

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Transportation and Telecommunications Committee April 4, 2024

**MOSER:** Committee meeting will now come to order. We have three gubernatorial appointments on the agenda for today. My name is Mike Moser. I represent District 22, Platte County and most of Stanton County. And we'll start introductions with Senator--

**DeBOER:** DeBoer.

**MOSER:** --DeBoer.

**DeBOER:** Good afternoon everyone. My name is Wendy DeBoer. I represent District 10 in northwest Omaha.

**DeKAY:** Good afternoon. I'm Barry DeKay, representing District 40, which includes Holt, Knox, Antelope, Cedar, northern part of Pierce, northern part of Dixon counties.

**BRANDT:** I'm Senator Tom Brandt, District 32, Fillmore, Thayer, Jefferson, Saline, and southwestern Lancaster Counties.

**BOSN:** I'm Caroline Bosn, District 25, which is southeast Lincoln, Lancaster County, including Bennett.

**MOSER:** OK. Our page today is Julie. Our committee clerk is Lynne Woody. Our committee council is Mike Hybl. There are blue testifier sheets on the table near the entrance of the room. Please complete one and hand it to the page if you'd like to testify. Those not testifying but want to record your presence, you can sign the gold sheet in the book on the table near the entrance. Handouts submitted by testifiers will be included as part of the record as exhibits. Please provide ten copies of any handouts and give them to the page. Senators may come and go during our hearing. That's common and required, as they may be presenting bills in other committees, or have other commitments over lunch hour today. Testimony will begin with the introducer's opening statement. Then we'll hear from supporters, and those in opposition, and then those in neutral. Please begin your testimony by giving us your first and last name and spelling them for the record. We'll be using a three minute timer today. No demonstrations of opposition or support on the testimony is allowed. Please remember to turn off your cell phones or put them on vibrate. And with that, we'll start with the first appointment. Steven Raims [PHONETIC], is that the proper pronunciation?

\_\_\_\_\_ : Raim-es [PHONETIC]. He's not here at the moment.

**MOSER:** OK. Well--

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\_\_\_\_\_ : I can call him.

**MOSER:** All right. Well, let's, go to then to Roger FIG-ard, or Fig-ARD, how do I say it?

**ROGER FIGARD:** FIE-gard [PHONETIC].

**MOSER:** Figard. Attempt number three I got it. Welcome.

**ROGER FIGARD:** Thank you. Roger Figard, R-o-g-e-r F-i-g-a-r-d. It's a privilege, and I appreciate the opportunity to be here and share with you why I would like to be reappointed or confirmed for this position. Unfortunately, I'm old enough to know, if you think back over 50 years ago, in the wisdom of the Legislature to create the trust fund, and the goal and the desire was to have a system of safe, uniform state highways, county roads, and municipal streets across the entire state. And over the last 50 years, through the board and, and the Legislature, and the DOT, there is, I think, a really good system, state highways, county roads, and municipal streets across the state. And the board helped promulgate those minimum design standards. I am currently the representative for the municipalities over 50,000, but I think I have some unique knowledge and experience. I grew up in the sandhills on a ranch, so I know what it's like to drive on a two lane cow path as well as an interstate. I was first appointed to the board in 2008, and I've served as the chairman since 2010. In that time frame, again, as I said, I think we've got a good set of standards. In the late teens, the board, working with the DOT in the cities and counties promulgated new standards for, for 3R standards for cities and counties that were not there before, which made scarce road dollars go much farther and still provide a safe roadway. We're currently working with the DOT, and in the cities and counties on what's called more of a practical design approach. Maybe not every roadway out there today meets that new and reconstructed standard, but over 50 years they've proven to be safe and uniform and driver consistency and expectation is met. And practical design means we'll continue to do that, and we'll use the dollars we have to go a little bit farther and maintain the roads. So, I'm excited to continue to serve, and I would certainly answer any questions that anybody has.

**MOSER:** Anybody have questions? Yes, Senator DeKay.

**DeKAY:** Just out of curiosity, you said you grew up in the sandhills, where at?

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**ROGER FIGARD:** South of Thedford, on the Dismal River, on Highway 83, north of North Platte, about 50 miles.

**DeKAY:** OK. Thank you.

**MOSER:** Why'd they name it the Dismal River?

**ROGER FIGARD:** My understanding is, when they first started coming out, unlike today with all the cedar trees and whatnot, there were-- there was just grass, and sand, and dunes, and very few trees, and somebody said, this is really a dismal looking area, and they became the Dismal River. That's my recollection.

**MOSER:** Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you for your willingness to serve. Is there anyone here to speak in support of Mr. Figard's nomination? Is there anyone here to speak in opposition to his nomination? Is there anyone here to speak in the neutral on his nomination? That will close the hearing on Mr. Figard, and we'll move to Russell Kreachbaum, also for the Board of Public Classifications and Standards. Welcome.

**RUSSELL KREACHBAUM:** Thank you for having me. My name is Russell Kreachbaum, R-u-s-s-e-l-l K-r-e-a-c-h-b-a-u-m. I have currently served on this board for the last two years, I filled a vacancy. And I have been county supervisor for Merrick County for the last ten. I took this position basically because as any county, especially county supervisor, you're dealing with county roads. And so I thought anytime that I can get any kind of knowledge, whether it be from higher up, I thought this would be probably be the best place to do it. So, other than that, I just don't, don't have too much to say, I guess. So kind of keep it short and sweet. If you've got any questions?

**MOSER:** All right. Anybody have questions? Senator Brandt?

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for coming in today. You were here last year, weren't you?

**RUSSELL KREACHBAUM:** Yeah. Yeah, I was-- was it last year or two years ago, I couldn't--

**MOSER:** Probably two years.

**BRANDT:** Two years ago?

**RUSSELL KREACHBAUM:** Two years ago? Yes. Yes.

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**BRANDT:** And you have seen you were filling out somebody else's appointment?

**RUSSELL KREACHBAUM:** Yeah, I filled a vacancy for-- they had-- I'm not sure. Roger could answer that, whether they took a different job or whatever, but they resigned.

**BRANDT:** So you've been on the board now for two years?

**RUSSELL KREACHBAUM:** Two years.

**BRANDT:** More or less. How have you found the experience?

**RUSSELL KREACHBAUM:** I've very-- found it very satisfying. I have learned some things as far as relaxations and the standards of-- as far as trying to pick up knowledge, you know, and trying to take that back to the county and see how we can use it there. But yes, it's very-- been very informative, and I've enjoyed it very much.

**BRANDT:** All right. Thank you.

**RUSSELL KREACHBAUM:** Thank you.

**MOSER:** OK. Other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**RUSSELL KREACHBAUM:** Thank you.

**MOSER:** Go ahead and have a seat. Is there anybody here to speak in support of Mr. Kreachbaum? Anyone here to speak in opposition? Anybody here to-- here to speak in the neutral? OK. That'll close our hearing on Mr. Kreachbaum. Has our other nominee arrived?

\_\_\_\_\_: No, he stepped out to check [INAUDIBLE] and see--

**MOSER:** OK.

\_\_\_\_\_: [INAUDIBLE]

**MOSER:** All right.

**DeBOER:** That clock, [INAUDIBLE]?

**MOSER:** What's that?

**DeBOER:** That clock?

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**MOSER:** Yeah, I know. Maybe the clock was broken.

**DeBOER:** Remember we took it down, and then--

**MOSER:** Yeah, we were going to adjust it.

**DeKAY:** Another senator tried to put it back up there.

**MOSER:** So we're waiting the arrival of one of the nominees.

**BRANDT:** Mr. Chairman. Can we turn the mics off until the nominee gets here? Can we turn the microphones off until the nominee gets here?

**MOSER:** I think we'd want to have our hearing continuously, right? He wants to shut the microphones off.

**MIKE HYBL:** I'm willing to stand at ease [INAUDIBLE].

**MOSER:** Shut them off? Yeah. OK.

**MIKE HYBL:** Stand at ease.

**MOSER:** We're going to stand at ease for a few minutes. You can go ahead and shut them off for just a minute. if you want.

[EASE]

**MOSER:** Hello, is this Mr. Rames? Technology. [PHONE RINGING].

**STEVEN RAMES:** This is Steve. Hello.

**MOSER:** Is this--

**STEVEN RAMES:** Hello?

**MOSER:** Yes, hi, this is--

**STEVEN RAMES:** [INAUDIBLE]? Yeah, I'm sorry about that. Yeah, this is Steve, like Joni Gibson [PHONETIC] was calling in to try to get in touch, in touch with you, so. Yes, this is Steven.

**MOSER:** Steven Raims [PHONETIC}, or how do we pronounce your last name?

**STEVEN RAMES:** Ram-es [PHONETIC].

**MOSER:** Rames. OK. Could you spell your name, please?

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**STEVEN RAMES:** S-t-e-v-e-n R-a-m-e-s.

**MOSER:** OK, great. We've already had the other two nominees talk for just a little bit, telling about the position that you're being nominated to, and I have my phone on speakerphone so the rest of the committee can hear. And if this doesn't fly with the powers that be, we'll have to redo it later. But I think this may be sufficient. This is easier than calling the system that the Legislature uses. I'm, I'm not up to speed on how to run it anyway. So tell us a little bit about yourself and what you're applying for.

**STEVEN RAMES:** I'm applying for a continuation or a renewal of my seat on the Board of Public Roads Classifications and Standards. I, I guess I'm finishing out my, my first term on that. On that board, in general, our, our role is to kind of balance the public safety when it comes to using our, our state highways and, and transportation systems, but balancing the requirements of the sort of national state design standards against the cost of improving our system to meet those standards. And there are times when it becomes more costly than the benefit of the improvement. And so our, our role in general is to evaluate that, discuss that, and, and either approve those, those waivers of the standards, or, or deny them.

**MOSER:** OK. Stand by for just a minute. Is this OK, or do you want to-- it's working. OK. All right. Thank you, Steven. Any questions from committee members? OK. All right, well, I appreciate your willingness to serve. We'll continue here to see if there's any support or opposition to your nomination, and then I'll, I'll hang up once we get through that. So just hang on for just a little bit.

**STEVEN RAMES:** OK.

**MOSER:** Is there anyone else here to speak in support of Mr. Rames? Yes.

**ROGER FIGARD:** I'll come forward. Roger Figard, R-o-g-e-r F-i-g-a-r-d, currently serving as the chairman of the Board of Classifications and Standards, and certainly want to support and thank Steve for his participation. He's brought his knowledge and expertise for some of those smaller communities in the state, rather than just big cities, Lincoln and Omaha. He's been very helpful. He's served on several committees. He has good ideas, and I think he has been very consistent in weighing safety and uniformity versus cost, and trying to do the right thing and be practical. So, I have appreciated his

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support and his service on the committee, and I would certainly recommend and ask the committee to approve that appointment.

**MOSER:** OK. Any questions from the committee members? All right, thank you. Seeing none, Anyone here to speak in opposition to Mr. Rames? Anybody in the neutral? OK, seeing none that will close our hearing on Steven Rames. Thank you. I'll hang up and we'll continue the rest of our hearing. Thank you.

**STEVEN RAMES:** You bet. Thank you.

**MOSER:** OK. That concludes our hearing for all three applicants. We're going to have an exec session, Mr. Counselor.

**MIKE HYBL:** OK.

**MOSER:** So if the members could stick around for just a little bit. Thank you all for coming. That ends our hearing for today.