mr. Stilmock. [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Thank you. Good night. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: It's not night yet. [LB437]

JERRY STILMOCK: Good afternoon. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Other proponents, please. Good afternoon. [LB437]

TIMOTHY KNOTT: (Exhibit 7) Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to appear. My name is Tim Knott, T-i-m K-n-o-t-t, and I'm representing the Wachiska Audubon Society in southeastern Nebraska. We're the local Audubon chapter of the southeast Nebraska. And luckily for you, I forgot my glasses today, so I can't read my testimony. So I'll just tell you a couple of words. First of all, the nongame wildlife program at Game and Parks has been in existence for a long time. and they've done a lot of good work. And the local Audubon chapter has tried to help with this work. And we've been involved with things like the Blue Bird Project, and the project to restore least terns, and piping plovers, and a number of other activities and usually in a volunteer way. And we've become aware that the program is very underfunded, not only underfunded, but the amount of funds that they have are going down every year, as has been explained by Mr. Humpert, because they're relying on the tax check-off, income tax check-off. The best argument of the day, I think, was by Mrs. Campbell that said, if we had a little bit more money, or at least somewhat more money, we could take advantage of these

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federal matching monies that are available and make a much better program, and meet more of the needs that are not being met now. If we could match the federal money, we could bring more money into the state, and that would be good for our economy. Certainly, there's a need for more protection for nongame wildlife. My estimate is that of the total Game and Parks budget, this is just off the top of my head, the nongame program, perhaps, gets less than 1 percent of the total budget. So they really do need funding, and this seems like a good way to do it and we would like to support it. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Knott. Are there questions? I see none. Thank you very much. Are there other proponents? I believe this is the last. Good afternoon. [LB437]

DONALD SANDMAN: Hi. Saving the best for last. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: We'll see. (Laughter) [LB437]

DONALD SANDMAN: Yeah. My name is Don Sandman, S-a-n-d-m-a-n, and I'm York County's Veterans' Service Officer. I've been crossing off things, so as not to repeat myself. But I think what I wanted to do is put some serious thoughts in your mind. As I've been listening to this, I thought this has been very interesting and very educational for me. The Veterans Cemetery is going to come in this year, the state cemetery, it's going to come in this year. That's got to be funded, it's got to be maintained. This is a real important time to get this through at this time. You know, we teach our kids to get involved and to support things, as long as they're positive things. And what greater way to do it than to show your support by volunteering to donate to a good cause, knowing what that money is going for, and to have a license plate that shows that support. What a great thing. Law enforcement, we talked about how law enforcement would feel about all of these plates. I was a three-year deputy sheriff, and I'm telling you what they taught us, in the commission of a crime, what to look for when you identify a vehicle, is something unusual about it--a broken out tail light, or a dent, or something like that. As an ex-law enforcement officer, I think there would be nothing better than to have all kinds of different plates. How much easier it would be to find that particular vehicle if it's stolen or...I'm telling you it would be a great thing. And I'm telling you that from experience. I think everybody should have a specialty plate. It gives everybody an opportunity to contribute without having to come out of taxpayers dollars. I'm a taxpayer. I'd rather choose what I would like something to go to than have it come out of my pocket, you know, forcefully. You see what I mean? It's an opportunity. Department of Motor Vehicles, everything is computerized these days; what a great thing. And I think you have a very good handle on it by knowing what you can and cannot do by opening up a can of worms. I think that's very important. And I appreciate all the questions that I've heard here today. As a Veterans' Service Officer, in the last four years there have been 700 new veterans that I have serviced who have received a service-connected disability award, who are eligible for DAV license plates. Since we found out they could

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get them, in June, I've done 90 applications myself just in York County, if that's any kind of an indicator. I wish I had known this four years ago. So it is a big selling point. And I'll tell you I'm going to give you a little thing. Myself with a DAV license plate was in a parking lot with a Purple Heart license plate. And here's a parking stall, and I'm coming this way, and he's going that way, and we're going to fight for this stall? I don't think so. I thought he should have it because he had a Purple Heart. He thought I should have it because I have a DAV plate. We both went on past and parked someplace else and we hooked up. What a good camaraderie thing. He thought I should have it because I have a service-connected disability, and he's got a Purple Heart, but he says, I'm not, you know, I've got a scar but I'm not disabled. And I thought he should because he was combat wounded, I was not. So it's good camaraderie. And then traveling, the last thing I wanted to let you know, how many times have you seen vehicles come by, even on the Interstate, that come from other states that have specialty plates? What an interesting thing to see all the different plates. But to have the state of Nebraska show support of all these great organizations by allowing these plates, I just think, is a great thing. So it's a really good advertiser for the state, going other places, like we see from theirs. That's all I've got. Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Sandman. Are there questions? I see none. Thank you very much. [LB437]

DONALD SANDMAN: Thank you. [LB437]

SENATOR FISCHER: (Exhibits 8, 9, 10) Are there other proponents to come forward? I do have two letters of support. One from Christine Peterson, the acting director of the Department of Health and Human Services; and one from Mark A. Weaver, the Cherry County Veterans' Service Officer, in support of LB437. Are there people here to speak in opposition to this bill? I see none. Would anyone be interested in speaking in the neutral capacity? I see none. I do have a letter from Larry J. Dix, the executive director of the Nebraska Association of County Officials, and he would like this entered in the neutral position on this bill. Senator Cornett waived closing. She had to leave for Exec Session on her committee. So with that, I will close the session on LB437, and I will close the hearing for the day. Thank you all for coming. [LB437]

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Disposition of Bills:

LB598 - Held in committee.
LB360 - Held in committee.
LB570 - Advanced to General File, as amended.
LB419 - Held in committee.
LB421 - Held in committee.
LB93 - Held in committee.
LB437 - Held in committee.

Chairperson

Committee Clerk