

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

Health and Human Services Committee
February 11, 2011

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Health and Human Services met at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, February 11, 2011, in Room 1510 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on gubernatorial appointments. Senators present: Kathy Campbell, Chairperson; Mike Gloor, Vice Chairperson; Dave Bloomfield; Tanya Cook; Gwen Howard; Bob Krist; and Norm Wallman. Senators absent: None.

[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: (Recorder malfunction)...agenda for this afternoon are the gubernatorial appointments to various boards, and we see that we have a number of folks in the audience here today. We very much appreciate your attendance. We cannot emphasize that enough. It is certainly our review as we ask certain questions and ask you to describe before we take your appointments to the floor of the Legislature. So with that, we will start with our first candidate, Dr. Dale Michels. Dr. Michels. Dr. Michels, welcome, and this is reappointment to the state board. So how many years have you served on the state board? [CONFIRMATION]

DALE MICHELS: Thank you. I believe I've served three. I served the unexpired term of one of our previous board members, Dr. Les Spry, who became the NMA president and felt that it was (1) a conflict, and (2) he couldn't do both at the same time. So I was appointed in his place, and this is my first appointed full term. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions from the senators that you would like to ask Dr. Michels? Dr. Michels, tell us why it's important for you to serve on the State Board of Health. [CONFIRMATION]

DALE MICHELS: Well, an interesting comment, Senator. About ten years ago, I put in a resolution that suggested the Board of Health go away, so for me, there is a significant turnaround in that sort of situation. There's no question but what we have, a board that is appointed by the Governor, so, therefore, there is some politics involved in that. We don't request, but certainly, the Governor looks at things through his eyes as he makes the recommendation. I think once we're appointed, that political aspect really goes away almost completely, and we work as a board that functions together that really allows us to cross multiple disciplines. We have a veterinarian; we have some physicians. You'll meet Diane, an advanced practice registered nurse. We have a number of people, and so we can work together, and we can take the appointment process, for instance, because we do appoint many of the other boards. We can take that out of the political realm and try to really look at the best possible candidate devoid of any of that particular influence that might be...someone might try to bring. I've never seen that. In addition, I think we work well on the process which we all call the LB407 process, which is really a process that's designed to help you all in the process of looking at groups and individuals who would like to expand their scope of practice, who would like to change

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their scope of practice, or do something different. And the Board of Health can work on that, again, across multiple disciplines to try and find people who will work, who will provide good information, and good input that we can give to the Department of Health and Human Services; we can give to the total Board of Health, because it's actually a committee that starts the process, and along with the Chief Medical Officer of the state, we can give that information to you, so that you, as you review legislation that's been proposed, can see whether it makes sense for the people of the state of Nebraska. We also do some things in public health. We try to reflect across the state those individuals and what they've done in public health. So I think there are a number of things that we do, do. I think we provide a good service. As you know, we're basically a voluntary board, and one of my colleagues comes from Scottsbluff which, for him, is a significant voluntary issue. I come from east Lincoln in your district, so it's not a real big issue to get across town. But those are some of the things that, at least, that we do.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other comments or questions that the senators have? I just have to say, I've known Dr. Michels for a long time, and was also involved in some very thorny issues for the city and the county, and stepped forward and helped us out. And you all would recognize him, because he's frequently the Doctor of the Day for the Legislature (laughter). [CONFIRMATION]

DALE MICHELS: I'm privileged to...it's been around for a long time as I have, so about 28 years ago, I helped start that program so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Yeah, exactly. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Well, thank you. My ankle thanks you too (laughter).
[CONFIRMATION]

DALE MICHELS: And we did get the medicine, Senator Cook, that we needed to have on board. It's here. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR COOK: Good, good for my Homer Simpson limp that I had a couple of weeks ago. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Oh, oh. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: These doctors are really watching out for you.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR COOK: They're good, and the copay is really reasonable (laughter).
[CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR HOWARD: It's my medical home (laughter). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Thank you, Dr. Michels. [CONFIRMATION]

DALE MICHELS: All right. Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We much appreciate your service and your willingness to continue. Our next candidate is Diane Jackson. Welcome. We'll find you in our notebook here. And you were a new appointment... [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...to the board... [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: I just started in September. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...to the Board of Health. Ms. Jackson, can you tell us a little bit about your background and what brought you to the Board of Health?
[CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: Well, I've been a nurse, and I graduated in 1984 so I've been a nurse for a long time, went back to school in 2000 to become a nurse practitioner, and worked in rural health. When I was young and single, I worked in the urban area, but now that I'm married and have children, I've stayed in the rural area, and I really enjoy the opportunity to practice as a nurse practitioner in the area. I work for Franklin County Hospital. I rotate between some of their rural health clinics--Red Cloud, Campbell, and then I service Franklin too. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: For some of those clinics you probably are...they may not have a physician nearby, so the nurse practitioner really can fill a spot in terms of their healthcare. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: Yeah. Our Campbell clinic, I and one of our physicians on staff are the only two that go there, and we rotate the days that we go, but I'm there by myself when I'm there, um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Gloor. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Thank you, Senator Campbell. Thank you for your willingness to volunteer, but you have a life and a professional career that's been as a clinician, and now you've decided to jump into the ring with a far more political process, although those of us who have been in medicine would say, it's all political in some ways (laughter). But what was your interest in making this move to the Board of Health?

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[CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: I'd have to say my daughter who's a senior in high school this year really got me involved in some political aspects. She has an interest in law, and so these last couple of years, her and I have talked a lot about different issues that have come up, and things that she's working on at school, and it just kind of brought to light some of the public health issues that are going on right now, and made me more interested in finding an area where I could help serve. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: And a position became available, so I had also applied for the State Board of Nursing, but, at that time, it was full, and so then the Board of Health came open, and so I applied for that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: I'm sure the State Board of Nursing is not political in any way (laughter). [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: Oh, no, I'm sure not (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Well, just being able to use all of your practical experience and certainly from rural healthcare, that's so important to the Board of Health. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: I think so. You know, healthcare has revolved (sic) tremendously since I started in 1984, and so, it's quite interesting, this whole process of being appointed to the board. I've learned something every time I come to a meeting. I found it very educational and...but I feel, though, I have a voice, too, as somebody in the rural area that doesn't want to lose their healthcare, doesn't want to have to drive to obtain healthcare. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: In the future to come, what do you think is the largest problem in the rural part of the state for healthcare? [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: Accessibility. I think the ability to have the providers available in the rural area will continue to be a problem. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: How can we entice more people to look at rural health as a field of medicine? [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: You know, we need to somehow make it so that they have some relief. A lot of the rural physicians don't have...I mean they have to be available 24/7 all year long and without minimal relief. And so, making relief available, having more

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choices as to practice issues, I guess. You know, I see that in our area. It's costly for us to hire doctors to fill in when our two physicians want to be gone, and so, then that puts a burden on the hospital as far as finances. So, I think if there was some way to make it...you know, an incentive of some kind. I don't know if doing some kind of financial incentive would be the key or not, but I think it would be a good part of it.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Krist. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: That's critical and what a great point. I get to fly a lot of doctors and nurses to different places for clinics, and in another sense, I think a little respite care for some of you that are out there by yourself all the time from the urban areas would be good for both in the exchange. And if that's all we do is fly in somebody to give you a break, I would encourage you to go with that idea, because I know there's a couple of doctors and dentists that I specifically do that with, who have kind of a partnership with their counterpart. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: I think that would provide a lot of learning experiences on both sides, because our doctors, you know, could learn an opportunity to, on some of the newer methods going on. And then for an urban doctor to come to a rural area and see that, you know, people aren't going to always do what you think they should do, because financially, it's a burden, but... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Thanks for what you do. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: ...I think it's an opportunity to check into. Thank you.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other questions or comments from the senators? Thank you so much for coming. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I realize it's a short amount of time, but it really gives us a face to the names, and we certainly trust and count on all the information that comes from the Board of Health, so appreciate your service. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE JACKSON: Like I said, I'm having a wonderful time in the learning process, so they said to give myself this first year to learn a lot, so, and I have. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Absolutely. Well, if you're here and you have any extra time, and they don't keep you super busy, you're always welcome over here to stop in and talk to us. [CONFIRMATION]

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DIANE JACKSON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I know, I know. Would that be thrilling or not, but, anyway, thank you so much for coming today. Our next candidate is Roger Reamer. Is it Reamer or Remmer? [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: Reamer. Excuse me. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Welcome, welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: Excuse me. I've got a cold as well, so. Sniffing, coughing. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: You're fine. And yours is an appointment, Mr. Reamer, is that correct? [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: Reappointment. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Reappointment. That's right. [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: Yes, um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Reappointment. Well, tell us a little bit about how you came to the Board of Health. [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: Okay. I've been in hospital administration in Nebraska about 14 years now, and, as you know, one of the positions on the Board of Health is designated for hospital administrator. And Mr. Gary Bieganski out at McCook had served the first two terms on the Board of Health ten years, two five-year terms, and he contacted me to see if I'd have an interest in doing so. And right at that time, I was also working with the Four Corners Health Department which is a district public health department in our area, Polk County, Seward County, York, and Butler County. And so, getting a lot of experience in the private side of healthcare through my work with the Nebraska Hospital Association, and just working in the private sector. When the state moved in the direction of creating more public health departments out there, I just saw that there's a real interest now in combining that private and public health. And so, that...I thought this was an opportunity for me to do more work in that area. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We very much appreciate your service. Questions or comments? Senator Gloor. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Thank you, Senator Campbell. Roger, it really is nice to have you

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there, because I know and trust your decision making abilities. You didn't mention it and wouldn't emphasize it, but you're still on the board of the American Hospital Association, aren't you? [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: That is correct, yeah, newly appointed to that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: And for the committee's benefit, there aren't many people across the country who are asked to serve on the board of American Hospital Association. And Roger does, so he brings experience that he gleans at a national level to help us at the state level. I also like having you there, because a lot of what finds its way to us is...relates to the 407 process. And you have a dog in that fight, and you don't have a dog in that fight. Your particular career wouldn't be subject to 407 unless you're a clinician in some way, I don't know. But I certainly feel better knowing that you're there when it comes to some of those 407 reviews, so glad to have you there. [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: Thank you. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Other questions or comments? So, what do you think is the largest issue facing us in healthcare from your perspective? [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: One? One? (Laugh) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Oh, you can mention more. I just think... [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: Still, I think the accessibility as was mentioned, and we talked about it from a rural perspective, but just, in general, just making sure that we can have models out there that people can access care whether it's on the wellness side or if it's on the illness side, those two things have to balance out. And obesity and those things are...definitely wellness that lead to the sickness side, and getting a handle on those things. That's true. Public health is understanding and assessing your communities and what their needs are to help them be more healthy. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Well, thank you very much for your service... [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: You bet. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...to the Board of Health, and your comments are always welcome, certainly, to the committee. Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

ROGER REAMER: Okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next candidate is Martin, and I'm not going to say that right (laughter). I know I'm not. Fattig? [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: Fattig, yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Fattig. Mr. Fattig, thank you very much, and you're an appointment on the Nebraska Rural Health Advisory Commission. What does that do? [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: Well, actually, it's a reappointment, and this is my...I'm being appointed for my third term. Rural Health Advisory Commission, I think, performs a couple of very important functions. One, first of all, we were created to...as the name implies, advise the Legislature and the Governor regarding rural health issues, and I think we do a pretty good job of that. The other thing we do is we administer a couple of really important programs that I believe that a couple of my colleagues have discussed earlier, and that is with access to care. We administer the state's student loan program, medical student loan program, and we also administer a program that I think is very important, and that is the student loan repayment program where a physician, a medical provider, will go to a community, and if a community will put up to \$20,000, the state program will match that \$20,000 so that we can pay off provider student loans while they work in a state-designated medically underserved area. We were recently able to go to the federal...get federal legislation in place that makes that award, that loan repayment award tax exempt, so that the provider that is working in the medically underserved area is able to keep that money rather than send half of it to Washington in federal income tax. I feel very privileged to work with the people...there are some people at the Office of Rural Health in the Health and Human Services that are absolutely dedicated to rural healthcare, and I really appreciate the opportunity to work with those folks. Some of those are nearing retirement, and I'm really concerned about what's going to happen when they do retire, because I don't know that we have anyone who in the state that can fill their shoes. But I really, really...you've been talking about access to care, and I think that the loan repayment program is one of the programs that is in place, that does help access to care in rural communities. It is one of the carrots that a rural community can offer that an urban community cannot to a graduate of a medical school or a dentistry or physical therapy, respiratory therapy, those kinds of things. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Have you been able to bring anyone to Auburn? [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: Auburn is both, I guess, it's both a good thing and a bad thing. We don't qualify. We're not a medically underserved area, so we are close enough to Lincoln and Omaha, and there are some things that we have put in place that allow us to recruit physicians much easier than some of our more urban counterparts. I've spent

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most of my career in western Nebraska, and I know how difficult it is to recruit physicians to Grant and to McCook and to Bridgeport and Gordon, and places like that so those are the places that really benefit from this program. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Krist. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Sir, you probably heard the comments that...with Diane Jackson... [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: ...about respite-type care. [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: Absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Could you see where potentially a smaller amount of money could be applied to a doctor who's in an urban setting for a part-time share of practices? Would that bring people in? [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: You know, I think it would help, but you still have to have that permanent provider, and if you can't recruit them initially, then there's no one to give respite care to. The respite care is, I think, would be very important. That was a new idea to me, and it makes sense. You got to let these people get away and rest a bit, because as Ms. Jackson said, it's 24/7, 365 whether they're in the grocery store or in their office. They are still the medical provider in that community. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Thanks for what you do. [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Gloor. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Thank you, Senator Campbell. Marty, do you still have your certification as a bench tech--(inaudible) tech? [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: I do. Yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Do you still do bench work? Well, I suppose you'd have to... [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: I do not... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: ...at least to stay somewhat... [CONFIRMATION]

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MARTIN FATTIG: You know, I do a little bit. The draw is there, and the door comes open, and I have to run in and look at some slides or see what they have growing in microbiology or something. It just...I started my career in 1975 as a medical laboratory person, and since that time, I've either escaped the lab or something. But anyway, I've been in healthcare administration since 1991. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Well, I know I didn't used to say this often enough, but I don't think there's a harder job in healthcare than being the administrator of a smaller hospital, because of all the things you have to do. And in your case, even running into the lab occasionally. I remember driving up to visit a hospital once, and the administrator was out mowing the lawn (laughter), because it had to be done, and the maintenance worker was sick. And so,... [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: Yeah, right. (Laugh) Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: ...I have no doubt that you'll work hard in that...and have worked hard in the role. [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: One of the things, I think, I bring to the...appreciate your comments. One of the things I think I do bring to the commission as well is that I have been recently appointed to the HIT Policy Committee Meaningful Use work groups, so I am...by the Office of the National Coordinator in Washington, so I am sitting on that committee, and helping design policy for our electronic medical records as we move forward so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: That's a nice (inaudible). Are you still sailing? [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: Not nearly enough, Senator Gloor (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We could probably all answer to that. I think it's just great for the senators to realize how fortunate we are to have Nebraskans who are serving on national boards and regional areas. That is just a great boon for us as you are serving on committees, because, no doubt, you bring back a lot of ideas that will help the state, so we appreciate that sense of volunteerism. Any other questions? Thank you for coming and serving very much. [CONFIRMATION]

MARTIN FATTIG: Thank you. Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next candidate is Dr. Zachary Frey, and Dr. Frey's appointment is a new appointment, correct? [CONFIRMATION]

ZACHARY FREY: Correct. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Tell us a little bit about how you came to the Rural Commission. [CONFIRMATION]

ZACHARY FREY: Well, I'm actually a resident physician, so I'm still...my residency, being trained...doing that through UNMC's program here in Lincoln, so I don't have too far to come for this. But how I kind of got involved...a lot of times one of the Lincoln residents or one of the other residents in the state, serves as the resident appointee to the board. And just to kind of partially from my understanding is to getting a better understanding for how rural healthcare works, and then also, to give, you know, input to the committee based on being a resident still and just coming fresh out of training. And I think that sometimes it's good to have that new fresh face every couple of years from someone coming out, just out of med school, because there's a lot of new things that are facing med school grads and I think that it's good to have that new...kind of a new perspective every couple of years for that. How I kind of came about knowing it was one of the third years when I started out, was on the committee and talked to me about it, and my father was on it previously, too, and I'd have a lot of experience growing up with him as a rural practitioner part of my life. And then also, during med school, I got to spend quite a bit of time in some rural communities and really enjoyed my time, and that was kind of what convinced me to do family medicine over some of the other specialties was my time spent in the rural communities, so that's kind of how I came about being on it so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We need a lot more of you, Doctor (laugh)...
[CONFIRMATION]

ZACHARY FREY: I agree, I agree. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...primary physicians and family physicians will be such a prime target for us to find for the state of Nebraska. So your service on the commission as a resident is just very, very helpful. Questions or comments? Senator Bloomfield.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: I have very little knowledge of advanced education. Where is William Jewell College? [CONFIRMATION]

ZACHARY FREY: It's in...do you know where Liberty, Missouri, is? It's just outside of Kansas City. It's in Liberty. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: Yes. Okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

ZACHARY FREY: Old liberal arts school so. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Gloor. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Thank you, Senator Campbell. I just have to ask, Dr. Frey, why did the volleyball player have a cyanotic (inaudible)? [CONFIRMATION]

ZACHARY FREY: (Laugh) They... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: In 30 seconds or less, perhaps (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

ZACHARY FREY: Basically, it was their anatomy of the hand bone was pinching one of the arteries and every time they went to play and struck the ball so hard, it would pinch the artery off and so that's what...it ended up throwing little tiny blood clots into the fingers, and that's what. So they had to take some time off. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

ZACHARY FREY: Yep. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay, would you like to explain that? (Laughter) Did I miss the story here? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR COOK: It's in the (inaudible). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: It's (inaudible)... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Oh, it's in here. I'm sorry. I did miss the story. Any other comments? Thank you so much for coming today and for your willingness to serve. A lot of new ideas, I'm sure. [CONFIRMATION]

ZACHARY FREY: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I missed that story. Wow, I'm going to have to go back and read that. Well, Sharon Vandegrift. Am I saying the last name correct? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON VANDEGRIFT: Yes, ma'am. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Ms. Vandegrift. We're going to find you in our book here, just a minute. And you are a reappointment to...? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON VANDEGRIFT: Yes, ma'am. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Tell us how you came to your service. [CONFIRMATION]

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SHARON VANDEGRIFT: How I came to be on the RAT Commission?
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON VANDEGRIFT: I'm a member of the Nebraska Nurses Association and was serving as vice president, and when my term was up, I was asked to represent rural health nursing on the commission. As you probably all know, the commission is made up of rural people for a reason, and that is, we have the most difficulty in getting providers of any specialty out there whether it's primary care, advanced practice, radiology, RT, you name it. We do provide all those services in rural communities, and so we try to get them back to us. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: How long have you been in the nursing career?
[CONFIRMATION]

SHARON VANDEGRIFT: Since I was 16, many, many years since mid-'60s.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: A very dedicated professional. Thank you very much.
[CONFIRMATION]

SHARON VANDEGRIFT: You're welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: So, what do you see in needs in the rural healthcare?
[CONFIRMATION]

SHARON VANDEGRIFT: I see a lot of needs. One of them is going to be access to not just primary care, but mental health as well. We're already suffering greatly out there with all the cuts that have come down. In fact, that there are so many regulations in place to get the licensed mental healthcare providers into our rural communities. I think there's a lot of issues going on, as you all know, that the healthcare reform that was passed last year is going to be having profound effects on us, going forward and trying to figure out how to not only provide adequate care to those who live in cities and urban areas but also, rural Nebraska. I came from a very rural area, even more so than where Fairbury is, out in western Kansas where Nebraska and Colorado all meet, Denver probably being our largest urban area when I was growing up. And I can tell you that we're having serious problems out there getting primary care, even advanced practice people. I do think that Nebraska is sitting very well in one aspect, because we do have telehealth medicine or the ability to use that, which I think is an opportunity for outstate Nebraska to capitalize on that. From what I understand, we're the only state in the nation who has been able to connect all of our healthcare entities together, i.e. our

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primary care, our public health folks. I can't think...hospitals. We don't have nursing homes on board yet. I'm hoping that sometime in the future we'll be able to bring those folks on board as well. A lot of education occurs via the telehealth as well.

[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Exactly. Are we situated well enough to keep the elderly in their homes and provide medical care? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON VANDEGRIFT: You know, that's a very good question. I like the concept of a medical home concept, because I think it will go a long ways towards helping. I do think that from my point of view or my advantage, there is a big gap there, that home health could fill in. But because of the way we pay them, we're not utilizing them to the best of their capabilities. I would like to see that expanded a bit more for them, and I think it would go a long ways for keeping people in their homes. My father passed away about a year ago, and because my brothers and sisters were able to provide care along with myself, we were able to keep my father in the home, so he did not put a burden on the healthcare system, and that was his wish. And I think we need to do more of that, being able to provide the support. Not many families have folks that can take time off from work to provide that one-on-one care that's needed. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Exactly. Senator Gloor. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Thank you, Senator Campbell. And thank you for your service. Had you been a practicing nurse prior to Hawaii--being in Hawaii? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON VANDEGRIFT: I have been a licensed nurse either as an LPN or an RN since 1971. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Okay. Okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We really do benefit from that long-term commitment and experience. And thank you very much for your willingness to serve. I'm sure that there's a lot of demands on your professional life, and then all of you volunteering to come forward, that's just terrific. So, thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON VANDEGRIFT: Thank you for this opportunity. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: All right. Next candidate is for the Foster Care Review Board, Susan Staab. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Great job on that pronunciation. It's usually Stab or Stabe. Hello. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: How are you doing? [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: I'm fine, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Tell us a little bit about how you got to the Foster Care Review Board. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Especially now, right? (Laugh) I like challenges, so I think the timing is good in that regard. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Long story short, my husband and I have three children, and years ago, I was begging him for a fourth child, and after about two years of begging, he said, I really don't want another baby, but would you consider adoption? And that had not even been on my radar nor had HHS or Social Services or any aspect of this. But, at that point, I said, that would be great, so we enrolled in foster parent classes and adopted Katrina. And when she was placed with us, we were given the case file, and I'm not sure if that's the norm or not, but it was a very big file. And the first inkling I had that I wanted to get more involved was simply reading her case, because to read in black and white--I was trying to get to know this four-year-old who had come to live with us and was going to be my child--to read about her life was astounding, and I thought, this is so wrong, and how can this be? So I really became a student and started asking a lot of questions and trying to understand more about the system, and it was really through our own experience, then after getting her fully assimilated into our lives of determining that, okay, now I think I have the time, and I want to devote more to this cause. She is the youngest of nine biological children by the same man, who has all nine of those children have been in the system or were (inaudible). And she had two biological brothers. Those three were split apart to be adopted, and at the time, they were four, six, and eight. We were her fourth placement. Her six-year-old brother had had six placements, and her eight-year-old brother had had nine placements. And to know that that's one case out of thousands was just astounding to me and very eye opening. So, we did, at that time, she was part of the ICCU--the Integrated Coordinated Care Unit, because they were a sibling group of three, and they were high-needs kids, so we got great support. We had great...in terms of our caseworker, so I felt like we were able to learn a lot, because of that. We had an involved GAL, you know, we had therapists, and team meetings, and all the things that should have been in place, were. And so, we kind of learned a lot from that, I think. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: That's excellent. Questions from the senators? Senator Gloor. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: You knew it (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR GLOOR: Go ahead. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We'll defer to Senator Howard. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: For the benefit of the people that aren't in the know like we are, the ICC unit is an intensive service unit with a lower caseload. Do you feel that you benefited from reading the case file? [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: That's so good (laughter). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: She even testified the other day on the floor of the Legislature (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: My husband was just telling me about that bill. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Well, I mean, I did social work for 34 years and worked for the department all that time, and, absolutely, you should be entitled to read the case file. You read that after you signed the adoption agreement? [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Oh, no, we read...I mean, she had only been with us a few days when we asked for that. And I don't...like I... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: And they let you read that? [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Yep. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: That's really unusual. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: That's what my husband was just telling me that, because he was telling me about this potential... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Yeah, that's not the norm at all. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: But I will tell you that not only do I think as adoptive parents were we entitled to that...she's entitled to that. That's her life. It's her medical history. It's her...at some point, she's an amazing reader and writer, and I think, wow, if she could read that and write her story, it's incredible, because you can't look at that case file and look at this little girl and match them together. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

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SUSAN STAAB: Because she's just this amazing, beautiful person, and you would never have thought she could come out of what she started with. So, absolutely, I would advocate for that information to be shared. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Sounds like rather than being a discouragement, it filled you with hope. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Well, it did, and, for me, someone who has always been an engaged citizen and wants to be a leader, it gave me a cause all of a sudden that had not been on my radar prior to that at all. And now it's, you know, something I started serving on a local board, so I could learn, and learned quickly that to be on the state board, you could have a little bit more influence in terms of the direction, and so, that's why I wanted this post. I'm not giving up my local board, because I think to stay in touch with what's going on in those cases is also really, really important. And it's a...you know, it's a high emotions, high-stake issue across our state. And I will tell you that probably at least three, if not more meetings, I've sat there and cried. And I think the board members have come to expect it. I cry easily, but it's sad, and it's hard stuff, so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: And I will say to you, I think the Foster Care Review Board is going to have an increasingly important role to play as this privatization moves. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Moves forward. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Moves (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Yep. It has to move forward, and it will. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Gloor. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Are your in-laws Ken and Rosie? [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: They are. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Yeah, and so, good... [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: So Mike is their son. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Yeah, good job...good job bringing an import into the state with some talent, Mike. (inaudible)(laughter) We're glad to have you here and glad that you're serving in this capacity. Tough job, tough job, especially now, as you pointed out.

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[CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Bloomfield. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: I want to follow up a little more along the line of Senator Howard's involvement up on the floor the other day. Was there anything at all in that bill that once you decided or were thinking you wanted to adopt that child that would have scared you away from it? I would think not, but I... [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: No, but I cannot say that without telling you that we...we had been praying about this for a long time as a couple and as a family. We knew that this was the right thing, and we knew that once she was in our home, there was no turning back. So the first six months was horrific. It was extremely difficult on all of us, but never once did we consider not moving forward with it, and when I read that case file, yeah, it just kind of makes you shake your head in disbelief. But I tend to be pretty idealistic and optimistic, so I would say, no, there wasn't anything in there that turned me away. I will tell you that the pediatrician had to force me to have her tested for infectious diseases, because I said, well, we're going to keep her anyway, it doesn't matter. He said, well, I won't be your doctor unless you get her tested (laugh), because based on that history, that's not uncommon. But, of course, she was fine, and all is well. But I think it could be discouraging in different circumstances. It was not a deterrent for us. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other comments or...Senator Howard. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Well, I just have to add to that. Of course, you read that file early on, and then there's a period of nine...it's a mandatory period of nine months that the child is in your home. That's a minimum... [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: I think it's six, actually. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: It might depend where you're at. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Well, state law, so we'll let that rest, but (laugh). Anyway, it usually takes at least a year to get in to get the adoption finalized. Did you read the record again when you got closer to...after you signed the adoption agreement, or had you...did you feel you sufficiently reviewed the information? [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: You know, we have it, and I still...I've still gone back and referred to it. So, I mean, is that what you're asking? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Well, ordinarily, and again, well, maybe I don't want to get into

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this, actually (laugh). But you did have the information, and I think it's important to note that that makes you feel better about the arrangement that you've got with the department. You feel like the department is sharing with you. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Absolutely, and, you know, just for medical reasons alone, the child and, I think, the adoptive parents are really entitled to that information. And, thankfully, in her case, and with many of these state wards, once they're adopted, she cannot have contact with her parents till she's 19. And now I know that they're divorced, and I found that out accidentally, but, in any case, we have their Social Security numbers, so...and we have her maiden name, so we'll be able to track them down. We also have her original birth certificate, so I think all that information is not only good information for us, but it is valuable information for her. It's part of her history, so it's good to have that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Bloomfield. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: You were allowed to keep the entire file or a copy thereof or something? [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: As far as I know, there may be more to it, but it's a pretty healthy stack of papers. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: I think that...does (inaudible) allow that, Senator Howard? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: No, no, no. And that really...I mean, the department always keeps the file and, I mean, we've got Whitehall over here on the...on the...what used to be the campus with the basement that is piled with records. We don't release those records, so I don't...that's what I didn't want to get into here. I don't know how you would have that, but. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: I probably was pretty persuasive, and the caseworker is no longer there, but (laughter). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: I'm starting to get a feeling (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Not because of that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Well, thank you for bringing not only your life experiences, but your commitment to children. That's wonderful, and we appreciate your willingness to serve. [CONFIRMATION]

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SUSAN STAAB: Well, thank you. You're all committed as well, and I appreciate the countless hours and energy that you're putting into this privatization movement, too, so. Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And best of luck. [CONFIRMATION]

SUSAN STAAB: Thank you (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. That concludes our candidate hearings for this afternoon, and I would entertain a motion to go into Executive Session. [CONFIRMATION]