

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

Education Committee
March 24, 2009

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Education met at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 24, 2009, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on gubernatorial appointments. Senators present: Greg Adams, Chairperson; Gwen Howard, Vice Chairperson; Bill Avery; Abbie Cornett; Robert Giese; Ken Haar; and Kate Sullivan. Senators absent: Brad Ashford. []

SENATOR ADAMS: (Recorder malfunction)...hearing of the Education Committee. We have some appointments today, some confirmation hearings more specifically. But I will nonetheless introduced the committee in the normal way as if we were hearing bills today. To start with, I would ask you to turn off your cell phones, but as I look at the faces here, most of you know the routine. But if you haven't, just as a reminder, please do so. Becki Collins over us our committee clerk, and as you...well, I guess we're not going to hear any bills to testify on today. But please state your name and spell it for the record so that Becki can get all of that information into the record. Next to her will be Senator Ashford from Omaha; Senator Giese from South Sioux City; Senator Cornett is here from Bellevue. And we will have Tammy Barry, eventually, our legal counsel. I am Greg Adams. Next to me is the Vice Chair of the committee, Gwen Howard; Senator Sullivan from Cedar Rapids, Nebraska; Senator Avery I hope will soon be here; and Senator Haar from the Malcolm area; Kris Valentin, our research analyst today is here with the committee. Our two pages today, Sarah McCallister and Brennen Miller. If there is something, by chance, that you need to hand out or you need something, just ask them about it and we'll take care of it. We'll move on then to the confirmation hearings we have. And the first one...what I would ask the appointees to do very simply is to come to the microphone, state your name, spell it for the record, and then maybe give us a little bit of background, particularly any background that you think would be relevant to the position that you have been appointed to. And then field some questions if the committee has them. And we'll promise to take it easy on you today. And then we'll move on. Our first appointment today is Kim Dinsdale to the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission. Kim, if you could come forward to the testifier's seat and state you name and address for the record and tell us a little bit about yourself.

[CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: My name is Kim Dinsdale, Dinsdale is D-i-n-s-d-a-l-e. I've lived in Nebraska a little over 21 years, and live in Grand Island and moved here with my husband and chose to be a volunteer rather than to have a career. So maybe some of my experiences in nonprofits have led me to be excited about the NET Board of Commissioners. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: Okay, Kim. Thank you. Kim, is this a reappointment...

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KIM DINSDALE: No. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: ...or is this a first-time appointment? [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: What do you think the job is going to be about? [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: I'm not exactly sure, but I'm eager to find out. I have acquaintances and friends that are on the NET board and have attended functions with them and may be more familiar with what they do on the board rather than what the board of commissioners does. But I am eager to find out. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: Good. Other questions of committee members? Senator Haar. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HAAR: Thank you. Related to any Dinsdales in Lincoln? [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HAAR: ...or in the Lincoln area? Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: Have an uncle in Lincoln. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. Good. Just because it's a very familiar name. Then I notice you're on the Crane Meadows Nature Foundation. [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: I was on that board and served my term, and that has actually...is no more, the crane meadows is no more. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HAAR: Oh, really? [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: That building...did a capital campaign, built the building, and was not able to...you know, the funding was not there. And so now they're collaborating with Hastings College. And they received a grant and will be able to reopen nothing for about three years and try to kind of figure out what they're going to do is my understanding. I'm no longer, you know, participating with that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. I was just out to see the cranes then. [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: But it was kind of a sad... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HAAR: It's a wonderful experience. [CONFIRMATION]

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KIM DINSDALE: We're going to get to go see them Thursday night, go out in a blind and see them come in with some people from the Nature Conservancy and I'm looking forward to that. They promised us to see lots of cranes. I hope they come through with that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HAAR: (Laughter) Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: Are there other questions for Kim? Yes, Senator Howard. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you, Chairman Adams. Looking at your history, the work that you've done, you must work well with others. [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: Well, I hope so. I hope so. I enjoy very much the things that I've done and getting to know different people, and it's really been very rewarding for me. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Good. Well, thank you so much for doing all of this. [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: Well, it's my pleasure. Nebraska has been awfully nice to me since I moved here and I was an outsider, so. Been very good to me. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: You still have just a little bit of the accent, right? (laugh) [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: I do have a little bit of the accent and we just got back from spring break with my children yesterday and we were in Texas. So whenever I'm down there it comes back very quickly. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: We appreciate that. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: Kim, one other...at least from me one other question. And it's not my intention to put you on the spot, and I hope that I am not putting you on the spot, but as you view education in this state, what do you see as the function or the role of educational communications in forwarding the way in which we teach? [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: Well, there's so many opportunities and I don't know all the technological things. My children tease me and, you know, tell me I'm challenged. Having young children I do appreciate what NET does and I think that education and keeping kids in Nebraska...you know, educate them here and keeping kids in Nebraska

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is very, very important. And I think that one thing we've been working on...and I'm kind of going all of the board here, but one thing exciting that we're doing in Grand Island is recognizing excellence in teaching. And I just think the more positive we can be about teaching, the better things that we can put on TV rather than some of the things I walk in and see my children looking at is just the way of the future and what we need to be focusing on. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: All right. Fair enough. Are there any last questions for Kim? Let me reiterate Senator Howard's comments. Thank you for your willingness to serve the state. We appreciate it and to be here today. [CONFIRMATION]

KIM DINSDALE: Well, thank you all for having me. I appreciate it. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: You bet. Thank you. Our next appointee is John Wilkinblack (sic). I hope I got that right, the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. John, I bet I butchered that, didn't I? (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

JOHN WINKLEBLACK: Good afternoon. John Winkleblack... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: I did butcher it. [CONFIRMATION]

JOHN WINKLEBLACK: W-i-n-k-l-e-b-l-a-c-k (laughter). I moved to Nebraska in 1980. Bought a minority interest in a John Deere dealership in Humphrey, Nebraska. Acquired the store in Neligh and Clearwater, Nebraska. Merged with Green Line Equipment, and we acquired our seventh and eighth store in February. So part of my mission, as it were, or the interest in secondary education come from the fact that from our business aspect, we literally need everyone trained. Right now, we have nine students in co-op programs, some with Milford, some with northeast on the mechanical aspect of it. Four or five years ago we had a mentor through the ag college down here. Ms. Dinsdale said it the best. If we can educate these youngsters here, teach them that they have an opportunity to go to work, they will stay. My wife and I have five kids together and it appears that all five of them are going to stay in Nebraska. One is in the National Guard. Three are in the various institutions in postsecondary education, and we have a junior at home. So that's a little bit about me, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: All right. Thank you. Are there questions? Senator Sullivan. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator Adams. I thought your last name was interesting. My husband's grandmother started out as a Winklepleck (sic), went to Winkleblack, and ended up Black as far as her genealogy (laughter). So maybe there might be something in your history as well like that. [CONFIRMATION]

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JOHN WINKLEBLACK: It started out as Winklepleck (sic) and then they changed it, so.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: In my pronunciation I might have added another limb to your tree.
(Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: But apparently in your remarks, you've had opportunities through your business to work with community colleges, state colleges, and the university. So I guess I'm wondering if as a member of the commission if you'll be looking at any particular focus or any particular institutions or what are you...I guess what I'm asking is, where do you see your particular role on the commission, your strong point? [CONFIRMATION]

JOHN WINKLEBLACK: Well, I have always felt that probably one of my strongest suits was in the mathematic or financial analysis. Actually, I was on the board at Northeast Community College, and they had several projects in front of the commission over the seven years I was on there. And I always was a little bit enamored with the process because as those projects were put together by the administration there, they were mindful that, you know, that the numbers had to work and they had to be realistic. And if they were talking about curriculum, the number of students, what they could project into that program needed to be realistic. When they wanted brick and mortar, they needed to be able to justify the square footage. I know on one program they were shooting a little bit high on the building and they knew that, and as it started through the process with the coordinating commission, they couldn't justify the square footage which in essence translates back to the dollars they were going to request. So we've managed to survive and we think prosper in Nebraska in agriculture which tends to make us a little bit more conservative. So I'm looking forward to looking at this from a little higher elevation to see what is good for the entire state. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: Are there other questions? Then I do. The commission that you have been appointed to, I can tell by your conscientiousness that I'm sure that you've looked into it, what do you foresee this commission role here in the state to be?
[CONFIRMATION]

JOHN WINKLEBLACK: Well, my perception is that it unbiasedly looks at the information and gives its recommendation on whether it's a good use of the taxpayers funds. But it's just a recommendation, so like I say, I think that what it does is gives...the commission looks at everything from 20,000 or 30,000 feet to make sure that there isn't too much of a duplication of programs, and that we're good stewards of the money that's allocated for education. I've only been to one meeting, but that's my perception.
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SENATOR ADAMS: Fair enough. Are there other questions for this testifier? Yes, Senator Avery. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: I'm going to ask the same question of you that I've asked everybody else who's come before us for this board. We have the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. We have the Board of Regents. We have another layer of administration for the state colleges. Do you think maybe it might be just a little top heavy in administration? Or what do you think about it?
[CONFIRMATION]

JOHN WINKLEBLACK: Well, I think that anything that you can do for education is viable. I know that the various institutions all have their mission and their mission statement, as it were. And I understand that the commission's role is to give the unbiased opinion, and that's a good use of state funds whether they're duplicating programs at any level. So it seems to me that when you sit on board you maybe have...that board has a higher priority than the entire picture of the state. And I guess that's what I'm under the impression the coordinating commission does is not get us...I don't know how you'd ever decide how top heavy you were if you didn't have any deciding how much was too much or...you know, there might be every institution in Nebraska might be duplicating the same programs so they could offer it. And then I think they all suffer because then they struggle to get enough students in there, so.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: So what would you think of a proposal to, oh, restructure the coordinating commission into a super board of regents and do away with the Board of Regents at the university and do away with the governing structure of the state colleges? Then you've got the community colleges, you know, you've got all these different administrative layers, all of which cost money. [CONFIRMATION]

JOHN WINKLEBLACK: Well, (laugh) that's kind of a loaded question there, but...
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: You could say it's a good idea. (laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

JOHN WINKLEBLACK: Well, you know, I was on the board at a community college and it occurs to me that that was a fairly dedicated board, as are the other boards. And what those cost the institution would be gas money to the facility once a month and a ham dinner. So I'm not sure that... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: I see Dennis Baack is squirming back there in his seat. (Laugh)
[CONFIRMATION]

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JOHN WINKLEBLACK: Well, you know, I guess I'm just not sure that as many institutions that you have that if you lose the local control there, that would make me nervous. And really that's the only thing I can relate to is. You know, if you want to do away board of education at the high school and, you know, just let everybody run it, ten people run it from... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: We're talking about higher education here. [CONFIRMATION]

JOHN WINKLEBLACK: Higher education. Well, I don't know. I haven't seen that much overlap. And what I've been exposed to it seems to me I guess I'd be uncomfortable about it. But I don't know what...I really would want to research that a little bit more. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR AVERY: Change is difficult. People are uncomfortable with change. That's all I have. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ADAMS: Are there other questions? If not, thank you, John, for your patience and your willingness to serve the state. Appreciate it. That will end the confirmation hearings for the day, and we're going to go into Executive session now. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

Chairperson

Committee Clerk