

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

Health and Human Services Committee
April 20, 2017

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Health and Human Services met at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 20, 2017, in Room 1510 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on a gubernatorial appointment to the Foster Care Advisory Committee. Senators present: Merv Riepe, Chairperson; Steve Erdman, Vice Chairperson; Sue Crawford; Mark Kolterman; and Matt Williams. Senators absent: Sara Howard; and Lou Ann Linehan.

SENATOR RIEPE: This is a hearing for the appointment of the Foster Care...I've got it here...Foster Care Advisory Committee. And in front of us we have Dr. Timothy Robinson. And with that, I will ask the committee members, so that you know who we are. We'll ask you to share a little bit about yourself and then we'll ask some questions hopefully, or maybe, or we'll quickly move on that and we will invite you to ask us questions. Many times in our hearings we don't, but in this case we can. So Senator Kolterman, would you introduce yourself and your district?

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: I'm Senator Mark Kolterman from the 24th District: Seward, York, and Polk Counties.

KRISTEN STIFFLER: Kristen Stiffler, legal counsel.

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Sue Crawford from Bellevue area, District 45.

SENATOR WILLIAMS: Matt Williams from Gothenburg, District 36.

TYLER MAHOOD: Tyler Mahood, committee clerk.

SENATOR RIEPE: I would also...we have Sam--is it Haarberg--Haarberg as our page, and Sam is a UNL student from Imperial, Nebraska. Sam, what's your major?

SAM HAARBERG: Ag economics.

SENATOR RIEPE: Ag economics, great. Thank you for being here, you pages are very essential to our surviving, if you will. With that, Dr. Robinson, I would ask you if will just state your name, spell your name for the record, and then tell us everything we might ever want to know.

[CONFIRMATION]

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

Health and Human Services Committee
April 20, 2017

TIMOTHY ROBINSON: It's Timothy Hank Robinson, R-o-b-i-n-s-o-n. First, I want to thank the Governor, and I want to thank Kim Hawekotte for inviting me to consider this position. I've worked in and out of the state, and in and out of the university for several years now. And this is the first time I've been invited to sit on a board. And I really appreciate the honor and I look forward to serving the state in that capacity. One of the things I'm proudest about, I think, is that, even though I was not born in the state of Nebraska, I've lived in Geneva, Ainsworth, Oshkosh, Scottsbluff, Crete, Lincoln, Cambridge, and now Omaha. And so I feel like, because of opportunities like this at the state, I have unique qualifications because all of these areas of the state have been really important to me in my life growing up. So as far as on the professional side, I was...I started out my career representing children and family in the juvenile court of Lancaster County, working for Legal Services of Southeast Nebraska. And I loved that job, I loved being involved with the cases. And I learned so much. A Legal Services attorney has an ample caseload, even in the early '90s when I was there. But even then, when I moved over to the state of Nebraska and went to work as attorney there, I had this feeling that more could be done if I could figure out a way to work on child welfare and juvenile justice issues from a system standpoint, instead of on a case-by-case basis, primarily because of the frequency with which I was tackling the same issues over and over and over again. And some of those issues had to do with the procedures and the process, and some of them had to do with the chronic issues that our families struggle with in the state of Nebraska. The next opportunity that I had to be involved with that was when I was just finishing up my PhD at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and the Unicameral created the Juvenile Justice Institute and put it at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Because of my experience in state government, the university asked me if I would be willing to run the Juvenile Justice Institute. And so I was glad to get started that first year. We published the first summary of research of all the different research reports that had been written about juvenile justice and child welfare in the state up to that point, and had everybody come in. The Unicameral had put about \$90,000 behind that department...or that office at Juvenile Justice Institute at that time, so there wasn't a lot of resources to start out with. But over time, working with the current commission, working with state probation, working with the Department of Corrections, working with child welfare, working with the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Supreme Court of the state of Nebraska, we were gradually able to run annual budgets \$500,000 or more with no additional support from the Legislature, just on the contract and evaluation work that was required in the state. So even though that was centered at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, we had projects going in every single county in the state of Nebraska in juvenile justice and child welfare. And I moved from...after that was up and running I got a call from Bob Houston sometime after that and asked whether I would be director of planning, research, and accreditation for the Department of Corrections. And I was glad to go and do that. And so for a couple of years, right at the tail end of Bob Houston's directorship, I was there. But before Bob left, my former dean became senior vice chancellor at Omaha and asked me to come back to Omaha and run his Office of Institutional Effectiveness, which main responsibility is find all the change in the couch cushions and try to create as good of a crystal ball as possible for executive

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

Health and Human Services Committee
April 20, 2017

leadership within the university, as well as the NU system, and to continue that engagement extension with local county and state representatives and policymakers. And one of the things that's so nice about being in Nebraska is that--and being at of the university, and being involved in higher education--is that an opportunity like this is considered germane to my role and responsibility at the university. So not only am I glad to be here personally, but from an institutional standpoint the University of Nebraska supports this level of service. And I hope it stands well by the expectations and aspirations you all have. So... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Thank you very much. I would...Senator Erdman has joined us. Senator Erdman is from Morrill County, which is out in the Panhandle. And I'm Merv Riepe, I didn't introduce myself in the first round. I would open that up with any questions. Senator Kolterman. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Yeah. First of all, thanks for your willingness to serve. Secondly, as I look at your resume here, it talks about you have a bachelor of science degree in biopsychology. What is that? [CONFIRMATION]

TIMOTHY ROBINSON: It's a degree that Nebraska Wesleyan University created to flesh out the biology curriculum in the late '70s and '80s, particularly for people who thought they might be wanting to go into medicine or go into graduate science degrees. There was a recognition, even at that time, that there were a lot of physiological processes going on that influenced behavior, and that's what it was really about. It was about marrying what we understood about biology and physiology with what we were beginning to understand about what drove behavior. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Thank you. Very interesting. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: And is your Ph.D...is that in criminal justice? [CONFIRMATION]

TIMOTHY ROBINSON: Yes, sir, in criminology and criminal justice. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Senator Crawford. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you, Senator Riepe. And thank you, Mr. Robinson, for being here. And I really appreciate your willingness to serve, given your academic background. And it was nice to hear about your experience in different parts of Nebraska. Today as well, that's going to be very valuable to the Foster Care Advisory Committee. In your additional information, you note that you are continuing to do research on child welfare, especially youth in transition. So I'd

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

Health and Human Services Committee
April 20, 2017

wonder if you would tell us just a little bit about that research, especially if it relates to some of the things that you hope to see or that you expect to bring to this committee. [CONFIRMATION]

TIMOTHY ROBINSON: There's two things that child welfare...the way child welfare is practiced in the state that impacts K-16 education. First, in elementary school in particular we know that out-of-home placements a lot of times mean moving between different schools. When Kim and I were doing research earlier in our careers, related to child welfare, one of the things that we consistently identified as problematic was the extent to which out-of-home placements and even department involvement interfered with education. And it wasn't just a matter of they're in a different school with a different set of siblings or a different set of peers or anything. We are really good at local control in the state of Nebraska, to the point where a movement between two different schools, even within the same district at third grade, means that a child has been removed from one reading program and curriculum to another, a different reading program and curriculum. And as an educator, you can certainly understand that there's never a perfect overlap between different approaches to teaching something. So the first thing is that there is a concrete, direct influence on a child's future success if they get moved between schools, beyond the social aspect of it. The second thing that we see at the university system, I'm sure Creighton could attest the same thing, is that we've done a very good job in the state of Nebraska about opening access to college. In fact, the last time there was national data available for a comparison, Nebraska had about 70 percent of its high school graduates going on to some type of college. Whether it was technical school, community college, private university, they were going on in their education. That put us in the top 10 in the country. And since 2010, we've been more around 72 percent. So we're still probably five, six, seven in the country in terms of the proportion of our high school graduates that go on to college. Well, this includes our former wards and the people who, growing up, get involved with probation or the juvenile justice system with diversion and everything. College has never been easy for anyone. At that time of our life we are still a year or two away from growing into our adult brain and now, all of a sudden, our whole resource base underneath us is shifting. And so at the same time, we're realizing, you know, unforeseen freedom and discretion...there's all these other moving parts. The children have grown up in...children who have been in foster care at the time they graduated from high school, but even children who have been involved with foster care at any point in their education, this is one more disruption. It's a positive disruption for many of us, but it's another disruption in their life. And what we see at the University of Nebraska-Omaha is probably similar to what they see at Creighton is that not all of those students are equally prepared emotionally and aspirationally for what happens when they get to school. In fact, what I've seen at...when I first got back to UNO and started looking at what might explain why we were losing students in those first year and a half that they started, I figured that we would find these courses like organic chemistry that, you know, people were failing. And they wanted to be a doctor and they were having trouble with organic chemistry and that was driving them out of the university. And I was shocked to find that the highest number of courses that occupied a student's final semester were

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

Health and Human Services Committee
April 20, 2017

not organic chemistry or advanced philosophy. It was algebra, it was composition 1, it was world civilization. And this was with students who were qualified to be admitted to the University of Nebraska and probably most of the time even a school like Creighton or Nebraska Wesleyan. Well, when you start looking at it, we've all heard of hive collapse, you know, with bees. Where all of a sudden you don't just have a few bees, you just lose the whole hive at the same time. The students that appear to be leaving in those first two or three or four semesters, they get into algebra 1, they're taking world civ, they're taking composition 1 and 2 and they start into a tailspin with algebra. Well, many of us who have had supports growing up, you know, it's like cut your losses time, okay. I'm going to have to figure out algebra some other semester and pour myself into these other courses. For them, for a certain segment of the students, including those who are uncertain about their place in the world and what's possible, for them they take it as a signal that, in fact, they don't deserve to be there. And so even in the best of circumstances, even when they have family...maybe they have Aunt Lucy and Aunt Lucy has always said, you know, she believes 100 percent in them and what they're going to do. Well, you don't want to disappoint Aunt Lucy and you don't want the naysayers proven right. So I'll just start working a few more hours. And in fact, you know, I should have worked this semester instead of starting. So I'm not quitting college, but I'm going to work more this semester and make more money so I can get back into it next semester and throw myself into my studies. You know, so it's all very rational and it comes from a very legitimate place. So one of the things that I hope to contribute is, by being able to see some of the downstream effects on being able to transition former wards and the system-involved youth, getting them over some of these humps that get them to their third year. Where they start having that security that they are going to make it and graduate.

[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: Do we check in at 1:30 again upstairs? Okay. I don't want to try to cut that off, but are there any other questions? I want to be respectful of that. Do you have any questions of us? Don't give us hard ones. [CONFIRMATION]

TIMOTHY ROBINSON: Only if there's special objectives or aspirations you have for what the office ought to accomplish. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR RIEPE: I'm looking around left and right. My own sense is you have a stronger body of knowledge than I could ever hope to have. And so I would not have any particular questions. I don't know about the other members. Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

TIMOTHY ROBINSON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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

Health and Human Services Committee
April 20, 2017

SENATOR RIEPE: As usual, we do ask for any proponents that want to speak. Seeing none, any opponents? Do you have anyone? None of those. And for my dear friend, Senator Erdman, are there any neutrals here that would like to speak? Hearing none, that closes this hearing. Thank you so very much for your time, for your interest, and for your knowledge base. That's very helpful. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]