

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
General Affairs Committee May 6, 2025

**HOLDCROFT:** Welcome to the General Affairs Committee. I am Senator Rick Holdcroft, representing Dis-- Legislative District 36, and I serve as the chair of the committee. The committee will take up the nominees in the order posted. This public hearing today is your opportunity to be part of the legislative process and to express your position on the proposed nominee before us. If you are planning to testify today, please fill out one of the green testifier sheets that are on the table at the back of the room. Be sure to print clearly and fill it out completely. Please move to the front row to be ready to testify. When it is your turn to, to come forward, give the testifier sheet to the page. Well, we don't have a page, so just give it to--

**BARB DORN:** No, we do. Jacob's here.

**HOLDCROFT:** Oh. [INAUDIBLE]. If you do not wish to testify but would like to indicate your position on a bill, there are also yellow sign-in sheets back on the table for each bill; these, these sheets will be included as an exhibit in the official hearing record. When you come up to testify, please speak clearly into the microphone. Tell us your name, and spell your first and last name to ensure we get an accurate record. We will begin each nominee hearing today with the nominee's opening statement, followed by proponents of the nominee, then opponents, and finally, anyone speaking in the neutral capacity. We will finish with-- or we will not finish, actually, with the nominee's statement. We will be using a three-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light comes on, you have one minute remaining, and the red light indicates you are finished. Questions from the committee may follow, which do not count against your time. Also, committee members may come and go during the hearing. This has nothing to do with the importance of the nominee being heard; it is just part of the process, as senators may have bill-- have-- well, other things to introduce in other committees. A few final items to facilitate today's hearing. If you have handouts or copies of your testimony, please bring up at least 12 copies and give them to the page. Props, charts, or other visual aids cannot be used, simply because they cannot be transcribed. Please silence or turn off your cell phones. Verbal outbursts or applause are not permitted in the hearing room; such behavior may be cause for you to be asked to leave the hearing. Finally, committee procedures for all committees state that written position comments on a bill or nominee to be included in the record must be submitted by 8 a.m. the day of the hearing. The only acceptable method of submission is via the Legislature's website at [nebraskalegislature.gov](http://nebraskalegislature.gov). Written position letters will be included

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in the official hearing record, but only those testifying in person before the committee will be including in the committee statement. I will now have the committee members with us today introduce themselves, starting with my left.

**STORM:** Good afternoon. Jared Storm, District 23; Saunders, Butler, Colfax County.

**ROUNTREE:** Good afternoon. Victor Rountree, LD3; Bellevue and Papillion.

**CLOUSE:** Good afternoon. Stan Clouse, District 37; Shelton, Gibbon, and Kearney.

**QUICK:** Dan Quick, District 35, Grand Island.

**DeKAY:** Barry DeKay, District 40, representing Holt, Knox, Cedar, Antelope, northern part of Dixon, northern part of Pierce Counties.

**ANDERSEN:** Good afternoon. Bob Andersen, representing District 49; northwest Sarpy County and Omaha.

**HOLDCROFT:** Also assisting the committee today, to my right is our committee research analyst substituting for Micah Chaffee--

**BRYSON BARTELS:** Bryon Bartels.

**HOLDCROFT:** Bryon Bartels. To my left is our committee clerk, Barb Dorn. Also, our page today is--

**JACOB JANSSEN:** Jacob Janssen.

**HOLDCROFT:** OK, Jacob, thanks for being here. Today's agenda is posted outside the hearing door. With that, we will start with Mr. J. Chris Stinson. Welcome to the General Affairs Committee.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Appreciate that. I was going to just kind of speak off-the-cuff, but since I got here earlier, I wrote some stuff down. So, I don't have 12 copies, but--

**HOLDCROFT:** That's OK.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** [INAUDIBLE] welcome to make copies if you'd like. But my name is J-- John Christopher Stinson, C-h-r-i-s S-t-i-n-s-o-n. I'm from Grand Island. I know Senator Quick. And I'd like to thank you for the opportunity for speaking in front of this committee. I was appointed by Governor Pillen two years ago to fill out the term of

another individual, and have recently been reappointed by the governor. I thought I'd take a little time to just give a minute or two history of the Nebraska Racing and Gaming Commission. From the late 1870s until the early 1930s, gambling was prohibited in the state of Nebraska. A bill was passed to allow horse racing, and as a result, the Nebraska Racing and Gaming-- or excuse me, Nebraska Racing Commission was established in 1935 to oversee racing, with three commissioners. The number stayed at three until 2010 when it went to five, and we currently now have seven. The Nebraska Racing and Gaming Commission exists to make sure that rules are followed with regards to fair practices, and granting licenses that public trust, and to ensure due process in administrative proceedings. It is also tasked with promoting agriculture and horse racing. In other words, we are regulators, nothing more. I was appointed as an at-large commissioner for racing, so my focus is to try to look out for the interests of horsemen and horsewomen. For many years, they've been playing against a stacked deck, but now, with the advent of beautiful new casinos in Omaha, Lincoln, Columbus, and Grand Island-- we just opened ours about three weeks ago-- and down the road in Ogallala and South Sioux City. I hope that horse racing can make a comeback in this state. The thoroughbred foal crop has dropped from 51,000 in 1986 to 18,000 nationwide last year. I believe that that trend can and will be reversed in Nebraska if, with the help of-- help of casinos, the breeding of horses can make economic sense. I'm not naive; I don't expect us to get back to where we were in the 1980s. But at least now horsemen and horsewomen have, have got a shot, and that's really, you know-- without, without horse racing, there are, there are no casinos under current Nebraska law. In 2024, we raced 54 days in the state of Nebraska. This year, in 2025, we're going to race 65 days, and they've got a beautiful mile track in Columbus, beautiful seven-furlong track in, in Lincoln here. And we hope to get to 90-plus days within a couple of years; that's all going to depend upon Nebraska breeding. OK? You know, I, I was thinking a lot about how-- obviously, \$29 million in tax revenue this last year, and I think it's going to do nothing but get bigger. There's also another benefit. I mean, the counties are going to benefit, the cities are going to benefit, the state's going to benefit. But I think one benefit that people don't talk about too much is the fact that it provides something-- casinos and horse racing provide something that we're sorely lacking sometimes in the world today, and that's fun. It's fun to go to horse races, it's fun to go a casino. And I, for one, am glad that the people of the state of Nebraska going forward can be a part of that. Thanks for your time, and I'll answer any questions you might have.

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**HOLDCROFT:** Thank you, Mr. Stinson. Are there any questions from the committee? Yes, Senator Clouse.

**CLOUSE:** Thank you, Senator Holdcroft. When-- we've been kind of crazy down here, so I haven't made it over to GI for the horse races--

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Sure, sure.

**CLOUSE:** --and then we're done.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Yeah, they finished on Kentucky Derby day.

**CLOUSE:** So when you, when you extend it to 90 days, or as, as-- is yours allowed-- do they race in Columbus and Lincoln, or what's those [INAUDIBLE] look like?

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Yeah. Yeah. It used to be, back in the 80s, you know, they used to go Grand Island, Ak-Sar-Ben, Lincoln, then Columbus. We had a whole bunch more racing days. I'm-- I don't think we're ever going to get back to that level. But this year, we're gonna race 15 days; we're going to go to Lincoln for 15 days starting next week, and then we're going to go to Columbus for 15 days.

**CLOUSE:** OK.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** But what we're hoping to do is get more barns in Lincoln to be able to have more horses there. You can't race without the horses, and that's why I'm a big proponent of the-- increasing the foal size, the breeders in this state. I just hope that we can get-- it's got to make economic sensible, and it hasn't for a long, long time. Now, with casinos, I think it can. So, that's what we are trying to do. When I say 90 days, I'm thinking Grand Island's probably never going to run anymore; they've had a-- the worst days. I mean, they race in February. So, I'm hopeful that Lincoln and Columbus can, you know, pick up the slack. And maybe just a little bit more in Omaha, too, but they're kind of landlocked; there's not much room for them to do much else. And then, of course, Ogallala is going to be quarter horses, not thoroughbreds.

**CLOUSE:** So we're done this year, then?

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** We're done in Grand Island. We're going to go to Lincoln starting next week.

**CLOUSE:** [INAUDIBLE] OK.

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**J. CHRIS STINSON:** 15 days in Lincoln, then 15 days in Columbus, and that'll get us to our 65.

**CLOUSE:** OK. Thank you.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Sure. My pleasure.

**HOLDCROFT:** Senator Quick.

**QUICK:** Yeah. Yeah, thank you. And I just wanted to-- more of a comment, but I just wanted to thank you for your interest. And I know you advocate a lot for the horse breeders, and also for the racing.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Yeah.

**QUICK:** And, and so I really appreciate everything you're doing.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Well, I appreciate that. That's kind of my focus, yeah.

**HOLDCROFT:** Any other questions from the committee? Yes, Senator Rountree?

**ROUNTREE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes sir, and thank you so much for coming today.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Sure.

**ROUNTREE:** As you're saying that our breeders are going to have an opportunity now to expand, what, what are-- what processes do they already have in place?

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Well, back in the old days, back in the 70s and 80s, there were a number of breeding operations in the state of Nebraska. It became economic-- economically unfeasible to do that once, you know, horse-- or, the dog races got into Colum-- got into Omaha. It didn't-- it just kind of dried up. When Ak-Sar-Ben closed, things started on a downhill climb, and there just really wasn't any reason for them to breed horses. There was a big surge in 2020 when the bill was passed to enable gambling. But actually, in, like, 2022 and '23, when it kind of took a little longer than what maybe some people thought it might to get some casinos going, et cetera, et cetera, it tailed off. But in the last two years, there have been more studs brought into the state of Nebraska, and more mares and things like that. It's-- you know, it's not an overnight process [INAUDIBLE] because from the time a horse is foaled, you know, you're

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two-and-a-half, three years before you're ever going to hit the track, if you hit the track. But at least they can see a little light at the end of the tunnel, which I'm very happy for.

**ROUNTREE:** All right. Thank you so much.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** Sure, sure.

**HOLDCROFT:** Any other questions from-- yes, Senator DeKay.

**DeKAY:** With the opening of the casino and stuff down in Grand Island, did you see a resurgence or an uptick or enthus-- more enthusiasm at the tracks this year, or?

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** I'll say this. Fonner Park, it's, it's a unique track, and it is packed every Saturday, with or without the casino. But yeah, I was out there on Saturday, Kentucky Derby day, with my wife, and, and it-- the place was just packed. You wonder how many people really are out there just to kind of kick the tires a little bit, or how many are actually wagering on the horse races. Because, you know, we got to get the mutual handle up for the purses and things like that. I'm hopeful that we can get some, some-- we have gotten help, don't get me wrong, from the casinos. I just hope we can get more, and that's what we'll be working on down the road.

**HOLDCROFT:** OK, any other questions? OK. Thank you, Mr. Stinson.

**J. CHRIS STINSON:** My pleasure. Thank you.

**HOLDCROFT:** Are there any proponents for this nominee? Proponents? Any opponents for this nominees? Any neutral testifier? There were no online comments. With that, we'll move on to the next nominee, Mr. John Barrett for Racing and Gaming. Welcome.

**JOHN BARRETT:** Thank you, Senator. Good afternoon, Chairman Holdcroft, and members of the General Affairs Committee. My name is John Barrett-- it's J-o-h-n B-a-r-r-e-t-t, and I'm here today to respectfully request your support for my appointment to the Nebraska Racing and Gaming Commission. I want to thank Governor Pillen for his appointment, and I'm honored by the opportunity to serve. I'm excited to get started. I'm a lifelong Nebraskan, born and raised in Lincoln where I graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. After marrying my wife Denise, I moved to Omaha, where we've made our home and raised our kids. I currently serve as the vice president of government and regulatory affairs at Great Plains Communications, headquartered in Blair. In addition to my professional work in

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government affairs, I've had the privilege of serving on the Omaha Administrative Board of Appeals, and as a trustee on the Omaha Library Board. I have long supported Nebraska's horse racing industry. Growing up, I attended races at the state fairgrounds in Lincoln, and my wife has fond memories of visiting Ak-Sar-Ben racetrack with her family. I believe that a vibrant horse racing industry is vital to the state, and the introduction of casinos presents an opportunity to further strengthen it. When Nebraskans voted in 2020 to legalize gaming, they sent a clear message. It's now our responsibility to ensure that the industry is well-regulated, provides high-quality entertainment options, and generates meaningful revenue to support property tax relief. I recognize the commission's role in reg-- in regulating a growing and dynamic industry, and I believe every decision should be grounded in what's best for the people of Nebraska. I also understand the importance of, of ensuring that gaming in Nebraska is conducted responsibly. The commission plays a critical role in maintaining public trust by enforcing regulations that protect consumers, prevent problem gambling, and ensure a level playing field. This role matters deeply to me because it gives me a chance to the-- to serve the state I've called home my entire life, and to help shape a regulatory framework that supports both economic development and community well-being. Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

**HOLDCROFT:** Thank you, Mr. Barrett. Are there any questions from the committee? Yes, Senator Clouse.

**CLOUSE:** I was hesitant to ask this, John, but have you ever ridden a horse?

**JOHN BARRETT:** I have, I have a few times with my kids throughout the years.

**HOLDCROFT:** Any other questions? Thank you, Mr. Barrett. Appreciate it.

**JOHN BARRETT:** Thank you.

**HOLDCROFT:** Any proponents for this nominee? Any opponents? Neutral. OK. There were no online comments. With that, we'll move to our final nominee today. Mr. Tyler Ritz for Electric(al) Board.

**TYLER RITZ:** Hello. My name is Tyler Ritz, T-y-l-e-r R-i-t-z. I am the nominee for the Electrical Board. I've been an electrician for 20 years, been an inspector for the city of Kearney now for nearly eight years. I'm also a member of the IAEI, or the International Association

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of Electrical Inspectors, which has been rebranded to the Alliance of Electrical Industries, but-- been a member of that for four years now. I work with the state closely in the Kearney area. I guess I'm excited to possibly be a member of this board because ideally, the board is about safety, but also with housing costs going up, it's also finding a balance of meeting the intent of the code and then also not raising prices through the roof. So, if we can find a way to do both, I think that would be ideal, and that's one of the things that Kearney's been pushing for quite a bit, is trying to find a way to make our housing more affordable. So, keeping safety and affordability in mind, that's what I'm hoping to help with. Any questions?

**HOLDCROFT:** Are there any questions for the nominee? Yes, Senator Clouse.

**CLOUSE:** Yes. Thank you, Tyler, for doing this. Come-- one question, and from another committee, we talk about the '21-- was it the-- the latest revision of the electric code, and to the 2021 code.

**TYLER RITZ:** Yep. That's the--

**CLOUSE:** --and we haven't adopted that. But what's your thoughts on that?

**TYLER RITZ:** We have adopted the 2021 in part. We've basically gotten rid of a lot of the ground fault protection in basements, the outdoor service disconnect. A lot of that code was just written not clearly, and it's been hard to enforce, and there's a good reason we amended it out. Moving forward, like, towards the 2026, there's a lot of things that they're changing; I'm hoping it makes it a lot easier for people. Some of it was just not worded correctly in the code, so it's, it's a good thing we probably passed on it for now.

**CLOUSE:** Then how many housing inspections are-- do you do on a, you know, on the annual basis, do you think?

**TYLER RITZ:** Well, since I do building and electrical, a lot. I think we had, last year, 500-and-some permits. Which was lower; usually, we're closer to 600 or 700, but I've probably done at least a thousand inspections.

**CLOUSE:** Thank you, Tyler.

**HOLDCROFT:** Any other questions for Mr. Ritz? Yes, Senator Andersen.



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**ANDERSEN:** Thank you, Chair Holdcroft. Tyler, thank you for being here and for your willingness to serve. Question: in a different committee, there was discussions about using drones for doing inspections. Do you have any thoughts about that?

**TYLER RITZ:** It'd be interesting. Currently, we're-- I guess I am on the side of doing in-person inspections. It's a lot easier to actually see what's going on. The farther away you get from the project, the easier it is to miss things, or for people to hide things. And when you're looking at safety, people like to cut corners, and you want to make sure that you're catching the things that definitely need to be caught. So again, being on the site, I think, gives you a way better grasp of what's going on. I mean, you can sit there and fly around with a drone, but your vision is a lot smaller, or you have to get a lot closer, so. I don't know. It'd be interesting. Technology changes fast, and things are getting better, but as of right now, I don't-- I'm not so busy that I can't go to the job sites, I guess.

**ANDERSEN:** Thank you.

**HOLDCROFT:** Any other questions? Yes, Senator DeKay.

**DeKAY:** Yeah, thank you. Thank you for being here. So, when you say people are cutting corners, what are they doing? Spacing down receptacle boxes, or how-- or--

**TYLER RITZ:** The most common would probably be sizing their wiring incorrectly. I mean, when you're running service conductors for 200-and-some feet, it adds up really fast when you're talking \$3 to \$4 a foot. If you can drop that down to, like, \$2 a foot, a lot of people want to do that. But the farther you go, the more voltage drop there is, and then you have to actually upsize your wire, not go smaller. And then you get fires or possible damage to structures and things that we definitely don't want to do. Or, just poor craftsmanship sometimes, is a better way to say cutting corners. We're just making sure that they're not damaging the cables in the process of installing them.

**DeKAY:** Thank you.

**HOLDCROFT:** Any other questions? Thank you, Mr. Ritz. Were there any proponents for this nominee? Any opponents? Any neutral? OK. There were no online comments for this nominee. And with that, I think we have concluded our hearing on nominees for today. I would like to hold an executive session.