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Education Committee
February 23, 2015

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Education met at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, February 23, 2015, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on gubernatorial appointments. Senators present: Kate Sullivan, Chairperson; Rick Kolowski, Vice Chairperson; Roy Baker; Tanya Cook; Mike Groene; Adam Morfeld; Patty Pansing Brooks; and David Schnoor. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Education Committee. I'm Senator Rick Kolowski, Vice Chair of the committee and I'm from District 31 in southwest Omaha. I'll ask the committee members who are present to introduce themselves starting with my far left. Senator Groene, please.

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Mike Groene, Lincoln County.

SENATOR COOK: I'm Senator Tanya Cook, District 13. That is in northeast Omaha and Douglas County.

SENATOR BAKER: Roy Baker, Senator of District 30, southern Lancaster County and all of Gage County.

SENATOR SCHNOOR: I am Senator Dave Schnoor, District 15, which is Dodge County.

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. And we have our staff with us today: Mandy Mizerski, committee clerk and we also have...LaMont Rainey is right here, legal counsel also. Tammy Barry is out and should be back...or might be back later in the session, so thank you very much for their being here. We also have pages with...a page with our committee today, Seth Thompson. Seth is here and he is from Ogallala and a student at Wesleyan majoring in criminal justice and political science. Today we have appointments...reappointments to go over. And I'm not going to read anything else as far as our normal display of testimony and all the rest when we get into regular session, but this is all for reappointments today and we'll be starting on a phone call-in with Dr. Richard Sawyer for the Technical Advisory Committee for Statewide Assessments, TAC. And as soon as that's ready to go, we will...

CHUCK HUBKA: We're ready. We're just waiting for him to call in. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thanks, Chuck, appreciate it very much. So stand by. We'll be with you in a minute. Senator Sullivan is presenting in another committee at the present time and I

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will be doing the same shortly. As she returns back, we'll be tag-teaming this this afternoon. So just bear with us. We do have six reappointments we'll be going through this afternoon with Dr. Richard Sawyer being the first one. And in every case, we'll ask if those...if there's individuals in the audience that would like to speak on their behalf of each of the candidates. We will call you forward and have you sit and speak to the mike after you identify yourself. So thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

CHUCK HUBKA: There you go, Senator. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Good afternoon, Dr. Sawyer. [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD SAWYER: Good afternoon. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Good afternoon, sir. This is Rick Kolowski, Senator Kolowski, and I'm from District 31, and I'm cochair of the Education Committee. Senator Sullivan is presenting in another room at this time. And we're glad to welcome you to our meeting this afternoon and thank you for joining us. We're looking forward to this opportunity to get to know more about you, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD SAWYER: Well, thank you, Senator Kolowski, be glad to help you any way I can. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Well, thank you. And could you briefly tell us a little bit about your own background as it ties into the Technical Advisory Committee for Statewide Assessment, please. [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD SAWYER: (Exhibit 1) Yes, certainly. My training and background are in statistics. I became interested in statistics when I was an undergraduate at Rice University in Texas. And I then enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Iowa, 1969, and got a Ph.D. in 1973. Immediately after that, I was hired in the research area at the ACT testing company and I've been there ever since. Broadly speaking, most of my work at ACT has been related to promoting good use and interpretation of test scores. I've not really been involved in the development of test forms or the administration of forms, but I look at the results of the test scores and how they can be interpreted and used. Just an example, some of the work I did in the '70s and '80s was to document that the ACT scores didn't unfairly underpredict the success of minority students in college. At that time, there was a concern that somehow tests were biased in that respect and I did some work to show that wasn't the case. In the past ten years, I've worked on finding evidence that would suggest interventions that, if you could start them in the elementary grades,

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would improve the academic achievement of students when they graduate from high school. I did some work with Arkansas on that. Last summer, I retired from full-time service at ACT but I'm continuing to work there part time. And I'm now working on a project to estimate the benefit of students taking remedial courses in college. About, roughly speaking, a third of all first-year students in college take one or more remedial courses. Testing is a big area and my colleagues on the TAC bring expertise in areas that aren't my own. My contributions have been mostly relating...related to promoting a good interpretation and use of the Nebraska scores. Is that a sufficient description of my background? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes. Yes, thank you very much. How many years, Doctor, have you served on the...already served on the board, please? [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD SAWYER: Well, at least three years. I...you know, I think maybe four. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. And what have you enjoyed the most about serving on this particular committee, if you could tell us that, please? [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD SAWYER: Well, the colleagues on the committee, you know, I've been very impressed with their knowledge and skills. And I've learned things from working with them. I've enjoyed working with the staff members at the Department of Education. They've been very forthright in providing us the information we need to give them the advice. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Very good. Thank you. Questions from the committee, please? Seeing none at this time, is there anyone present that would like to step forward and speak on behalf of the candidate today? Please come forward. Seeing none, Dr. Sawyer, thank you very much. Any closing comments on your part, sir? [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD SAWYER: Well, I look forward to helping Nebraska again. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. Thank you for your volunteered time and I'm sure for the time that you'll be giving in the future as well. [CONFIRMATION]

RICHARD SAWYER: I will, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: We appreciate your taking the time to be with us today and we wish you a good day. [CONFIRMATION]

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RICHARD SAWYER: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: All set? [CONFIRMATION]

CHUCK HUBKA: Yep, you bet. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Chuck. [CONFIRMATION]

CHUCK HUBKA: Thanks. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Appreciate it very much. Next we'll move on to a reappointment, also, of Michelle Suarez, Board of Trustees for the Nebraska State Colleges. Michelle, welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Well, thank you. I assume this is where I sit. Is that correct? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: (Exhibit 1) Okay, very good. Well, Senator Kolowski and members of the Education Committee, I'm pleased to be here. My name is Michelle Suarez, and the last name is S-u-a-r-e-z, and just pleased to be with you today. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Would you tell us about your background, please, and describe that, please? [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Yes, I'm an elementary school principal just down the road here at Everett Elementary School. I've been there for about 5 years, been an elementary school principal for about 18 years, teacher before that, and I've been on the board since 2007 for the Nebraska State College System. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: All right. And what have been some of the highlights of your work? You've been seven years on the board? [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And that's an excellent length and thank you for your time and service. What have you enjoyed the most on the board? [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Well, it's been my pleasure. What really...what I first noted was just the outstanding quality of education that the Nebraska State College System colleges serve. Our students get an outstanding education at an affordable price, and I've been able to meet professors. I was so impressed that professors are in classrooms teaching and so really the colleges are teaching colleges and you have to be an excellent teacher to be successful in Nebraska state colleges. And I was impressed with the quality that I see happening. So I was able to meet students and then professors. And, of course, I enjoy working with the Nebraska State College System staff. And it's just a real synergy of effort on everyone's behalf and so it keeps our rural communities strong. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Very good. Thank you. Questions from the committee, please? Yes, Senator Cook. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you, Senator Kolowski. And thank you, Ms. Suarez, for coming today. [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR COOK: I have a question, if you could help the committee. [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Okay. Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR COOK: You are in a unique position in your role as an administrator in the elementary schools... [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR COOK: ...and in your role as a trustee for the state colleges to perhaps offer us one bit of advice about a policy direction to help prepare our students of the future to arrive at state college or community college... [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Right, right. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR COOK: ...or at the university prepared for success. If there's one thing you could identify from your perspectives, any of your perspectives, what might that be?
[CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Right. The one thing that I believe so strongly is that we have to start as early as possible. So I go back to early childhood education. And each step along the way, we have to provide the best possible education for students. Maybe it starts with parenting education but we have to be able to engage those parents to partner with any kind of educational institution to really support our kids. But it takes so much. For our most needy kids, it takes just tremendous partnership. And it has to be with the business community. It has to be with state agencies. It has to be with nonprofit agencies, churches, families. It takes all of us to really make that work. And so we all have to be on the same page to be able to get our kids where they need to go. That's what I would say: Start early. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR COOK: Okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Any other questions from our committee, please? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: I know you to be an excellent administrator.
[CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: And I just...I want to thank you for putting yourself forward for this state board. And I think your vision about being able to see things from early education through the college system is integral to the success of a lot of our state college systems. So thank you for doing this. [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Thank you. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Senator Pansing Brooks has joined us as well as Senator Morfeld on my left as well. Glad to have both of them. Anything else from the committee? Any other questions to ask? Michelle, thank you very much for your time today. [CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: Yes, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Good to have you here and thank you for your service.
[CONFIRMATION]

MICHELLE SUAREZ: You're welcome. My pleasure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Our next reappointment, Jess Zeiss, is that correct?
[CONFIRMATION]

STAN CARPENTER: Can I speak on her behalf? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Oh, yes, I'm sorry, Stan. [CONFIRMATION]

STAN CARPENTER: I'm sorry. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Please, anyone who would like to speak, please come forward. Stan.
[CONFIRMATION]

STAN CARPENTER: Thank you. Senator Kolowski, members of the committee, my name is Stan Carpenter, S-t-a-n C-a-r-p-e-n-t-e-r, and I'm chancellor of the Nebraska State College System. And I'm here to speak in strong support of Michelle Suarez being reappointed to our board. Michelle has served as the chair of the student affairs and marketing and enrollment committee. She has served as vice chair of the board. She has served as chair of the board. And in all those roles, she has been...provided me invaluable advice and information and knowledge that I wouldn't have had otherwise. She is informed. She knows what the issues are. She comes to the meetings prepared. And that's all a chancellor can ask for. So I would appreciate your continued support for Michelle to serve on our board. She's been a real asset. I'd be happy to answer any questions. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. Any questions at all? Thank you.
[CONFIRMATION]

STAN CARPENTER: Thank you, Senator. Sorry to interrupt. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: No, no problem. Thank you. Anyone else like to come forward and speak on Michelle's behalf? Thank you. Now, Jess Zeiss, please come forward and this is for the Board of Trustees in the Nebraska State Colleges as well. And thank you for being with us today.
[CONFIRMATION]

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JESS ZEISS: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Good to have you here and could you tell us about your background, please? [CONFIRMATION]

JESS ZEISS: (Exhibit 1) Thank you, Senator and members of the committee, for allowing me to be here today. My name is Jess Zeiss. I'm born and raised in northeast Nebraska. I'm now an investment banker in Omaha and have been doing that for about 18 years now. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And how long have you served on the board with the reappointment? [CONFIRMATION]

JESS ZEISS: Since January of last year. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: The last year. [CONFIRMATION]

JESS ZEISS: So I finished the term of trustee Ron (phonetically) Roskens...Bill Roskens, excuse me. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Bill Roskens? [CONFIRMATION]

JESS ZEISS: Yeah. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. What are...have been some of the highlights of your very fast year of work? [CONFIRMATION]

JESS ZEISS: You know, it's been a steep learning curve. But when you have people like Stan and Michelle and those people, it sure helps. I guess one of the biggest things I learned is that 40 percent of our students in the college system are Pell Grant recipients. As a businessman in Omaha, I see a number of these students come through our system looking for jobs. And the importance of keeping these kids in the state is obviously extremely important. And I see it every day when these...seeing these applications come through our company. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Any questions from our committee as a whole, please, for Mr. Zeiss? Jess, thank you very much... [CONFIRMATION]

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JESS ZEISS: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...for your day today and for your time and for your service thus far. Good luck in your future work. [CONFIRMATION]

JESS ZEISS: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. And would anyone like to speak for Mr. Zeiss, please? [CONFIRMATION]

STAN CARPENTER: Just like a bad penny, he keeps coming back. (Laughter)
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Good to have you. [CONFIRMATION]

STAN CARPENTER: Senator Kolowski and members of the Education Committee, my name is Stan Carpenter, S-t-a-n C-a-r-p-e-n-t-e-r, and I'm chancellor of the Nebraska State College System, and I'm here today to speak in strong support of the reappointment of Jess Zeiss. Jess has been with us for about a year and I can say to you that he has picked up the state college system in terms of information and knowledge and the way the workings of the board and so on and so forth as quickly as anyone I've ever seen on our board. He is prepared, as I said about Michelle. He reads his material. He comes. From the very first meeting he was engaged and engaged in the questions at hand and provided a good insight, a different kind of insight, as a man in the business world in Omaha, the kind of insight that we could benefit from. So he's been a real benefit for us in this past year and I would certainly look forward to working for him...with him if he were to get a full term. And I would ask you to give him serious consideration and reappoint him to the board or recommend his reappointment to the board. Hello, Senator Sullivan. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. Any questions? Thank you, sir. Appreciate it very much, Stan. [CONFIRMATION]

STAN CARPENTER: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. Our next appointment: Linda Poole, Technical Advisory Committee for Statewide Assessment. Welcome, Linda. Thank you very much.
[CONFIRMATION]

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LINDA POOLE: (Exhibit 1) Thank you, Senator Kolowski and Chairman...Senator Sullivan and the other members of the Education Committee. It's my pleasure to be here today.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Great to have you. And can you briefly outline your own background, please? [CONFIRMATION]

LINDA POOLE: Sure. I'm here as a teacher in the Papillion-La Vista School District. I've been a teacher in our public school system for 15 years. I taught for 5 years in Millard and then I took 15 years off to raise my children. And the last ten years, I've been back teaching 3rd grade in the Papillion-La Vista School Districts. Besides being a teacher, I also have some background in that I've served 19 years as a board member in the Millard Public Schools. I've also served for 16 years on the state School Boards Association and for 2 years at the board of directors on the National School Boards Association as well. So I have experiences both as a classroom teacher and as...from the policymaking perspective as well. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And how many years on this Statewide TAC? [CONFIRMATION]

LINDA POOLE: I've been on here since the inception of it. I can't think how far back that goes, but as long as Richard has been. So I think it...I was thinking it was more like seven years, but maybe it has just been four years, so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Thank you. Any questions for Ms. Poole, please?
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SCHNOOR: I just have a quick one. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SCHNOOR: You said you took 15 years off? Is...did I hear that right?
[CONFIRMATION]

LINDA POOLE: I did. And that's when I got on the Millard School Board, so, yes. (Laugh)
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SCHNOOR: Okay. Well, good for you. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: What have been some of your major impactful memories of working in this capacity on this board? [CONFIRMATION]

LINDA POOLE: You know, since I had the pleasure of being on it since the inception, it was just seeing the whole statewide assessment roll out. You know, we have had some difficulties along the way. A couple years ago or the last couple years, we've had some issues with the writing part of the assessment in terms of middle school and high school and the students having some difficulties not being able to see what they had written and some frustrations. So being a teacher in the classroom and a board member as well, I was able to bring those perspectives to the TAC and to let them know what our students were actually feeling. The TAC committee is made up of three psychometricians of which Richard Sawyer, who you heard from earlier, is one of them. And there's two others and then there's myself as a teacher. And then currently Frank Harwood is the superintendent that's on that committee. So having three psychometricians and then two local people, I think, is very important because we're able to bring the local perspective as well. So it's been exciting to be a part of it. We still have some challenges that are ahead of us. And as a classroom teacher, there are some things that I would like to possibly see...do a little bit different, and I'm hoping to be able to continue with that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Any questions, anyone else on the committee, please? Linda, I'd like to thank you also because of your being a practitioner and being on...serving in this particular capacity. It gives you a very rare view on what's happening and the impact on a classroom teacher in the classroom on a daily basis. And it adds a great deal for all of our benefit. Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

LINDA POOLE: Thank you, Senator. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. Anyone like to speak on behalf of Ms. Poole? Thank you. Welcome back, Senator. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Sorry, I was introducing a bill in another committee. But I'm here, Senator Kate Sullivan. We'll now move on to our next reappointment, Mr. Glenn Wilson, Jr., to the Board of Educational Lands and Funds. Welcome, Mr. Wilson. [CONFIRMATION]

GLENN WILSON JR.: Thank you, Chairman Sullivan and board. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Can you tell us a little bit about your background and your experience on the BELF board? [CONFIRMATION]

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GLENN WILSON JR.: (Exhibit 1) Yes, be glad to. I have a very broad and different experience in life than most. I have a wife that's been extremely supportive and I've had 17 different jobs. But most of them were...early on I've had two jobs in politics running the national Young Republicans and the state Republican Party in Nebraska. Prior to that, I was a salesman for Glidden and Masonite corporations. And then I became a partner with Milan Bish in Grand Island, Nebraska. And we were developing a significantly large project. And once we got that developed, we couldn't...we had a hard time finding builders that had the same perspective on the project as we did, so I became a builder. And for ten years, we built out 208 apartments and almost 200 houses and the project turned out to be very successful. But during that time I also worked with...well, Governor Reagan then as an advisor off and on and was appointed the president of Ginnie Mae which led me to a whole new career. After being there, I went to the FirstTier Bank in Omaha to turnaround...their mortgage company was hurting their ratings of the bank. They gave me three years and in 16 months turned that around. That changed my whole life, because after that I turned around three other mortgage companies and banks in Minnesota and one of the nation's largest law firms which was focused on bankruptcy and foreclosures. And in about a year and a half we were able to turn that around and sell it to a large corporation in California that continues that law firm today in Minnesota. But after that I retired from the US Bank. I was a consultant there for my last eight years of my career. And when I notified them that I thought that I had the project done and I was going to retire, the president of the bank called the governor-elect, Tim Pawlenty. And he called me the next day and I accepted a position, told him that, well, okay, I just retired but I'll do this for two years. You can find somebody else in that meantime to be the commissioner of commerce. And I did that for every day of those eight years. It was one of the most enjoyable jobs I ever had. It was the largest department in the state government as it covered energy and oil and telecommunications of all kinds. There was 22 different areas that we licensed, 320,000 people. And the most interesting part of that was to develop systems for as broad a department as there was. And so I stayed the whole time. I very, very much enjoyed it and retired. And because our kids are almost all in Nebraska, grandkids and great-grandkids are here, we moved back to Grand Island where we have recreational property in my previous business. My daughter still runs some of that.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And what's been your experience on the BELF board in terms of particular things that you may have worked on? [CONFIRMATION]

GLENN WILSON JR.: Well, a couple of observations that I'd like to mention: First of all, I think it's one of the most prudent organizations that I've ever witnessed. And I've been in government and private business. They do an outstanding job. They are very firm on doing the best they can to get the most out of the properties that we manage statewide on behalf of education, cut the budget and increased the rents all 3.5 years I've been there. And it's been their history. I think they do an outstanding job of...manage the field staff. Management over there does an

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outstanding job of getting the most out of the property but also have a historic perspective on...this property belongs to the state school system for over 100 years already and they want to maintain that ground and property in the highest value and best return possible. I think they do an outstanding job. I've been very pleased to be a member of that board and see the staff that they have over there that's dedicated. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: To that end, is the philosophy, in spite of the dramatic increase in land values that we've seen, that the fund continues to own land rather than sell it?
[CONFIRMATION]

GLENN WILSON JR.: Well, I'm a strong believer in real estate. And when I look at the rent increases, you only have to go back 15 years to match the total value of the land at that time. The rent today is equal to the value 15 years ago. I think it's one...I didn't know this before I joined the board that that land was set aside by our founding fathers. And the value of it today and the way that it has increased and the money that it provides for the education, I can't imagine a congress today that...that much foresight, that it's just been fabulous. Now, we are trading some ground that has lower return on investment for ground that has a higher return. And that's helped on some of the areas that were originally dedicated that will bring better return. But the returns have been going up in the 3.5 years I've been there, but historically at a rate of 10 to 12 percent. So I don't know historically where--and I've been in a lot of different business, as you already know--I don't know where you get consistent return of that kind on the money and have it go...and have as prudent an organization running it as the state does. I don't take any credit for that but it has historically been outstandingly...performance. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Wilson. Any other questions for him? Thank you for your testimony and for the information you gave us today. [CONFIRMATION]

GLENN WILSON JR.: Thank you, appreciate the opportunity to be here. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Um-hum, you bet. We will now move on to our next and final reappointment, Patricia Kircher from the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission. Welcome, Patricia. [CONFIRMATION]

PATRICIA KIRCHER: (Exhibit 1) Thank you very much. Thank you for having me here, Senator and committee. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Yes. Could you tell us a little bit about your background and your involvement on the commission? [CONFIRMATION]

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PATRICIA KIRCHER: I'd love to. I stepped into the position to fill out the term of Steve Seline at the end of last...I believe it was May of last year, so I've gotten my feet a little bit wet. But I come to you kind of in a circuitous route. I was born and raised in metropolitan New York, moved here 13 years ago as part of a transfer...or a job opportunity for my husband. My background is in sales and marketing. I was always in sales and marketing in New York in Manhattan until we moved here. When we moved, I have two children who were in elementary school at the time. And we had our third child. She is the only native Nebraskan (laughter) and we love it here. We'd not consider going back and always have been very involved in our school. We're part of the Millard School District. Our youngest has some physical and some speech and learning disabilities, so I have been her full-time advocate for the past 11 years and have worked well within the education department to get the best for her and, I hope, the best for other children as well. So that's...I come to you as a parent who recognizes the value of early intervention, special education, and I'm passionate about helping all kids regardless of how they learn, where they learn. And I've worked with Hope Center for Kids. I've worked with Completely KIDS. I've spent countless hours working with all of those organizations that truly help the kids who are in the most need. So that's my background. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Very good. And in your short term thus far on the commission, how have you seen that connection between NET and the education arena? [CONFIRMATION]

PATRICIA KIRCHER: Well, it's an interesting conglomeration there between the university and public TV and the state. And it's, I think, a very unique setup compared to other organizations around the country. So it's navigating the portion that is controlled by each one of those entities that has taken a little bit of time to figure how things go. But I think the thing that I'm most enthusiastic about is the Ready to Learn program and all of the stuff that this communication department brings to the state versus just regular PBS TV that most people think of. So it is an actionable, hands-on approach to getting these kids, that really need help, the help that they need. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Do you have any thoughts or goals in mind for the commission as a member? [CONFIRMATION]

PATRICIA KIRCHER: You know, I think as I navigate through this as well, I think there are so many places--and I can only speak of Omaha because that's where I'm from--there are so many organizations and schools and...that can really make use of the Ready to Learn program. And I think my personal goal would be to see how that is implemented within some of these organizations. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right. Very good. Any other questions for her? Well, thank you for being here today and for your service. [CONFIRMATION]

PATRICIA KIRCHER: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right. Is there anyone who would like to speak to this appointment? Then that closes the appointments for today and closes the public hearing. Thank you for all in attendance. [CONFIRMATION]