

## Education Committee March 22, 2018

**GROENE:** [00:00:01] Welcome to the Education Committee public hearing. My name is Mike Groene from Legislative District 42, I serve as the chair of this committee. The committee will take up the appointments in the posted agenda. Our hearing today is your public part of the Legislature process. This your opportunity to express your position on the proposed legislation or proposed appointments before us today. Please shut off your cell phones. If you have any handouts about yourself of whatever, pass them out now and give them to the page. I'm going to go right through this. If there's anybody testifying pro or opposition to the appointment we'll give you five minutes. Otherwise you folks can talk as long as you want. You might lose the votes if you talk too long. That's just--

**EBKE:** [00:00:48] Almost certain.

**GROENE:** [00:00:55] And I understand, not to be funny, this is an honor that you folks have been appointed to these boards. So we will get started, and shut off your cell phones. Who is the first? Paul Von Behren, appointment to the Coordinating Commission. Paul is a retired veterinarian from Ames, Nebraska, doctor of veterinary medicine from Iowa State, MBA from UNO. Paul, did you want to tell us something about yourself and why you want to be on the Coordinating Commission?

**PAUL VON BEHREN:** [00:01:23] Okay, thank you. Appreciate the opportunity to appear. I am, as Senator Groene said, I'm a farm kid. Come from originally from eastern Iowa and moved to Nebraska about 35, 36 years ago. My children have gone through the public school system, and consider myself a Nebraskan. Basically a veterinarian, my career really has primarily encompassed food production and food animal systems and at the same time I've been in probably public and private corporate business all my life. So fairly wide background. Not sure what that says-- what that says, frankly, but it just I think it says I have a lot of interests. And actually what a friend of mine asked me to submit my name for the commission, and it frankly did take me a little bit by surprise because obviously education is not my native pursuit. But there are a couple of things that a career in business will teach you very quickly. Number one is that almost any endeavor is 80 percent people, and once you seek to understand the rest of the detail that becomes fairly obvious. And the rest of it is probably in my own nature. Whether you call it a fault or an attribute, I have always had trouble finding things that I couldn't get interested in. And I've been able to attend a series of commission meetings in the last five or six months, and frankly I am very impressed. Not-- it's I was telling a couple of our people earlier this morning when you get close to your job, my job, anyone else's area of expertise, the most striking thing you normally find is how much more, how much deeper and more involved it is than you ever imagined. How much more technical. I have been nothing but intrigued by the work of the commission. The quality of the work they put out it would be hot-- difficult to recommend the staff and their work to you highly enough. If you're not familiar with what they do and the content of what they put out I would just I would very much urge you to take a look. It's very high quality. There is information there you will see nowhere else in the state regarding education. And in that venue I consider it an honor to be a considered for the position.

**GROENE:** [00:03:51] Thank you. Any questions?

**ERDMAN:** [00:03:58] Senator Groene, I guess I just have a comment. I was reading through your additional info and I came across this at the very bottom of the top comment. It says my interest is this, in this position seems a personal burden for both our state and our children, is an opportunity to make a difference with the abilities and opportunities that have been gifted to me. I appreciate that.

**PAUL VON BEHREN:** [00:04:22] Well, and it is obviously I'm at the point where I'm also a grandfather. and one of the real burdens that I have, and most of you know the feeling from either children and or grandchildren, as you look at them, one of the questions you ask yourself: what am I leaving behind for them? And I'll be candid. If they ask, ever ask me, grandpa, what did you do? I don't want to have to look away. Whatever I could do I hope will be the answer.

**ERDMAN:** [00:04:52] Thank you.

**GROENE:** [00:04:54] So you don't want to tell your grandkids in your obituary that you had a 5 handicap? You actually accomplished something.

**PAUL VON BEHREN:** [00:05:01] That would actually be complimentary. It's actually--

**GROENE:** [00:05:06] So and you read the constitution and state constitution and how the authority that the Coordinate Commission have over higher education?

**PAUL VON BEHREN:** [00:05:13] Yes. Yeah, and the responsibilities, as I said, are quite a bit more vast than I would have anticipated.

**GROENE:** [00:05:19] The commission has a lot more power than a lot of commissions.

**PAUL VON BEHREN:** [00:05:21] Yes, yes.

**GROENE:** [00:05:23] Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you, Paul.

**PAUL VON BEHREN:** [00:05:29] All right, thank you.

**GROENE:** [00:05:29] Is there any proponents or opponents to Von Behren's appointment? So that closes the hearing on the appointment of Dr. Paul Von Behren. We will now go to the reappointment to the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission of Frederik Ohles. Mr. Ohles, would you come forward and tell us?

**FRED OHLES:** [00:06:12] Thank you, Senator Groene. I'm accustomed to saying I am Fred, F-r-e-d, Ohles, O-h-l-e-s, when I come to these meetings. Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to meet with the committee. I'm grateful to Governor Ricketts for nominating me to serve a new term on the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission. It is an honor. I treasure the work that NET does on behalf of all Nebraskans through radio, television, and new media by providing education, arts and culture, news and information, entertainment, and public safety. I'm proud to represent Nebraska's independent universities and colleges on the NET Commission. I serve as president of Nebraska Wesleyan University. NET is an exemplary partnership of the state of Nebraska with the University of Nebraska. The NET Commission holds almost all of the broadcast licenses on behalf of the state that bring NET programs to all of us. So as commissioners we are the guardians of the state's assets. At NET we monitor how state of Nebraska funds are allocated and utilized. And then the University of Nebraska has ultimate responsibility for integrity of programs and quality of management at NET through the University of Nebraska's academic programs, through its strong and diverse research efforts, through extension and other forms of public outreach. Its four campuses are a valued resource for the rich broadcast content that originates at NET. There are not many things that reach every corner of our state across 350 miles--450 miles from Rulo to Crawford, 300 miles from Haigler to Wynot, and everywhere in between. NET is one of those rare connectors for our entire state. It's a center of excellence, a service, a link back to our heritage, and a beacon toward our future. I'll be glad to answer your questions. Thank you.

**GROENE:** [00:08:24] Senator Erdman.

**ERDMAN:** [00:08:24] Thank you for coming. I noticed in your comments you referenced the west as being Crawford. Do you know where Harrison is?

**FRED OHLES:** [00:08:31] A little bit west of Crawford. Yes, sir.

**ERDMAN:** [00:08:35] That would be the furthest most . Does your signal go there to Harrison? It sure does, doesn't it?

**FRED OHLES:** [00:08:39] I'm quite sure it does through transmitters and repeaters, translators, a remarkable stretch of broadcast. And senator, one of the most interesting things that's happened recently is that one of the signal points in southeast Nebraska was bought in the federal auction by one of those big companies, and the federal auction was meant to make that process possible. Under the terms of the auction, the sale, and the transfer NET had 120 days to move to a new frequency and sustain service. And I'm pleased to say that under such a challenging condition the signal was only off for one week. Well I think that's a sign to taking good care of our resource.

**ERDMAN:** [00:09:38] Thank you.

**GROENE:** [00:09:38] Any other questions?

**KOLOWSKI:** [00:09:38] Yes.

**GROENE:** [00:09:39] Senator Kolowski.

**KOLOWSKI:** [00:09:40] Thank you, sir. Dr. Ohles, thank you for your appointment and for what you've done for NET in the state. What would you say would be the main, the main strength that you bring to the board among your many strengths? What do you think is more of a driving force than anything else for you?

**FRED OHLES:** [00:10:08] I'll put in one and a half. The first half is that in another stage of my career I served on the equivalent commission for a public television station in another state. So I have experience in this kind of service. Beyond that I would say that I have a passion for the mixed kinds of resource that such a service provides, so that it's partly educational, partly entertainment, partly information. I'm really keen on the mix and keeping the mix going.

**KOLOWSKI:** [00:10:46] Thank you.

**GROENE:** [00:10:49] Sir, Dr. Ohles, I didn't address you as that earlier. Sorry.

**FRED OHLES:** [00:10:53] Oh, Fred is good.

**GROENE:** [00:10:55] Fred is better than Frederik. With the university controlling the content stuff, do you see any-- there's no-- they don't try to restrict it to their content? Are they pretty open and making sure that, let's say Wesleyan had something, a something that an attribute to present to the programming part of it. Are they open to that?

**FRED OHLES:** [00:11:23] Yes, sir. Senator Groene, we have we have a very good, I would say a powerful, sense of academic freedom at our flagship public university. And that applies as well to the work of NET.

**GROENE:** [00:11:39] So your college or any other group could bring programming to them and if they deem it worthy they it have a good hearing?

**FRED OHLES:** [00:11:48] It's all about the appropriateness of the content to the mission and the quality of what's brought. So yes, that works well for all of us.

**GROENE:** [00:11:57] Thank you and I-- Senator Kolowski.

**KOLOWSKI:** [00:12:00] Thank you, sir. I just wanted to also say congratulations on Division 3 national championship in men's basketball. Outstanding.

**FRED OHLES:** [00:12:10] Thank you. We're very excited.

**GROENE:** [00:12:14] And I want to thank you for keeping a promise to my granddaughter. She's going to graduate in eight semesters this spring.

**FRED OHLES:** [00:12:21] I will sign that diploma when instructed by the board.

**GROENE:** [00:12:26] She's on the record board on a couple of the track events there. So she got a nice trip to Alabama the other day on the national. So, no, you kept your promise and I appreciate that you guys do.

**FRED OHLES:** [00:12:35] You're welcome.

**GROENE:** [00:12:38] Any other questions? Thank you, sir.

**FRED OHLES:** [00:12:49] You're welcome.

**GROENE:** [00:12:49] That closes the hearing on Dr. Ohles' appointment to the Nebraska Telecommunications Commission. We have one more appointment, and it's a new appointment by Nicholas Baxter to the Nebraska Education Telecommunications Commission. So he doesn't have to talk, brag on himself, I will tell you that he's the current bank executive with First National Bank in Omaha; an undergraduate law degree from Hull University in Hull, England; international U.S. law course from Vanderbilt University in Nashville Tennessee; and a graduate school in bar exam, the School of Law in Chester, England. Do you want to come forward, sir, and tell us about yourself?

**NICHOLAS BAXTER:** [00:13:37] Good afternoon, Senators. Thank you very much indeed for taking this time. I'm honored, actually, to be nominated for the commission. I've served two terms on the NET Foundation and chaired that foundation for a couple of years, so I've been involved with the Nebraska broadcasting organizations for a while. First-generation Nebraskan, first-generation American. Emigrated from the U.S. for work opportunities and ended up in Nebraska because, like many of us, married way above my station to a lady from Omaha who decided that Omaha was a way better place than Nashville, Tennessee. To that day I should feel very thankful to that. Three daughters all graduated through the Millard school systems and actually all three actually are current resident outside the state. I expect like many of us we'll see them come back in a few years. Why Nebraska Public TV? I'm a firm believer in the fact that we need science-based and STEM education but I'm also a firm believer that that has to be balanced by aggressive and proactive humanities education. It is critical that everybody has access to good humanities-based content, whether it be radio, TV, other kinds of media. People understand-- need to understand the constitution. They need to understand the laws, they understand governments, but they also need to

understand their history, how we got to where we are, what people do. And public broadcasting has always provided that. It provided it obviously in the last century through organizations like the BBC, the National Public Broadcasting Organization in the United States, NHK in Japan. It's the legion. But they all have a common mission of providing fact-based education to people. They also in this country have a massive opportunity to play in public safety. It's a key role. I'm excited to be able move from what was a somewhat of a fund-raising or friend-raising opportunity at the foundation to the commission and its governance role as the site of the various components of what is a somewhat unique but very sophisticated public broadcasting infrastructure. Thank you for the time.

**GROENE:** [00:16:19] Questions?

**KOLOWSKI:** [00:16:22] Just a comment. Thank you very much, sir, for your community involvement and the impact on the community that you do have. It's very extensive, thank you.

**GROENE:** [00:16:34] Any other questions? I'm just curious, how does this compare to the BBC in England with their-- isn't that a government-run news broadcasting system?

**NICHOLAS BAXTER:** [00:16:45] I got myself into trouble with a lot of family members and other ex-pats. The BBC lost its-- lost its pulse or it lost its direction a long time ago, the BBC that I grew up with. The people to look at to compare yourself now are NHK in Japan. But regardless, I think that what we're doing here in NET, the combination of national, international, and locally-produced broadcasting is unique.

**GROENE:** [00:17:14] The free market, the free market on the other side, which England has I guess. But just curious, if you're the first generation, how many generations has your wife been here, her family?

**NICHOLAS BAXTER:** [00:17:27] Oh, four or five.

**GROENE:** [00:17:28] So does that make your kids four and a half generation?

**NICHOLAS BAXTER:** [00:17:30] You know, my kids, my kids are a mess. They've got passports coming out their ears, they don't know which way they're coming. They're just happy to be here.

**GROENE:** [00:17:37] I always wanted to be a comedian, bear with me. Any other questions? Thank you, sir.

**NICHOLAS BAXTER:** [00:17:44] Thank you.

**GROENE:** [00:17:44] We will exec on this, we might do it right now. Things went rather quicker than I thought it would. But thank you, folks. If everybody would leave the room we will exec on it.