

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Health and Human Services Committee May 19, 2025

HARDIN: Welcome to the Health and Human Services Committee. I'm Senator Brian Hardin, representing Legislative District 48, and I serve as chair of the committee. Today, the committee will take up a gubernatorial appointment. And if you're a testifier, please fill out one of the green sheets on the table in the back of the room, print clearly, fill it out completely, and give it to the page. We don't have one of those today. So Glen-- Senator Meyer will be the page today. Go, go, Senator Meyer, go.

MEYER: I think I'm good.

RIEPE: Can I have a coffee?

HARDIN: That's right, send him out for water. So if you have anything to pass out to us, let us know. We'll, we'll definitely jump right in. Silence your phones and whatnot. Go ahead, everyone, introduce yourselves for the sake of the record. Starting with--

RIEPE: Merv Riepe, District 12, which is Omaha and Ralston.

MEYER: Glen Meyer, District 17: Dakota, Thurston, Wayne, and the southern part of Dixon County.

QUICK: Dan Quick, District 35, Grand Island.

HARDIN: And I'll just say, finally, committee procedures in all committees state that the written position comments on a bill 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. Written position letters will be included in the official hearing, but only those testifying in person before the committee will be included on the committee statement. And so now we have legal counsel. That doesn't help you out much, Senator Riepe, in terms of having to be in two places at once, but we will keep, we will keep going. And with that, Mr. Christensen, thank you for being with us today. He is here for the position of Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Would you please tell us about yourself?

ROY CHRISTENSEN: My name is Roy Christensen, R-o-y C-h-r-i-s-t-e-n-s-e-n. I am a private practice audiologist here in Lincoln. I've been practicing for 33 years. All but 5 of those years have been here in Lincoln. And so it means I'm closer to the end than the beginning, and what I'll tell you is when I was invited to be here for this appointment, the governor's office asked me to do this and I thought, OK, this is a good opportunity to maybe share with the state

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of Nebraska some of my expertise and knowledge. So here I am willing to serve.

HARDIN: Wonderful. Well, thank you. Questions for Mr. Christensen? How many years have you been in practice as an audiologist?

ROY CHRISTENSEN: 33 years.

HARDIN: 33 years.

ROY CHRISTENSEN: Um-hum.

HARDIN: Kind of-- have you kind of watched that Commission? Do you have a sense of what it needs? We promise not to tell anyone what you've been observing from afar, even though it will permanently be on the record.

ROY CHRISTENSEN: Well, the interesting thing is that two, two of the members of the Board right now are patients of mine.

HARDIN: Are they?

ROY CHRISTENSEN: Yes.

HARDIN: OK.

ROY CHRISTENSEN: But what I can say having observed this is it's in serious need of modernization.

HARDIN: OK. How so?

ROY CHRISTENSEN: Technology has moved so rapidly today that this can take the place of most-- this cell phone, for those who can't see my, my gesture there, it takes the place of almost all the technology that's been used in the past for telecommunications for severely hard of hearing and deaf individuals. So we need to embrace the technology. Again, in my experience, no matter what realm of interest you're looking at, government is always behind the power curve when it comes to the private sector.

HARDIN: Can you, can you give us a for instance of using that phone?

ROY CHRISTENSEN: For instance, TTYs.

HARDIN: OK.

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ROY CHRISTENSEN: You don't need that anymore. You can, you can use everything a TTY can do. It can be done easier on a cell phone.

HARDIN: Interesting.

ROY CHRISTENSEN: And, yeah, there, there, there are phones now that you can-- one person can talk and the other person can receive that printed out on their screen and vice versa.

HARDIN: OK. Senator Meyer.

MEYER: Thank you, Chair Hardin. I just got a couple questions. Number one, as part of being on the Commission, just what are your duties specifically with regard to the transactions that, that the committee does? And, also, are you seeing an increase in hearing issues, a decrease, an increase based on identifying issues earlier? Just, just kind of a general--

ROY CHRISTENSEN: I looked at the, the website for the Commission to get an idea what they're doing and as a commissioner I would be voting, but I think I would also be more-- I was-- having had some legislative experience myself, I would be more interested in proposing changes to the way, way things get done than just sitting back and just waiting to react to things coming to the Commission. In terms of what am I seeing over the last 33 years, because of technology, it used to be that people would say, oh, I don't want to wear hearing aids because people will think I'm old. And now you see younger people say, well, can this technology help me? And if the answer is yes, they embrace it. They, they don't care if people see them using something on their ears to help them hear better. So the acceptance of technology as a solution to life's difficulties is much better today than it was before. But on the other hand, you see-- I'll tell a quick story. I had a mother call me one time and say my son has got one of these huge sound systems in his car. The kind you hear coming down the street, boom, boom, boom. And she said he, he was, was told by the salesman that the, the sound was not as damaging because it only hit your ear drum once every-- you know, 400 times a second. OK? And my-- you know, I said, OK, yeah, that's, that's 400 times a second, as opposed to something that would hit you 6,000 times a second for a very high-pitched sound. So the question is, would you rather be hit upside the head 400 times a second by a brick or 6,000 times a second by a BB? Neither one of them do you any good. And so we, we have a lot of young folks who are damaging their hearing. So at one, one point in my career, I thought maybe I'll run out of hard of hearing people, but it's not going to happen, even after I'm long gone.

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HARDIN: So are you seeing, in general, a lot of younger people who, who are having issues along the lines of what you would typically see much older people?

ROY CHRISTENSEN: I'm not sure if I'm seeing younger people with more problems. I'm seeing younger people be more willing to come and address those problems. I'm sure which one it is. But I'm seeing more, more people who are still in the workforce coming to me for help.

HARDIN: OK. Interesting. Yes.

MEYER: This is a personal question. I have hearing aids and even on the floor of the Legislature, they don't work worth the darn and I spent a lot of money for them. Maybe you and I need to talk later.

ROY CHRISTENSEN: You got it. I can give you advice.

MEYER: But, but from the technology side, side of it, it's improved a great deal?

ROY CHRISTENSEN: Exceptional improvement.

MEYER: Is there any new changes coming, some, some, some new technology maybe that's coming?

ROY CHRISTENSEN: I'm wearing hearing aids not because I have a hearing problem because I love getting streaming messages from my phone, my phone conversations, but I can also do things-- like in this room earlier, I do this little button on an app, I just press that button, it does a 10-second sound sample of the environment, turns all of the background noise down and keeps voices turned up. It works. So--

MEYER: So I need to be better at technology?

ROY CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

MEYER: OK. Thank you.

ROY CHRISTENSEN: Yep.

HARDIN: Interesting. Any other questions? Seeing none, there are no proponents or no opponents in the room for the transcribers and so with no one in the neutral either and I think we have no one online, we appreciate your, your willingness to serve.

ROY CHRISTENSEN: You're welcome.

HARDIN: So thank you so much. This ends our hearing today, and we appreciate everyone's--