

Transcript Prepared By the Clerk of the Legislature
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Health and Human Services Committee
April 08, 2010

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Health and Human Services met at 1:15 p.m. on Thursday, April 8, 2010, in Room 1510 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on a gubernatorial appointment. Senators present: Tim Gay, Chairperson; Dave Pankonin, Vice Chairperson; Kathy Campbell; Mike Gloor; Gwen Howard; Arnie Stuthman; and Norman Wallman. Senators absent: None.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Okay, go ahead and just hear a public hearing on...is it Muelleman?
[CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: Muelleman. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Muelleman, Muelleman. Okay, appointee for the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. You want to go ahead and introduce yourself?
[CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: Okay. My name is Diane Muelleman. I have a hearing loss, born with a hearing loss, a bilateral sensorineural hearing loss. And I have four other siblings, and three of them have hearing loss. And I have four children, and three of them have a hearing loss, so I am very familiar with the lifestyle of people with hearing loss. And I'm excited to be asked to be on this committee now because we have a new director who's pretty excited about helping...doing more for the people with a hearing loss. We've done a lot...they've done a lot for the deaf community, the deaf culture, the deaf population, not as much for those of us with a hearing loss. And Dr. Cihlar (phonetic) is anxious to get some things done, and so I'm anxious to be a part of it. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: What kind of things are they talking about now as far as...?
[CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: Well, for one thing, I also...I am currently part of the Omaha chapter of the Hearing Loss Association, and we'd like to see more education in the community. And there is...I think people are becoming more familiar with people in the deaf culture, but they're not really familiar with people who have a hearing loss. And we need to get the education out there that those who have a hearing loss, when they go to the audiologist, the audiologist should be informing every one of them the advantages of having a t-coil on your hearing aid because we would like to see more public places having a loop system. Are you familiar with that? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: No. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: A loop system is a wiring that's put into a room, so that anyone

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who has a t-coil can flip that switch on their hearing aid and whoever is talking through a microphone, their voice will be amplified in their ear. And so it's much easier if...you know, I could have left the door open if you had a loop system here because I would hear your voices straight into my hearing aid. But since I don't have a loop...you don't have a loop system here, I don't have it, my hearing aid is also amplifying the noise outside, so it makes me very hard to hear your voices. It's competing with the noises out there. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Right. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: So we want to make it easier for people with a hearing loss to hear in difficult situations. And a loop system is a big thing right now with the Hearing Loss Association. They're trying to get more people aware that it exists, and then if public places would start putting them in place, then consumers need to know they need t-coil on their hearing aid, and if you have an in-the-ear hearing aid like...you're not likely to have a t-coil. So then we have the problem of people who won't wear behind the ear because of the stigma attached to it, so we're trying to educate people that, you know, a hearing aid is just like wearing glasses. You know, and it doesn't mean you're deaf and dumb and, you know, we just want to be a part of society, and we need to hear just like some people need to see. We even... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Yeah, exactly. Senator Pankonin, you have a question.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR PANKONIN: Thank you, Senator Gay. Diane, I've already learned something right there that we didn't know, and that's why it's nice to have you take the time to come today. But if you would explain to me a little more about, you know, I guess, and I don't mean to be questions that seem uninformed, but deaf, I assume, is no hearing, hearing loss there's obviously different degrees of hearing loss or...
[CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: There are different degrees of hearing loss, and I guess to back up, I usually say, capital D deaf. I don't know if that offends anyone here, I won't use that term. But we refer to capital D deaf as those who are in the deaf culture. They sign only. And it's a whole different culture if you haven't met anyone yet from the deaf culture... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR PANKONIN: We have on this committee. We have...we have people on yeah, regularly. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: And then there are...some people call me deaf, not capital D deaf because I know a little bit of sign, but I don't use it consistently unless I'm with someone who signs. But...so I am considered deaf simply because I was born with some hearing

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loss. If I don't have my hearing aids on, I don't hear very well. I have to wear both of them (laugh). And so, I am considered deaf but with a little d. And then, because I wear my hearing aids, I call myself hearing impaired, but there are people in...with a hearing loss that don't want to be called impaired because then they think you're saying they need fixed. But for me, it makes more sense. I just got my master's a couple of years ago in special ed, an emphasis...concentration was on the deaf and hard of hearing, and I began to understand that hearing loss is really like an acoustic filter. We maybe don't hear...we've lost some of the sounds, but some of them are just smeared or distorted. You know, it's not totally a hearing loss or else we could just turn up the volume, but it's an acoustic thing (laugh). So we just want more people to understand that. You know, that's why we need things like the loop system, and we need audiologists to be honest about people needing the t-coil, and people who need hearing aids, we really want them to wear hearing aids because we come...we have become very aware of if...I'll back up. Do you know what part of the brain...or part of the (laugh) anatomy you use to listen? It's not our ears. It's our brain. And so, you know, for the capital D deaf culture, they listen with their brain and those of us with a hearing loss listen with our brain. But the deaf culture uses sign to get there, so they're using vision, and we're trying to use our ears in the oral world to get to our brain. And so if you have a hearing loss, and you want to keep it, you need hearing aids, and you need to keep them in consistently in order to keep those neurological pathways from your ear to your brain functioning. And so it's just simple little things like that we're trying to get out to people. My real love is with early childhood. We need to get those babies in the first three years because if they don't keep the neurological pathways, they lose them. And then for the adults, as we get older, we're losing our hearing. If we want to keep those neurological pathways, we need to get hearing aids in our ears...just trying to educate people. There is a difference between those with a hearing loss and those (inaudible) deaf. Does that kind of explain it? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR PANKONIN: Sure, it does. And...and thank you. Obviously, it's obvious you have passion and enthusiasm for this, and so we're just appreciative that you're willing to serve. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Exactly. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: Yeah. Great. Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Is there any other questions? Senator Howard. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you. Thank you, Chairman Gay. I just want to say thank you for coming down here, for taking your time and driving from Omaha to Lincoln, and that really matters because that really shows that you are sincerely interested in doing this, so thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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DIANE MUELLEMAN: Absolutely. You're welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: And, Diane, what we're going to...what we'll do, we just...we had all your information here, and we looked at it. But just also, the reason we want people to come down is if you ever need anything from different senators, just approach them,... [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: ...because a lot of times you're going to put a lot of hard work into it, but don't feel that you can't call one of the committee members up and say here's what's going on, because we do like to hear from people. So a little bit to get that barrier down, and if you need anything, call. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: Okay, not a problem (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: And then what we'll do...we'll vote on this here quick too, because we're getting ready to be done for the year, and then you could get started fairly quickly here once we get this confirmed and through the whole process, and we'll get it on the agenda, probably in the next couple of days so. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Okay, all right. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR PANKONIN: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Thank you very much for coming. Appreciate it. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: You're welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

DIANE MUELLEMAN: You're welcome. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: All right. We're going to go into an executive... [CONFIRMATION]