

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

Education Committee
February 23, 2016

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Education met at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 23, 2016, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing for confirmations for the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. Senators present: Kate Sullivan, Chairperson; Rick Kolowski, Vice Chairperson; Roy Baker; Mike Groene; Bob Krist; Adam Morfeld; Patty Pansing Brooks; and David Schnoor. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Education Committee. Today we will have a hearing on two reappointments to the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. But first, I'd like to introduce everyone. My name is Kate Sullivan, Chair of the Committee, and I represent District 41. I'm from Cedar Rapids. I'd like the other members of the committee to introduce themselves, starting with the Vice Chair.

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Good afternoon. Rick Kolowski, District 31, in southwest Omaha. Thank you.

SENATOR SCHNOOR: Dave Schnoor, District 15: Dodge County.

SENATOR BAKER: Roy Baker, District 30.

SENATOR GROENE: Mike Groene, District 42.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: The three additional members of the committee hopefully will be joining us: Senator Krist, Senator Pansing Brooks, and Senator Morfeld. They may be introducing bills in other committees. We also have staff helping us today. To my immediate left is LaMont Rainey, who is legal counsel for the committee. And Tammy Barry is at my far right, another legal counsel. And to her right is Mandy Mizerski, who is committee clerk, and will make sure that we have adequate record of this reappointment hearing. We also have two pages that are helping us...and at this point we are hearing our first reappointment calling in. Yes, Mr. Hunter, are you on the line? [CONFIRMATION]

RONALD HUNTER: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Hi, welcome. We have just as a committee convened. I just had all the committee members introduce themselves and indicated that we will be hearing two reappointments to the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. So without

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further ado, perhaps you can tell the committee a little bit about yourself and why you'd like to be reappointed. [CONFIRMATION]

RONALD HUNTER: (Exhibit 1) Thank you. Well, about myself, I was born in Nebraska, I grew up north of where I live right now, about 25 miles. So I haven't gotten very far. But in the other sense, I have gone a long way because I graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1970 with a DDS degree and joined the military and spent 22 years on active duty. Retired in 1992 and came back here. I had some physical problems and some eye problems and decided I didn't want to practice dentistry, so I bought a farm. And now I'm retired from not only the military, but also from farming. So anyway, education has always been very important to me and it was how I left and then managed to come back. The Coordinating Commission, until I'd been appointed to it, I was not even aware it existed, but I think it plays a very important role in education in Nebraska--postsecondary education in Nebraska. And I have the time, and I decided that I could probably manage another term. I originally came on the Coordinating Commission when Jim O'Rourke in Chadron had to resign, I think for health reasons. And so I spent my first couple of years were finishing out his term and then I've had another term and then this one. I would be happy to talk to you about anything you'd like to talk about. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right, very good. And how long is the term again?
[CONFIRMATION]

RONALD HUNTER: I think it's six years. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Aside from, as you indicated, the importance of higher education, are there any particular things in your years of service thus far that you feel you've...have been highlights or things that you've really been good about having worked on?
[CONFIRMATION]

RONALD HUNTER: Well, I spent...I've been on the academic committee for the Coordinating Commission for the whole time, except for the two years that I was chairman of the commission. I can't think of anything specific that I've done, but we've done...there's been an awful lot of interesting things that have come up with academics and things that people probably don't...would never think about, you know? And I can't think of anything specific, but it's all been interesting. I've done that and I've also worked with the planning committee. I've not been on the budget construction committee. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, thank you. I'm going to ask the other committee members if they have any questions for you. Committee members, any questions for Mr. Hunter?
[CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Nope. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Well, it doesn't appear that there are any questions. I guess I'll give you one final swing at the back, so to speak, see if there's any final comments you'd like to make. [CONFIRMATION]

RONALD HUNTER: Well, I just...it's an interesting thing. One of my colleagues on the commission said this is a very interesting way to pay back something to Nebraska, after all the years that you've lived here and taken from Nebraska. But I think I agree with that. I've got the time, and it does take some time, because you not only spend time going through all the material, but I spent some time on the road--like two days, every time we have a meeting. So it's...and my hat is off to the folks that work and then do this, because it's pretty easy for me. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: I know it's in the materials we have in front of us, but you might tell the committee where you're from. [CONFIRMATION]

RONALD HUNTER: Oh, I'm from Hay Springs, which is out by Chadron, where...it's about an eight-hour drive to Lincoln. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right, Mr. Hunter. Well, thank you so much for calling in and for your comments. And certainly thank you for your service on the Coordinating Commission. Take care. [CONFIRMATION]

RONALD HUNTER: Thanks. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right. That's the reappointment hearing on Mr. Ronald Hunter. We'll now go to the next reappointment, Ms. Colleen Adam, if you would come forward, please. Thank you, Ms. Adam, for being here. And as we did with Mr. Hunter, can you give us a little bit of your background and why you'd like to be reappointed? [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: (Exhibit 1) I'd be happy to do that. I'm born and raised in the state of Nebraska myself. I graduated with a master's degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, master of arts in audiology. After I completed my education, I worked at the University of Nebraska Medical Center as a clinical audiologist and instructor for a few years and then moved on the Boys Town Research Institute for clinical disorders in children. I was there as a staff audiologist and researcher for a few years and then we made the family decision to move to Hastings, and I've been there for nearly 35 years. And since that time, I've been a full-time

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mother and even more full-time community volunteer. So some of my activities, besides having served on the Coordinating Commission for 12 years now--and I've served 3 terms as the commission chair. Besides that activity, I'm involved locally. I was the chair of the Hastings Museum Foundation for over eight years, I've been active in my church, I'm currently serving...and I've done many things for the public schools, task forces and whatever they need me for. In fact, I was involved in a facilities study of public school facilities in the Hastings area, which resulted in a very successful bond issue which we're very proud of. Currently, I'm serving on a task force for the Hastings Economic Development Corporation in recruiting and retaining a talent...it's a talent initiative where we are recruiting and retaining entrepreneurs in our community. So I'm happy to do that. So statewide, besides this, I've been on the Nebraska Humanities Foundation, then nationally, I am a past national president of the American Medical Association Alliance. And I was on their board of directors for over 10 years, and I was on the National Patient Safety Foundation. So that's kind of my...a little bit of what I do. And why I enjoy being on the commission, I think it's a valuable service to the state, I take it as an incredible responsibility to monitor what's happening in policy making in our educational system in the state. Obviously, the goals of our Coordinating Commission are well known, everyone knows what we work for. We have a statewide comprehensive plan that we follow--we try to get more kids to go to school and we try to get them out of there with as little debt as possible. And personally, the reason that I want to stick around is I think we do a really fine job of preparing reports that not only the leaders in our educational system use, but I think you as legislators use as well. So I take personal responsibility, while the staff does incredible writing and data collecting for all of that, I think we take our role seriously in monitoring what they're writing and offering our guidance, and support, and approval of what they write. So I really want to make sure that continues to happen. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Very good, Ms. Adam. Are there any questions that you'd like to ask of her? Senator Groene. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: So if somebody walks up to you on the street and they say what does the Coordinating Commission do, what is your 30-second answer for the layperson?
[CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Well, I don't have a 30-second answer, honestly. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: Well, three-minute. Or you got three minutes, I guess...
[CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: You know, I think we take fiscal responsibility for education in the state very seriously. And as you know, we monitor budgets that come in from the University of

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Nebraska, and we approve not only academic plans that they have, we monitor taxpayer spending in that. If someone wants to open a new program at UNO, we can say gosh, that's already offered at this school and is that really a good use of taxpayer money. So I think we have a fiscal responsibility to our taxpayers. We send you the recommendations, you're the final word. We're not, but we send the recommendations. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: I understand that you also do, like my junior college out there, Mid-Plains, you folks are where we're getting more cooperation through you guys with the university and the other colleges to accept their credit hours and their degrees. Is that correct?
[CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Yeah, you know, that's... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: That isn't what you do, or is that what you do (inaudible)?
[CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Oh, absolutely. I don't know specifically what you're referring to, but one thing that we've really pushed hard in the last five to eight years is dual credit. We're really working for students to, while they're still in high school, to take classes through our postsecondary education systems, so they get some college credit. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: Well, what I'm getting to is in the past, it was always this competitive...well, we want to sell that credit hour and they weren't accepting...the university system wasn't accepting credit hours from... [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Well, that, and honestly that isn't our decision. Any time you take a class and you want to transfer to another school, it's the responsibility of the school that you're trying to get into whether or not they accept the credits. So you know, we always ask the question, in fact, we have a proposal before...we have a conference call this Friday. Someone wants to bring a new school into our state and that's the first thing we ask them is how can you ensure to us that your classes are going to transfer to another school. And if they're accredited through the proper accrediting bodies, typically they should be accepted somewhere. That's a very simplistic answer to that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: You have a little oversight over it. [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: I'm sorry? [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR GROENE: You do have some oversight over that? [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Yeah, we do. And we have had people come to us who have registered complaints if their credits are not being accepted somewhere. And there's a system that they have to go through of complaint, and we look at that. And one school in Omaha for instance had a course in place and when their students got out they were not passing the national exam that they had to pass, and so we have to talk to them about the rigors of their academics and that sort of thing. It's a big responsibility, we have a wonderful staff. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: It's interesting that you should mention the conference call on Friday. Can you tell us a little bit about the process that's used when an institution from outside of the state wants to come in here and makes that plea to the Coordinating Commission? [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Sure. The expert is sitting right back here if you really want to know the answers. There are certain hoops they have to jump through to be able to open a school within this state. Obviously, if they're a for-profit institution and they're not taking our taxpayer dollars, there is only so much we can say. It's free enterprise in this state and in most states in the United States, so someone wants to come in, open a school, we very rarely tell them no. A reason for telling them no would be if they're not in good financial position. If we think they're going to be taking our student's money and they're going to close and they're not going to be able to offer a degree at the end of taking the student's money, then we can say no. But I don't know that we've ever said no. If they have all of their ducks in a row before they make application, if they're simply offering competition to our state-sponsored schools, I don't know that we can say no, unless there's good reason. If they don't have faculty, if they don't have resources, if they don't have a budget, and that sort of thing. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, very good. Any other questions? Senator Kolowski. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam. Thank you for your service and for re-upping at this time. I appreciate that very much. How many members are there on the Coordinating Commission? [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: There are 11 members. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And are their terms staggered like every two or three years or so? [CONFIRMATION]

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COLLEEN ADAM: Yes. We have six-year terms and we don't all come up at the same time. We have one opening right now, we lost a valued member--Eric Seacrest decided to step down after nearly 30 years on the commission. So his spot is still open, he'll be tough to replace.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: That's...could I... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Groene. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: What is the turnover? I mean every... [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Pardon me? What is what? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: Do the terms come up every two years? Is that how it does?
[CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: I don't know the answer to that. They're staggered. Honestly, that's probably about right. Every year you are approving probably two people. And you understand we have some people who resign in the middle of their term, they don't have to stay for the six-year term.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: So what's the average do you think of the terms? Average years of terms on the 11-member... [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Well, I think most people take the responsibility seriously and I think they stay for their full six years. We do have people who step away after their first term. Am I now the oldest literally or just number of years I've served? No, Mary has served longer than me. It's unusual to have someone serve this many years, I think. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: Eric Seacrest from my area in North Platte, and you say he was on there 30 years? [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Yes. He lives in North Platte, but he's actually a delegate at large, so his spot can be filled from anywhere within the state. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions for Ms. Adam? Thank you for being here, and thank you for your service. [CONFIRMATION]

COLLEEN ADAM: Thank you for inviting me today. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Yes. At this time, we will give anyone who would like to make some comments on these reappointments an opportunity to speak, if any would like to. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE BAUMGARTNER: Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. My name is Mike Baumgartner, M-i-k-e B-a-u-m-g-a-r-t-n-e-r, I'm the executive director of the Coordinating Commission. I don't have a green sheet, if I need to do one, I will (inaudible) here presently. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: We'll see afterwards. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE BAUMGARTNER: Okay. But I would like to thank you all today for considering the reappointment of Dr. Hunter and Ms. Adam. In the 18 or 19 months that I have been here, they have both been invaluable to me. Ms. Adam was the chairwoman at the time that I was hired and really provided invaluable direction to me on the directions that the commission takes, what we can and can't do, and takes the writing very seriously in our documentation, and makes us better for that. Dr. Hunter is a trooper for coming from Hay Springs time after time. His contributions to us are very valuable, and I know that for the rest of the staff, they've both been incredibly valuable and we hope that you will keep them as members of the commission going forward. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right, thank you. Any questions for Dr. Baumgartner? Thank you for your comments. Seeing no one else wishing to testify, this closes the hearing on the two reappointments and committee. We will now, as soon as the room clears, go on to Executive Session. [CONFIRMATION]