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Transcriber's Office

Agriculture Committee
January 16, 2018

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Agriculture met at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 16, 2018, in Room 2102 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on gubernatorial appointments. Senators present: Lydia Brasch, Chairperson; Carol Blood, Vice Chairperson; Joni Albrecht; Ernie Chambers; Steve Halloran; Bob Krist; John Lowe; and Theresa Thibodeau. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR BRASCH: I have 1:30 on my watch. So today I would like to welcome everyone that is here today to the Agriculture Committee. And if you're not supposed to be at the Agriculture Committee, now is when you leave. I am the chairman, Lydia Brasch, and before we begin on the Committee's agenda today, I would like to introduce members of the committee who are here with us so far and the staff who will be assisting us today. First I would like to introduce the vice chair, Senator Blood, and she is from District 3.

SENATOR BLOOD: Three.

SENATOR BRASCH: And then I would also like to introduce the other members of the committee and, in fact, I would like to have self-introductions today, beginning with Senator Krist.

SENATOR KRIST: Hi, Bob Krist. I represent District 10 in northwest Omaha and the city of Bennington.

SENATOR ALBRECHT: Good afternoon. I'm Joni Albrecht. I represent northeast Nebraska: Wayne, Thurston, and Dakota Counties.

SENATOR HALLORAN: Good afternoon. I represent District 33: Adams and part of Hall County. That's Steve Halloran.

SENATOR BRASCH: And Senator Thibodeau is in another committee introducing a bill this afternoon, and she is from District 6.

SENATOR LOWE: John Lowe, District 37: the south half of Buffalo County.

SENATOR BRASCH: And next to Vice Chair Blood will be Senator Chambers, representing District 11. I would also like to introduce, to my right is Rick Leonard, the research analyst for

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the committee. To my left is committee clerk, Courtney McClellan. The page that is working with us today is Joe Gruber, from Omaha, and a student at UNL. And today the committee is meeting for a public hearing and to receive testimony on gubernatorial appointments of...there are going to be three today. And for the audience, first I'd like to let you know that we'd ask you to be respectful of the testifiers and each other. Please keep any conversations amongst yourself to a minimum and, if necessary, please take your conversations outdoor into the hallway. During testimony we do ask that you're respectful and keep any expressions of support or objection silent. And no one may address the committee except as a testifier while seated at the testifier's table. Please turn off your cell phones and any electronic devices, or put your cell phone on vibrate. Any phone conversations should also be taken into the hallway. And if you do not plan to testify on a bill but you would like to record your position on a bill, there is a yellow sheet located outside the door where you can do so. And these will be part of the hearing record. However, only persons who testify will be included in the committee statement. If you are coming forward to testify, please introduce yourself. Today we will not be using any lights for the testifiers. Fill out a green sheet if you're going to come up and testify. They're located outside the door. On those sheets indicate your name and contact information and whether you are testifying in support, in opposition, or neutral on a bill. Indicate whether you are testifying as an individual or if you are representing a group. When you first begin, please state your name and then spell it for the benefit of the transcribers. If you have any handouts, please gesture to our page, Joe here, who will take any copies and distribute them to the committee. We're asking for 10 copies of any handouts. And I mention again today we will not use the clock. Typically it's five minutes in here, but today please feel free to testify. At this point, I think I've covered the business at hand, and I would like to call forward our first gubernatorial appointment, Tyler Weborg, for the Beginning Farmer Board. Welcome, Tyler. Please state and spell your name.

TYLER WEBORG: My name is Tyler Weborg, T-y-l-e-r W-e-b-o-r-g. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: And tell us a little bit about yourself. It's almost, it seems...I live within five miles, I think, of your business then. [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: That would be correct. Yep, yep. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: And to commend you on everything you've done over the years. But let the others know of your work and what you would like to see done with this appointment. [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: (Exhibit 1) Yep. Okay. Yeah, I'm...like I said, I'm from...born and raised in Pender, Nebraska. Our family has a feeding...cattle feeding and farming operation there. I currently live just outside of West Point with my wife and four kids. And I've been back at our

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family farming and feeding operation upon graduating from the University of Nebraska in 2000, with a degree in ag economics. And over that time, I have served on our local Cuming County Feeders board, which has benefited me greatly, being a young producer coming back at that time, meeting people. And, as I've been there, I still consider myself a young producer, which I am, but as I've spent a little time on this NextGen board to help these beginning farmers have an opportunity to do what they love and come back, it's another neat way for them to do that. And I've really enjoyed just offering, I guess, my little part of being a producer--that input--to the board because the board has a wide range of different perspectives coming from different areas in the state. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. And on the Beginning Farmer Board, is there a mission you would like to move forward on? Have you made any insight onto first things first?
[CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: I guess, you know, I've been to the first...the first meeting was in October, and I missed the December meeting. And I've...we're in our...I'm actually attending the second meeting today. So I guess I'm still kind of feeling my way around. I think it's a great program and one that has a lot of potential. There probably may be some...a few tweaks that could be made. And I think that it's still a great way, working together, that we could get these young producers back to our state because, I guess, I would consider the age of the farming...the farmers that are in the state, that's an aging community. And getting those producers...giving them all the tools, with tax benefits and whatnot that this board offers, is just a great way to encourage them to come back, which I think is important for our state and our communities.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: That's wonderful; thank you. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Blood. [CONFIRMATION:]

SENATOR BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Brasch. You talked a little bit about the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit Act. Knowing how successful that's been here in Nebraska, what would be your impression about some upcoming legislation that might potentially happen in reference to applying this to veterans in Nebraska and increasing it just slightly to create greater incentive? How do you feel about that? [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: I think that's just another way to pay back to our veterans and that would want to get involved in this great industry that I've been in for, basically, my whole life.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. And speaking of your whole life, I believe your great grandfather served in the Legislature. [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: Both. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Both. Great... [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: Great- and great-great. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Great- and great-great, yes. [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: I had conversations with your grandfather... [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: Yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: ...while he was at the Pender Care Center... [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: ...and learned a lot of things about the Legislature and the work the Weborg family has done for the state. Any other questions from the committee? Seeing there are none, thank you for coming forward for this appointment, and we'll have an Executive Session. And we look forward to hearing more from you and seeing you here at the Ag Committee, testifying, and working in the community. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: Okay, thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Are there any--excuse me--any proponents coming forward today yet? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Sorry. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Proponents? Any opponents? Oh, proponent...you are a proponent. [CONFIRMATION]

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MIKE DRINNIN: Yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Okay. All right. It's nice working with you (laughter).
[CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: I just... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Okay. Welcome. Please state and spell your name. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: My name is Mike Drinnin, M-i-k-e D-r-i-n-n-i-n. Good afternoon to the Agriculture Committee. And I'm the president-elect of the Nebraska Cattlemen, and I'm here today to express our strong support of Tyler Weborg, his appointment to the Nebraska Beginning Farmer Board. Tyler has been a member of...actually just got to be a member of our board of directors, and he holds the Region 3 vice chair of membership. He's been a member of our Nebraska Cattlemen's Young Cattlemen's Conference, and he manages his family's feed yard and farming operation in Pender, which has been in business since 1972. Tyler's knowledge of agriculture, coupled with a strong work ethic and rich family history in Nebraska, make him an excellent addition to the Beginning Farmers Board, and Nebraska Cattlemen is pleased to support his appointment. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Mr. Drinnin. And I also want to welcome Senator Chambers to the committee this afternoon. Do you have a question, Senator Chambers, as well?
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Uh-huh. Do you belong to the Young Cattlemen's Association?
[CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Yes, in the Nebraska Cattlemen, I was part of the Young Cattlemen's, yeah.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: You're not anymore? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: No, I wish I was (laughter). Age kind of comes along. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: See, the...everything is relative. At my age, you're a kid, so I'll just say that. Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

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MIKE DRINNIN: But I have two sons that are, so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. Are there any questions from the committee from this young man here? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: I see there are none. Are there any other proponents that would like to come forward? Are there any opponents that would like to come forward? Yes.
[CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Can I go as a proponent? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: As a proponent, yes. Oh, please do, yes. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Sorry (inaudible). Filling out my sheet. Good afternoon, Senator.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Good afternoon. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Committee, Robert, R-o-b-e-r-t Johnston, J-o-h-n-s-t-o-n. And I really wasn't prepared to give testimony but, after seeing and hearing this young man, I think that it's important. I am the president of the Nebraska Soybean Association, and we know how important livestock production is to the state of Nebraska. And we know that livestock consume a lot of soybeans. So just briefly, I would offer my support and thank the young man for stepping up and taking this position. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. Thank you, Mr. Johnston. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Any questions from the committee? Seeing there are none, are there any other proponents? I'll wait a couple minutes in case someone needs a little time to come forward. Okay, seeing there are none, any opponents? Seeing there are none, anyone in the neutral? Very

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good. Seeing there are no other questions, no other opponents, would you like to have any final words in conclusion here? [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER WEBORG: I don't have anything else. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: All right. That would close the hearing on your gubernatorial appointment to the Beginning Farmer Board. Thank you. Next we will move forward with the gubernatorial appointment of Harry Hoch for a reappointment to the Nebraska State Fair Board.
[CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Good afternoon. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Good afternoon. Welcome. State and spell... [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Harry Hoch, H-a-r-r-y H-o-c-h. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Welcome. Could you tell us a little bit about your interest in reappointment, and a few things for those who have joined us here today? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: (Exhibit 1) Certainly, certainly. I've served in the last, almost, two years and have served on the executive committee the last 15 months. As you might be aware, at the end of the year, the executive director retired from the State Fair so, being on the executive committee, I've been involved in the search for a new executive director, which has been quite an experience. Fortunately, we've been able to interview a number of very qualified candidates from around the area who have a lot of respect within the fair industry. So that's been keeping us pretty busy. I look forward to being reappointed because I want to follow through with the new ED and help them get on their feet, both in Grand Island and in the state. Hopefully we'll have somebody appointed here in the next few weeks. And it's just...it's a joy. The fair is a great...it was a great investment in Grand Island. And for the state, we've seen solid growth and have an excellent staff and it's a pleasure to work with all of them. And I'd enjoy continuing to do that. I know my children and grandchildren love to come to the fair every year, and I see the joy in a lot of other kids, too, the way they do everything, so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. And thank you for your work on the executive board and your search, moving forward. Are there any questions? Yes, Senator Blood. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Brasch. So you're from the Tri-City area?
[CONFIRMATION]

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HARRY HOCH: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: I know the area well; I grew up around there. So I actually have two questions for you. So given the State Fair's stated goal of promoting Nebraska-based goods and services, I'd be curious if you believe that local craft brewers should be afforded an equal presence with all beer products. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: You know, that's a...personally, that's a question that is generally a management decision. I know that we had a craft beer tent, an area that they wanted to keep that...it's my understanding they wanted to keep the craft beer special, and it was Nebraska craft brews only available there. And it was kind of in a...it was...I don't want to...it wasn't in a...it wasn't in the central area, but it was in an area leading from and to some ag areas and some other shows. And it was my understanding through the concession people that that's what the craft brewers wanted, was to have a special area. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: So it's considered a concession, is what you're telling me?
[CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Well, the...if the decisions on that are made by the people that run the concessions and the fair. The board tries to stay away from day-to-day management activities.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: None of us believe in micromanaging; that's why we have a qualified staff.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: No, but as a board, it is... [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Yeah. But as far as the craft brewers, yeah. They should have a presence wherever... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: So I mean, from what I've seen, in my personal opinion, I don't think they've been equally represented at the State Fair. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR BLOOD: So if there is something that you could do as a body, what do you think that would be? What would that look like to improve that? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: They might have another tent if they want to keep them all together. And we might have another designate...a second designated area if they want to keep them all together. There's a limited amount of space in the other bars... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: ...for, I mean, for kegs and what have you, because it's all draft beer. And so if you wanted to split them up so you could only have certain ones in this area and others in this other area, if the people that are looking for the craft beers...if they take the time to be wrist-banded to go into the bar and the craft brew that they're not looking for is not in this area but it's in another area in another part of the grounds, then they have to go through the process again. So keeping them together would make sense. But some of it's the logistics that the concession people have to work with. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Right. And I totally understand that. My concern, that I'm not seeing, is we talk about promoting Nebraska-based goods at the fair, and it's not just about concessions; it's about education and displays. And that's why I was kind of curious to hear... [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Yeah, I haven't seen anything done by any of them, in terms of, you know, an exhibit on brewing or anything. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Would you be open to that, like an exhibit? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: That...once again, if there's the space for it and what you want to do, it seems like everybody...I am familiar with the fact that everybody wants to have their own share. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: And I don't know if you can accommodate...how many craft brewers do we have that can...they can be all given the equal amount of space, without taking over a large number of the fair? Or where we put them right now, a lot it is already committed. I know that from the people that set that stuff up. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR BLOOD: Maybe next to one of those great big combines or something.
[CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Right. There somewhere, somewhere with the corn or wheat or something that's nearby. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: I appreciate your honest answer; thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Senator Chambers, did you have a question? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: I pass. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: You pass. Anyone? Senator Krist. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: I'd be remiss...I've been asking this question for ten years, so I'm going to ask it again. When are we going to see horse racing back at the State Fair? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Horse racing at the State Fair would have to be something that would be worked out with Fonner Park right now. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Don't you control Fonner Park, as part of the State Fair?
[CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: No, we do not. Actually Fonner Park is our landlord for the buildings, and we take control of the buildings sometime in the middle of August and relinquish them back to Fonner Park the middle of September. We become...we're responsible for all repairs and maintenance at that time. The balance of the time they're responsible for repairs and maintenance, and that's how they, through...GILCA is a local organization in Grand Island which you might be familiar with. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: And that's how they...they'll lease those buildings then to various youth cattle shows from around the country. And Fonner Park is the agent that does all of that.
[CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR KRIST: So during the State Fair, the fair itself leases the property from Fonner Park and fills it up with tractor pull instead of having a race horse run...a race run.
[CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Correct. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: And what I'm suggesting, and I've suggested it in General Affairs, where we deal with the horse racing books. And I just keep suggesting it to everyone. It was a tradition, before we moved the State Fair between Lincoln and Grand Island, to have horse racing, which I think is an important part of our history and agriculture. And everyone has a different reason why... [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: ...you can't race horses at the State Fair, so I would ask you, once again, to bring back the request that the State Fair needs to have horse racing as part of the venue because that's part of our history and, I believe, part of our agricultural history that we need to bring back to the kids of Nebraska. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: We have a meeting next weekend in Kearney, and it's a meeting of all the fairs in the state. And we will have a board meeting then, and I will bring it up in our...to our exec committee. And they'll take that forward as a recommendation to start conversations, at least, with Fonner Park... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Perfect. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: ...to try and see if we can resurrect that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Thanks. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Krist. Any other questions? Yes, Senator Chambers.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: In view of what Senator Krist asked, maybe I'll ask a question. Did you say Fonner Park is your landlord? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CHAMBERS: And you meet in a building which Fonner Park owns, manages, or operates? Or do they own it? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: They manage it, and it's on the property that they donated to the...for the fair project. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: For the record, does Fonner Park conduct races--horse races--now? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: They start in February, I believe the 24th of February. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Would that...excuse me. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: And that will run...pardon me? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: No, I said excuse me. I didn't want to cut you off. Go ahead. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: That will run through, I think, the Saturday of the Kentucky Derby. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Would there be, if you decided--by you I meant the fair board--to have horse racing, would there be competition between the two? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: We're not...the fair board is not versed in the horse racing itself. We would have to have somebody that would be able to...that would know how to run the races. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: But I mean, would the races...if there were to be...when...does the fair meet during any of the time that Fonner Park is conducting horse races? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: No, they do not. Fonner Park is early in the year and then, at the time--at that time--they already have their racing in Omaha, because that's in June or July. And they might be in Columbus around the fair time. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CHAMBERS: Well, based on what I feel about horse racing, you may not have to worry about them, because there may not be any anywhere in the state if I have my way, but I'm only one. I'd just like to have the record clear. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Chambers. Senator Lowe. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LOWE: Thank you, Mr. Hoch, for being here today. What has the fair--State Fair--done for the economy around Grand Island, you being a businessman? It's been there for quite a while and it seems like moving the State Fair out there has gotten more involvement from western Nebraska coming to the State Fair. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: I believe that's true. I think, you know, we see...we've seen increased construction of hotels and motels that's, quote, for the fair and for the other events that are conducted there then, so that there's lodging, enough lodging. Naturally tax, you know, state tax...our sales tax revenues are...have to be up. I'm not familiar what it's done with business in the last couple of years since I sold my business, you know, from that perspective. But everything I see and hear has been that it's very good. Everybody in the community is excited when the fair comes. So that being said, I would have to deduct that it's been good for everybody's business. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. I do want to recognize Senator Thibodeau of Legislative District 6. She has now joined our committee and has been here for a few minutes, so welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR THIBODEAU: Thank you. I would apologize for my late arrival. It was because I was presenting a bill to another committee, so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Senator Chambers. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Mr. Hoch, in view of the positive impact that moving the fair has had on that region of the state, I have to ask you this question. Are you aware of the fact that I played an instrumental part in recommending that the fair move from Lincoln and then did what I could to make sure that it did move out to that part of the state? If you're not well aware of it, don't put your mortal soul in danger of eternal damnation by lying (laughter). [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: I was not involved in any of that part of trying to move the fair to Grand Island. So everybody that was involved or not involved, I'm not aware of. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay, that's all I had for real. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Chambers. Senator Blood. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Brasch. I'm sorry to beat a dead horse--no pun intended, not a very good joke. I hate to retouch on this, but I guess I'm looking for the same kind of answer that Senator Krist was just given. When we talked about horse racing, you were willing to go back and talk about horse racing. I would hope that you would do the same thing for craft brewing. I feel that... [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: I'll be more than happy to do that at the same meeting. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: I would appreciate that. It's a very important business in the state of Nebraska. We have so many young entrepreneurs that we want to keep here in Nebraska. It's such a small demographic when it comes to the beer community that it's not a threat to our big brewers. But it...I am looking around this table and I know of at least two-three communities that have benefited greatly from having craft brewers in their communities. So I would hope that we would hope...start to highlight it more at the state level when it comes to the State Fair, because I think it would play an important role. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: We'll bring that up. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: I would be appreciative. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: My pleasure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Blood. And that brings me to a question. I'm not familiar any longer with all of the different competitions and programs. I used to be; I was a former marketing director and foundation director with the State Fair many years ago, about 25 years ago. They used to have a craft brewing division and competition. Do they still do that? [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: I saw some tasting and awards for different brands, medals for different styles of beer and wine--Nebraska wines. I saw that in the...oh, it was located in the concourse of the Fonner Park building when you came in, right by the offices. If you...it was on the west wall, and it displayed all of the various award winners from the state competition. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR BRASCH: And I believe at least a couple of your winners have become very successful entrepreneurs with their own establishments located not just in Lincoln but other locations. So it has been a good starting place for... [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Right. We have several in Grand Island. I know there's several in Kearney. There's several in Hastings, in the Tri-City areas. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Um-hum, very good. I just didn't look at all the programs then. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: The entrepreneurial spirit of the craft brewers is second to none. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: And that is to be commended that there's a...the State Fair is Nebraska's very first, original marketplace. We had a State Fair before we had a state of Nebraska, and people would come there to exchange their secret recipes, their secret ways to grow produce, bigger and better livestock, so it's a... [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Um-hum. And I think that's alive and well. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: The history has been tremendous. And I did want to add another question because I had visited with Joseph McDermott, the leaving director. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Is that horse racing, that it would physically need another facility that Fonner Park would need to do, to build, because all the buildings are filled with livestock--the barns and things that horses have moved out and now other livestock has moved in... [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: There's some logistic issues that...correct. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: And parking also is...even the tractor pull. I have heard from many tractor pullers that that event has them saddened, that now they have been pushed out of the fair like horse racing. And they're on some metal bleachers out in the dust. [CONFIRMATION]

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HARRY HOCH: That's been...that was moved over to the, if I'm not mistaken, the training track that's at Fonner. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: And I know there was discussion about trying to figure out how to energize that area a little more because there's other things that are held there also. And it's trying to get crowds to there. And they're working on a plan for that. We're hoping that, as we've been interviewing for a new director, we've been asking questions about revitalizing and doing some different things that will bring some added, new...some new...a new look, a second set of eyes is always good or a new set of eyes at anything, because sometimes you overlook some of the obvious. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Because we've always been doing it this way. So we're hoping that we will find the person that has that, and I think we'll be close to the... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: That would be after... [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Those are all things that need to be improved upon; I know that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: And I see every year you have improved upon, from building the arboretum to different exhibits and I know individuals who have worked very hard, not just the board, but many hands to make that a good venue. Any other questions from the committee? Senator Halloran. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HALLORAN: Partially first a comment. I would like to recognize the volunteers that work at the State Fair. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HALLORAN: But that being said, if they should have a craft brewery contest, I would volunteer to be a judge (laughter). [CONFIRMATION]

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HARRY HOCH: Well noted, well noted. I would like to say, while you were talking about improvements and things that have been done there, last year, and fortunately we haven't had to...we don't have to...didn't have to use it and we hope we never will, and that is that we, in conjunction with the State Patrol assistance, put in a big network of cameras for security for fairgoers, so that we could...in the event that we needed something that we won't want to talk about happened with somebody, we could at least go back and try and identify what was going on. And that was a sizeable investment by the fair, but it seems to be working quite well. And we're working, first and foremost, on security all the time now because of everything that's been going on in the world today. So we're trying to make it as safe a place as possible for our patrons. Hopefully they'll understand as the fair opens up. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Well, our thanks to the many volunteers, the State Patrol, the board, and the staff for keeping things growing at the State Fair. Any other questions or comments? I see there are none. Thank you for your willingness to be reappointed. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Well, thank you very much for your time. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: I will ask for any proponents to come forward, if there are. [CONFIRMATION]

HARRY HOCH: Free to go? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: I think so, unless there's an opponent. Any opponents? Anyone in the neutral? Seeing there are none, thank you once again. And at this point, we will ask our next gubernatorial appointment to come forward: Steve Wellman, for the appointment of director for the Department of Agriculture. Welcome. Welcome. Please state and spell your name. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: (Exhibits 1-3) Sure, Steve Wellman, S-t-e-v-e W-e-l-l-m-a-n. Chairwoman Brasch and committee members, it's a pleasure to be here today for...to visit with you a little bit about my background, my knowledge, and the qualifications, and my goals for the Department of Agriculture, as the director of Ag. The handouts here...my comments are just an abbreviated version of the printed handout that's...that was just being handed to you. And then also, on the back of that handout, there's also a few pages of some recent accomplishments from the Department of Ag, according to their focus areas, so basically just some basic information on the department along with my comments, so. So as we look at agriculture in Nebraska, agriculture affects each and every one of us every day. It's more than the number one industry to the state; it impacts all of us. And I'm proud to have spent my career in production agriculture and also volunteering in associations and other boards. So our diversified grain and cattle farm near

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Syracuse is similar to 95 percent of the other farms; we are family-owned. My wife Susan is a high school business teacher at Syracuse and--excuse me--we have two adult children that are living in Nebraska and, you know, producing...living the good life in Nebraska and doing the things that they love to do. So when we look at that...and they are the fourth generation to actually live on the same farm where my father was born. So when I grew up on a farm, I mean, I look back and I remember doing the daily job--the daily chores with my dad, riding on the tractor, riding on the combine, checking the cattle...and think back at all the things that I learned by actually being there and hands-on experience and things that I'll remember and have remembered all my life: the value of hard work, commitment, and dedication, maybe a little bit of stubbornness along the way, too, but all of the things that are necessary for a productive farm in southeast Nebraska. And also, like many of the children of farmers and ranchers, I was involved with FFA. And I participated in crop production projects and competitions on the state level and on the national level. So those early experiences really taught me the need for education for the youngsters of...that want to be involved or, hopefully, be involved in agriculture, the leadership development, and just opportunities to educate anyone that wants to learn about agriculture. And the Department of Agriculture has some programs that affect focus on young leadership and education of youngsters. And some of those are the Elite Showman Competition, the Nebraska Agricultural Youth Council, and the Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute. And those programs are something that I tend to wholeheartedly support through the Department of Ag. So after graduating from high school, I attended the University of Nebraska - (Nebraska) College of Technical Agriculture. I received an associate degree in production ag in 1981. After graduation I went back to the family farm, and I've been part of that operation for over 35 years now. I believe that that long-term activity and working in agriculture every day will suit me well as I, for this director position...as I understand agriculture as a whole and understand the challenges that individual farmers and ranchers will face, and do face, every day. So also throughout my career in farming, I volunteered for numerous organizations. And the most recent leadership organization, the position I had was with the American Soybean Association; I was president and chairman in 2012 and 2013. And we focused a lot on advocating for policy, regulations, and international trade. So international trade missions have been a key component of the Governor's effort to expand markets to grow Nebraska ag. I believe the State Departments of Ag can set the stage for a successful effort on the national and the international scale. So I'm anxious, I'm excited to be a part of Governor Ricketts' administration and his vision to grow Nebraska, and I really look forward to the role that the Department of Ag can play in promotion of Nebraska ag products and, also, the other focus areas that we have and I'll address those here as I go along. So as the director, I will oversee all the programs of the department. And the NDA's role is very diverse, and I think it's vital to the success of ag in Nebraska. Since I was named director, I have met with all of the focus area administrators to get a good briefing--overview--of what they do and what the tasks are, every day, for the department...and also asked them to bring forward the successes and challenges that they've seen in the past. And really, for me, it's just a--and I know we're just touching the surface on a lot of

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the details. I've been in the office now for about six weeks so there's a lot going on there, but I think I have a good understanding of the basics. Now our key roles and oversight are in the areas of ag promotion and development, animal and plant health protection, and food safety and consumer protection. I appreciate all the past work the department has done, and we can count on the experience that we have within the department, and their expertise to carry on those duties, as we move forward. Under my leadership, NDA will focus on increasing utilization of our Nebraska-grown commodities and, to do that, we will stress adding value in-state to those commodities and, in the market, create value here in Nebraska. I believe that's very important before products are moved out and promoted. That extra value that's built in Nebraska definitely goes to create jobs and add economic growth for our communities. Beef and other products in...from Nebraska have a good reputation of...in many market places across the world, there's been an excellent job done to build that marketplace and the reputation. And we'll continue to build on that as we move forward. So animal and plant health protection, we will protect the producers and the consumers, as well as the health of the livestock industry, by monitoring for diseases and inspecting and licensing feed and facilities. We'll continue to safeguard Nebraska's plant industries from pests, with year-round inspections and licensing. For food safety and consumer protection, NDA will continue to carry out quality standards relative to the dairy and food industries, through service, education, and oversight. Our inspectors will continue to protect the integrity of commercial measurements through certification of weighing and measuring equipment, through our Weights and Measurements Division. And the Department of Agriculture is responsible for oversight, based on 92 statutes, so I intend to have an open communication with the Ag Committee, with other interested stakeholders, and making sure that the department withholds those statutes and, as we work together, we'll work together for the benefit of the state's agriculture and our consumers. So I look forward to serving Nebraska agriculture: the farmers, the ranchers, and the citizens of Nebraska. And I'll be happy to answer any of your questions. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Mr. Wellman. I just had a question. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: When you touched on international trade missions, I know you've only been in your post for six weeks, as you just said, but your international trade missions have been...years of it? Or... [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes. Through the American Soybean Association, we cooperated with USDA on foreign market development funds and market access programs funds. And then also, the soybean farmers pay into a checkoff fund, and some of those are used for marketing development. So anyway, we've had...I've had numerous opportunities to do international

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marketing in Europe, Asia, South Africa, and also...so I've seen the...I've seen the work and the relationship building that it takes to be successful in international marketing. The ASA and soybean marketing started in Japan almost 60 years ago and, in China, it was...the 30-year anniversary was in 2017. So it's been a long-term process and, obviously, not just me involved but soybean farmers and others, in many aspects. But I really believe that the relationships that have built through all those missions and the conversations are what works to be successful in marketing our products. And then, although that was focused on U.S. soybeans, I think that gives me the benefit--the background--of being able to do that with Nebraska-based products.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Very good, thank you. That...when you mentioned that, I wanted to be sure to ask because I know you've been very active. Questions from the committee? Senator Chambers. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Ladies first. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: I...it's up to the Chair. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Say it again. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: It's up to the Chair. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: I thought I saw your hand up first but, if you would like to...
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: But I yield. I was raised that way many, many years ago.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: You yield, okay. All right. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: I was just trying to follow the rules. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Senator Blood. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Brasch. So I hear you talking about regulating, protecting, advocating all the positive things that come out of ag. So I have a question for you. Knowing that the future of ag is really technology, what role, especially when we talk about our

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international markets, do you think that the Department of Ag should play when it comes to things like blockchain technology and sharing that information with Nebraskan farmers-- Nebraska farmers, Nebraska cattlemen? Because I see, the more that we do internationally, that that's going to be something that's going to be in front of us very soon. And I'd be curious if you think that there's a role that can be played by the Department of Ag in reference to blockchain technology in our international trade. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Blockchain technology...well, I think we're going to start this off with that's a terminology I'm not really familiar with, to be quite honest about it. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: Okay. That's fair. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: But you know, whatever...well, we'll look into that and be very willing to work with you on what that might be and how the department...the role it might play in that. But I guess one thing I will say, the Department of Ag...we have some very talented people that have worked in international trade for a long time, and they've been very successful in marketing Nebraska-based products. And I believe that, whatever the technology that's involved or the needs of the consumer is, I believe that the Department of Ag and the experience that we have will bode very well for representing Nebraska ag products. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: I do believe that you'll see it, not just in international trade, but especially delivery. I think it's going to change how we deliver our product. It's going to go more to peer-to-peer with no middleman. And I don't think this is something that's ten years in the future. I think we're talking one or two years in the future. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: And I'm hoping Nebraska can get in front of it as opposed to bringing up the rear. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: So essentially--maybe you can explain it a little--I think you touched on it there is more direct to the consumer type of marketing. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: It's about... [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: And the consumer knowing where the product comes from and their interest in the product. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR BLOOD: No. Actually, it's more business to business. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: At least the aspect that I'm talking about, it's basically coding and math that is done that is going to set a platform. So, for instance, say that we actually do have electric self-driving delivery trucks. So code math would be put in, and when that load is picked up and delivered to its destination, the code would know when it was picked up automatically and the payment would be made upon delivery automatically. That's one of the smaller examples... [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: ...that I can come up with. There's a lot of examples but you're not here today to hear me talk about my knowledge of blockchain but... [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: We'll have to talk later and see what the role the Department of Ag might play in that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOD: I would really like to see that. I think that that would be a very important forward-thinking thing for the department. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Blood. Senator Chambers. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Mr. Wellman and I go way back. I met him this morning. (Laughter) Mr. Wellman, you mentioned international trade. Although Mexico borders the continental United States on the south and Canada to the north, are they considered international trade partners or just neighbors? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: I would consider them international trade partners. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Have you heard the acronym NAFTA, N-A-F-T-A? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CHAMBERS: What do those letters stand for, if you're aware of it?
[CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: North America Free Trade Agreement. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Is Mexico a part of North America, Central America, or Latin America? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Well, now we're into geography, right? And so I think they're part of North America. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: I know that the Governor is in love with Donald Trump. He has said it's been a delight to work with him. Well, if Donald Trump wants to scrap NAFTA, then...and you work for the Governor, I mean, you're appointed by the Governor, that's your view, too, isn't it? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Well, my view is to represent Nebraska agriculture on trade issues and those...the international trade agreements are obviously something that was put in place by the federal government. And I think they have been beneficial for ag up to this point. And I...as far as whether I support the trade agreement or not, I think either way we will do what we can to market Nebraska products internationally to the consumers in those import countries that are interested in our product. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: You just went from being very forthright to being a graduate of the Gene Kelly or Arthur Murray tap dance school. See, when those very critical questions are put, then politics enters and a welfare of the state...anybody knows that NAFTA benefits agriculture. All of the agricultural interests that I have ever read quoted or commenting, all of them have said they want to leave NAFTA in place. I don't know if you're aware of that being their position or not. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: No harm done is the phrase that I've been hearing for agriculture.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: If NAFTA were to be scrapped, would that be beneficial to Nebraska in your opinion? [CONFIRMATION]

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STEVE WELLMAN: Well, the speculation, I don't know for sure what the effect would be if we can continue the trade and marketing of our products without NAFTA, I mean, that's something we'd have to look at. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: But obviously it facilitates what Nebraska agriculture is trying to do. And it is a benefit to this country or it would not have been entered into in the first place. Is that at least a reasonable conclusion? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Well, from the...I'll speak on the agriculture standpoint. I believe the free trade agreements have been a success story for ag trade. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Now the agriculture from the United States to other countries has a very positive trade. We don't have a trade deficit. We're trade positive from the U.S. to the exporting countries for agriculture in general. Obviously, these trade agreements affect way more than agriculture; and from that standpoint, I can't address their success or lack of success. You know, we do have a negative trade deficit from the United States to many of our trading partners. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Does the Governor expect you to be a person with whom he can consult on agricultural issues as they pertain to the overall welfare of the state's economy? Would he look to you to advise him on issues like that? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: I would hope so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: And how would you advise him on NAFTA if he said...if he said, I want your opinion? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Um-hum. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: And I want you to be very honest with me. The way you ought to answer this question is, well, Senator Chambers, you're not Governor Ricketts so I don't have to answer that. But if I were Governor Ricketts and I said I want you to be very honest with me, I have a meeting with President Trump, unless he changes his mind, and he is looking for my view as to whether NAFTA ought to be retained or scrapped. What would be your advice to me to relate to him as the opinion of my ag director? What would you tell me if I were the Governor and asked you that question and I'm about to board a plane to go talk to... [CONFIRMATION]

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STEVE WELLMAN: I would...of course, the Governor is going to consider the whole state. And I'm just...I'm talking it is the number one industry in the state, agriculture is. So it's a big part of the decision that he'll have or would have at that moment. And I would...you know, I would advise him that I think we've definitely benefited, "we" being agriculture has benefited from NAFTA. I don't know personally, I don't know what the ramifications or the end results would be if we didn't have NAFTA. I'm not prepared to really answer that, what the net effect would be if it didn't happen. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Well, he's not...I'm not asking for the net effect. I've got to give him an answer. And I want to have some advice from you. Are you acquainted with Nebraska agriculture? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Am I? Yes, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Yes, are you? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: And the Department of Agriculture, does it deal with agriculture? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes, it does. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: And I appointed you to that position because I think you are conversant with agriculture and that which would be in the best interest of agriculture. And since it's the number one industry in the state, what benefits agriculture benefits the state. And now that we've gotten those preliminaries out of the way, what would your advice be to me to relay to the President? He wants my honest opinion. I want my opinion to be informed by those who are knowledgeable from their experience with agriculture. You're such a man or I wouldn't have appointed you. Now certainly you're not reluctant to give me your view on this very important issue that I'm going to discuss with the President if he doesn't change his mind about inviting me. So your advice to me is that I should say, if he asks me for a yes/no answer, should my answer to him be based on what you're telling me? He says to me, Governor Ricketts, you're the governor of an agricultural state and a red state. Deep-dyed red, redder than the sins of all of humanity, and I mean that. Yes or no, would NAFTA be beneficial to Nebraska or it would not? Now so that you can give me a yes or no answer, I'm not going to give alternatives like is it beneficial or is it not. I'm going to ask you directly. Is NAFTA beneficial to Nebraska agriculture? [CONFIRMATION]

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STEVE WELLMAN: I believe it is. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: I don't want your belief. I want your settled opinion.
[CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: I...and, Senator, I understand that. I personally don't have...
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. I'm going to leave you alone. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: I just don't have the... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Let me tell you why I'm doing this. Donald Trump has put all kind of people into position of being foolish. They deny what they know. They deny what they've heard because they've got to kowtow to him. I've seen people at the national level look like complete and utter fools. When Donald Trump made that insulting remark about the continent from which my forebears come, if he didn't say it, he should have said when it was first alleged that he said it, he should have said, I didn't say that, but he didn't. He went to those flunkies who wear the label "Repelican" and said you boys have to stick with me on this one now. You're going to have to figure some way to get me out of this. And the way to get me out of it is to say I didn't say it. But Mr. Trump, you said, did you hear what I said? Now I am the master of bombastic superlatives. And I want to be able to tell people that, no, I didn't say that. And you've got to say that I didn't say it too. Well, now the day that it was reported, they did not say he did not say it. He did not say he did not say it. From my part, Donald Trump is the biggest racist who has ever sat in the White House. And there have been some slaveholders such as George Washington, Andrew Jackson. And I see Donald Trump as worse than they because they acknowledged what they were. He said he is the least racist person who has ever been interviewed or been in that White House. I just wanted to get a feel for where you stand, and I think I know where you sit, which is in that chair. So I'm going to ask you a completely domestic question. There are laws that relate to the protection of dogs and cats in this state. Mr. Ibach lied repeatedly and I pointed out on the floor that he lied. He said he would enforce those laws. The Governor said he would enforce them. And he did not. Are you aware that there are such laws on the books in Nebraska?
[CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes. I'm aware of the Commercial Dog and Cat (Operator) Inspection Program. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CHAMBERS: Is it your intention to enforce them as they're written?
[CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: I don't have anything else. Thank you. And you see the kind of guy I am when you come before this committee, don't you? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes. That's... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: What kind of guy am I? Don't...leave it alone. But that's the kind of guy I am--always had my own question, but thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Thank you for those questions. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Chambers; and thank you, Mr. Wellman. Yes, Senator Krist. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: We spoke when you came to the office about--thank you, Madam Chair. We spoke when you came to the office about the really important things (inaudible). And one of the things that I think I was reluctant not to mention is following on with Senator Chambers. There are really some things that only you should come to us to discuss. In the past, not just with Agriculture but other committees that I've sat on, the person at the head of the food chain, if you will, within the department sends someone else to come in, sometimes to avoid Senator Chambers, sometimes just because they didn't think they had all the information. But we appreciate, I want you to know I appreciate the work of Senator Chambers and everyone else. When there's a contentious issue or when there are things that need to be discussed, I appreciate if the director or commissioner comes in directly. It helps us make a decision and it also, I think, helps in terms of where you stand and where your department stands. So that's a comment and you're welcome to respond to it if you wish to, but it is important to me that when those important issues come up that the dude what's in charge is sitting in the chair.
[CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: So, yeah, if I may, so I appreciate those comments. And just from my perspective, I mean, I'm used to working for myself and doing things myself. Okay? So...and as far as decision making, I think communication is key. And so being in front of the senate...the Ag Committee here and communicating with all of you is going to be important to me. When I talk about communication, most...the part that I think maybe doesn't get done enough is

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listening. And I really try to focus on the listening part of communication and hearing thoughts and different perspectives than I might personally have. And for my benefit, I think that helps as far as when it does come time to make a decision to not only...I mean, I know what I know, I don't always know what everybody else knows. But through hearing and listening, I get a good take on what other people and their thoughts are. We may not agree, may not; but at least when it does come time for me, as the director, to make a decision, I mean, that's a little bit of the way I go about things to try and make sure that I make the best decision based on the situation and where we are at that time. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KRIST: Several of us sit on the Judiciary Committee and a couple times it appeared to us that there were sacrificial lambs sent in front of the Judiciary Committee for key issues that came out of...that have come from agriculture. So that's one of the reasons I made the comment is I think you are a man that is going to be sitting in the chair when you need to, so I appreciate that. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Krist. I recognize Senator Albrecht. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ALBRECHT: Thank you, Senator Brasch. A couple of questions. What, I mean, being a president of the Soybean Board and having the background that you do in agriculture, gives me great pause to understand that you've been there. You're in the trenches. You actually do the work on your farm. Your children are watching what you've done. But at what point did you make a decision that this might be something for you? I mean, did you spend a lot of time in Washington with the Soybean Board? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes, yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ALBRECHT: Like how much time did you spend with them there? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Well, if I could just give a little bit of background. So first, with the soybean association, which is where I spent most of my volunteer time through...as far as a farm commodity organization, so there was a county organization with membership...so the Soybean Association is membership based. The focus is on policy and regulatory and international marketing. So there was an Otoe County organization which I began my participation in. I did serve nine years on the Nebraska Soybean Association Board and was president and chairman of

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that organization and went on to the American Soybean Association and voted on by the Nebraska board members to represent them on ASA. And so our focus there was leadership development was one thing we spent--focused--a lot of time on because we do need an agriculture and we need young people to step up and be leaders for our industry. The other thing was policy development, whether it be the Farm Bill or other legislation, regulatory issues that we felt were overburdensome or more hurdles in the road of being productive to the farm sector. Those were issues that we dealt with and then, like I mentioned, the international trade. So we were...we, any of the farmer directors on those associations are active and hands-on. There is staff involved, but it's the farmers that go to the Hill, have the visits with our representatives and address the issues face to face with them. So I've had considerable experience in Washington through ASA meeting with our senators, representatives. Now USDA Secretary of Agriculture, some of the others within USDA, United States Trade Representative Office on trade issues, that was another committee that I was on was the USDA USTR, the Trade Representative, a technical advisory committee on agricultural trade policy, so that was a four-year term that dealt with the negotiations of some of the trade agreements and just trade issues that came up and maybe blocked trade or caused interruptions in trade with our trading partners, so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ALBRECHT: So when you, like, were you approached? Were you...did people think that this would be a good fit for you? Or is this something that you had on your bucket list to get done? What made you decide to apply for this? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: For the director position? It wasn't necessarily on my bucket list per se. But years ago I was also involved with the Syracuse Jaycees, the Junior Chamber, and through that organization I learned about serving the community and serving the things that interest you and the state, so. So along with that and the opportunity here to serve Nebraska, the background that I've been able to have through the experience with the Soybean Association and all the other organizations, I decided it was something I felt I qualified for and something I felt I wanted to pursue. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ALBRECHT: I do believe the qualifications are definitely there. Okay, since you've been in the office for six weeks, tell me where you're at with the Brand Committee. Will you continue to do what Director Ibach was working with them to make them a better program to look to for the cattlemen and for some of the producers out there? Where are you at on that? Have you been briefed on... [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Well, I believe the Brand Committee is actually a separate organization and they have their own board. But we would be willing...we will continue to work with them and have communications with the Brand Committee. But it's something that's really not in... [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR ALBRECHT: Okay, so is it something that you talked about in the last six weeks with anybody in the ag (inaudible)? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: I'm familiar somewhat with the Brand Committee and the efforts they've undertaken recently with their modernization of their inspections and the technology and that part. I know a couple of the board members, the Brand Committee board members. But it isn't something that we've addressed a lot. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ALBRECHT: Okay, very good. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Albrecht. Senator Halloran, did you have a...? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HALLORAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just, I guess you can correct me if I'm wrong. On international trade agreements, I need some clarity on this because my primitive understanding of international trade agreements is, is that they're not by executive order. They're ratified by the respective governance of each country involved in that international trade agreement. Is that correct? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: That's how they were agreed to and passed to start with, yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HALLORAN: In 1993, Congress ratified NAFTA. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yeah. Right. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HALLORAN: It wasn't by executive order. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Correct. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HALLORAN: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Are there any other questions from the committee? Senator Chambers. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: I'm glad Senator Halloran made that point. Sometimes people get the impression when they watch certain things that an individual can just say I'm going to do this

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and then do it. But the thrust of my questions was that I was trying to find out how forthright and direct you could be in giving the Governor advice. I'm sure that with all of his failings...let me not say "sure." I suspect people would inform the President that he cannot undo NAFTA by executive order, but he may be trying to see if he can line up enough support in Congress, both houses, to undo it. If there are impediments, he, by executive order, can do even while leaving the agreement itself in place. So he would decide to talk to governors who have made it clear that for whatever reason they'll kowtow to him so that he can say to Congress, he can say to the media that there is a groundswell of support to dismantle NAFTA, including governors from states where agriculture is the driving engine of their economy. Now I'm going to take a different approach, because I went as far as I could, got as much as I could from that other line of questioning. And I'm not going to ask you the substance or content of it. Did you have discussions with the Governor before he appointed you? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes, an interview. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Did...no, I don't mean just asked you, do you want this job. I meant did you...did he discuss with you or question you about your views on agriculture?
[CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: So I've served on the Governor's Ag Committee for four years so...
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Oh, so he knows...he's acquainted with you then. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: ...so we...so we are acquainted with each other... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: ...and I'm sure we...yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. That nullifies the need for me to ask you questions. He's aware of your positions on these things. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. That's all I have. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Chambers. Are there other questions from the committee? Seeing there are none, thank you, Mr. Wellman, and... [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: May I say--this is not a question--Mr. Wellman,... [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE WELLMAN: Yes, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: ...when the Governor appoints people, I will vote to confirm unless that person has given me a reason to vote not to confirm. Nothing you said, nothing you failed to say put me in the position of not voting for you, so I will vote for your confirmation. Now I hope that doesn't make the Governor mad (laughter). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: (Exhibits 4-10) And with that said, I think you've answered Senator Krist's concern. Yes, there a rapport there, I can see, so very good. We can move forward with proponents. And while the first proponent is coming forward, I do want to read into record letters that are proponents from Russ Vering on behalf of the Nebraska Pork Producers Association, Barry Kennedy on behalf of the Nebraska State Chamber; Dan Wesely on behalf of the Nebraska Corn Growers Association, Bob Campbell on behalf of Farm Credit Services of America, John Hansen on behalf of the Nebraska Farmers Union, Stan Stutheit from Stutheit Implement of Syracuse on behalf of himself, Nebraska Agri-Business Association. And, members, copies of these letters are included behind the tab for this appointment for your review. These will be included in the hearing record for this confirmation and we also...thank you, members. And our first proponent, thank you for coming forward. Please state and spell your name. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: (Exhibits 11-13) Again, good afternoon, Senator and committee members. I am Robert Johnston, R-o-b-e-r-t J-o-h-n-s-t-o-n, and I would make note that I also submitted support from the Nebraska State Dairy Association and the Nebraska Grain Sorghum Association. And again, I will say that I am president of the Nebraska Soybean Association. And on behalf of the Nebraska Soybean Association, I offer our support for Steve Wellman as director of the Department of Ag. Steve has spent years working at the grass-roots level as a member of many organizations, most notably the American Soybean Association. During his nine-year tenure, Steve was an advocate of farm policy for the American farmer. Furthermore, in 2012, Steve was elected president, leading the ASA's 23,000 members and advocating for the American soybean farmer. During his time as president of ASA, he built numerous relationships with industry partners and elected officials at both the state and federal level. While at ASA, he

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chaired the organization's efforts to work on a major strategic plan to take them in a new direction. That was no small task at the time, and today they are implementing the plan with great success. This hands-on experience in building a strategic plan will lend itself well to the Department of Ag. His experience working to build and secure international trading partners while at the American Soybean Association will greatly complement the work he will be doing at the Nebraska Department of Ag for both livestock and crop production industries. Steve is a person that understands very well how different agricultural issues connect, how row crop farmers rely on the livestock industry, and how everyone in agriculture depends on consumers, both at home and abroad. That understanding will serve him and our state very well. These experiences will be a great asset to lead the Nebraska Department of Ag. We fully support and urge the confirmation of Steve Wellman as the director of the Nebraska Department of Ag. And being as there's no time limit, I would add another couple personal anecdotes beyond my printed testimony. I met Steve probably eight years ago when I became a director with the Nebraska Soybean Association, and I was impressed with Steve from the start. He is very knowledgeable. He knows a lot about the issues. He's well-informed. And I think Senator Albrecht asked him questions about if he's spent time in Washington, and we do. We make Capitol Hill visits at least twice a year to visit with our Congressional delegation. And I had never done it before so it was really great to be able to go with Steve my first time. We have talking points and he was very well informed, knew all the issues, and was able to talk with the Congressional delegation with ease. And so I appreciate that, Steve. That's what I have. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Johnston. Questions from the committee? Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Mr. Johnston, if it's not too personal, how old are you? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: I am 61. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Don't look it, kid (laughter). [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Well, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Now I've always wanted to ask somebody this question. Has your name been Johnston as long as you can remember? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: It has and my father says that maybe it was Johnson but when they found out how tight we were they put the T in the name. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CHAMBERS: See, this man is Kreskin. He knew what I was going to ask. I was going to ask what the significance of the T in your name is. When you present written testimony, would you be offended or pleased if somebody read it word for word carefully?
[CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Oh. I guess I know what you're going to say. I...no, and I changed it a little bit. Would I be offended? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: No, I did not read it word for word, as the testimony was submitted.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: No, no, I meant if somebody who is reading it were to read it word for word, would that please you? They took it seriously enough to read it. Do you want it to be read when you present it? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: I guess I don't know. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: (Inaudible). [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Yeah, I don't know as that happens. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Are my questions making you nervous? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: No. I don't know as I have a feeling towards that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. Do you have a copy of this statement that I have? The last sentence, the first sentence in the last paragraph of what I have says: "These experiences will be a great asset." Is that the same statement you read from? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Yes, these experiences will be a great asset to lead...
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

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ROBERT JOHNSTON: ...the Nebraska Department of Ag. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Now, count three paragraphs from the bottom and what's the first word in the third paragraph from the bottom? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Is it the paragraph that says Steve or a paragraph above, his? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Well, count three. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. Now where it says Steve, how many is that from the bottom? How many paragraphs from the bottom is that? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Well, I'm on two pages. Okay. That might be the second paragraph. So the third would start with his. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. Now the middle line in that paragraph, are you with me? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Oh, I think so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: And it starts with the word "how," the middle line in the third paragraph and the...I meant "the." "The" is the first word in the middle line of the third paragraph from the bottom. Do you see it says, "the American Soybean Association"? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Yes, will greatly... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. Now, one, two, three, four, five, six...what's the seventh word in the middle line of the third paragraph from the bottom? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Oh, "compliment." [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: How do you spell "compliment"? I see how it was spelled here. [CONFIRMATION]

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ROBERT JOHNSTON: I believe in this situation that it should be an E instead of the I.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: And what's the first letter of my name? [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: E. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: I'm partial to E and whenever the E is slighted, I have to call it to people's attention. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay. Now we're clear on that. Thank you. That's all that I have.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Chambers. I will compliment you on your sharp briefing edit. [CONFIRMATION]

ROBERT JOHNSTON: Thank you for noticing the grammatical error. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Any other questions from the committee? Seeing there are none, thank you very much. And the next proponent. Welcome. Please state and spell your name.
[CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: My name is Steve Nelson, S-t-e-v-e, and Nelson, N-e-l-s-o-n. Good afternoon, Senator Brasch and members of the committee. I am a farmer from Axtell, Nebraska. I farm there with my son. My grandson represents the seventh generation on our farm and we raise corn, soybeans, and hybrid seed corn. I'm here today as the president of Nebraska Farm Bureau and representing the members of Nebraska Farm Bureau today, as well as We Support Agriculture, the organization that promotes animal agriculture in Nebraska as well. It's with great pleasure that I'm here to support the appointment of Steve Wellman as the next director of Agriculture here in Nebraska. As has been well-stated, Mr. Wellman has experience as a farmer, which I believe is very important for the position. He has experience in the areas of trade, which I believe is very, very important. And he has experience in areas of management, which come from his experiences in farming but will be great skills for him as he leads the department. So again, it is with great pleasure that we support Steve Wellman for this position.
[CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Yes, Senator Chambers. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Mr. Nelson, if I properly pronounced your name, does a person have to be a farmer to belong to the Farm Bureau? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: No. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: In fact, there are more nonfarmers who belong than farmers in Nebraska. Isn't that true? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: That is probably true. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Does the Farm Bureau have an insurance program? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: Yes, we do. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: And the nonfarmers are interested in that insurance? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: Yes, they are. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Why do they call it the Nebraska Farm Bureau when most of the members are not farmers? I'm curious. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: The name of the organization, it goes back much further than the service to members of insurance, and so that, the name is the name of the organization that goes way, way back. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Just like State Farm may have...may insure other types of things than farms. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: That's true. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CHAMBERS: There's no intent to give people the impression, who may not know better, that the Farm Bureau comprises mostly farmers. That is not the intent by keeping it called the Farm Bureau, is it, as far as you know? [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: (Shakes his head no.) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: I'll take your words. You have a mustache and that always gives a guy at least the (inaudible). That's all I have. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. Any other questions from the committee? Seeing there are none, thank you... [CONFIRMATION]

STEVE NELSON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: ...for coming forward. Next proponent. Welcome, and please state and spell your name for the record. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Mike Drinnin, M-i-k-e D-r-i-n-n-i-n. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Thank you, Senator Brasch. And again, good afternoon to everybody here in the committee. I'm the president-elect of the Nebraska Cattlemen and we're here today representing our membership to express our support in the appointment of Steve Wellman as director of the Nebraska Department of Ag. Steve has been a member of ours and a supporter for a great many years. Steve's lifetime work and his service to Nebraska agriculture really has proven his ability to work fairly with all interested parties. A national honor that Steve has received, as he stated earlier, is being elected president of the American Soybean Association by his peers. This honor speaks in volumes to the respect of his experience and his talents. And as I close, the Nebraska Cattlemen would strongly support Mr. Wellman's confirmation in serving Nebraska agriculture as director of the Department of Agriculture. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Yes, Senator Chambers. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CHAMBERS: Now, I'm 80 years old. That's old by anybody's standards except maybe Methuselah's. And you know, old people are forgetful. Have you and I ever met before? You look familiar to me. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Well, I've been in here before but I don't know if I've ever actually personally met you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Was I here when you came before? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Yes, I believe so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: How long ago was that? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Probably in the late 1990s. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Were you here earlier today? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: No, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: You're not playing a trick on an old man, are you (laughter)? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: No, sir, I'm not. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: So we didn't meet before the '90s. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: It was in the 1990s. I think I've seen you... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Well, have we met since then? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: No, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Were you here today? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Just this afternoon. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CHAMBERS: Was I here? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: When you walked in, yes, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: And had we met, again, before then...since the '90s?
[CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: I'm sorry? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: We've met since the '90s, haven't we? We met again today, right?
[CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: That very well could be, yes, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: You were trying to trick me, weren't you? [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: (Laughter) No, I wasn't. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Let me tell you one thing, sonny. When you reach my age, watch these young whippersnappers such as yourself who try to trick you, okay? That's my message to you. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: (Laughter) I will certainly keep that in my memory bank, so.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CHAMBERS: Okay, junior. That's all I had. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you, Senator Chambers. And thank you. Any other questions for the committee? Seeing that you weren't here before today, you may go ahead and...back to your seat. [CONFIRMATION]

MIKE DRINNIN: Thank you, Senator. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Thank you. Next proponent, please. Welcome. Please state and spell your name for the record. [CONFIRMATION]

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RANDON PETERS: (Exhibit 14) Randon Peters, R-a-n-d-o-n, Peters, P-e-t-e-r-s. Thank you, Senator Brasch and members of the Agriculture Committee. I'm Randon Peters, fifth-generation farmer from McCook, Nebraska. I come here today as the past-president of the Nebraska Wheat Growers Association. The Nebraska Wheat Growers Association would like to support...express its support for the appointment of Steve Wellman as the director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Mr. Wellman brings a passion for agriculture, supported by 30 years of farming, to the position. We believe his experiences on various local, state, and federal committees will help him in the position of director. The role requires its holder to be the leading voice and agricultural representative for our state, both domestically and internationally. Our association believes Mr. Wellman can successfully fill that role. Again, the Nebraska Wheat Growers Association fully supports the appointment of Steve Wellman as director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BRASCH: Very good. Thank you, Mr. Peters. Are there any questions from the committee? Seeing there are none, thank you for coming forward today. Any other proponents? Are there any opponents? Anyone testifying in the neutral? Seeing there are none, that will conclude the hearing for the confirmations this afternoon. Thank you for coming today and safe travels. Stay warm. [CONFIRMATION]