

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Natural Resources Committee March 20, 2025

BRANDT: Welcome to your Natural Resources Committee. I'm Senator Tom Brandt from Plymouth, and I represent the 30 Senate-- 32nd Legislative District: Fillmore, Thayer, Jefferson, Saline, and southwestern Lancaster Counties. The committee will take up the bills in the order posted. This public hearing is your opportunity to be a part of the legislative process and to express your position on the proposed legislation before us. If you're 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. When it is your turn to come forward to testify, give the testifier sheet to the page or to the committee clerk. 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 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. Spell your first and last name to ensure we get an accurate record. We will begin each bill hearing today with the introducer's opening statement, followed by proponents of the bill, then opponents, and finally by anyone speaking in the neutral capacity. We will finish with a closing statement by the introducer, if they wish to give one. We will be using a five-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 that you need to wrap up your final thought and stop. Questions from the committee may follow. Also, committee members may come and go during the hearing. This has nothing to do with the importance of the bills being heard; it is just part of the process, as senators may have bills 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. 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 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. Written position letters will be included in the official hearing record, but only those testifying in person before the committee will be included on the committee statement. I will now have the committee members with us today introduce themselves, starting on my left. On my left.

CLOUSE: That's me. Stan Clouse from Kearney.

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HUGHES: Jana Hughes; Seward, York, Polk, and a little bit of Butler County.

DeKAY: Barry DeKay representing District 40, which consists of Holt, Knox, Antelope, Cedar, northern part of Pierce, northern part of Dixon County.

RAYBOULD: Senator Jane Raybould, Legislative District 28, which is Lincoln.

JUAREZ: Margo Juarez, District 5 in south Omaha.

BRANDT: Also assisting the committee today, to my right is our legal counsel, Cyndi Lamm, and on my far left is our committee clerk, Sally Schultz. Our pages for the committee today are Emma Jones, a junior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. And a newbie today, we've got Joel, a junior political science major at UNL. With that, we will begin today's hearings with an appointment for Lisa Roskens, if she'd come forward. She's applying to Nebraska Game and Parks. The length of the term is February 13, 2025 to January 15, 2029, a four-year term representing District 3 of northeast Nebraska. Political affiliation is an independent. She is an attorney and CEO of Burlington Capital. And background, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has nine members representing eight districts and one at-large, which is statewide, and they serve alternating, alternating four-year terms. And with that, welcome to your Natural Resources Committee.

LISA ROSKENS: Thank you very much. Thank you all for the opportunity to talk to you today. I guess since my name is on all sorts of pieces of paper, I probably won't spell it for you, but--

BRANDT: No, you need to--

LISA ROSKENS: It is spelled--

BRANDT: I need you to-- you need to spell it, yeah.

LISA ROSKENS: Do I need to spell it? OK. It's L-i-s-a R-o-s-e-k-n-s, so you got it right. It's kind of a trick spelling with that little "e" in there. Anyway, thank you for the opportunity. I am excited to be asked to serve on the commission. It's something-- from my perspective, it's very personal because it comes-- the interest that I have in it comes from three very important people in my life. I grew up very fortunately on an acreage outside of town, so I was able to wander the forests and learn all the plants that my mother taught me. And so, she's person number one because everywhere we would wander,

she would tell me what was going on in the natural world around me, and it gave me an appreciation for all sorts of things, not the least of which which mushrooms to eat and which ones not to, but all the ways that Mother Nature kind of works to take care of all of the creatures within its ambit, and just gave me an appreciation I didn't realize until later in life not everybody had the opportunity to have. Second, I would spend my weekends fishing with my father, so I learned the art of catching my own meal, and sort of there's an empowerment to that, right? There's a sense of independence and, and confidence that comes with knowing where your food comes from and, and how to do things like that, and getting your hands very dirty. But the, the third component, or the third person is later in life, when I moved back to Nebraska after a prodigal period in the western part of our country, I met Gene Mahoney, and he became a lifelong mentor of mine until his passing. And it's impossible, as you would know, to meet Gene without getting a tour of pretty much every park within driving distance that he could whisk me away to while I was preparing for the bar exam. So anyway, it's, it's something that I felt, when I was asked, gave me the opportunity to sort of pay tribute to knowledge and education that I gained as a young person, and then as a younger person than I am now that I realize is very special. And there's a lot of young people and families in our world today who don't get to contact the natural world, who don't understand the resources that are out there, literally in the forest around the corner a few miles away from where they live. And I think that there's just a lot of benefit to be gained by trying to help the Game and Parks Commission give people more opportunities in, in a way that benefits families and, and young people, and then ultimately, our state by creating a sustainable system that benefits the community around it. So, I guess I'll stop babbling and let you ask me questions and then possibly get onto--

BRANDT: All right. Let's see what we've got for questions. Senator Raybould.

RAYBOULD: Thank you, Miss Rosken [SIC], and-- for your truly impressive resume. So, I'm so thrilled to hear that you are such a fan of Game and Parks. So, what can we do as a state, legislatures, or what would you like to see done to make our parks more accessible for more families and their children to, to explore nature in, in a wonderful way like you were exposed to?

LISA ROSKENS: You know, that's a wonderful question. Thank you. I appreciate your openness to wanting to help. And I guess what I would say is, "Can I come back in a year when I know more?" Because to be honest with you, I, I feel like, from an outsider's perspective, with

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a-- with the ignorance that I currently possess and hope not to possess for much more than maybe a couple of meetings, I feel like the parks get a, get a lot of support, both from, from the Legislature but also from the communities and through their foundation. And so, what I'd like to do is get more knowledgeable about where the gaps are; what, what is missing. I-- you know, I look at the, the opportunities to do things, and I have a lot of ideas, but until I have knowledge, those ideas may or may not be useful or relevant. But I, but I think the, the people on this committee-- obviously, you're doing what you're doing by being on this committee, and that's an important part of, of what we need. But I appreciate you letting me know. I won't be shy when the time comes to, to give you some input. Thank you.

RAYBOULD: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: Thank you. Just a couple quick questions on the lighter side. Where did you grow up at?

LISA ROSKENS: I grew up just north of Omaha, just outside the city limits. If-- put a, a pin in the map at 72nd Street north of 680.

DeKAY: OK. And then when your mom was identifying plants to you, I'm hoping the first plant she had you identify was poison ivy?

LISA ROSKENS: Poison ivy, and then we learned about nettles. And then more importantly, we learned about jewel weed, because you can break that open and put it on your nettles or poison ivy, and it's like aloe. So, those were three things she taught me before she turned me loose in the forest, so.

DeKAY: OK. Thank you.

LISA ROSKENS: Yes, thanks.

BRANDT: Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chairman Brandt. Thanks for coming in today.

LISA ROSKENS: Oh, thank you.

HUGHES: Sounds like it might have been a--

LISA ROSKENS: It had the potential to be an adventure.

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HUGHES: --little bit of an issue to get out of the neighborhood and whatnot, so.

LISA ROSKENS: I didn't want to call you guys at 11 and say I'm not coming. I'd rather get out in front of it. But turns out, we were able to get a little creative and dig me out, so. Thank you.

HUGHES: Well, I appreciate you doing that. I, I love your zest for this. I think you're a great fit. Just curious, what is your favorite State Park that you've been to? Or, or maybe top 2 or 3?

LISA ROSKENS: Well, I'd be remiss if I didn't say my favorite was Mahoney, right?

HUGHES: Well, I--

LISA ROSKENS: Because I think he'd probably--

HUGHES: I've been wondering about that, with your mentor, right?

LISA ROSKENS: --come down from on high and take me out. You know, and I'll be honest, part of the reason I have such an affinity for that is I was around before it, before it began. I remember it from when it was an idea--

HUGHES: Cool.

LISA ROSKENS: --and seeing what it's become, I think there's something about being, you know, connected to a project that gives you an affinity for it. And then, of course, you know, I live very close to, I think, the, the natural resource is the DeSoto-- up by DeSoto bend. But more importantly, in Fort Calhoun, we have the historical district that's up there that I do love taking people to, because I think people have lost track of how old our area is. But really, my, my true heart goes out to Fort Rob. I'm a horse person and I love going out there and riding, riding through the countryside and--

HUGHES: Fort Robinson is awesome.

LISA ROSKENS: --and-- yeah. It's probably-- like I said, if I, if I didn't have to worry about Gene up there, I would definitely say Fort Rob.

HUGHES: Thank you. I-- yeah. Thrilled you're here [INAUDIBLE].

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LISA ROSKENS: Thank you. I appreciate it. I'm very glad to have the opportunity.

BRANDT: Senator Clouse.

CLOUSE: I was just shocked she didn't say Yanney Park.

LISA ROSKENS: Well, it's not part of the parks system, so I knew better than to cross over-- cross wires on whose is what. But yes, big heart for that one, for sure.

BRANDT: So, if you had a chance to attend any of the meetings?

LISA ROSKENS: I have not because the one-- this-- the one that's going-- well, the one that's going on right now, I'm here, but the-- I was actually supposed to be out of the country this week, so this is the only one that's happened since I was nominated. So, I actually haven't attended anybody-- any, but I've been talking. I talked with several of the commissioners. They're actually-- it was wonderful. I'm excited to join them because they were all so welcoming and have given me a lot of information and bigger documents than I expected to have to read this early in the process, but I'm looking forward to it.

BRANDT: So, looking at your background, you're a world traveler, you've seen a lot of things; here, there, and everywhere. Who has the best-- who has the best parks? Wait a second. Man down. Are we all right?

CONRAD: Very clumsy. Only my pride is hurt.

BRANDT: You've, you've not had a good day so far.

CONRAD: [INAUDIBLE] a bad day.

BRANDT: Yeah. But I guess my question is who does it best out there? Is it the United States, another country or another state? If you had to model our Game and Parks, that is probably the best already, but how could we make it better?

LISA ROSKENS: You know, that's a really good question because so many-- so much of it's cultural, right? Not just outside of the United States, but across the United States. And so, different countries and different states do things differently. I mean, for example, you know, you can't go to Paris without bumping into a green space. They do a really wonderful job for a big city to make, you know, make parks and, and of course, their history very accessible. The one that I think

comes to mind for me that's sort of most analogous to, to what we're-- to what, what I'm thinking of, like I said, kind of ignorantly, out-of-the-box is I look at states that have a lot more space, right? I look at states like, you know, Wyoming; I look at sort of the rural parts of Germany; I look at some of these places that are outside the cities. It's easy to talk about-- for example, I spent a lot of time, ironically, in Kuwait City, and they built this huge park. Of course, they have volumes of cash that are hard to fathom. This huge park right through the middle of town, kind of rivals-- intended to rival Central Park. But that's not relevant necessarily to us because that's not who we are, right? We are-- we have so many wildlife areas and, and ability to contact the natural world without a long drive, without having to sort of fake it in the middle of the city. And so, I really look at places like the forests of Germany, or even-- I was in Estonia of all places, and they have this huge forest, and it's all very-- orchestrated is the wrong word, but they have places for mountain bikes, they have places for people, and they have places for nothing so that, that, that we're not invading the environment while we're trying to experience it. And so, I guess that's kind of, to me, an example of what I think is a natural balance that we're trying to strike. We're trying to get people in it without disrupting it. And, and, and I think we do, from the ones that I've been to, a pretty good job of that. But, but where-- what ideas-- and, and I will be more intentional as I'm wandering the world and-- to try to steal ideas. Usually, I've just been wandering the world; now I'll be wandering it with purpose.

BRANDT: OK. Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: Thank you. On a-- on-- I don't know if it'd be an equal plane or not, but what do you think is more important in a state park system in Nebraska: the accessibility or the amenities part that they offer?

LISA ROSKENS: You know, that's something where I, I want to-- I think data will help us a little bit, and I don't know that data. I'm very much somebody who likes to look and see what the people that are actually using something say, rather than what I say. That's something we do a lot in our company, is people run their worlds, I don't. So, I guess some of that is my ignorance at this point, having not focused on that. But I think it's kind of-- I think, I think it's a balance. And there might be a way-- you know, you think of like websites, there's all this free content, but then there's paid-for content, right? So, can you, can you take that concept and say, here's all these amenities that you get with your park pass, but then you want to, you want to-- because you don't want to make it so that people

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can't afford to come, but maybe some of these amenities that actually cost a lot more money to maintain and manage than a fishing pond-- which is amazing; I have one-- how much work they actually are is, is a little bit of an uptick. So, you can still come and experience, but you, you find a balance between that. Because you're right, that's going to be always the challenge.

DeKAY: Thank you.

BRANDT: Would you like to introduce yourself?

CONRAD: Hi, I'm Danielle Conrad from north Lincoln.

LISA ROSKENS: Hi.

CONRAD: Hi. Good to see you.

LISA ROSKENS: Nice to see you as well.

BRANDT: And I guess the last question I've got-- and this is, this is kind of an example of our Game and Parks. Because we're only 2 million people, we have a huge land base, we don't have a lot of resources, or at least state resources. I think we-- and I think the park next to Omaha has done a good job of leveraging public-private partnerships, but this public-private needs to travel further west.

LISA ROSKENS: Agreed.

BRANDT: And, and we don't have the people, probably not the amount of capital that you find in the eastern part of the state. So, you look at, like, the Cowboy Trail. I'm not a bike rider, but I, I-- you know, that would be the longest-- look at-- if we could develop that,--

LISA ROSKENS: Right.

BRANDT: --we'd have people from all over the world come to, to ride that. And right now, it's mainly sunflowers and cockleburs. I mean, it is. If you've driven along this-- no, no offense to western Nebraska, but we just haven't had the resources to make this happen. And I think with, with your financial background, how would you make something like that happen, not using state resources? How would you model that?

LISA ROSKENS: Well, she just-- no, I'm kidding. No, so I think you're right, and I think that just because there's not a lot of people somewhere doesn't mean you can't find parties interested in partnering. I mean, that's what philanthropy is all about. And a lot

of our typical "Omaha foundations" are starting to realize they've done about. I mean, there's always something else they can build or something else they can do, but they're starting to look their, their eyes more towards the horizon. I mean, some of it is the Yanney Park. A lot of them had never been west of this building, right? And then all of a sudden we drug them out to put something in a park in Kearney, and they came out and said, wow, a) this is beautiful part of the state; b) there's really interesting and fascinating things going on here, and so how can you-- so I think some of it is just asking. Like, I just don't think we've put a package together and thought about how to ask them in a meaningful way. And that's something, you know, I frankly have begged for the majority of my adult life, whether it's for non-for-profits or for business, so that's something I'm happy to be able to help with. But I also think they're-- if you're, if you're building an attraction like the Cowboy Trail, right? Why couldn't you start talking to bike manufacturers and people in that industry, and the Outdoor Channel, and organizations that would want to-- that would maybe not benefit from the volumes of people that are not living near it, but the volumes of people that would participate in it and start getting, getting stories written about it. You could get that need broadcast through the enthusiast angle rather than necessarily through Coke and Pepsi that want thousands of eyes on something. So, I think there's always a way to find an "in" with people. I mean, here's a random example. But when we were hosting the equestrian event in Omaha, I was trying to get ConAgra foods to sponsor it. And realistically, there wasn't a lot of connection between ConAgra Foods and horses and what we were doing, other than we were going to bring a lot of people from all over the world, and they wanted to do it through their foundation, not through their marketing arm. Well, their focus was on ending hunger, right? And I said, well, why don't you sponsor the finish markers? Put your big pin that says "hunger ends here" at the finish markers. And they loved it because it gave them something that was thematic to what they were trying to accomplish, and it was contextual with the event; it wasn't some thing from outer space. So, I think a lot of it is breaking these big projects down into components, and then figuring out where's the interest and where's the connection. And sometimes, you have to get a little wacky and creative to do that, but I think a lot of times people appreciate that.

BRANDT: All right. Thank you. Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: So, your last comment that you made triggered a thought in my head. I, I attended that equestrian event--

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LISA ROSKENS: Oh, good.

JUAREZ: --that you're talking about. It was at the arena in Omaha, right?

LISA ROSKENS: Right.

JUAREZ: So, I actually was there because I was an usher--

LISA ROSKENS: No way.

JUAREZ: For the event.

LISA ROSKENS: Oh, very cool.

JUAREZ: I used to work for them doing that. I actually started with College World Series and then ended up helping them over at the arena.

LISA ROSKENS: Oh, I love that.

JUAREZ: Do you think you could bring that event back to Nebraska?

LISA ROSKENS: Yes. We're work-- it's one of those things that's sort of like-- the women in the room will understand-- sort of like labor and delivery. You have to kind of wait long enough till you forgotten what it was like before you go back again. You kind of have a recovery period. But thank you. And it's funny, because I've gotten to be-- I got to know a lot of the ushers and security people that were in whatever, wherever I was bustling. And then I go to another event, so I've kind of become friends with, with several of the, the folks down there, so I'm sorry I didn't bump into you more often. But yeah, we would like to try to bring that back. It rotates around the world, and it's about a five-year cycle from when you apply to when you can get it, and it usually takes me about a year-and-a-half to recover from it. So, hopefully we'll be able to bring it back here in a few years.

JUAREZ: Yes. And one more thing I wanted to tell you too that I remember vividly was admiring the beautiful riding boots that I saw that those vendors have.

LISA ROSKENS: I know.

JUAREZ: They were to die for.

LISA ROSKENS: I know. They're so amazing. I just have black ones.

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JUAREZ: Oh, such quality. Bringing that back would be well appreciated.

LISA ROSKENS: Oh, good. You can buy-- and you know what? I actually have bought my little-- like, the little-- OK, we're getting into girl stuff. Little half boots. I buy them from the riding boot people because they're just as attractive and a lot less expensive, and they last longer. So, a little side thing; when we bring it back, you go shoe shopping.

BRANDT: OK. Any other questions? I see none. Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you for coming.

LISA ROSKENS: Thank you. I appreciate your time, everyone. Thank you very much.

RAYBOULD: Thank you.

BRANDT: I think this is going to go pretty fast. Any proponents? Any opponents?

JUAREZ: Have a good day. Thanks for coming.

BRANDT: Anyone in the neutral capacity?

CONRAD: Best nomination ever.

BRANDT: There were no online comments. And with that, we will close the hearing on Mis. Roskens [SIC], and we will be going into executive session. Can I have a motion?

CLOUSE: So moved.

RAYBOULD: Second.