

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee January 22, 2020

BREWER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Tom Brewer. I am representing the 43rd District of western Nebraska and I am the committee Chair. We have our committee members here today and we'll start by having them introduce themselves starting on my right with Senator Lowe.

LOWE: John Lowe, District 37, southeast half of Buffalo County.

HILGERS: Mike Hilgers, District 21, northwest Lincoln and Lancaster County.

La GRONE: Andrew La Grone, District 49, Gretna and northwest Sarpy County.

M. HANSEN: Matt Hansen, District 26, northeast Lincoln.

HUNT: I'm Megan Hunt and I represent District 8 in midtown Omaha.

BREWER: A-- Senator La Grone is the Vice Chair. To my right is legal counsel, Dick Clark. To the left on the end is committee clerk, Julie Condon. Our page is Noa Snyder, over there. Today we're gonna hear six appointments: one to Tourism and the others to the Emergency Response Commission. I would ask at this time that you mute any electronic devices so that we don't have any interruptions. You will see senators working on their computers. We're kind of at that point now where we're transitioning from paper to digital. So please don't think that they're not listening or watching. They're just now able to do two things at once. So if you wish to record your attendance, ask that you fill out the white sheets located on the back table who wish-- well, there won't be any testifying today except for those that are gonna be interviewed for the appointments. If you have any materials to pass out, we'd ask that you provide 12 copies. If you don't have 12 copies, please let the page know, see if we can't have copies. Any letters need to be submitted to the committee by 5:00 p.m. the day before. Each letter must include your name, address, subject or the bill number. And with that said, we're gonna need to indicate on the letter whether or not as a letter of support, opposition, or someone in the neutral position. When you're asked to come forward to testify, just come forward to the seat. We ask that you begin by stating and spelling your name so that we can record it. And would ask that you speak directly in the microphone so it's clear. Again, today we're going to have six appointments. We're going to go in the order of the

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sheet that was posted for the committee. So the first one up is Robert Phillip Sabin and this is the Nebraska Tourism Commission. Come on up. There will be no time. Usually we have a time system, but for the appointments here today we're simply going to let you tell us why you're a good choice for this appointment and you won't be under a time limit as long as you don't get carried away. And with that said, whenever you're ready.

ROBERT SABIN: Well, greetings. Robert Sabin, Robert, R-o-b-e-r-t, P is my middle initial, Sabin, S as in Sam-a-b-as in boy-i-n as in Nancy, Junior. It's my name.

BREWER: OK.

ROBERT SABIN: I do have a bio that I could distribute--

BREWER: Sure,

ROBERT SABIN: --if that's OK.

BREWER: If we could have a page snag that.

ROBERT SABIN: Thank you so much,

BREWER: But feel free to just go ahead and--

ROBERT SABIN: Yeah.

BREWER: --kind of give us a little background--

ROBERT SABIN: Sure.

BREWER: --and why you're a good choice for the Tourism Commission.

ROBERT SABIN: Great. Thank you so much. Greetings, everyone. Good afternoon. Robert Sabin. My current position is the general manager of the Hilton Omaha. Hilton Omaha is the largest hotel in the state of Nebraska. We're connected to the CHI Convention Center, as well adjacent to the T.D. Ameritrade ballpark, which obviously hosts the annual College World Series, great, great annual event there. I've been with the Hilton Omaha for about two years now and have been working for Hilton for-- this is my 10th year now that I'm starting. This has been a great two years for me, and that's why I have great interest in being appointed to the commission. Actually, I-- it's pretty interesting. I knew about Omaha as a tourist first. I came to

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Omaha about five years ago. My daughter was swimming in an event in Elkhorn and we got to stay in Omaha for about five days and we got to enjoy Omaha. And when this position came up within Hilton, I knew a little bit about Omaha already, and I already knew it was a great place to live. And now in the last two years, that's definitely solidified it. I've had an opportunity to not only enjoy the things of Omaha, but Nebraska overall has some great tourist destinations. And that's what again, why I would be honored to be in this appointment, because as we continue to go out to the other states and throughout the world, absolutely show what Omaha has to offer, whether it's some great things in Grand Island; the prairie museum is amazing. You can go on out to national treasures out there in Scottsbluff; Chimney Rock. I've personally gone to these destinations. I've gone to a Cornhusker football game and-- and have attended many other events. We've got great states and state parks as well and the list goes on and on. I've also had a great history in working some other markets and tourism is very important and vital, whether it be in south Florida; Chicago; Springfield, Illinois, a smaller destination, but great charm with the President, Abraham Lincoln Museum; in Minneapolis, which is a great destination as well. I lived there for five years, but always challenged with certain things of weather and going, fighting through that. So state of Nebraska obviously has great assets, but some people think there's challenges to be why they should come and visit. And I think that some of the benefits that I can offer. So I'd be a great honor to be able to help support the state and as a-- as a commissioner on the Tourism Commission.

BREWER: All right.

ROBERT SABIN: Open for any questions.

BREWER: Well, thank you. And let's go ahead and open it to questions. All right. Well--

LOWE: Senator.

BREWER: Oh, I'm sorry, go ahead, Senator Hunt.

HUNT: Thank you, Chairman Brewer. Thank you so much for being here, Robert. I want to-- I'm familiar with you and what you have done. Have you been involved with Visit Omaha like the Omaha tourism--

ROBERT SABIN: Yeah.

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HUNT: --stuff that they do?

ROBERT SABIN: So currently a board member of Metro Hospitality Association. And so the executive director of Visit Omaha is on our board as well and have a lot of engagement with Keith Backsen and his team. Actually, in my current role, for instance, when we go out to conventions around the country to try to bring conventions to Omaha and Nebraska, I've "partaked" in those with the CVB and it was great. One recent one was in Las Vegas. It's called IMEX, where we met, had the opportunity to be involved with almost 3,000 meeting planners around the country and the world and to showcase Omaha, Nebraska, as a great destination. And it was-- it was a great-- it was a great experience. We were able to book some business, as you say, and get more people here. The great thing about it, and this is why I'm so honored for the opportunity, is whenever I tell people and I've, you know, lived in several different places, I say, get over here to Omaha, get to Nebraska. Let's show you what we have. People walk away and say, this is a great destination. So I think, oh, you know, that's why it's exciting for me, because the sky's the limit. Just get people here and they see what it is. It's a very authentic experience, whereas some tourist destinations are a little bit contrived. And I've lived in those. I won't name them, but there's definitely great authenticity to what we have here.

HUNT: Thank you.

BREWER: All right. Additional questions? Well, since I got you cornered here, have you had a chance to go to Fort Robinson yet?

ROBERT SABIN: Fort Robinson is not one I've been, but it's on the list.

BREWER: All right. It's on the list. I see that you had time with Doubletree.

ROBERT SABIN: I did, yes.

BREWER: So tell me how you guys make those cookies right there in the place. They're always hot. They're always good.

ROBERT SABIN: They're great. Doubletree is a great brand by Hilton down in Springfield, Illinois. We're about 500 yards from the presidential museum in the old state capitol. It was an experience in my life. It's great.

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BREWER: Keep up the good work with those cookies.

ROBERT SABIN: We're putting them in space now. Did you know that?

BREWER: No, I didn't know that.

ROBERT SABIN: Yeah, throw them in space.

BREWER: All right. There you go. No additional questions. The only thing I'll ask and this is-- this is my-- my bad. If I could have everyone who is going to testify fill out one of the green sheets that then we have as a record.

ROBERT SABIN: OK.

BREWER: So when you get done, just knock one of those out. And then if you don't have a green sheet when you come up, just make sure you get one filled out and to Julie before you leave so we got everything documented correctly. But thank you for your testimony. We'll be getting with you as soon as we have a chance to have a vote here.

ROBERT SABIN: OK. Thank you.

BREWER: And we'll be Execing today as soon as we're done.

ROBERT SABIN: OK. Thank you for your time.

BREWER: OK, so at this time, if there are any proponents that want to speak would be your opportunity. Seeing none, any opponents? Anybody in the neutral? All right. Well, then we will close the appointment on our first and our only Nebraska Tourism Commission, Robert Sabin, and move on to our first from the State Emergency Response Commission. Kyle Keeling, come on up. And you have your paperwork ready to go. Look at that. Please have a seat. Whenever you're ready, go ahead and begin. Welcome to the Government Committee.

KYLE KEELING: I'm used to standing up and moving.

BREWER: That's all right.

KYLE KEELING: I'll try to sit still.

BREWER: We'll trap you for a little bit.

KYLE KEELING: Kyle Keeling, K-y-l-e K-e-e-l-i-n-g. I'm actually from a little out west, Sutherland, Nebraska. As for my background, I'm with

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Union Pacific hazardous materials group. My background, I've only been with UP for a year and a half. But before that, I was with an emergency response contractor where I actually worked on the ground with the shovels and equipment for seven years. And then on top of that, my dad was actually in the position I'm in now for 25 years before I was so been a part of it for a long time, whether it's actually me doing the work or just family. What I'm responsible for at UP is what we focus on is tank cars and stuff like that. So 30,000 gallons of hazardous materials moving down the rail. Most of our training is in hazardous materials. But along with that, we have to have response plans, federal response plans to connect-- to protect the communities that those rail cars go through. We've all seen rail, actually here in Lincoln, not much. You got to go north, but over in Omaha and around North Platte and stuff like that, rail all over, two-- two blocks from my house. So with our FRBs, we map out, which we're responsible for putting in. Again, we map out the communities where, say, nursing home, school, stuff like that. So serving on this board and having those in place and having the knowledge behind those plans also help with the rest of-- the rest of the transportation and just the State Emergency Response Commission and working together. Plus, I'll see these people all the time through training events and stuff like that. So to me, it just makes sense for me to be part of this so I can add my input and ultimately keep our community safe here in Nebraska.

BREWER: All right. Thank you. Questions? Go ahead, Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Thank you very much. Kyle, did you have a special set of trainings that you went through or did you do that in the service or some other location, please?

KYLE KEELING: No. Everything has been done for when I started with hazardous materials. We had to have our 40-hour HAZ-- HAZMAT, which you have to do for any to be in contact with any HAZMAT. Then on top that with UP, now we have tank car training, rail training. And then now since other states, but we have managers throughout. We have 17 throughout the whole system. California, Washington has forced all of us to be more apt, adapted into the federal response plans for like for those states. So now we're now starting this year we're getting specialized training in stuff like that, run and-- run incident commander and stuff like that. So NIMS training is what-- what we would refer to if you guys know what that is.

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KOLOWSKI: So you've had most of the training [INAUDIBLE].

KYLE KEELING: Yes, the majority of the training. And now Washington and Oregon are states that we have rail in has caused us to have more now. So this year, we're going to start on that.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you.

BREWER: Additional questions? Let me hit you up with one real quick. I've been to the facility. I'm not sure the exact title, but the command center in Omaha that has oversight.

KYLE KEELING: The dispatcher.

BREWER: For UP, the dispatch center.

KYLE KEELING: Yep.

BREWER: And then I've been to Fort Worth to the one for Burlington. If you have an incident, are you part of what would be considered the QRF, the quick reaction team or force that would-- would move to the location and stabilize things and assess?

KYLE KEELING: If it has to do with hazardous materials--

BREWER: Right.

KYLE KEELING: --or the possibility of hazardous materials or something just as simple as diesel or oil. We are-- we are one of the first calls that happen in that incident, say derailment. Dispatch center gets train crew, tells the dispatch center, then they call RNCC, which is our-- which is our-- kind of our dispatch center. They call out from there. We're one of the first. We will be one of the first three-- three calls so.

BREWER: All right. If there are no more questions, thank you for your testimony.

KYLE KEELING: Thank you.

BREWER: And like I said, we'll be meeting in Exec and we'll be getting to you with the information.

KYLE KEELING: Yes, sir.

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BREWER: Thanks. All right. Again, we're back to the State Emergency Response Commission next appointment. Rod Beadle [PHONETIC]. Welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. Whenever you're ready, please begin.

ROD BUETHE: OK. Good afternoon. My name is Rod Buethe. I'm from Gretna, Nebraska. First name is Rod, R-o-d, last name B as in boy-u-e-t as in Tom-h-e. Currently, I'm a member of the Gretna Fire Department, been a member for 30 years. I've been the fire chief going on 22 years at Gretna Fire Department. Also been a member of our Mutual Aid Association for the whole 30 years. I've been a officer, either vice president or president of that organization for the last 15 years. I've been a member of the Sarpy County LAPC committee, done that for the last 20 years attending those-- attending those meetings. Helped set up the Nebraska State Fire School. I've been on that training committee for 30 years, setting up training for all the firefighters in the state of Nebraska and been a member of the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association for all those years, serving many as an area rep for the association. I was talking to Lisa the other day. A couple of months ago, she asked me to join the SERC. They had a opening for firefighter, I think with my experience in the fire service that I'd be a fit. So I'm here looking for the appointment to the SERC.

BREWER: All right. Thank you for your testimony. Questions? Well, I just got to tell you that I spent 15 years on a volunteer fire department. So thank you for your service. And I think with the number of years you have and the diversity you definitely have a lot of skills we need. So thank you for putting your name into contention here and we'll be getting with you as soon as we Exec.

ROD BUETHE: OK. Thank you.

BREWER: Thank you. All right. Next appointment, again, this is State Emergency Response Commission. And that's Tonya Ngotel. Welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. You can begin whenever you're ready.

TONYA NGOTEL: OK. Well, thanks for having me. I'm honored to follow the two individuals before me. My name is Tonya Ngotel, spelled Tonya, T-o-n-y-a, last name is Ngotel, spelled N as in Nancy-G as in George, o-t-e-l. I'm here representing public health on the State Emergency Response Commission. My background is varied but does not include first responders. So again, I respect the gentleman that spoke before

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me. My current position is with the Center for Preparedness Education. That's actually a joint endeavor between UNMC, the Medical Center in Omaha, and then Creighton University. So they came together about 14 years ago and created this collaboration to go out among the public health departments and the hospitals and teach them emergency preparedness, right, so teach them how to do adequate fire drills, how to do tornado drills, and kind of connect the dots between community preparedness and healthcare. And prior to that I spent 14 years with NEMA, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, where I kind of collated and then coordinated the State Emergency Response Commission. So I'm excited to be here on the other side of the table and bring the public health perspective to the, to the commission, and hopefully educate the public, the senators, and the hospitals and public health departments to try to connect those dots and make sure the HAZMAT that Kyle's bringing down the rails is communicated to the hospitals. I would entertain questions. That was quick but.

BREWER: No, actually, it's great that we have the diversity in the candidates because it doesn't do you good if everybody's all got the same skill set. So this is refreshing to see that we got a good mix.

TONYA NGOTEL: Thank you.

BREWER: OK. Questions? Yes, sir. Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Chair. Did you have anything to do with the flooding in Nebraska? Did you have any experiences connected with that? Would you elaborate, please?

TONYA NGOTEL: Yeah, that's a great question. You know, I left Nebraska Emergency Management before the floodings, but I was fortunate to go back and kind of volunteer my time through the university. The president of the university and the chancellors and the board through the direction of the Governor definitely supported that. So as several employees of several universities, not just UNMC but UNL also responded to that. My specific role was to actually help with the Joint Information Center. So that's kind of the public information component, volunteered there for a couple days taking in phone calls from people that were concerned. Kind of got to get my feet wet with that. But it was really a very limited role compared to what I'd done in the past but yeah.

KOLOWSKI: And it was quite extensive, but--

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TONYA NGOTEL: It was.

KOLOWSKI: --you were right there.

TONYA NGOTEL: It was, yep.

KOLOWSKI: Good. Thank you.

BREWER: OK. Additional questions? Got off easy. Thank you for your testimony.

TONYA NGOTEL: Thank you for your time.

BREWER: Same thing-- we'll Exec and, we'll get information to you as quick as we can.

TONYA NGOTEL: OK. Thank you.

BREWER: OK. We're still on the State Emergency Response Commission, and the next one would be Kimberly, is it Pozek [PHONETIC]?

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: Yes. Very close. Good job.

BREWER: It's a Government Committee. We just try and get close.

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: Good afternoon.

BREWER: Welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: Thank you. I am Kimberly Plouzek, K-i-m-b-e-r-l-y, last name P as in Paul-l-o-u- z as in zebra-e-k. Thank you, gentlemen and ladies, for your time. To go into my background, I have actually been on the State Emergency Response Commission since July of 2009. I serve as the environmental chair. My background is 20 years in public health, environmental and emergency at the city, county, state, and rural district health department levels. I am currently a data program manager for the state Military Department. I work with the Army National Guard. I've served and I appreciate the opportunity to serve the people of Nebraska in this capacity. This work is a continuous effort of engaging, educating, and preparing for emergencies in the management of hazardous materials during emergencies. This effort starts at the local level, but requires collaboration across all levels of government. I ask for your approval to continue to serve on

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the State Emergency Response Commission. And subject to your questions, thank you for your time.

BREWER: All right. Thank you for your testimony. Yes, Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Are you a member of the National Guard?

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: No, I'm not.

KOLOWSKI: Or just coordinate with them.

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: I'm a state employee for the National Guard.

KOLOWSKI: How many years have you done that?

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: Five.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you.

BREWER: OK. Additional questions? Oh, before you go--

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: Oh, sorry.

BREWER: I get-- I get last shot here. You--

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: And I should warn you, I work with your daughter.

BREWER: That's OK.

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: So I can make Thanksgiving very painful [LAUGHTER].

BREWER: So you work-- Yeah, well, [INAUDIBLE] now you got me all flustered. You work in joint force headquarters then?

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: I do.

BREWER: In the G3.

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: I am right under the chief of staff, but I am housed in the CFMO.

BREWER: Ah, OK. That's close enough. And so your day-to-day, I guess, job there, what does-- what does it consist of?

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KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: So you because of your background, you may be familiar with the data system that I manage. It's referred to as installation status review, ISR.

BREWER: Yes.

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: And it's a compilation of multiple modules of data collection that happen quarterly, annually.

BREWER: And you're the manager of that.

KIMBERLY PLOUZEK: And I manage that.

BREWER: OK. Good. Good enough. That was my question. And just so I understand, within the Military Department, you have the what we call AGR, active duty guard, which are active duty military personnel. You have federal technicians, which are guardsmen on the weekend, technicians during the week. And then you have state employees that are just that. And then you have a few oddball what we call Department of the Army civilians that work there, but most of them fit in the first three categories. Anyway, thank you for your testimony. OK. Our last interview will be a phone interview. And so if we can go ahead and do the shout out. Are they on the line?

JULIE CONDON: Not yet.

BREWER: All right. Let's go ahead and hit the send. I'll give you guys some background while she's doing that. Again, State Emergency Response Commission Polly Jordening. And because of the distance issue, we agreed to go ahead and do this phone interview. I just didn't feel like making someone drive eight hours in this weather we're have probably was justified. So please bear with us when we get it connected.

CHUCK HUBKA: She's on.

POLLY JORDENING: Thank you.

BREWER: You're good, Chuck. Thank you. Greetings. This is Senator Tom Brewer, the Chair of the Government Committee. Is this Kimberly?

POLLY JORDENING: This is my Polly Jordening.

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BREWER: Oh, sorry. One line off. That's exactly who we're looking for. Polly, how are you?

POLLY JORDENING: Thank you, sir.

BREWER: That was a test. You passed the first one. Good.

POLLY JORDENING: OK. Easy enough.

BREWER: All right. We have everyone here in the Government Committee. What we'd like you to do is just kind of give us a little of your background so that we can kind of get to know you better.

POLLY JORDENING: OK. Thank you. First I'd like to start off by telling everyone thank you for allowing me to do this over the phone. My work schedule was kind of hectic this week and along with really bad road conditions this morning, so this has turned out well. And thank you very much for allowing me to do this over the phone. So I was born and raised in Nebraska. We-- my husband and I did move out of Nebraska for about 15 years. And we elected to move back in 2004. I have dedicated my life to the health, safety, and environmental field. I started off in the late '70s as a nurse and I have now worked my way into a corporate safety manager position. And like I said, I served-- worked for a lot of really good companies that have been Nebraska based as well. Right now I work here in Hastings, Nebraska.

BREWER: OK. Thank you. Let's see. By chance, how did you find out about the position on the State Emergency Response Commission?

POLLY JORDENING: I served for the past four years. I originally found out from Mr. Bryan Tuma. Him and I worked together for several years when we both worked for Dupont Pioneer. And he asked me to serve on it representing labor for the state of Nebraska.

BREWER: This is the same Bryan Tuma that used to head the Nebraska State Patrol?

POLLY JORDENING: Yes, sir.

BREWER: All right.

POLLY JORDENING: And he is it now assistant director of NEMA.

BREWER: Yes. No. Great guy. So that's-- that's a good credit to you. If he likes you, you've done something right. OK. Questions? Wow.

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You're gonna get off easy, Polly, on this one. Looks like we've-- we've heard enough to know what we need to know. So thank you for calling in and we'll be getting back to you and let you know the outcome of today's Exec.

POLLY JORDENING: OK. Thank you so much. And again, thank you for allowing me to do this over the phone.

BREWER: All right. You have a good day.

POLLY JORDENING: Goodbye.

BREWER: All right. With that, we have completed all of our appointment hearings for today. This will close our public hearing and we'll go ahead and clear the room and we'll go into Exec Session.