

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
General Affairs Committee March 28, 2024
Rough Draft

LOWE: Welcome to the General Affairs Committee. My name is John Lowe, and I represent District 37. I am the Chair of this committee and will be conducting today's hearing. There-- today, we will be hearing 3 appointments, if you wish-- 2 live and 1 is a letter that we have. If you wish to testify in person on behalf of the appointments before us, I don't see a problem with that. Fill out the green sheets. Please begin your testimony by stating and spelling your full name for the record, which is very important for our Transcribers Office. The appointee will be given an opportunity to open, then we will hear from the proponents, opponents, or neutral testimony. Unless you guys are going to talk about each other, I don't think we have a problem. We ask you to listen very carefully and try not to be repetitive. We do use the light system in the General Affairs Committee. We will be giving 5 minutes to you guys to do your opening. Testifiers afforded-- the green light signifies your start. When the light changes to yellow, you have 1 minute remaining for you to conclude your remarks. When the red light comes on, your time is expired, and we will open up to the committee for any questions that they have-- may have before you. At this time, I'd like to encourage everyone to turn off their cell phones or electronic devices that make noise. For equip-- for electronics, so you may see members referencing their iPads, iPhones, or electronic devices. I can assure you they're just researching the matters before us. If you are prepared a statement, an exhibit, or anything you would like to have distributed to the committee, we ask that you provide 10 copies. So we'll-- if-- we'll have the senators introduce themselves at this time, starting at my far right with John Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: John Cavanaugh, District 9, midtown Omaha.

BREWER: Tom Brewer, District 43, 11 counties of western and central Nebraska.

HARDIN: Brian Hardin, District 48.

HOLDCROFT: Rick Holdcroft, District 36, west and south Sarpy County.

LOWE: Now, now if you need to leave, you can leave.

HOLDCROFT: Do we need to leave?

LOWE: I think there's a vote going on or something.

BREWER: I'm [INAUDIBLE].

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LOWE: So I will call up our first appointee, Don--

DON GERJEVIC: Gerjevic, sir.

LOWE: That's what I said.

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir.

LOWE: Yeah. If you would please pronounce and spell that for the Transcribers once you get up, that will be-- I didn't want to butcher your name.

DON GERJEVIC: I appreciate that, sir. That-- the pronunciation is 3, 3 syllables. It's Ger-je-vic, and is spelled G-e-r-j-e-v as in Victor, i-c. My first name is Don-- Donald.

LOWE: All right. Thank you, Don.

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir.

LOWE: And go ahead.

DON GERJEVIC: Yeah. I've-- first of all, I'd like to thank the committee for allowing me to come before you today. And I'm excited that I've, I've applied for, and I think this will be my last stop, for the appointment of-- to sit on the, the State Electrical Board. I've basically worked in the electrical field for really, all my life. In-- I grad-- or graduated from South High, and then I went to-- and that's in Omaha, Nebraska. And my address, just for the record, is 8716 South 163rd Street. But I, I immediately went to work for the University of Nebraska Medical Center as a utility operator. And that's operating boilers and all the accessory equipment that goes with that. High-voltage generators, working with 13,000 [INAUDIBLE] volt transmission lines, and basically the support structure, the back end, if you will, with-- for the University of Nebraska Medical Center. I worked with them until about 1997-- '96. And then I had the opportunity to go to and work for the Omaha Joint Apprenticeship Training Program, and I was a successful graduate. I went through the apprenticeship program with them, and I was successful at that. And I stayed with that construction end of it until about 2012. In 2012, I actually joined the Omaha Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, training-- I'm sorry. That was 1990-- 1995 to 2012, I was with the Omaha Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, and-- working with the apprentices and the journeyman electricians, and teaching them. And then in 19-- or 2012,

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I joined the city as a electrical inspector. I was then promoted in 2016 to the chief electrical inspector's position, which I still hold today. So I'm, I'm excited. I think that everyone should give back to whatever industry they're in. And so, I think if I'm allowed to move on and join the Electrical Board, I think I have something of value to add. And so I'm excited to do that. And if I'm allowed to do that, I, I plan to do my best. Thank you.

LOWE: Thank you. Thank you. So you jumped right into work right out of high school?

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir. Right out of high school. I did go to college part-time here and there-- Metro, UNO. I took some-- took a sociology class at, at UNO. And there-- I took a-- some math classes and trades-type classes at Metro Community College.

LOWE: Well, that, that boiler system at the University of Nebraska medical system is something else.

DON GERJEVIC: It's very, very-- yeah. It's a little bit antiquated, sir, but it's-- you got to know what you're doing.

LOWE: Yeah, yeah. I've taken tours of that.

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir.

LOWE: And very, very interesting.

DON GERJEVIC: They actually-- besides the main boiler room, they have boilers sprinkled out--

LOWE: Yeah.

DON GERJEVIC: --through the campus, and so-- yeah. I, I actually learned a lot there. Yes, sir.

LOWE: Crash course.

DON GERJEVIC: Crash course.

LOWE: Yeah. Are there any questions? Senator Brewer.

BREWER: Well, you're, you're more than qualified, so that's not an issue. But your last name is unique. Is that-- it's Orient, Orient from--

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DON GERJEVIC: It-- it's Yugoslavian, sir.

BREWER: Yugoslavian.

DON GERJEVIC: Croatian.

BREWER: Makes sense. It's, it's perfect.

DON GERJEVIC: Yeah. My dad is full-blooded, who's just turned 91.

BREWER: And did he share language with you?

DON GERJEVIC: A little bit. I, I kind of lost most of it as I grew older. I'm, I'm 66. And so-- but I could understand it better than I could speak it. My grandmother, his, his mom, whenever she would get mad at me-- and it seemed like it was all the time, she, she would go into the old, old school language.

BREWER: Oh, I hear it. I, I experienced the same thing in the Ukraine. I'm like a dog. I can hear and understand it, but I have a problem speaking it, so.

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir.

BREWER: Thank you.

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir.

LOWE: Thank you, Senator Brewer. Senator Holdcroft.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you, Chairman Lowe. And again, I, I echo Senator Brewer's comments. You're more than qualified. I'd just like-- and maybe Mr. Hunsberger is a better person to ask, but this is your initial appointment to the board?

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir.

HOLDCROFT: And how long is the term? Do you, do you know?

DON GERJEVIC: I, I want to say it's 4 years.

HOLDCROFT: Um-hum.

DON GERJEVIC: I think this gentleman behind me--

HOLDCROFT: Yeah. Yeah. And--

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LOWE: 6 years.

BREWER: 6?

DON GERJEVIC: 6.

HOLDCROFT: 6 years. And how many people on the board? Do you know?

DON GERJEVIC: 7.

HOLDCROFT: 7 people on the board.

DON GERJEVIC: I have that list, if you wish me to read it.

HOLDCROFT: No. Just curious. That's all. We get a lot of these. And I always like to learn about, you know, because we-- the Arts Council. How many do we have on the Arts Council?

LOWE: Truckload.

HOLDCROFT: Yes.

_____ : Truckload.

HOLDCROFT: Now, I know that Mr.-- and, and again, maybe Mr. Hunsberger is the right person to ask this, but I know there was an issue with us adopting the national standards for electrical. And I forget where we are with that process.

DON GERJEVIC: I, I think it's been approved, sir. I think it's awaiting the Governor's signature.

HOLDCROFT: OK.

DON GERJEVIC: I'm pretty sure that-- if I may?

HOLDCROFT: Sure.

DON GERJEVIC: You know, the building industry as a whole, the builders that actually build the residential-- especially the residential part of the, the building industry, they're concerned-- housing, as you well know, I'm sure, is already going up, up, up. And so, the builders, I think-- this is my opinion, in talking with the-- that, that niche that I'm involved with in Omaha. They're-- they don't want to keep increasing the costs of them having to pay for any upgrades or meeting the minimum standards of the code. And I understand that. And

for the most part, I agree with them. Some of-- if I may, some of the code is a little over the top. And so, you know, I liked-- for myself, I like to take a commonsense approach to any-- really anything that, that I'm doing. And I think we saddle the electrical contractors and electricians with a lot of rules and regulations already. And we keep doing that. But the GFI, which is a new requirement, which is, I guess, is being amended out, is-- makes sense to me. There's a, a portion of it that's the electrical disconnect outside of the 1 and 2-family homes, that is really-- the intent is to have it there for any first responders. Those guys don't-- they're not looking for anything like that. They're, they're going to pull the meter out of the, out of the house and they're going to kill it that way. But again, I like to bring a commonsense approach. But sir, I can't ask you a question, but thank you for letting me speak. I think it-- the only thing that it's-- other than the amendments, the, the government has to-- the Governor has to sign off on it. And then there's 90 days after that signature.

HOLDCROFT: OK. Thank you.

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir.

LOWE: All right. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you very much, Don.

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir.

LOWE: I appreciate you coming in today, and--

DON GERJEVIC: Thanks.

LOWE: --we'll, we'll let you know.

DON GERJEVIC: Yes, sir.

LOWE: OK. Thanks. It should be fairly short because we don't have much of the session left.

MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: Very good, sir. Thank you.

LOWE: Next up is Michael Hunsberger. Welcome.

MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: Thank you.

LOWE: Go ahead.

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MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: My full name is Michael Hunsberger, last name is H-u-n-s-b-e-r-g-e-r. And I echo Don's sentiments. Thank you, gentlemen, for meeting with us today. Briefly, my background is-- I was born, Ravenna, Nebraska, which is western-- kind of middle part of the state. Graduated from high school, and I went to tech school in Mid-Plains, out in North Platte, for building construction. And what got me into the electrical trade was actually working down here in Lincoln, pouring concrete. And an electrician grabbed me and said, why don't I get a job that pays better? And I said, where do I sign up? So I was lucky enough to get into the program down here-- an apprenticeship program. And I worked here-- I got in the program in '86, and I worked here till '93. And when I decided to start my family, I wanted to be back more in a rural area. So I moved to Custer County and went to work for Custer Public Power District. At that time, they had a wiring division that did inside-- what we call inside wiring, houses and stuff. And they did quite a bit of-- we did quite a bit of irrigation wiring, also. And I worked with Custer Public for a couple of years and decided there was-- at that time-- well, like Senator Brewer said, there was hardly any electricians out there. So I had done some moonlighting and I had enough interest. The contractor-- local contractors had encouraged me to go out on my own. And so I did, and started my business in 1993-- or '95 I'm sorry. And I've been a contractor in the Broken Bow/Custer County area since then. And when I say area, it's kind of broad. You don't stick in 1 county out there. You, you, you travel. So I've been fortunate enough to work in several areas where there's different inspectors. And I-- the reason I originally tried to get on this board, is when I got on, there was no representation on the State Electrical Board west of Seward. And I felt like maybe there should be a little more western representation. So, I had applied actually a couple of times, until I got accepted. And when I got on the board, it, it had some really good people on that board. About a year or 2 into the-- my time there, our, our director at that time, became ill and had to resign. And we were fortunate to pick up the new director. And we had some concerns on the direction that the division was going. There was a little bit of unhappiness, and the new director has done wonders. The morale is up. He's actively seeking younger inspectors. Because at the time, most of the inspectors were 60-plus. And labor is a shortage. I said, you know, we're going to run into a real problem here, eventually. So I think the division is going in the right direction. We've got an excellent director and, and a really good board. I personally try to keep in touch with not only the inside wiring part, but also the outside wiring-- or the-- what do you, what do you call-- the REA

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part. That's what we call it out there. You know, I try to keep my eye on what's going on there, how that's going to affect things. Again, I've been, you know, fairly blessed to have a good business and, and would like to do a second term here, and see how-- if there's any more I can accomplish.

LOWE: OK. I appreciate it. So is pulling wiring easier than pulling a [INAUDIBLE] board?

MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: Yes. Yes.

LOWE: I did plenty of that in my youth. Are there any questions for Mr. Hunsberger? Yes.

BREWER: Just more of a comment. Thanks for what you're doing, because you see these small towns-- when you start losing those key positions, like electrician, plumbers, you know, it just makes it almost impossible for these communities to grow. So, thanks

MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: We are for-- fortunate in our town, Mid-Plains Community College, College opened up a satellite. And they are actively pursuing the trades, not just electrical-- plumbing, mechanical, welding. They're actively pursuing and trying to get young kids in our area to look in those directions.

BREWER: They're doing that in Valentine, too. So, hats off to them for doing that.

MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: It-- it's a-- you can make a living.

LOWE: Yeah.

BREWER: Thank you.

LOWE: No. Thank you. And my father always said that if you went into a trade out of high school, by the time your next door neighbor who's in the same class as you went through college, you would be tripling what he could make when he came out of, out of college. So it's a, it's a good business.

MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: And I feel especially so, now, with the labor shortage, that skilled labor is at a premium.

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LOWE: Yeah. Yeah. Well, thank you. I think that ends your testimony for today. And we will be getting in touch with you and letting you know, but thank you.

MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: Thank you very much for your time.

LOWE: Yeah. I appreciate your time coming in today.

MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: Have a good day.

LOWE: Yeah. Have a, have a nice drive back. No snow today.

MICHAEL HUNSBERGER: No snow today.

BREWER: No snow today.

LOWE: All right. So our, our third is Jeanne Salerno. And she was out of the country, so that's why she could not be here.

BREWER: But we got a letter.

LOWE: But we got a letter.