

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

Health and Human Services Committee
April 06, 2017

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Health and Human Services met at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 6, 2017, in Room 1510 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on a confirmation to the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Senators present: Merv Riepe, Chairperson; Steve Erdman, Vice Chairperson; Sue Crawford; Sara Howard; Mark Kolterman; Lou Ann Linehan; and Matt Williams. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR RIEPE: (Recorder malfunction)...Dr. Brennan on the phone. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Oh, I'm sorry. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: No, no, that's just fine. Dr. Brennan? [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Hello there. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Thank you. Thank you for joining us. [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: My pleasure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: We have some individuals here, I'm going to have them introduce themselves and so that you know who's sitting at the other end of this line. I happen to be Merv Riepe, Chairman of the Health and Human Services Committee. I represent Omaha, Millard, and Ralston, so that's where I'm from. I'm going to start with one of the gentlemen down here to my right and have him introduce himself. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: I'm Senator Mark Kolterman from Seward, District 24. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ERDMAN: I'm Steve Erdman, I represent District 47, which is 10 counties in the Nebraska Panhandle. [CONFIRMATION]

KRISTEN STIFFLER: Kristen Stiffler, legal counsel. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Good afternoon. Senator Sue Crawford, District 45, which is eastern Sarpy, Bellevue, and Offutt. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR WILLIAMS: Matt Williams, District 36: Custer, Dawson, and the north part of Buffalo Counties. [CONFIRMATION]

TYLER MAHOOD: And Tyler Mahood, committee clerk. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: And we have... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Oh, Senator Sarah Howard. I represent District 9 in midtown Omaha. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: And we may have Senator Linehan, who will be joining us momentarily. Not real sure on this. We also have two pages. I know we have Brianne Hellstrom and we have...who is this? [CONFIRMATION]

TONI CAUDILLO: I'm Toni Caudillo. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: What was it, Toni? Toni, thank you. And I apologize for not having your name down. We are talking with Dr. Brennan about a role on the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. So Dr. Brennan, thank you very much for being with us via phone. And we have seen your resume and we're quite impressed with that, Doctor. And so but we would ask you a little bit. Tell us your interests, a little bit about your background, and your interest in serving, if you will, on the commission. [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Yes, so in terms of my background, I was actually born with a hearing loss. So I've been wearing hearing aids since I was about four years of age. And that's kind of why I got interested in the field that I'm in right now. I'm an audiologist at Boys Town Research Hospital, as I overheard you talking about. And I do research here, so I look at different ways that we can try to better fit hearing aids for our patients. And then I'm also actually in the clinic, seeing both children and adults with hearing loss. And I love what I do. I really enjoy being able to help people out so that they can proceed in life. And that's part of the reason that I want to serve on this board. I've really enjoyed working with the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing sort of as an audiologist, in the sense that we get referrals from them for the hearing aid bank and some of the other things that they do. And I've always enjoyed the way that they work with people that are deaf and hard of hearing. I have also served on a number of boards and so I feel that my experience in that area would help out as I serve, or hopefully serve, on this board. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR RIEPE: We know that Boys Town has an excellent reputation, and I know that you work with a number of Medicaid and also uninsured and other disadvantaged individuals. So we obviously want to express our appreciation for that, too. I'm going to ask, Dr. Brennan...Senator Linehan just joined us and so we have a full panel, and I'm going to invite them to ask any questions. And we'll just kind of go from there. [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Sounds good. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Thank you. Are there questions from the committee? Senator Howard has a question. [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Hi, Dr. Brennan. How are you? [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Great. And how are you doing, Senator Howard? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: I'm doing better, thank you for asking. I wanted...and thank you for your willingness to serve on this board. I was hoping you could tell us a little bit about Nebraska Hands and Voices. You've been a board member for them for a few years. [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Yeah, I would be happy to. So Nebraska Hands and Voices is a parent-driven organization, as opposed to, like, a professional type of organization. And what's really neat about it is they do a couple of things. So one of the main things that they really try to do is work with parents of newly identified children with hearing loss. And they try to pair them up with a mentor so that they can sort of hold their hand, if you will, as they go through this process because, as you can imagine, most people don't really know a lot about hearing loss and they don't know about the impact that it can have on their child. And it's really nice if you can talk to someone who has gone through that experience. And that's sort of one of the roles that Hands and Voices provides. It also...they have regular meetings and they put on events for parents and the children of people who are deaf and hard of hearing. And so I think they do a lot of great things. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you for your work on that board, and thank you for your willingness to serve on the commission. [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR RIEPE: Are there...Senator Kolterman. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Thank you, Senator Riepe. Dr. Brennan, thank you for your willingness to serve. My question is about public education as it pertains to hearing loss and the ability to hear. Do you see...do you think we're up to speed as we deal with people that don't hear well in the public school settings? And are we making any strides to improve in that arena? [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Well, I think there's always a challenge there in the sense that there's always more that we could be doing. But of course we're always...there are limited resources, and schools have to sort of figure out how they best want to deal with these issues. So I do know that parents sometimes have some concerns about the way these things are being handled. And so I think the nice thing about what I feel like the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is doing is I feel like they're sort of even an outlet for this just sort of discussion to take place, so that we can make sure that we are indeed providing the best services that we can in the state. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Didn't we, and this is just kind of a follow-up question. We used to have a school for the deaf, specifically designed for the deaf and hearing impaired, and I don't believe that that's in operation any longer, is it? [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: That is correct. And that's not specific to Nebraska. I don't know how much information you want, but that is something that most states have moved away from as we shift away from separating children who have disabilities from, you know, mainstream classrooms. And so this is just part of that broader shift toward trying to maintain...or have children in mainstream classrooms. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Okay, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Sure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Dr. Brennan, Merv Riepe here. Do you know if the school for the deaf is still operational in Council Bluffs? [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: It is. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Okay. Because I think that Nebraska's school was smaller and merged some students into the Iowa school. [CONFIRMATION]

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MARC BRENNAN: Yeah, it is. I do know that students from Nebraska do go there.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Okay. Do you have any connection with them or, I mean, do they refer stuff out to you for clinical? Or... [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Yeah, we sometimes, I believe, see their students here. And, you know, I don't have a relationship with them, per se, although we sometimes get their emails for their events and stuff like that, so... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Okay. Do you feel the existing commission is living up to our expectations, or is there something that is a driving piece, in your desire to serve, that you would like to see changed? [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Well, I'm really interested in the education committee that they put together to, you know, address some of these concerns about the education of children that are deaf and hard of hearing. So that's something that I would really like to work closely with and see if there are opportunities there to improve that, the education we provide. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: I know that you said that you were, if I may use the term, fitted with some hearing aids at the age of four. Is that sort of a still typical age? [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: No. We've got that age down to...we try to get children fit between six months and one year of age, ideally by six months of age. And that's because of the universal hearing screenings that we now do. So every...well, not every, but most children when they are born are now screened for hearing loss. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Okay, very good. Are there other questions? Do you have questions of us, sir? [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: I do not, actually. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: That's good, because I was going to give the hard ones to other people. Okay, thank you. So no last questions? Okay, thank you. Thank you very much for your time today, thank you for your interest in serving. And we will be back with you. We take this recommendation to the Chamber of the Unicameral, and they need to confirm it. And so it will be a little bit of time, but we appreciate your time today. [CONFIRMATION]

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MARC BRENNAN: Okay. Well, thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Okay, thank you. Have a great weekend. [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: You too. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Okay, bye. [CONFIRMATION]

MARC BRENNAN: Bye. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]