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Transcriber's Office

Health and Human Services Committee  
May 26, 2015

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[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Health and Human Services met at 12:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 26, 2015, in Room 2102 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on gubernatorial appointments. Senators present: Kathy Campbell, Chairperson; Sara Howard, Vice Chairperson; Roy Baker; Sue Crawford; Mark Kolterman; and Merv Riepe. Senators absent: Tanya Cook.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We'll go ahead and start today. Did you misunderstand, Senator Crawford? I could tell by the look on your face. We want to welcome you to the official hearing of the Health and Human Services Committee. And today we have three gubernatorial appointments. And I think what we'll do before we have the first person come up is we'll go ahead and do self-introductions. So, Senator, I'm going to start with you. Sorry.

SENATOR BAKER: Roy Baker, District 30, Gage County, part of southern Lancaster County.

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Good afternoon. Senator Sue Crawford, District 45 which is eastern Sarpy County.

SENATOR HOWARD: Senator Sara Howard. I represent District 9 in midtown Omaha.

JOSELYN LUEDTKE: Joselyn Luedtke, legal counsel.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Kathy Campbell, District 25 in Lincoln.

BRENNEN MILLER: Brennen Miller. I'm committee clerk.

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Senator Mark Kolterman from Seward, District 24.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Excellent. Our first appointment today is Normal Weverka. Am I saying that correctly?

NORMAN WEVERKA THROUGH INTERPRETER: Vi-ver-ka (phonetically).  
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Pardon? Would you repeat that? [CONFIRMATION]

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NORMAN B. WEVERKA: Weverka. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Please come forward. Right there is fine. And for the record, we're going to have you spell your name. [CONFIRMATION]

INTERPRETER: Just a moment. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

NORMAN B. WEVERKA: My last name or the first name? The full name? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Both. [CONFIRMATION]

NORMAN B. WEVERKA: Okay. It's spelled N-o-r-m-a-n B. W-e-v-e-r-k-a.  
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Welcome to the hearing today. And we'd like you to tell something...a little bit about yourself. [CONFIRMATION]

NORMAN B. WEVERKA: (Exhibits 1, 2) Well, a long, long time here...I've been a number of years. How much time do you have here? Okay. I was born in (inaudible) Nebraska. And I grew up on the farm. I went to country school and later I went to high school in East Butler there in Nebraska. And I went to college briefly and also went to art school and I worked for a sign company in the art department. I also went to work for the Vocational Rehabilitation department. That was a quite a bit...long time ago. And then I worked at the Barkley Memorial Center. And then I worked for LHD, League of Human Dignity. And then I worked for the Nebraska School for the Deaf. After that I worked for the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. I'm married. My wife, Karen, is here. I have two adopted sons and that's an overview of my life. I could go on and on but I don't want to. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: You've had a lot of experiences... [CONFIRMATION]

NORMAN B. WEVERKA: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...that would help in your serving on the commission.  
[CONFIRMATION]

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NORMAN B. WEVERKA: Yes. Oh, yes. And my heart is there too. My heart is there with the deaf and hard of hearing community. I've been president of the Omaha Association of the Deaf for, like, 35 years and a member of different deaf organizations. I'm also a licensed interpreter for the deaf here in the state of Nebraska and, you know, my heart is there with the deaf and hard of hearing people. I love to be able to provide in any way, like, information, assistance, anything to improve the quality of life in Nebraska. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Were you the illustrator of this fine book? [CONFIRMATION]

NORMAN B. WEVERKA: Yes. When I worked for the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, yes, I drew that. And I want to...well, it's some information for kids, you know, not deaf and hard of hearing but for kids so they could learn about people who are deaf and hard of hearing and their lives, about the fact that they can't hear. And so that's the purpose of those drawings. It's a coloring book, an informational book so they could understand what it's like to be deaf or hard of hearing. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I'm going to pass the book around, because we only have one copy here, so the senators can take a look at it. What's the major thing that you'd like to accomplish while serving on the commission? [CONFIRMATION]

NORMAN B. WEVERKA: Well, perhaps people who know me always want to see deaf and hard of hearing children have a good education whether it's with the commission or maybe not always, but there's the big possibility to improve that but I'm very supportive of that. I'm quite an advocate myself. I was mainstreamed in the public schools. And before, there wasn't a lot of information available. But I do know that education is important. It's very vital for deaf and hard of hearing people. And I feel that that's the key for success with our children here in Nebraska because if you don't have that, it's hard to succeed. It's the same with hearing children as well. Good education equals success. It can happen. But I feel that's a big issue with me personally. But I know that the commission probably has some limited things that they can do in that arena. But I would like to do what I can. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Excellent, just excellent. Senators, questions? Senator Crawford. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you. And thank you for your service. And I was struck by your experience in working with the Fire Marshal and security which I thought is so very important. And I didn't know...I just wondered if you saw an important role for the commission on that public security/public safety side. [CONFIRMATION]

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NORMAN B. WEVERKA: Yes, because deaf and hard of hearing people can't hear, they can't hear the fire alarms, things like that. And I really am thrilled to find that the government...the Capitol now one day...itself has a strobe lights in the hallways. And that was never there before. So that part of my job...that's included in my work. And I would advocate for that for the fire marshal. We need to improve awareness so that people across the state understand that deaf people can be in a building at any given time. And, you know, there's...maybe they need...if they live in a building, they need equal access. They need the different types of technology that will provide their safety. I don't like to hear stories about what happened in New York. Two deaf people died in a fire because they didn't aware...weren't aware of the fire. They were waiting in the building. So that's a big issue with me as well. The State Fire Marshal really...I really enjoyed working with that group, yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Excellent. Any other questions, Senators, that you'd like to ask? Seeing no other questions, thank you so much for your willingness to serve. And at any time, if you should see issues that you think this committee needs to know about or to hear about, we certainly would hope that you would send an e-mail or let us know how we could be helpful. And thank you very much for the coloring book. [CONFIRMATION]

NORMAN B. WEVERKA: I have more in the office if you want more. (Laughter) I want to thank you, too, Senators, for being on this committee, for serving, and for allowing me to be a part of this process. I really appreciate that. And I...we had wonderful rain today, ha-ha. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you. Thank you very much. Our next appointee is Stacie Ray. And I believe they're all new appointments. So welcome. Please, sit down. [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And go ahead and spell your name for us. [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: (Exhibits 3, 4) Okay. It's Stacie, S-t-a-c-i-e, L. Ray, R-a-y. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Tell us a little bit about yourself. [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: Well, I currently teach at the University of Nebraska. My road to being connected with those who are deaf and hard of hearing started when I had my first son who was

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stricken ill when he was about five months old and lost his hearing. So he is deaf. He is now 25. He was the first cochlear implant recipient in Lincoln Public Schools, I know, so it's been a lot of years ago. I have a huge passion to do anything I can to help those who are deaf and hard of hearing. I teach audiology. I see patients. I work in the clinic with students. And I run all of the hearing aid banks in the state of Nebraska. There's three of them. And I do have a brochure about that. I wish we would have gotten more. But that is through...the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the University of Nebraska kind of pair up. So we are able to provide hearing aids and other assisted listening devices for people who are deaf or hard of hearing who don't have accessibility for the funding for those instruments because insurance does not pay for those. So that's kind of my passion at this point. I do a lot in the community as far as I interpret in church and do things like that as well. So I've just been working as an audiologist for about 15 years and have been at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln at the Barkley Memorial Center for 11 years. I also have been with the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Committee for, goodness, probably close to 18 years or so. Before I was an audiologist, I was a representative as a parent on that committee and continue to serve on that committee as well. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Excellent. Questions? Senator Howard. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you, Senator Campbell. Thank you for your willingness to serve. I was curious. In your statement under additional information, you said, "I believe Nebraska is one of the greatest states to live in for deaf and hard of hearing individuals." Why...what makes you say that? [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: I really believe we have a strong deaf community. People like Norm have worked for many, many years of their lives making sure that what we do in the state of Nebraska is being able to give accessibility to education, accessibility to services for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Are we perfect? No. We have a ways to go with anything, with education, making sure that our children, no matter if they're hearing or deaf or hard of hearing, they have the proper education. And that's going to depend upon what district they're in. It's not going to be, well, you're a hearing child, you're going to have better services necessarily. But we have to make sure that our children do have the best education possible. And for children who are deaf and hard of hearing, they need an early start because they need to be able to have access to language. And we do a pretty nice job. I remember twenty...it would have been almost 23 years ago my son was picked up in this big yellow school bus on his second birthday, taken to school and starting to learn how to communicate with his peers who were deaf and hard of hearing as well as other children with numerous different...whether they're hearing or whether they're deaf or whether they had disabilities, he was able to interact with those children and be able to do that at a very early age. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Other questions, Senators, that you'd like to ask? Senator Riepe.  
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Senator Campbell, thank you. Thank you for being with us, Ms. Ray. My question, I guess, gets to be...is I assume that you've followed the activities of the commission for at least some period of time. Do you have some thoughts, maybe just one idea, of things that you think it...we could build on, improve on, and do better at? [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: Yeah, I think we need to continue working on being able to provide accessibility as Norm talked about, just things as...strobe lights in buildings. I worked with a project through a grant through the Lincoln Fire Department. And it's true, you know? So many people don't even think about what happens if there's a fire in my home. We need to be able to educate both the citizens and we need to be able to educate those who are deaf and hard of hearing and connect with different phone services, captioned phones. We have that capability of being able to give people phones at no cost through some federal monies. People don't know that. I have people come to me weekly that could use this technology but they don't know about the technology. So we need to be able to interface with professionals who are able to provide these services for deaf and hard of hearing. Their education oftentimes doesn't include, what can you do outside of the norm? What can you do to make sure that when they're in their home that they're safe, that they have accessibility? They don't even...a lot of people don't even realize that they can turn closed caption on, on their TVs, that it's there. They're like, well, I have a TV that's ten years old. That's okay. It's there. The computer chip is inside the TV. So we need to be able to educate citizens that services are available and that they can utilize those services but we have to be able to educate the professionals that are able to provide those services. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Exactly. Other questions, Senators? One of the...oh, I'm sorry, Senator Riepe. Go right ahead. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: No, I'm sorry. I'm just a...curiosity question about distribution of services and how they are across this vast state, is that like most other things? [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: Yes, yes. It's very interesting. It is. It's very difficult. Western Nebraska is very underserved. There's only two audiologists that are west of Kearney, so services are very difficult. People have to come into Kearney or go to service...attach with those two audiologists or Denver would be the next. So it is difficult especially for children because children are not little adults. You have to treat children differently. They can't raise their hand to little beeps so you have to have specialized equipment in order to diagnose whether they're deaf or hard of hearing. And those services are primarily provided in Kearney and Grand Island and Lincoln and Omaha. And if it has to be...a child has to be sedated because they might be wiggling too much

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to do these tests then it's going to usually be Lincoln or Omaha. So that's another thing that I've worked with, with the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention committee, is being able to see what we can do to provide services to the western part of Nebraska. We do...our hearing aid banks that I run provide hearing aids for children from...I think the earliest was three weeks old and to people well in their 100s. So we are doing a fantastic job that way. But the diagnostic part of it continues to be an issue, that accessibility to service. We have one of our students that is working on...one of her doctorate projects focuses on that very thing. We're losing some kids after they get out of the hospital and they're not following up. So we call them "lost to follow up." And we're trying to establish how much of that is socioeconomic, how much of that is distance to a provider. So we continue to try and give or build on that accessibility throughout our state. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: One of the things that I wanted to mention for the commission is that we had a bill before the Legislature this year and it has passed, Senator Bolz's bill, on resource centers. We're doing a pilot of three of them and would encourage the commission to make contact with those centers because they are meant not only for people who are aging in Nebraska but people who have disabilities or need help. And when you talk about all the different services and trying to get out to those, we're hoping that the resource centers will be able to do that. [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: That's a great idea. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And we will increase those in the years to come. But it's an extremely important bill for people across the state. [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: That's wonderful. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: So we thank you so much for coming today. [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: Absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Again, the offer is there. If there's information that you think we need to hear or have, please, contact us. And thanks for your willingness to serve. [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: You have a very interesting perspective as both a parent and a professional. [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: (Exhibits 5, 6) Thank you. And I'm just going to send around a couple other things in case you want to take a look at those. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL Absolutely. We can put them in the file and know they're there. So thank you much. [CONFIRMATION]

STACIE L. RAY: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next nominee today is Craig Timm. And Mr. Timm is a reappointment, I know, to the Foster Care Advisory Committee. Welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Yes, nice to see you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And for the record, we do need you to state your name and spell it for us. [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: (Exhibit 7) Yes. Craig, C-r-a-i-g, Timm, T-i-m-m. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: So tell us just a little bit about yourself and how it's gone with the first changeover years. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Just real quickly, I'm a professional pilot. I run a flight department for a Fortune 500 company in Omaha. And I'm going to celebrate 34 years of marriage coming up this summer. I have an adult daughter that we adopted, thankfully right out of the hospital, three days old, 26-odd years ago. And she's married and she's given us a great little granddaughter who is going to be nine months old tomorrow, for goodness sakes, so pretty precious. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Good, good. [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: And then we have a son and he just got married on Sunday. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Wow. [CONFIRMATION]



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CRAIG TIMM: And so they're launching off on their honeymoon this afternoon and we'll be empty nesters and that's going to be really different. (Laugh) Been with the Foster Care Advisory Committee, as you stated, from the beginning when they reappointed the whole operation and it's gone very well. We have...the committee has really one voice. And we are really pleased with our appointment for executive director that we...that was our first phase and the most important thing right out of the gate. So all of us new to one another didn't know each other from anywhere and we worked very hard for those first five months to get someone in here right away that has taken this...the Foster Care Review Office to a different level. And we are very pleased at how well she's doing. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: So tell us how you got...I mean, how you got to the foster care...what was your interest? [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Actually, when my daughter was getting ready to go to college, being adopted of course there was all kinds of grants and scholarships out there. So I just got online and I was looking for scholarships for her. And everything that came up was...there were thousands of offers for kids coming from foster care. And she did not come from that and it just sparked, really, an interest way back then. And it was like, I had an idea what foster care was about. But when I started getting involved in the Foster Care Review Board and in a local board and then, I don't know, eight-some years, eight or nine years, whatever it is now, and it was amazing that I had no idea the depth and the struggles and the heartaches that these kids go through. You know, I thought, they're in for short term. Foster care, it's a short term, you know, 90 days, 60 days while mom and dad get their life back together and pretty soon I'm reading and reading and reading and it's two years and three years and five years. And then they get to teenage and then they're not adopted and then they age out. And it's like, oh, my gosh, what can they do about that? How can I get involved? And that's what really prompted that. And then the facilitator said, well, Craig, you're asking so many...you should be at CASA. Okay, well, what's that? (Laugh) So I was at CASA for two years in Omaha. And it was very, very interesting and I was able to work firsthand with a little guy and didn't get the results I was really hoping but I was with him for two years before they moved him out and he had five different families in two years. And that broke my heart and it was just...confirmed everything that I had been reading. Now I see it firsthand. And it was very difficult. And when these...this opportunity came up three years ago and it was like, I'm going to submit my name and see if I can come in from that side, have some influence, hopefully, in legislation and so forth and maybe we can really help these kids. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Well, the five of you have just been amazing, I have to say. [CONFIRMATION]

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CRAIG TIMM: I appreciate that, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: When we went out to look for candidates, it was a joint effort between this committee and the Governor's office. [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And really...and then Governor Heineman's office took such an interest and care and we...both sides were reading the applications and I just think it is incredible what the five of you have accomplished in such a short amount of time and really met and went beyond our expectations, I believe. [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Well, I appreciate that, thank you. We have set some high standards for ourselves and some high goals to bring the Foster Care Review Office back to what we think it should be as the go-to facility for all the data that you're looking for and information that you need to help the kids minimize their stay in foster care and get reunited or get adopted and just get out of the system, so to say. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Right. Exactly. Questions from the senators or comments, anyone? Boy, that's a lot of confidence in the Foster Care Advisory Committee. (Laughter)  
[CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Yes, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Well, we appreciate you taking time to come today and for your service. [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Yes, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I know it's not been easy to start up, really to restart...  
[CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Restart, yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...restart the Foster Care Advisory Committee and set it on a path of well-respected data and information that comes to the senators and to the community.  
[CONFIRMATION]

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CRAIG TIMM: Thank you. Oh, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And really, you are the go-to for us in the Legislature, so.  
[CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Yeah, well, I appreciate that. Yeah, we're really trying to be that again. And we should be. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Yeah, absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: And the best thing is the data is much more timely than what it used to be. And we're hoping to get it better, is what our goal is for you all. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Right. And not that we don't appreciate every single professional in this field, but watching people like yourself who come from, really, as a private citizen...  
[CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...to make that kind of commitment, it's commendable, so thank you.  
[CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Oh, I appreciate that. Thank you. Yeah, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you. And again, if there's information...I know we get a lot of information from you but if there's anything that you feel we should be looking at, don't hesitate to contact us. [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Okay. Great. I'll come knock on your door. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Excellent. Thanks. [CONFIRMATION]

CRAIG TIMM: Okay. Yes, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And rest up from the wedding. [CONFIRMATION]

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CRAIG TIMM: Yeah, thank you very much. Yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Yes. We...some of us know what that is, that's for sure. We have no other appointments today so this will conclude our hearing and thank you very much for coming today. [CONFIRMATION]