

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

Health and Human Services Committee
March 20, 2014

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Health and Human Services met at 12:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 20, 2014, 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; Bob Krist, Vice Chairperson; Tanya Cook; Sue Crawford; Mike Gloor; Sara Howard; and Dan Watermeier. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: (Recorder malfunction)...and it is a reappointment...
[CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Correct. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...of Dr. Brian...is it Buhlke? [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Yep, Buhlke, not small but bulky, easy to remember it that way.
(Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Doctor, what I'm going to do is have the Senators introduce themselves. I'm Kathy Campbell. I serve District 25, and I chair the Health and Human Services Committee. So at this point, we'll go around and introduce ourselves and then come back to you. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Okay, sounds great. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR WATERMEIER: Good afternoon, Doctor. My name is Dan Watermeier from the southeast corner of the state, District 1. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: My name is Senator Sara Howard. I represent District 9 in midtown Omaha. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR COOK: I'm Senator Tanya Cook. I represent the 13th Legislative District, Omaha. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Good afternoon. My name is Sue Crawford. I represent the Bellevue, Offutt, eastern Sarpy County area. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Gloor. Just trying to get people in their place real quickly, Dr. Buhlke. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: No problem, no problem. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Senator Gloor, Grand Island. You've got my vote, Doctor.

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(Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Thank you, Senator. [CONFIRMATION]

BRENNEN MILLER: I'm Brennen Miller, committee clerk. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And we have a page with us. Nathaniel is here with us. And Senator Krist, would you like to introduce yourself? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Senator Bob Krist from Omaha. Hi. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Wonderful. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Dr. Buhlke, we certainly appreciate your taking time to visit with us today. And this is a reappointment. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Correct. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: You have served on the Rural Health Advisory Committee. What we usually do with gubernatorial appointments is allow the appointee, tell us a little bit about yourself, and obviously we would be most interested to hear about your experience on the Rural Health Advisory Committee. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Sure. Absolutely, absolutely. Well, my name is Brian Buhlke. I'm a family practice doctor in Central City, Nebraska. I was born in Nebraska. I was born in Kearney, Nebraska, and my wife and I went to Iowa to school, both professional schools, me getting a medical degree and my wife getting a physical therapy degree. When we returned back to Nebraska, we were a little bit disappointed with some of the loan repayment programs that were set up with the state of Nebraska because we had interviewed in other states and saw that they had much more aggressive loan repayment and much more aggressive tools to pull young professionals back into rural Nebraska. I started working with the Department of Health and Human Services and Marlene Janssen and Bob Rauner in 2005 and helped with the legislation that went eventually to President Obama's desk to be signed to take away taxation of rural Nebraska's loan repayment, which was one of the big stumbling blocks for loan repayment in Nebraska. After that victory for Nebraska, Marlene Janssen and Bob Rauner asked me if I would be interested in sitting on the commission and helping further try to advance healthcare in greater Nebraska, not just medicine but pharmacy, mental health, everything. And so working the commission this long, you know, for us it's simply about access to great healthcare and, you know, developing those tools that we can use to get nurse practitioners, mid-levels, pharmacists, physicians, physical therapists, dentistry back out to greater Nebraska to provide that healthcare for those people. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Excellent, Dr. Buhlke. Questions from the senators or comments? Senator Crawford. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you, Dr. Buhlke. This is Senator Crawford. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: And I actually sit right next to Senator Dubas. So we were sitting there today. And so I showed her that you were up, and she had very great things to say about you. And so I just wanted to let you know that she spoke very highly of you. So I said, if you speak very highly of him, then I think very highly of him. So thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Wonderful, wonderful. Senator Dubas has done a great job for our district and really great to have that personal relationship with her. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Doctor Buhlke, you have provided for us in the questionnaire. And goodness, young physician of the year, rural physician of the year, educator of the year, med director of the year, you come with really sterling credentials, Doctor. And we're just pleased that you would take time from your practice to serve on the Rural Health. We are certainly beginning to see the increasing importance of that advisory committee in talking to us about the needs of rural Nebraska. What do you think that the rural...besides the loan repayment program, what are some other areas that this committee needs to know about? [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Oh, I think loan repayment is just a part of it. I think the primary care shortage is a big point. And I think getting all the mid-levels, the physicians to work together as a team with the patient-centered medical home. I think Medicaid expansion is going to be a big point for rural Nebraska again. I think the...you know, greater Nebraska just needs great leadership right now. And all that comes with time. And we need to work with the medical center. I've worked with UNMC and excited about some of their expansions in the medical center, specifically about possibly going out to Kearney for a second rural campus. I think that'll be wonderful. The med center continues to work with each individual physician in rural Nebraska in giving quality education. And we continue to rank very high in the nation as far as primary care education. With that said, you know, I'm sure you've read some of Bob Rauner's articles in the Lincoln Journal Star regarding some of the home-trained physicians and mid-levels and how 100 percent of the residents in the Lincoln Family Practice residency program went to Kansas. And so we need to do full circle. We need to educate. We need to provide those resources to the state. And then once we're done with them, we need to keep them here. So keeping them here is only the last part. But

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educating them, providing a good resource for them, that's all part of making greater Nebraska medicine strong. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Krist. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Hi, Doctor, Bob Krist. I have a question for you, and I'd just like you to weigh in with your opinion. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: We have discussed at great length this year and in the past few years that I've been in the Legislature, the inner...the practice agreement that is required between a nurse practitioner and a doctor. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: And this year in particular we heard some obtuse figures in terms of what doctors were charging. So I'd like to hear your opinion first of all on the need for that practice agreement, particularly with experienced nurse practitioners as it might apply to creating more opportunities for primary care and care throughout the state of Nebraska, and then secondly, should it come to the point where we need to start putting a rate cap on those kinds of things if it doesn't...if we have pushback, your opinion on that as well. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Yeah, absolutely. That is an absolute fabulous question because it's right here in front of us, and it is every year. I've been working on this issue now since 2006, had an opportunity to fly to Salt Lake City and then listen to it on a national level presented by states such as Colorado, Washington State, Texas and looking at all the pros and cons of taking the relationship between nurse practitioners and physicians away and letting them practice independent. I myself hire and employ three nurse practitioners. My three nurse practitioners think that the agreement in the state of Nebraska is necessary. We still have a great working relationship. We work in a team. They call me all the time. I guess I'm one of the unusual ones in that I don't charge my nurse practitioners for the collaborative agreement. I think it's just good medicine and if they need to call me with a heart question or a patient that's a little bit more difficult, I welcome that phone call. I think that the direction that medicine is going...20 years ago, we used to call it the triangle where the physician sat at the very top, and then all the ancillary staff sometimes comes below it. And the nurse practitioner would be placed somewhere in that triangle. That was 20 years ago. When I came out of training, when the new doctors were coming out of training, we no longer have this triangle where the physician sits on the top. But we have a circle where everybody sits around. Social services, nursing staff, mid-levels, psychiatric providers, everybody has got to be at the table. And we've developed these models and these tools about the patient-centered

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medical home where everybody is a part of this team, and the physician is just simply the captain of that team. So with that said, I don't believe that...I think the relationship that currently exists between physician and nurse practitioner is strong. I think you have a few cases. Two years ago, I went to the state of Nebraska and looked at some of these individual cases where nurse practitioners would get together and they would hire a physician from another state who wasn't in their practice specialty to oversee because of the cost. And I know there is some cost issues. I know some of the independent...some of the nurse practitioners have been in practice for a long time, do an excellent job. And I'm not saying that they don't do a great job. I just think that relationship...there's still cases that require you to have to ask somebody or, you know, get some help. Myself, I practice with three other family practice doctors. There's not a single day goes by that I don't grab one of my partners and say, hey, you want to take a look at this? Well, you know, this is...as a matter of fact, ten minutes before I got on this phone call, my partner came and said, hey, do you got ten seconds? I said, yeah. And we went and looked at this really, really unique rash on this young lady's foot. And so we're just working together. So I think it's a great team relationship, and I think it should stay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Thank you so much. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: No problem. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you. Senator Gloor. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Dr. Buhlke, Senator Gloor, Mike Gloor. Thank you first of all for your service to not just Central City but for a pretty big area of central Nebraska. And thank you for bringing up the term "patient-centered medical home." It's the third day in a row that that term has been used in front the Legislature. And repetition is a good thing. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Yeah, it's a great model. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: But my question really has to...remind me, are you in an employed model with Litzenberg or the Bryan affiliation, or are you still in a private practice? [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: We're still in a private practice. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Okay. So what's your opinion on where the private practice is headed? As you well know, there's more and more of--especially in the area of family practice, of whether it's because of the ACO model or just the finances of running primary care practices or any medical practice, far more folks are throwing their lot in with a larger organization or institution. What do you think the future is for being able to

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maintain a solid private practice? [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Oh, I think there's challenges on both sides. Our practice is a part of SERPA which is the...which joined together and formed the ACO in Nebraska.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Yep. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: We didn't go into the ACO with them as we were waiting diligently to see if the whole EHR and medical records would go away. We didn't. We looked endlessly at different products, and we didn't think they were going to enhance our practice. So with that said, this year has been a trial of new computer systems and then trying to get up to speed. It's taken a toll, and I think it'll take a toll on all of family medicine in Nebraska that's independent. I think the model of a...of independent physicians joining a larger group is getting more and more attractive for everybody. I think of the stage 2 of "attestment" for EHR is going to be a struggle for everybody who's independent. It's just so much cost prohibitive. It just takes so much more resources than what we have. And so although I am independent, I think the direction is going to go to probably becoming employed physicians. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Well, with your perspective it's nice to know that you'll be on the Rural Health Commission. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: Absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GLOOR: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: You're welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Dr. Buhlke, not seeing any other questions or comments from the committee, we again want to thank you for your service and your willingness to continue. We know that with a practice that's difficult at time to find those extra hours. So we very much appreciate those extra hours on behalf of the state of Nebraska.
[CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: You're welcome. It's my pleasure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Excellent. Have a great afternoon, and thank you for calling in.
[CONFIRMATION]

BRIAN BUHLKE: You too. Thank you again. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Bye. Brennen, you have listed on the agenda today Dr. Joyce

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Bischoff. We have already interviewed that person via the phone. [CONFIRMATION]

BRENNEN MILLER: Yes, that's correct. And the reason she's on there is when we moved everyone from the 26th to the 27th, she was not one of those. So you just need to open it, and then we need to move her again. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Oh, okay. Okay. Is there anyone...do you wish to make comment on Dr. Bischoff? No? Okay. If there's nothing else on the agenda, we will adjourn for the day. [CONFIRMATION]