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Transcriber's Office

Agriculture Committee  
March 31, 2015

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[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Agriculture met at 1:10 p.m. on Tuesday, March 31, 2015, in Room 2102 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on gubernatorial appointments. Senators present: Jerry Johnson, Chairperson; Mark Kolterman, Vice Chairperson; Dave Bloomfield; Burke Harr; and Merv Riepe. Senators absent: Ernie Chambers; Tyson Larson; and Ken Schilz.

SENATOR JOHNSON: Okay, it's 1:10, and we'll begin our confirmation hearings to the Ag Committee. Members that are here so far are Senator Bloomfield, Senator Riepe, Senator Harr; to my left, Senator Kolterman; to my right...direct to my right is research analyst and to my left is Travis with...the committee clerk. I'm Jerry Johnson, chairman of the committee. We'll start with what's on the order of the yellow sheet for the benefit of the committee. We'll start with Mary Baker, if you will come forward and state your name and please spell your name for the record and then you begin your testimony. If you would give your green sheet to the page that would be appreciated. Thank you.  
[CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: (Exhibit 1) I'm Mary Baker. I am an employee of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. I'm actually the state hazard mitigation officer. I was nominated by my director, General Bohac, to sit in his stead as his representative on the CARC. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Okay. And you are replacing another member?  
[CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: Al Berndt was our previous director, yes. He retired in June, so I'm replacing him. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Okay. And so, have you served...it's a new appointment, but...  
[CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: I am. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: ...have you had any meetings, have you been involved with it, has...sometimes when people come in with a new appointment they've served for six months before we officially... [CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: Right. No, and I have not served, I have not been a part of any meetings yet. I don't think there has been one since I've been appointed.  
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Okay. So I'll ask, what do you have to offer for the sake of the

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climate? [CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: Okay. Certainly, you bet. As I mentioned, I am the state hazard mitigation officer, so as such I have numerous roles. The one...one of the main roles is, I'm in charge of the State Hazard Mitigation Plan for our state. That is a document that is required by FEMA to ensure that we're doing what we can at the state level to do mitigation measures across the state to prepare our communities for future change and future disasters and hazards that might come their way. In particular, weather is one of our worst hazards, and number one hazards in many different forms. That mitigation plan is required for numerous reasons, mostly for grant money. FEMA requires that we have a hazard mitigation grant plan in place to receive public assistance funding, Category C through G, which is actually all our permanent work projects and any hazard mitigation grants that we might do such as putting generators in critical facilities, improving our warning sirens, any type of minor flood mitigation...mitigation, anything that we might do in that regard. We were required to have a state mitigation plan for that. That plan is approved by FEMA. It's a five-year cycle. Our recent plan actually was right before I took over as the mitigation officer and was approved in May of 2014. So, in May of 2019, we will have already submitted a new plan and we're working on revising that cycle right now. And one of the things that were required by FEMA is to integrate climate change and the different things that are afoot as far as what can we do to improve the resiliency of our communities. So, I have a very professional and personal interest in that. Also we are in charge in my office of the local hazard mitigation plans. Those are at the local level. All of our state plans at the local level are a multijurisdictional plan, meaning there are numerous entities that have come together. Many of them are championed by our National Resource Districts, so the NRDs have championed their territory. For instance, the Papio-Missouri NRD champions their territory and they bring all those people together to do a local mitigation plan. That plan at the local level is also required for hazard mitigation funding. So, FEMA, to get us to do the plan, holds the grant money over our heads, but I see it as a vehicle and a tool for us to enable our communities to better their position and to increase their resiliency. So, those are the two...two of the main things that I do that directly have a part of the climate change and anything that is going on that changes our frequency and extremity of our natural disasters that are coming our way. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Okay. Thank you. Any questions? Senator Bloomfield.  
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: Thank you. How often does this committee meet?  
[CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: I have been told, normally, twice...a year. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: Twice a year. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR JOHNSON: Any other questions? Senator Riepe. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: I guess my question would be is, what is your thing that keeps you awake at night, what's your primary concern if you had one thing to pick?  
[CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: I think my primary concern as the new mitigation officer, I just started this position in October of 2013. I've been with NEMA several years before that, but I originally took the mitigation job because I really think there's a lot we can do to better our position, especially at the local level. My goal is to get every community to do, I'll say, one more thing to prepare them for the next thing whether that's, for instance, tornadoes. EF3 tornado is our average normal tornado that comes across the state in one way, shape, or form. I don't want them to prepare to that level. I want them to prepare for the EF4 because if they're prepared that one more higher level, I know that they're going to be more safe and more resilient and more able to recover after a disaster does hit. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Have we ever...have we looked at things...I know that sometimes you're at sporting events and there are weather conditions, and it would seem appropriate to me that they should make the crowd aware of some pending bad weather rather than relying on people's personal phones. I don't know that there's...but I've seen situations where I think they'd let it deteriorate before they get to it. [CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: I agree. Public education is a huge part too of what we do in mitigation in trying to get the word out about what conditions are and what to expect and what...well, debunking the myth that your basement is the safest place to go and it is if the top of your house isn't blown away. If the top of your house is blown away, it becomes a garbage disposal. So, educating the public on what really is safe and what is the best thing they can do is a huge piece of the puzzle, always getting the word out about what to expect, what conditions are coming, and the extremity of the conditions and how much they're changing. I think most people are well-aware that things have changed in our world, but I don't think they do a lot to prepare for it, unfortunately, and I think that's what we need to work on more. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: I also have a concern like at maybe basketball games where the roof could, you know, people need to...not just for preparation, but sort of alert or warning and it says here it is, you're all adults you can make your own decision, but you may want to get under the (inaudible) or someplace. [CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: Well, and as adults we tend to want to run out and look at it and not take safe shelter. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR RIEPE: Or drive away. [CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: Yeah. Yeah. And if I had my money and my way, I should say, and money was no object, every gym in our...in every school would be a safe shelter, would be fortified to a tornado, you know, capacity. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: I say all of this having been in structures that were directly hit by tornadoes two times, so I know I have a third one coming and I'm concerned about that. [CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: Yes. Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

MARY BAKER: All right. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Are there any proponents? Any opponents? Anyone in the neutral position? Okay, we will close the hearing for Mary Baker. We'll go next to Barb Cooksley. Thanks for coming from Anselmo. Welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: (Exhibit 1) Thank you. Barbara Cooksley, B-a-r-b-a-r-a C-o-o-k-s-l-e-y. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Begin, tell us a little about yourself and what you might bring to the committee. [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: I grew up in southwest Nebraska, been a lifelong rancher, currently reside on my husband's family ranch. We're the fourth generation and we have our nephews and their families, so we have the fifth and sixth generations. I'm also president-elect currently of Nebraska Cattlemen Association and I have served really throughout my professional career on several conservation boards and committees. I had a 14-year career with the old Soil Conservation Service and then I was asked to join the CARC committee probably back in the late 1990s and that was to bring, in their words, a real life, real time aspect to the committee, so I represent livestock production and then give a perspective of the Nebraska Sandhills. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: You're a reappointment so when did you come on the committee? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: Sometime in the late 1990s. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR JOHNSON: 1990s, okay. I didn't catch that for sure, so okay. Questions?  
Senator Harr. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: Thank you. Thanks for coming up. You serve at the leisure of the Governor so your term is indeterminate and this is the first time I have ever seen or heard of the Climate Assessment Response Committee, and I didn't want to ask Ms. Baker because she's new, what exactly do you guys do? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: When we convene usually the National Drought Mitigation Center talks to us, the metrologists give us their best outlook. They look at the ocean currents and do all their modeling, and then the state climatologist gives us his best guess as to what may happen. Other agencies will give their reports how prepared they might be and we have looked at everything from drought. I've actually served long enough now that we were able to get out of drought, and then we were concerned with flooding in areas. City water, municipal water reports, university will give us background. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: So you coordinate all this and then what do you do with this information? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: The Department of Ag writes a report to the Governor as to what we're doing and we have also given interviews, I guess, to the media. They attend the meetings and so that people can get a...what's going on at the state level. And like I say, I bring a real life, real time what...how the grass is responding. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: And how long do these meetings usually last? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: Two to three hours. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: Two to three hours, and they're here in Lincoln or where?  
[CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: Uh-huh. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: And obviously you have enjoyed it and you think it's worthwhile what you're doing? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: It is. I get to continually educate people on livestock production, but more importantly how the weather impacts perennial grassland ecosystem and it's been surprising that we all have our professional hats that we wear and that's not something everyone on that committee has. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR HARR: Sounds good. Thank you. Appreciate the time. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Senator Riepe. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: This information that you put together is that based then on taking national which is kind of a macro look at this, and then you do the micro look at the state level, is that how that works? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: They do a global. They'll start with a equatorial temperatures and they bring it to the national and then bring it to the state. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: So you build on that, not replicate it if you want to do that. [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: No, no, they use what's already out there. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: The other question I have which is really a very important one is, Anselmo, Nebraska. How big is Anselmo? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: Around 100 people, west of Broken Bow. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Any other questions? How many are on the committee? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: I want to say, it would be a table about like this. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Okay, ten, twelve, probably. [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: Yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Okay. Any other questions? Yes, Senator Kolterman. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Mrs. Cooksley, I know you've been involved in a lot of things. Thank you for your service. [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA COOKSLEY: You're welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Thank you. Proponents? [CONFIRMATION]

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PETE McClymont: Chairman Johnson, members of the committee, for the record, my name is Pete McClymont, P-e-t-e M-c-C-l-y-m-o-n-t. I'm here representing the Nebraska Cattlemen to support Ms. Cooksley's reappointment. A, she's very qualified, and B, she's going to be my boss in December, so. (Laughter) But to not go into the details, she shared of her expertise. The things I would add is, all of you know, you see a lot of people here, the world is run by people that show up, and definitely Ms. Cooksley has done that and has done that over the years, so she gives great insight to what grass management and climate means. So with that, I would just like to end my testimony to support Ms. Cooksley to be reappointed. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Any questions of Mr. McClymont? Seeing none, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

PETE McClymont: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Any other proponents? Any opponents? Anyone in neutral position? If not, we will close the hearing for Barbara Cooksley. Richard, filling out his form. You want to come forward. You can finish that up when we're done if you wanted. I know you're in the process, so welcome. State your name and spell it, please. I can't even pronounce the last name. It's not Swedish, so. (Laugh) [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD KOELSCH: (Exhibit 1) My name is Richard Koelsch. I work with the University of Nebraska and Nebraska... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Could you spell it for the record? [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD KOELSCH: Oh, I'm sorry. K-o-e-l-s-c-h. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD KOELSCH: Okay. I work with the University of Nebraska here in Lincoln, work with our Nebraska Extension programs. I'm part of our administrative team and my...part of my focus is around the programming, the educational program that we do in the agricultural, natural resource area. I've been on the CARC committee for approximately five years representing Extension. My role...one of my roles within our organization is when we have issues dealing with climate extremes such as the drought in 2012 or the floods in 2011, I'm usually tasked with bringing our faculty together around that issue deciding what are the roles that we are going to play in responding to that, and making sure that we get our educational resources together for delivering to clientele in those kind of situations. Extension plays two roles, I think, in dealing with the climate extremes. One is in advance planning. As an example of that we have a group of faculty that works in the range management area and one of the curriculum that they have created and delivered over time is dealing with preplanning for drought situations.

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One of the critical decision points that you need to consider and what are some of the decision options that you have in preparation for that. So that would be an example of kind of the preplanning roles that we can provide. We don't play much of a role in terms of the actual immediate response and then our next goal is more in the recovery process providing kind of the decision-making tools to help individuals respond and make good decisions after that. And as an example of that, last year we had some of the pretty devastating hail storms and straight-line winds here in Nebraska. We were able to bring many of our growing degree day tools for estimating corn and soybean growth and help producers use tools such as that so that they could assess what different varieties, what chance different varieties would have of maturing in time for the fall. And we could put in this year's climate that we've had to date in today's paid climate out through the rest of the year if it's normal and then help people make decisions such as that for replanting or other options that they may have. So, that's the kind of roles we play in decisions, or in extreme events such as what the CARC committee deals with. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Okay. Any questions? Senator Bloomfield. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: Thank you for coming in. Do you get into the whole climate change issue at all, or long range? [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD KOELSCH: Certainly a lot of discussion on that going on campus. From the Extension perspective, I guess we don't take a stance one way or the other. Our role we feel is building resiliency into our agricultural systems or into our communities that would focus around extreme events or changes that we do see happening. So, an extreme event would be like a drought and the response that our beef faculty have put together in terms of planning...make planning decisions around drought response. We also play roles in...I mean, we can see there are changes that occurred earlier, dates at which our soils are warming in the state. Different kinds of pests that have moved in from south of us, and so what is our response to those issues, how do we better manage for those kinds of conditions. So, our role, I think, is primarily in developing it, helping producers be more resilient to anticipate the decisions that they'll need to make around those climate-driven issues. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: Okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Any proponents? Mr. McClymont again. [CONFIRMATION]

PETE McClymont: For the record, P-e-t-e M-c-C-l-y-m-o-n-t. I'm here representing the membership of the Nebraska Cattlemen. Regarding Mr. Koelsch, we've had a great working relationship with him in Extension. As you can see from his comments, he's always been very fair and balanced in how he approaches things, and so we've always



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appreciated his working relationship and want to support him in this reappointment.  
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Thank you. Any questions of Mr. McClymont? Seeing none,  
thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

PETE McClymont: Thanks. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR JOHNSON: Any other proponents? Any opponents? Neutral? Seeing none,  
we'll close the hearing for Mr. Koelsch and that concludes our confirmation hearings for  
today. Reminder to the committee, once we get in there and check in, come under the  
balcony, and we will continue our Exec on the commercial cat and dog bills and discuss  
confirmation of these three appointments. We are adjourned. [CONFIRMATION]