

Transcript Prepared By the Clerk of the Legislature  
Transcriber's Office

Natural Resources Committee  
March 05, 2009

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[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Natural Resources met at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 5, 2009, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on gubernatorial appointments. Senators present: Chris Langemeier, Chairperson; Annette Dubas, Vice Chairperson; Tom Carlson; Beau McCoy; and Ken Schilz. Senators absent: Tanya Cook; Deb Fischer; and Ken Haar. []

SENATOR LANGEMEIER: Welcome to the Natural Resources Committee. I'd like to welcome those here to testify within the audience and those that are watching on closed-caption television and those that are watching on our new live Internet feed as we strive to be more open to the public and allow more people to participate. My name is Chris Langemeier. I'm the Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee. I will introduce those that are here with us. We have, starting at my far right or your left, we have the committee clerk, Barb Koehlmoos; Senator Tanya Cook will be joining us later; we have Senator Tom Carlson from Holdrege, Nebraska, District 38; Senator Fischer will not be with us today. To my far left we have Senator Beau McCoy from the Elkhorn area, District 39 in Omaha; and we have Senator Ken Haar is introducing a bill in another committee, so I'm not sure if he will make it or not, from District 21; we have Senator Ken Schilz from District 47, Ogallala, Nebraska; and Senator Dubas who will be joining us as the Vice Chair of the committee. Laurie Lage is legal counsel for the committee. We do have one page. We won't work her too hard today with our agenda, Malinda Frevert from Omaha. And with that, we ask that you turn your cell phones off. This is pretty brief. We ask that you fill out one of the green sheets. I think you've already got that all taken care of. Mark does a good job of keeping you up on that. And with that, we'll open the first confirmation hearing with Barbara Batie, has been appointed to...reappointed, I should say, to the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board. And with that, we'll turn it over to you. [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA BATIE: (Exhibit 1) Okay. Well, I'm glad to be here as reappointee for another six-year term. The spelling of my name is Barbara, B-a-r-b-a-r-a and Batie, B-a-t-i-e. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LANGEMEIER: Very good. Is there anything you'd like to tell us about your appointment? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA BATIE: Just as I said, it will be a second six-year term for me. When I was first appointed to the Trust I thought, oh my, a six-year term. I've been on some other state committees for three or four years, and one of our veteran members, Vince Kramper from up at South Sioux, told me just wait, it will go fast. And he was very right. I have learned so much about our state and all of the wonderful environmental treasures that we have. And I'm excited for another six years to continue working preserving our natural legacy in Nebraska. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR LANGEMEIER: Very good. Are there any questions? Seeing...oh, Senator Carlson. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Senator Langemeier. Just give a little idea, in your six years what have you seen as some highlights and maybe some frustrations even of things that you deal with in the Trust? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA BATIE: Some of the highlights for me are some of the work that we are able to do with invasive...help other groups do, I guess we don't obviously do this ourselves, but help groups work with invasive species within the state. And I refer not only to the phragmites, the salt cedar or the purple loosestrife and the Russian olive, but also the eastern red cedar that's starting to invade the pasture lands, especially in the Loess Canyon southwest of Gothenburg and Brady and that area around North Platte. Those have been some very visible projects. Perhaps some of the less visible ones are habitat re-enhancement that you can view, say, in the Rainwater Basin. With the migration now this is the prime time for that. In fact, I enjoyed seeing a lot of Sandhill cranes on the way in this morning. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Thank you. And after this is over I'd like to show you something in my office for about ten minutes if I could. [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA BATIE: Is it your slide show, Senator? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA BATIE: I've seen it. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Have you? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA BATIE: Yes, I have. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: How recently? [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA BATIE: Within the last four months. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. I've got one picture I want to show you. [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA BATIE: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR LANGEMEIER: He typically has CDs he can hand out, (laughter) but unfortunately he must... [CONFIRMATION]

BARBARA BATIE: We have one of those, too. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LANGEMEIER: ...must be out of them. Are there any questions, other questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. Thank you for coming to the committee. That will conclude the first of our confirmation hearing reports. Oh, I'm sorry. I can see everybody here. Is there anyone that would like to talk in support? In opposition? Neutral? Now we conclude that hearing. Very good. Now we'll go onto the second confirmation hearing report offered, again, to the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board. And this is a reappointment as well. [CONFIRMATION]

MARK BROHMAN: No, it's a new appointment. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LANGEMEIER: No, this is a new appointment, excuse me, to Rodney Christen. Did I say that right? [CONFIRMATION]

RODNEY CHRISTEN: Yup. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LANGEMEIER: Has been appointed from...to serve a term from March 11, 2009, until March 10, 2015. Welcome to the committee and tell us a little bit about yourself. [CONFIRMATION]

RODNEY CHRISTEN: (Exhibit 2) I'm Rodney Christen, R-o-d-n-e-y Christen, C-h-r-i-s-t-e-n, and I'm cow/calf producer from southeast Nebraska, Pawnee County, Steinauer area. I have a wife and three kids which, you know, we farm and we run mostly run cow/calf operation. We do some small row crop producing. But we've been actively involved in grassland groups and we have a Southeast Nebraska Grassland Association where we gather together, try to at least once a month, area producers, farmers, ranchers, and just to share ideas. And we've kind of been noted for our pasture walks. Once a month we try to go to people's farms and ranches and see what they're doing, what they're not doing. And my particular interest in this was people in our area have actually participated in some of the projects and programs that have been helped out through funding with Nebraska Environmental Trust, some as landowner incentive program. We work with Jarrin Kuipers out at Beatrice on some of that. And we've seen some very good things being done, and with the changing times and the economy and everything else I'm frankly a little concerned as far as how grassland may be treated in the future, and I guess that's why I'm sitting here as a producer to hopefully provide and incorporate some practical land management that we can certainly promote and protect our resources for our future generations. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LANGEMEIER: Very good. Are there any questions? Senator Carlson.

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[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Senator Langemeier. What are the biggest challenges on grassland? [CONFIRMATION]

RODNEY CHRISTEN: Of course, right now is the economics of it. (Laugh) I guess, you know, I'm a...I guess I'd say I'm a third generation producer and we have two daughters and a son. And, you know, I'm not sure what's going to happen down the road a ways, but I think we need to do some things to protect what we've got for that future generation. Some of the challenges right now, of course, is what I've seen locally where I'm at, I mean, \$7 corn probably turned a lot of ground black. And, you know, there's programs out there that are, you know, they cost share for row crop. But there's also programs that seed row crop back to grass, but there's nothing preventing or protecting the breaking of tall grass prairie which is...we're in kind of a unique area where we do have a lot of that original tall grass prairie yet. And when farmers seen \$7 corn, I think you probably seen some record acres of that being threatened possibly. So that's one of the biggest concerns right now. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Just in the grassland itself, though, you manage year by year, what are your challenges? [CONFIRMATION]

RODNEY CHRISTEN: Well, the cedar trees are certainly one of the biggest things. Of course, we don't feel we're so large that we can't cover it. I mean, we just physically maintain our pastures, you know, probably once, twice, maybe three times a year we cover it with four-wheelers and weed eaters taking care of cedar trees. But it's certainly an ongoing threat, particularly in southeast Nebraska is we're having the invasive of cereal espedesa. And that's probably our biggest threat right now. It's...Kansans have kind of warned us about the invasive species. And I belong to Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition, and certainly we've heard of the phragmites and salt cedar and some of those things. And we haven't seen...although I have been...we were at a weed management meeting a couple of weeks ago, and I guess we do have phragmites in our area as well, which I only became aware of that within the last couple of weeks. But we do have leafy spurge, but the cereal espedesa is a pretty big threat for us. We were down at Indian Caves and seen some of, you know, some of the management practices they're doing there. So I think monitoring is certainly important and preventing a problem before it gets too overwhelming is the key. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. The last question then, I'd like to take five minutes of your time and show you about seven pictures. Are you willing to do that? [CONFIRMATION]

RODNEY CHRISTEN: I'd love to do so. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Good. Then I'll vote for you. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

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RODNEY CHRISTEN: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

RODNEY CHRISTEN: You're welcome. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LANGEMEIER: That's borderline bribery (laughter) or I should say blackmail. Are there any other questions? Seeing none, that will let you off the hook. Is there anyone wishing to testify in support? Seeing none, anyone want to testify in neutral? Seeing none, anybody opposition? I should skip that one. Seeing none, very good. That will conclude our confirmation hearings. Thank you for coming down and sharing your thoughts with us. [CONFIRMATION]

RODNEY CHRISTEN: Thank you for your time. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LANGEMEIER: You bet. Thank you. With that, that concludes this activity for today. [CONFIRMATION]

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Chairperson

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Committee Clerk