

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

Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee  
April 01, 2015

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[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Government, Military and Veterans Affairs met at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 1, 2015, in Room 1507 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on gubernatorial appointments. Senators present: John Murante, Chairperson; Tommy Garrett, Vice Chairperson; Joni Craighead; Mike Groene; Matt Hansen; Tyson Larson; and Beau McCoy. Senators absent: Dave Bloomfield.

SENATOR MURANTE: Welcome to the Government, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is John Murante, state senator for District 49 and Chairman of this committee. We are here today for one purpose: the confirmation of Sharon Medcalf to the State Emergency Response Commission. I would remind...we will be taking up just that issue. If you are here to testify on that subject matter, we ask that you fill out one of these green sheets which are located on either side of the room. If you are here and do not wish to testify but wish to state a preference of how you would like to see this confirmation dealt with, we have a sign-in sheet also located on either side of the room. We ask that when you begin, please, state and spell your name for the record. It's very important to our transcribers. We will begin by having our appointee make initial remarks. We will then proceed to proponent testimony followed by opponent testimony, neutral testimony, and then we will conclude the public hearing. We ask that you listen carefully and try not to be repetitive. We do use the light system in the Government Committee. Each testifier is allotted four minutes to speak. When the yellow light comes on, you have one minute remaining. When the red light comes on, we ask that you conclude. I would ask that you silence or turn off any cell phones or other electronic devices that make noise. And if you have a prepared statement or an exhibit, anything that you wish to have distributed to the committee, we ask that you, please, provide the page with 12 copies. If you don't have 12 copies, that's fine, just provide it to the page and the page will make copies for you. With that, I will proceed to the introduction of members. Again, my name: John Murante representing District 49, Gretna and Sarpy County. To my immediate left, State Senator Matt Hansen representing Lincoln. To his left, State Senator Beau McCoy representing Omaha. To his left, State Senator Joni Craighead will be here momentarily. She also represents Omaha. And to the far left Sherry Shaffer is the committee clerk. To my immediate right, Charles Isom is the committee's research analyst. To his right, State Senator Tommy Garrett of Bellevue, Nebraska is the Vice Chair of this committee. To his right, State Senator Dave Bloomfield who we anticipate to be here momentarily. To his right, State Senator Tyson Larson. I have no idea whether he will be here or not. And to his right, State Senator Mike Groene of North Platte, Nebraska. With that, we have concluded the formalities and we would welcome up Sharon Medcalf to introduce herself to the committee. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Do I sit here? Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR MURANTE: Please do. And welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: (Exhibit 1) Thank you very much. I guess as...by way of introduction, I am Sharon Medcalf, and I currently am an assistant professor in the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. I have been... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR MURANTE: Would you spell your name for the record, please? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Oh, sorry. M-e-d-c-a-l-f is the last name; Sharon, S-h-a-r-o-n. My introduction to the world of emergency response, emergency preparedness was actually about 14 years ago when post-9/11 dollars flowed to Nebraska. Dr. Raymond was the Chief Medical Officer at the time and what the state Health and Human Services office conceptualized was that Nebraska should do what none of the other states have done even to today and actually establish a freestanding training center for emergency preparedness and for the dollars that would flow to the state. So I was asked to actually stand up this training center in the fall of 2002. It was originally a joint project--well, it still is a joint project--between UNMC and Creighton. It's now housed in the College of Public Health. So we have a staff of about six or eight people. I have been at the helm since 2002 and we've been training anyone who would respond to a disaster across the state of Nebraska from first on the scene--EMS, fire, rescue--right up to clinicians who would take victims in hospitals. We've had a fairly stable staff over the last 12 years and relatively level funding from our partners at the Health and Human Services in Nebraska. About five years ago, I started developing an academic program knowing that these careers weren't going away. And so I developed a graduate certificate followed by a Master of Science in emergency preparedness which we launched, actually, in 2012 and are growing our student base every year. So I've been part of this world. I've been teaching students now, not only continuing education for professionals in the field but now I'd like to say I get my hands on the next generation which is really wonderful. And I've been teaching students in this master's program for about three years now. I developed all the courses so the content material is something that is second nature to me. The Emergency Response Commission for the state have been engaged in activities that my students have been learning about, that my staff in the training center have been partnering with for the better part of 12 years. So I definitely have the background for this area having taught it. In fact, it's interesting that I was just telling some of my colleagues this morning that the very first module in my very first course that I teach opens with the disaster legislation over the years. And I start back...when I talk about the last 50 years, I start with the union carbide industrial accident in Bhopal, India in 1984 which eventually led to the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act in 1986 so my students actually study that as part of our last-50-year legislative piece. So I'm very familiar with the legislation itself and what ensued and the local...what...it gave rise to what are called local...LEPCs, Local Emergency Planning councils...or Committees. I can't remember what the C is. But it's sort of...and I always

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like to make the point to my students that we've had an infrastructure for this kind of activity for a very long time, at least since the mid-'80s. Just because it was sort of resurrected and reenergized post-9/11 doesn't mean that it wasn't on people's minds before then.  
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR MURANTE: Okay. Thank you very much for your testimony. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator McCoy. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR McCOY: Thank you, Dr. Medcalf. In my...I think, unless I'm mistaken, it looks...appears you maybe had did your undergrad at Wright State University...  
[CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: I did. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR McCOY: ...which is, I believe, also the alma mater of one of our esteemed members, Senator Kintner, who I believe had also graduated from Wright State unless I'm mistaken.  
[CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Oh, good. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR MURANTE: We won't hold that against him. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR McCOY: You don't run across many Wright State graduates, I don't believe. I'm just curious: Clearly we have a very diverse state between...from where Senator Groene's district is out there in North Platte, you know, across the state, and we deal with a different potential challenges whether it's prairie fires or any sort of emergency out there. Is there any particular circumstance which you envision that we should be focusing on more as a state when it comes to emergency response, any particular instance out there that you think that we should be better prepared for? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Well, one of the...probably one of the most recent activities that I've been involved with actually in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control because they put out a grant RFP about two years ago for rural healthcare surge. And they...what they wanted to do was develop a program that they could pilot anywhere in the country. So the medical response system in public health departments from Saint Paul actually applied among...as did hundreds of other rural areas across the country. And they actually received the grant and the CDC came locally to do that. They tasked me with taking that concept of rural surge which we think nationally could be a problem. To have a surge of victims in a rural area and be able to have the healthcare

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systems within that community respond to that and respond collaboratively was something that I think was identified as a gap years ago. So that's something that we're actually taking on this year and training the...all the responders from, again, first responders and EMS to the healthcare system itself from the clinics to hospitals to any kind of urgent care as well as alternate care sites. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR McCOY: And I would imagine that would primarily be in the case of some sort of infectious disease outbreak? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Or a chemical event. I mean, it could very well be. We know that the traffic of...for the trains in areas like North Platte is something that we worry about. We worry about chemical exposures from industrial accidents. And we train our first on the scene, first responders, as well as clinicians how to deal with chemical events and chemical events that can overwhelm a healthcare system. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR McCOY: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR MURANTE: Thank you, Senator McCoy. Senator Garrett. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GARRETT: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Dr. Medcalf. Really curious with this role in the State Emergency Response Commission: Do you interact with the...an old friend of mine, colleague, Lieutenant General Bob Hinson in the CWMD? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Oh, yeah. Um-hum, yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GARRETT: So you interact with the...okay. Do you have a security clearance by chance? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: I don't. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GARRETT: Okay. What... [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: And the way I interact with him is that he's in charge of the...so you know that liaison, I think, between the university and STRATCOM and there's some sort of an agreement where there's...if there's research to be done on behalf of the military that they can do it. I believe that's his... [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR GARRETT: And do you get involved with that kind of activity or...  
[CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: I have been involved with the meetings when we bring the faculty from UNMC together to talk about STRATCOM's strategic areas and where we can fill from our research standpoint. But because I don't do bench research in, like, vaccines or chemicals or things like that, I have not actually had a project in that realm. But a lot of my colleagues have. So I'm kind of familiar with what's being done. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GARRETT: As important as agriculture is to this state, and it's one of the things that...I'm an intelligence guy by trade, but one of the things I was very concerned with early on is the importance of agriculture and the biothreat. You know, when I look at our adversaries and I see that our adversaries across the world that really want to hurt us, you know, they look to where is it that it can hurt us the most? And we are the world's food basket. And if they could get some...name it, whether it be something that hits livestock, anthrax, or some other biothreat to soybeans or corn or anything like...what's your perception of that threat? Do you even...do you look at that or... [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Oh, yeah, in a couple of ways: We...as a training center, we actually partnered with the Department of Ag here in Nebraska probably in about 2004/2005 when the bird flu first emerged. You remember when that first emerged in... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GARRETT: Oh, indeed. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Yeah. So we partnered with them and ran some programs with the veterinarians across the state from...particularly for poultry and fowl and things like that and for surveillance. And then what we did is we created an opportunity for the veterinarians to actually get to know who their public health departments were because in the event of a bird flu kind of an outbreak where we'd have to bring the veterinarian world and the public health world together, they needed to know who they were. Then we also did some work with the LEDRS Program. Department of Ag...Nebraska's Department of Ag actually has a LEDRS Program, and I think it's Livestock Emergency Response and their homeland security adviser was Dr. Janice Mogan for years. I think she's now in Iowa. But we worked pretty closely with her as she was developing plans for veterinarians to put on all the kind of personal protective equipment and decontaminate the farms if there was a foot-and-mouth outbreak and those kinds of diseases. So it's been interesting over the years to watch those worlds, the ag, that we wouldn't normally think of as part of our world, finally be sort of melded together. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR GARRETT: Again, that was very much of interest to me as, you know, ag is what Nebraska is all about. And if an adversary would like to hurt us, that would certainly be a target. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Yeah. Yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GARRETT: And it's writ large: It's larger than Nebraska. But from...also from a biothreat, what's your perception of...you know, we've been treating Ebola patients. Can you kind of give us a take on where you see us...UNMC going with that in the future? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Well, I...what's really interesting is that I was around when we first walked to the hospital looking for what the perfect place would be to put this biocontainment unit. I really feel privileged to have been part of those original conversations. My colleague and mentor, Dr. Phil Smith, has been my codirector for this training center for 12 years. Now, obviously, he's also the medical director for the biocontainment unit. So when that first patient arrived in August, I don't think I saw him for the better part of six weeks because he was so tied up with these patients. What we did as a center when they were...I think after the third patient, is the CDC actually designated 35 other hospitals across the country as Ebola treatment centers. And we were tasked--we as well as Emory--were tasked with developing training for these other hospitals. And because of our center that was already on campus that is seasoned in training, we were able to pull this together in about three weeks. So we actually brought that first group of hospitals in three weeks after the CDC delivered that mandate. And all of the staff in the biocontainment unit, who are obviously the content experts, did all the training. It was amazing. It was amazing to watch the, you know, the Mass Generals and the big hospitals that we would normally look up to as being the leaders in the world actually coming to the med center. It was very, very cool. So I think from that standpoint we've...because we have the training expertise as well as now the content and the subject matter experts together, I think the fact that we are going to be, hopefully, in contention to be part of this National Ebola Training Center, I think, will be great. And we are--we, as in my training center--is actually at the table during the grant writing, etcetera, for this because we've got the expertise also in exercising. So that's a big piece of this new thing. So I'm really hoping that we will play a huge role in the future of this kind of training. And it shouldn't just extend to Ebola. We should be thinking about any kind of a bug that mother nature throws our way that needs high-level biocontainment. I mean, all you have to do is look at the SARS outbreak in Toronto in 2003 to know we could get new organisms that we've never seen. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GARRETT: So do you see the role of UNMC then expanding as far as our ability to...for beds to treat patients and those kinds of things? [CONFIRMATION]

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SHARON MEDCALF: Absolutely. Absolutely, yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GARRETT: Okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: You're welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR MURANTE: Thank you, Senator Garrett. Senator Groene. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you, Chairman. Ms. Medcalf, I don't know anything about the State Emergency Response Commission. I'm sure you looked into it before you got appointed. How many members are there? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Nineteen. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: Nineteen? And it's across the board, people involved, I'm sure? Who is all on it? How do they... [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: The...I actually don't know all of the...outside of the 19 that would be my counterparts on the committee itself that represent the entire state. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: But this committee does more than diseases. It's, like, huge grass fires, earthquakes, tornadoes... [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Actually, the focus of the committee is the hazardous materials, correct, yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: Yeah, hazardous materials? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: More so hazardous materials, yeah, which was...was actually originated with the 1986 Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: So we've got the biggest rail yard in the United States, classification rail yard, in North Platte. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Exactly. Exactly. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR GROENE: So you folks wouldn't look over if we had a spill or a chemical in the rail yard? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Right. So we're...what we're doing is we're overseeing the local emergency planning councils in each county in Nebraska because that was a mandate from the 1986 act. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: All right. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: And what these committees do is, they're the ones that are responsible for that local planning should something happen in terms of an industrial accident or a rail...a derailment or the likes. And on these committees are representatives from emergency management. The hospital and the healthcare world has to be represented because they're going to play a big, big part in the healthcare response. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: Law enforcement, fire. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: The law enforcement, EMS, emergency management, as well as the latest: Public health departments, are now a part of it. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: Sure. So you look at your...you're bringing to the...disease and highly contagious disease type of (inaudible) where your expertise would help out? [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: That's...absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: All right. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Absolutely. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR MURANTE: Thank you, Senator Groene. Any final questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. [CONFIRMATION]

SHARON MEDCALF: Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]



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SENATOR MURANTE: For the record, we'd like to welcome Senator Craighead, Senator Larson, Senator Groene have all arrived even though they are in...switched up their seats on us. But that's all right. Variety is the spice of life, I guess. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GROENE: I need a name tag. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR MURANTE: Are there any proponents wishing to testify on behalf of Sharon Medcalf? Are there any opponents? Is there any neutral testimony? Seeing none, that will close the hearing on Sharon Medcalf's appointment to the SERC board and end our hearings for the day but we will go into a brief Executive Session so that we can have a couple quick votes. So thank you very much for coming down today, much appreciated. [CONFIRMATION]