

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

Natural Resources Committee  
March 18, 2015

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[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Natural Resources met at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 18, 2015, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on a gubernatorial appointment. Senators present: Ken Schilz, Chairperson; Curt Friesen, Vice Chairperson; Dan Hughes; Jerry Johnson; Rick Kolowski; Brett Lindstrom; and David Schnoor. Senators absent: John McCollister.

SENATOR SCHILZ: Good afternoon, everyone. We've got a huge crowd today; looking forward to it. We usually go through a bunch of things on what you do, what you can't do. We aren't going to...we're going to dispense with most of that. We have a confirmation hearing today, Robert Allen, for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. And I would take a minute, though, to allow the senators that are here to go ahead and introduce themselves starting with Senator Schnoor.

SENATOR SCHNOOR: I am Senator Dave Schnoor; I represent District 15 which is Dodge County.

SENATOR LINDSTROM: Brett Lindstrom, District 18, northwest Omaha.

SENATOR FRIESEN: Curt Friesen, District 34, Hamilton, Merrick, Nance, part of Hall County.

SENATOR JOHNSON: Jerry Johnson, Saunders, Butler, and Colfax Counties.

SENATOR HUGHES: Dan Hughes, District 44, ten counties in southwest Nebraska. Would you like me to name them?

SENATOR SCHILZ: No, you don't have to. We've all heard them.

SENATOR HUGHES: Usually I do.

SENATOR SCHILZ: Yeah, you do. That's why I was waiting. So...and I'm Ken Schilz, I'm Chair of the committee from Ogallala and represent District 47. We also have Barb Koehlmoos, committee clerk; and Laurie Lage, legal counsel. And Jake Kawamoto, who's been faithful and here every day as our page, he's done a great job. So at this time, Mr. Allen, if you would take the seat and take some time to give us a little bit of history of yourself and what you want to do

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when you get on the commission...since you've been on the commission, we'd be happy to hear from you now. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT ALLEN: Okay. I think they told me I need to state my name and...  
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SCHILZ: And spell it, too, yeah, please. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT ALLEN: (Exhibit 1) And so I remember that part anyway. Robert Allen, R-o-b-e-r-t A-l-l-e-n. I'll give you a little background. I graduated from the University of Nebraska with a double major in agriculture education and mechanized agriculture. I taught vo-ag in Glenwood, Iowa, for four years, and then got into agricultural sales and spent some time with T&L Irrigation Company in Hastings; and Lilliston Corporation out of Albany, Georgia; and, eventually, went to work for Orthman Manufacturing in Lexington, spent 12 years there, from eastern region territory manager to sales manager to plant manager, and eventually bought into a John Deere dealership in Broken Bow, Nebraska, in 1991. And I was a minority partner, and my majority partner had some health problems about four years later and I bought him out with a friend of mine from Florida that was a hunting friend of mine from Florida. And we expanded that dealership from Broken Bow to Ord to Ainsworth to O'Neill and eventually merged that into Plains Equipment Group, which has 17 locations, mostly in Nebraska and one in Kansas. So that was the background employment wise. When I moved to Broken Bow in '91, I got involved in the One Box Pheasant Hunt in Broken Bow and it's been an interesting time period as lots of things happened with that activity and the involvement in that. But the time when I moved there in '91, they were probably about halfway through a project where they had raised 10,000 pheasants a year in Custer County and had released them...raised and released them for ten years. And when the decline in the pheasant population happened mid-'90s and that type of time period, it was amazing that Custer County, with all those released birds, I mean the pheasant population still went down like a rocket, just like it did every place else in the state. And so the pheasant hunting actually got so poor that the One Box Pheasant Hunt was actually in jeopardy because we couldn't find enough pheasants to hunt and people couldn't find enough to even shoot 25...fire 25 shells, which is what the competition is in the One Box. And so we jumped into a venture of having a habitat program. And I was the chairman of that habitat program for...since its inception, basically. And we started doing some habitat work on our own in Custer County. And Game and Parks came out with a program that was called Focus on Pheasants about that time. And so I called Rex Amack, who was the director at that point, up and, basically, made contact with him and told him what we were doing in Custer County. And Custer County became one of the...in that Focus on Pheasants project, it was, basically, all on public lands, except for the One Box Project which was on private lands and, basically, did a lot of habitat development with that. And that worked so well that within about a couple years the Game and Parks and Pheasants Forever put a wildlife biologist at the natural resource office in Broken Bow, and that really

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kicked that program off, because that was an asset that we needed to have somebody that would be able to design the projects and make them as simple as they could for the landowners. And being in the John Deere business, I was pretty familiar with a lot of the big operators in that area and the bigger farming operations. And most of them were having...there was opportunities to have habitat developed on their land; but bigger operators really weren't that interested. I mean, it was kind of one of those things where it was more work than it was worth to them. They didn't see the asset value in it. And so we tried to make it as simple as you could make it for them. So Colby Kerber was the wildlife biologist, and he'd go out and pretty much...most of the work was done on pivot corners, but not all of it, but some of it was bigger projects, but a lot of pivot corners. And to get to a big operator and tell him to go plant a pivot corner to grass, it's about as much work for them to plant a pivot of corn as it is to do one corner. I mean, it's just a tremendous amount of work to try to get a grass drill calibrated, get all the seed rounded up and do this project and so forth. It's just...you're just not going to get a big operator to slow up and do enough at the time of year when you needed to do it. So, Colby would go in and do the project and, basically, get it designed; ask the guy, you know, this is the seed you need to plant; where do you want to order the seed from--Pheasants Forever or Arrow Seed, which is the seed business in Broken Bow. Didn't make any difference to us where they ordered the seed. If they ordered the seed from Pheasants Forever, Colby shipped it right directly to my John Deere dealership. If they ordered it from Arrow Seed, Arrow Seed had a corner in their warehouse that they stuck the seed in and I'd drive in and pick up the seed and sign the paperwork and turn paperwork copy over to Colby. As soon as we got the drilling done, we'd send them a bill...I mean The One Box would send them a bill, send Colby a copy of the bill, and, basically, we got that down to a place where the big operators would, basically, have to sign the deal to start the project. And when they got done, they'd sign another deal that said this is what the cost of the seed, this is the cost of the deal. And so they, basically, didn't have to do anything. We got it to a place where they could do it. And we were doing about a thousand acres a year in Custer County, which we did catch a time period when the drought hit in the '90s and we had about a seven-year drought there that made...well, it didn't make farming pivot corners very profitable. As a matter of fact, they were losing money because the corners all burned up. And so there was...it got a little easier to get some of these operators to commit to putting habitat on the corners because they were losing money on what they were doing. And so that helped that a little bit. But from the other standpoint, it didn't help you very much to develop very good habitat because it doesn't work very well with the drought conditions. But, fortunately, most the time grass seed will just lay there until it finally rains and then it will take off. And so if you were patient enough, and sometimes it looked like...as you'd go back, year after year you'd think nothing happened and then three years later all of a sudden, oh, this doesn't look so bad at all. So, anyway, that was my background with habitat and got involved with the Game and Parks from that standpoint. And eventually moved into...most all the work we did was on private ground, but we did do some work on WMAs in Custer County too, Pressey Park and Myrtle Hall. We did some of the "tractor" work, I guess you'd say; you know, not the (inaudible)...didn't do anything with...just

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basically helped them disc it and plant it and that type of thing. So that's kind of my background. I'm an avid pheasant hunter. I grew up with it from day one, my dad always had hunting dogs and, of course, I was the junior bird dog, I guess, for many years. So it's been in my blood and my family and my habitat for a long time. And I'm looking...excited about getting on Game and Parks Commission and working with the various people. So, do you...any questions, I guess?  
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SCHILZ: Very good. Thank you, Mr. Allen. Any questions? You know, back to the habitat that you talked about, we experienced some of the same on our properties out west, and the key is the habitat, isn't it? I mean, you can plant birds all you want, if they don't have a place to go...and once you have that habitat the numbers seem to maintain much better in my...  
[CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT ALLEN: You know, I relate it much to the Custer County area. We...I guess I should mention too, that since that time period, we've moved down to Plum Creek Canyon, which is a lake down by Johnson Lake, and I have a resident down in...have Eustis address, an Elwood phone number, and I live in Dawson County. (Laughter) So we live in one of those...one of those corners of everything. But I related a lot to the cattle people in, you know, like in and Custer County where it's a big cattle-raising operation. You know, if you don't have a baby calf, the cattle business isn't very good. Well, if you don't have baby pheasants, it doesn't make any difference what you do with the rest of the year, you can plant all the food plots you want to plant, if you haven't raised the pheasants to start with, it won't make any difference. So, to me, planting food plots and worrying about where you're going to harvest the pheasants at, is the least of your worries. You better figure out how to raise them to start with. The rest of it will take care...I don't think many pheasants starve to death in Nebraska because they can't find a piece of corn. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SCHILZ: That's right. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you very much, sir, we appreciate it. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT ALLEN: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SCHILZ: And at this point, we will see if there is anyone...you can go ahead...see if there is anyone in support of Mr. Allen's confirmation or appointment. Anyone in support? Senator, how are you? [CONFIRMATION]

ED SCHROCK: I came here to testify against him.(Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR SCHILZ: Well, let's see if he's true. We'll move to opposition then? Seeing no opposition, anyone in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, we will end our hearing today. And thank you very much, sir, for coming in; we appreciate your time and your willingness to serve. Thank you. That will end the hearing for today, guys, thank you very much.

[CONFIRMATION]