

HUGHES: Call the meeting of the Natural Resources Committee to order. I am Senator Hughes. I am Chairman of the committee. We will dispense, since it's not a formal hearing and it's just a gubernatorial appointment. We do have-- I'll let the members introduce themselves beginning on my far right.

KOLOWSKI: Rick Kolowski, District 31 in southwest Omaha. Thank you.

GEIST: Suzanne Geist, District 25 here in Lincoln.

QUICK: Dan Quick, District 35, Grand Island.

WALZ: Lynne Walz, District 15, which is all of Dodge County.

HUGHES: And on my left?

BOSTELMAN: Bruce Bostelman, District 23, Saunders, Butler, and most of Colfax Counties.

HUGHES: And we do have committee staff today. We have Laurie Lage, committee counsel. I have sitting in for committee clerk Ms. Krissa Delka. Thank you. Our pages today are Joe from Omaha. He's a UNL poli-sci major. And Sam, from Bellevue, he is also now at UNL in a poli-sci major. So with that, we will open our confirmation hearing on John Orr. So, John, if you'd like to come up and have a seat and give us a little bit of background about yourself and why you would like to be on the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board.

JOHN ORR: I'm John Orr. I've grown up in Nebraska. I-- I sent you an introductory letter to kind of give you a little background. And grew up in Lincoln, went to Hastings College, graduated with three majors in psychology, economics, and business administration, played football and track out there. And actually my senior year I decided I'd had enough track since I'd been doing track with AAU from the time I was third grade so I quit track. Track in college is kind of brutal, indoor season, outdoor season, and I'm like, I've had enough. So I went out for tennis. I'd never played organized tennis but I had played it, it-- you know, growing up, so I had a lot-- that was a lot more fun. And then as soon as I graduated I got-- I went to work as a-- in Omaha in banking. Banking wasn't exactly my bailiwick. It was interesting background, learning all about financial institutions back then, and instant cash machines were brand-new. They'd just been

invented. But then went into the grain business right within a year and loved that. I've been basically buying and selling grain all over the country, all over the world for 34 years, so grain elevators, grain processing plants, a lot of freight, so truck, barge, vessel freight, rail, and, you know, grain futures and that kind of thing, so it's-- that's been my background, my whole work life. As far as growing up, I was in Boy Scouts, camped, boated, rode horses, worked on-- even when I was a city kid, I did work on farms growing up. I was-- worked at the Department of Roads so I got to see probably more of Nebraska than I'd ever seen before or since. Every little bridge in the whole state of Nebraska I think I visited. Found out that some bridges were over capacity with just the asphalt that had been laid over them. I thought that was real interesting, you know, that-- the two-and-a-half foot of asphalt over it, so, but got to see a lot of that. I rode BRAN, got to see a lot of the state. So I, I really appreciate the-- I always kind of say the worst thing about Nebraska is-- is I-80 in a lot of sense because that's all anybody sees of Nebraska. Not saying I-80 is not bad but there is so much more and-- and it's beautiful and it's-- and it's-- needs to be, I think, enjoyed and preserved so-- so folks can, generations can-- can see that. And so I've been involved in a lot of trails, groups, Greater Omaha Area Trail Runners, Trails Have Our Respect, and I'm on the-- the Nebraska Horse Trails Committee which is a volunteer group that raises money to not only fund clearing of trails or keeping trails open in Nebraska state parks but also trailheads. So we do, you know, hitching posts and-- and-- and corrals and things that are coordinated with the parks and it's all volunteer money and it's all volunteer work so people can-- horses, horse riders can enjoy the parks. It is pretty amazing when you see a trail, how fast Mother Nature takes it back over if it's not continually used and cleared. So I live up by Blair, Nebraska. I have an acreage. I've been up there 22 years? Yeah, 22 years. I found out a lot about building and managing a pond. I thought, well, this will be easy, I'll just build it and we'll be done. No. There's a lot of flora and fauna that you have to, you know, be aware of and-- and whether it's algae or, you know, the growth of the plant life in the pond, so I get sterilized grass carp and, you know, just a lot of learning over the last 20 years of-- of managing a pond. And we enjoy it and we have lots of woods and-- and stuff up there as well. And I do bale hay for my horses. I'm kind of hobby farmer, too, so, but I-- again, I enjoy the outdoors. I spend a lot of time. That's my therapy I guess when I get

done trading grain, you know, the stress of trading grain futures and grain. I get outside a lot and enjoy it so.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you. Are there questions for Mr. Orr? Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. John, just more of a reaction or anything else, I-- I think your zeal and the excitement about what we have in the state and what you've seen, which sounds extensive, which I think everyone should have, it's really great, that that's going to be a very vital skill as you're on this board, committee, and-- and working in that-- in that Environmental Trust world of ours. That's really great. I thank you for your volunteerism and-- and keep it up. This is-- this is--

JOHN ORR: Thank you.

KOLOWSKI: You're-- you're a salesman, I can tell.

JOHN ORR: Well, and I-- and I'm just learning about the, you know, all the ins and outs of the board. I've been to a couple meetings. I did talk to Mark, the director, about some possible ideas of combining and even attracting other outside monies. There's-- there's trails money out there that--

KOLOWSKI: You bet.

JOHN ORR: -- I'm just learning about, too, that is they buy land that is about to be sold and instead they try to take it off the market in an open market way so it doesn't get developed, so it gets preserved.

KOLOWSKI: Sure.

JOHN ORR: And I think it's especially around cities that-- where these kind of things are kind of important, they really-- our land that is very valuable to farmers, it's kind of their retirement plan, but it also would be nice to preserve some of those lands, especially wooded areas that can be used for trails and things. So those are ways that maybe we can look at combining it. I was on the Rails to Trails committee back in the late '80s and that was when I met Arnold Schwarzenegger when he came to town. He was the president's physical education head, so that was kind of fun back then, but so I have been involved even since then on these types of things and I really-- it's

amazing the people that you meet. You know, that's the thing in anything. Volunteers are so important. And we just-- I don't know if any of you ride horses but we just had our expo this weekend and raised money privately, you know, for all to-- all to go back into the trails, so, yeah.

KOLOWSKI: [INAUDIBLE] Well, we just raised the speed limit on a lot of county and state roads, not I-80 but some other locations. So I've heard from my bicycling friends and they're very concerned because the roads they sometimes ride on are now going to be jacked up, you know, five or ten miles an hour.

JOHN ORR: Right.

KOLOWSKI: They're worried about safety and I-- so let's build as many trails as we can--

JOHN ORR: Yes.

KOLOWSKI: -- so they have many, many--

JOHN ORR: Yes.

KOLOWSKI: -- access as they can.

JOHN ORR: Well, that's the other thing, too, we work on because I'm involved in all three, kind of all three. There's walkers and runners and there's bicyclists or cyclists and horse riders and there's at times conflict with those groups because they don't understand each other, you know, as far as-- and I've worked, we've worked, we've had joint meetings to try to educate each other when we-- when we see each other out on the trail how to respect each other--

KOLOWSKI: Sure.

JOHN ORR: -- and be careful, especially with a large animal, but also then we organize joint trail, you know, clearing ventures and it's a lot of camaraderie then. So it's-- it's-- I think that builds when you get some synergy going and people--

KOLOWSKI: Yep.

JOHN ORR: -- people understand. And I think exactly right that-- I still remember-- this is interesting too. The Rails-and-Trails

[SIC--Rails-to-Trails] whether it's a cowboy trail or even the one in Iowa that goes down to Shenandoah, I used to ship grain on those lines. And so it's-- it's-- it's amazing how that's-- but it's nice to see that preserved for that reason--

KOLOWSKI: [INAUDIBLE] absolutely.

JOHN ORR: -- for trails, for riding. Yeah, so.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you.

JOHN ORR: Yep.

HUGHES: OK. Any additional questions? Just one quick one. The-- where do you see you fitting in on the Environmental Trust Board and what-- is there kind of an area? I'm assuming the trails is kind of where you see yourself focused.

JOHN ORR: Yeah. I-- I mean I think that, again, I'm learning the whole functions of the board and where the money is-- is utilized and a lot of even public-private partnerships. I really like that idea because the-- then when you have a private, whether it's a city or a county or a group, Pheasants Forever or whatever, when there's a partnership and they have some skin in the game they're-- they're motivated to do the project right and follow through on the project. I know that the board audits that to make sure that that's being done properly and that the money is being spent properly. But I think that when you-- those get-- you know, and I-- I'm not really familiar with the scoring of all the-- how they-- I know they score it. I just don't know the intimacy of the scoring and I'm still learning on that. But I think I can help with input because obviously in business you-- you in essence score things of why they should be done and how the payoff is going to be and how that-- the time line is going to be. So I think that I can be helpful as I learn and-- and bring that to the table so.

HUGHES: Very good. Any additional questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming, Mr. Orr.

JOHN ORR: All right. Thank you.

HUGHES: I will ask to see if there is anyone in the audience that wants to speak in support of Mr. Orr's appointment. Seeing none,

anyone wishing to speak in opposition? Seeing none, anyone wishing to speak in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, that will close our appointment hearing for Mr. John Orr, so if you gentlemen would like to vacate briefly, we'll have an Exec Session and probably have an answer for you right directly.

GEIST: Thank you.