

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee January 23, 2019

BREWER: [RECORDER MALFUNCTION] Committee. My name is Tom Brewer, I represent the 43rd District and I'm the Chair of the committee. We're gonna start today by doing some introductions. I'll start with my legal counsel, Dick Clark, to my right. To the left on the corner there is Julie Condon, she will be our official recorder. And with that said, Senator Blood is presenting so she'll be in as soon as she's done with her presenting. And Senator Lowe.

LOWE: State Senator John Lowe, District 37: Kearney, Gibbon, and Shelton.

HILGERS: Mike Hilgers, District 21: northwest Lincoln and Lancaster County.

La GRONE: Andrew La Grone, District 49: Gretna and northwest Sarpy County.

M. HANSEN: Matt Hansen, District 26: northeast Lincoln.

KOLOWSKI: Rick Kolowski, District 31 in southwest Omaha.

HUNT: I'm Megan Hunt from District 8 in midtown Omaha.

BREWER: And Senator La Grone will function as the Vice Chair. That said, we've got two pages to introduce: Preston and Kaci. A couple of technical things we need to run through here. I'd ask everyone to please mute your phones or other electronic devices. You're gonna see the senators going either to their laptops because we have gone to a-- I don't want to say a paper-free environment but we're trying to do what we can here and so their information is on the computers or in some cases they bring paper copies of the bills. So if they're looking at their phone it's probably to figure out whether or not they need to be at another committee hearing. So they'll come and go as needed to do their presentation, so I appreciate your patience on that. If you're planning to testify there is a white sheet, ask that you record, record that. And if you're also planning to testify that you also fill out a green sheet and present that to the page when you come forward. Today we only have two appointments so we shouldn't have any of that today. If you're going to pass out any materials please remember we need 12 copies. If you don't have them, let the pages know and they will secure copies. Those that are going to testify, we'd ask you to come to the front of the room so that when the time comes we'll, we'll know who's next up. We're not going to worry about the

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timeframe today because both of the appointments will have the time that they feel necessary to do their introduction and background. Today our first committee appointment will be for State Fire Marshal, Christopher Cantrell. With that, sir, please come forward. We just ask that you would state your full name and spell it for us for the record.

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: Yes, sir. [INAUDIBLE] these out. Would you like me to wait until you get a copy? The copy of my testimony that is being circulated right now?

BREWER: That's good. Go ahead. You're clear to go on.

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: All right. Good afternoon, Senator Brewer and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Christopher Cantrell, spelled C-h-r-i-s-t-o-p-h-e-r C-a-n-t-r-e-l-l, and I welcome the opportunity to share with you my perspective and experiences that will enable me to serve the state of Nebraska well as the State Fire Marshal. Strong leadership is one of the most important qualities in the head of any organization. My track record as a leader has prepared me to take on this role. As Fire Marshal, one of my primary goals will be to effectively lead this nearly 110-year-old agency, ensuring that it is prepared for modern business by fully embracing new technology and to implement efficiencies that modernize processes. Since my appointment as State Fire Marshal I have already been working hard to realize this goal. My first priority has been the merger of certain Nebraska Department of Labor safety programs under the Amusement Ride Act, Conveyance Safety Act, and Boiler Inspection Act into the State Fire Marshal agency. This has been introduced as LB301. The merger will allow our agency to begin exploring how we can create efficiencies in inspection activities, eliminate redundancy, and reduce the regulatory burdens on our citizens and job creators. Public safety is always a top priority for the State Fire Marshal agency but there is no reason we can't protect public safety efficiently to achieve-- to relieve some of the regulatory burden on Nebraska businesses. My career history in code enforcement has given me the skills to be a valuable safety resource to the state and her citizens. I have two decades of experience in performing enforcement activities at nuclear and coal-fired power plants, manufacturing facilities, repair firms, schools, hospitals, and many other organizations. Many of the code, codes with which I have experience are the same as have been adopted by the State Fire Marshal agency. I look forward to using my skills and code enforcement

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experience to support and enhance the agency's primary duties: helping to ensure public safety through fire and life safety inspections. One of my major duties of-- one of the major duties of the Fire Marshal agency is to support and train members of the volunteer community. My service in the U.S. Navy gave me experience as a shipboard firefighter, which taught me how to empathize with and relate to first responders, firefighters, and delegated authority jurisdictions. I have a passion for leading people through positive means. As a servant leader and change agent I was an early adopter of the Lean Six Sigma process at the Nebraska Department of Labor. This passion will drive me to move the State Fire Marshal agency towards our common goal of reduced fire-related deaths, increased operational efficiency, effective and positive relationships with the volunteer community, and providing outstanding customer service. I wish to conclude by assuring you that if confirmed as the Nebraska State Fire Marshal I will consider it my duty to carry out diligently the vision, mission, and principles of the State Fire Marshal agency. I will also support wholeheartedly the volunteer community of first responders in the state and all other agencies that help to ensure the safety of Nebraskans.

BREWER: Thank you. All right, at this time we'll open it up to questions. Are there any questions? Yes, Senator Hunt?

HUNT: Thank you so much for being here today and congratulations.

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: Thank you.

HUNT: What can you tell me about the challenges that we're currently facing in Nebraska as it relates to your position?

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: I believe one of the largest challenges we have is to increase the number of volunteers that are available to help serve our counties as first responders, EMTs, firefighters. And, you know, I believe over 92 percent of the state is served by the volunteer community. We've seen--

HUNT: Can you say that number again?

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: Ninety-two percent of the state is served by the volunteer community as the primary first responder force. So it is my priority to help those first responders, the volunteers to increase their numbers and to maintain steady enrollment in that community.

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HUNT: Thank you for coming here today and thanks for your willingness to continue to serve Nebraska.

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: Thank you very much.

BREWER: Any additional questions? Oh, sorry.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you, sir. Congratulations.

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: Thank you, sir.

KOLOWSKI: Great to see you today and I am sure this will all go very well. I wanted to ask you about from first responders comment that you made. In the preparation and in the facilities throughout the state, there is a lot of difficulty by many towns and villages to try to keep some health facilities open for emergency purposes or regular doctoral visits-- doctor visits or whatever else it might be. How does that weigh into the factor of your answer to the first question? Having enough locations throughout the state with diminishing numbers of people living in rural communities at this time?

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: Senator I'm not prepared to answer that question right now but I know that I could find that answer for you. If you'd like to contact my office, I can I can definitely give that to you here.

KOLOWSKI: Is that an issue though when you're looking at what you're, what you're talking about?

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: Of course if we, we have first responders respond to the scene and nowhere to take those, the injured--

KOLOWSKI: Sure.

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: --or the victims, that would be a huge concern for us.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you.

BREWER: Oh, Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you, Chairman. And thank you, Fire Marshal Cantrell. I appreciate your willingness to merger different organizations to make it run more efficiently as far as inspections. How-- do you think this

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will affect your agency and make it easier for those inspections to continue on?

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: I believe so. The State Fire Marshal agency is an agency that's focused on life safety and code enforcement and just public safety in general. The three programs we're talking about moving to the office of the State Fire Marshal under LB301 are agent-- are programs that I'm intimately familiar with. Those were programs that I ran for several years. So I believe that we could seamlessly, you know, there will be a little bit of growing pains, but I think we can seamlessly integrate those programs into the office of the State Fire Marshal. And that it just makes sense as a good fit for those programs.

LOWE: I appreciate it. Thank you.

BREWER: Additional questions? Why, I'll have to kind of echo some of the earlier comments and that, obviously coming from the district I have, our challenges, if you have an accident, say near Thedford, you either go to Valentine or you go to North Platte. Either way it's, it's, it's a long haul. And then it's the same thing as some of the small towns get smaller, that available pool of individuals that can be used for either volunteer firemen or for EMTs, becomes more and more a challenge. And then the EMT part of it of course there are more and more requirements that are making it almost impossible for someone who has a job to actually do that too. So those will be some of the burdens that you're going to have. I know you'll, you'll figure out some solutions and there's no easy solutions. But, you know, that's, that's what comes with the position. So--

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: Understood.

BREWER: --I'm excited that you're interested in taking on this challenge because I believe you will have a challenge. No additional questions? With that, thank you, sir, for your testimony, and we'll have some results here today for you.

CHRISTOPHER CANTRELL: Thank you very much, Chairman Brewer. Thank you, committee.

BREWER: OK. That concludes a hearing on the Nebraska State Fire Marshal, and now we'll swap out our indicators there and move to the next one. Oh, OK. Well, I've been corrected. We-- thought it was just

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with bills. Are there any proponents? Are there any-- oh. Oh, we got a proponent. Come on up.

TROY SHOEMAKER: Chairman Brewer, committee, my name is Troy Shoemaker, that's T-r-o-y S-h-o-e-m-a-k-e-r. I am the fire chief in Alliance, Nebraska, which is served by Senator Brewer. I'm also the president of the Nebraska Fire Chiefs Association this year. When the appointment of Chris came down from Governor Ricketts, seven fire service leaders in the state of Nebraska met with him very shortly after that came out because obviously we had an appointment of a position that is near and dear to our hearts that we take seriously because we work with this agency pretty much day to day. And we were unsure of the individual that was nominated by Governor Ricketts with the, with the experience in the fire service. We drove down to Lincoln, seven of us, met with him at the Department of Labor for a good probably an hour. We came out of that meeting wholeheartedly supporting the appointment of Chris as the Nebraska State Fire Marshal as one that we could work with and build lasting relationships with him and the agency. So as part as-- on behalf of the Nebraska Fire Chiefs Association, we wholeheartedly are in agreement with the appointment of Christopher Cantrell as the Nebraska State Fire Marshal.

BREWER: All right, thank you. Any questions? Thank you for making the trip from Alliance. All right, additional proponents? And I didn't mean to cut you off there. I'm, I'm new in the job. I'm just figuring it out. All right, are there any opponents? Any in the neutral? All right, with that said, we'll go ahead and swap out the sign. All right, next we will transition to the appointment of Jason Jackson to director of the Department of Administrative Services. Welcome.

JASON JACKSON: Thank you, sir.

BREWER: And you're free to start whenever you're ready. They will hand out papers as we go here.

JASON JACKSON: Thank you, sir. Good afternoon, Chairman Brewer and esteemed members of the Government Affairs Committee. My name is Jason Jackson, J-a-s-o-n J-a-c-k-s-o-n, and I appreciate your having given me an opportunity this afternoon to share with you my credentials to lead the Department of Administrative Services.

BREWER: Thank you.

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JASON JACKSON: I have spent the majority of my adult life in public service. After high school, I joined the military, attending the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, and earning my degree, my degree and my commission in 2002 as part of the first service academy class to graduate in wartime since the Vietnam era. And in 2003, I deployed in support of the War on Terrorism, participating in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. One of my primary responsibilities during the war effort was leading teams of sailors that were inspecting ships suspected of smuggling, both engaged in human trafficking as well as contraband smuggling in and out of Iraq. After the military I began my civilian career in the tech industry, first in facility management and ultimately in human resources. In those roles I was able to work with some of the most innovative teams in the country and had the opportunity to learn firsthand best practices for customer-driven innovation. I also learned firsthand best practices for talent planning, organizational design, rewards and recognition, and building management. Along the way, I also continued my education, earning my master's degree in political science and a law degree. Since 2016, my wife, Gina [PHONETIC], and our four young children have made Nebraska our home and we love it here. It's clear to us why Nebraska is considered the "good life." We love the opportunities that Nebraska can provide for our young children as we raise them and hope to see them prosper. And it's with great pride that we call Nebraska home. The move to Nebraska was accompanied by my own return to public service as the Governor's H.R. officer. As much as I enjoyed my time in the private sector and appreciated all I learned there, I did miss the unique sense of fulfillment that all of us get as public servants, knowing that the work we're doing is directly impacting our neighbors and our communities. It has been my pleasure to be able to take what I learned in the private sector and work with Governor Ricketts on running government more like a business. In my role with the Governor's Office, I've been particularly proud of our state's efforts to manage our work force size, bring organizational redesign to government with the merger of our Department of Transportation and the merger of our Department of Veterans Affairs, expand employment opportunities for military families and expand maternity leave benefits for expectant mothers, and ensure all of our cabinet agencies have updated-- up-to-date workplace harassment policies. I look forward to building upon these successes in my new role as director of administrative services. Under my leadership I intend to keep the department focused on three things. First is our values. Nebraskans have high

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expectations of their public servants and it's incumbent on us to hold ourselves to that high standard. We won't ever compromise on our values for operational expediency. Secondly is customer focus. DAS exists to serve our peer agencies and those that they serve. We need to have deep empathy for what other agencies experience and deliver outstanding service so that they can better serve the public and better serve their missions. And finally, saving taxpayer money. It's incumbent on us to be efficient in all that we do and help our peer agencies to do the same. I think my education and experience prepare me well to deliver on these goals. And I'm excited about the opportunity to lead our talented team at DAS and build upon this record of accomplishment. So thank you again for the opportunity present my credentials for your consideration, and I'd be happy to take any questions you may have.

BREWER: Thank you. Questions? Go ahead, Senator Hilgers.

HILGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Jackson, for being here. I appreciate the work you've done. One of the things that was referenced in Marshal Cantrell's testimony but it's also in here. I wonder if you could unpack a little bit some of the-- and speak to some of the, the opportunities but also some of the challenges of bringing some of these organizational efficiencies that you talked about. I think Marshal Cantrell referenced Lean Six Sigma. Some of those, government is a business but in terms of trying to do some of these organizational changes, can you talk about how the opportunities you've faced so far and some of the challenges maybe your time so far? Maybe what you see in DAS.

JASON JACKSON: Thank you for the question. So first, if I may just say a word about Chris, if it was appropriate for me to be a proponent of his up here, I would have done so. What an exciting example of internal mobility and development in our administration that we have somebody moving from an administrative level up to a cabinet level officer position. And as just an H.R. practitioner, that's something I take great pride in. So I'm really proud of him today and just wanted to say that. And he highlighted a great example of what this administration has made a focus. So we are trying to run government like a business. I've heard the Governor, the Governor say many times and we try to role model it. And I certainly try to lead with this perspective: Government is important. We serve a lot of people in need and it's important that it be done well. And that, that's core to what we do. You highlighted some of the things around organizational

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redesign which as an H.R. practitioner, to me, it's really fun because in private industry, particularly the second-- tech sector, organizational redesign is something that happens a lot. We're very agile about responding to customer problems and where the business is going. As you guys may appreciate in government, that happens very infrequently. We have agencies that have been roughly status quo in terms of their organizational footprint since, you know, legislation and, you know, empowered them decades ago. And so what we try to do with that is say, OK, let's work back from the point and need of the customer, affinitize like work, and then be as efficient as possible in terms of the back office support for those things. So our Fire Marshal and Division of Public Safety with Department of Labor is a great example of saying, hey, we have like work here. We have people focused on code enforcement, we have people focused on public safety. That's a program that's probably ill-suited for labor where they're focused on getting people back to work. So let's put it in an agency where it's more at home and they're working with people with similar skill sets and-- the similar supports. You also referenced our process improvement initiatives in Lean Six Sigma. That's something that's housed in DAS. We have our process improvement center of operational excellence which is focused on bringing basically process improvement to our basic-- our functions of government and trying to make those functions work as well as possible. And we've had a lot of successes. So a few I would like to highlight: ACCESSNebraska, ACCESSNebraska. Calling into our ACCESSNebraska call center for SNAP benefits. When this administration took office, it took over 40 minutes to get through on average. We've got those monthly calls times down to under five minutes. Similarly, SNAP applications; historically in prior administrations, they've taken up to 40 days for a family to apply and receive their SNAP benefits. We've got that down under 10. So these are great examples of where, hey, we're supporting people in need. It's important that government work really well. You can imagine a family that's eligible for SNAP benefits, they need to put food on their table and they're not able to do so because they're waiting for government for 40 days. To us that wasn't acceptable and we made that a focus area. So we're gonna keep doubling down on that. We see a lot of runway for continuous improvement and that'll be a continued focus area in our second term and under my leadership.

HILGERS: Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

JASON JACKSON: My pleasure.

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HILGERS: Thank you.

BREWER: OK. Additional questions? Yes, sir.

KOLOWSKI: Just the one, if I could. Mr. Jackson, congratulations.

JASON JACKSON: Thank you, sir.

KOLOWSKI: And I look forward to hearing more about you in the future with this work. I wanted to ask you, I know you're just getting into the work of the job and all that but the saving taxpayer money, can you give any, if you have some samples, a sample or two of what you might do to effect that and make that happen?

JASON JACKSON: Sure. So, you know, I guess I would take something that's been my responsibility in the Governor's Office has been to think strategically about work force planning. OK? So it had long been the practice here in state government that if somebody leaves to take another opportunity or they retire, we've kind of perpetuated the status quo by replacing that person with somebody who is doing similar work, rather than using all of those as an opportunity to evaluate strategically what are our future work force needs and how should we best be sizing our work force to meet those needs. We have a couple of competing things that are going on right now that are hitting the, the public sector. First is what's kind of commonly called the "silver tsunami." We have an aging work force, work force in the public sector, which will be very difficult to replace. And so we need to be thinking creatively about how we do that work so that we can be as efficient as possible in doing it. And the other thing is I think we have a shift in the public sector decades in the making away from, you know, 40, 50 years ago it might have been more transactional. Increasingly, we have a work force that might be more characterized as knowledge workers. And so they're higher skilled and we need work force practices that support that. And it always doesn't make sense to replace the same job with the same job. So I've been very proud of the fact that amid all the budget pressure that the state has been under for the past four years we've reduced our headcount and code agencies by about 500 positions, all without having conducted any layoffs, and we're delivering a service better. So that's, you know, no negative impact to people in terms of their careers or, you know, involuntary terminations. But rather just thinking strategically about as people

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leave the work force, what's the right strategy and footprint we need to deliver on that mission as effectively as possible going forward.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you.

JASON JACKSON: My pleasure.

BREWER: Additional questions? All right, with that said, thank you for your service to our country and to Nebraska. And thank you for your testimony.

JASON JACKSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Appreciate it.

BREWER: All right, with that said, that will conclude-- oh yes. Again, first day, we're figuring this out. All right, are there any proponents that wish to speak? Proponents? Any opponents? Any wishing to speak in the neutral position? All right, with that said, we're now going to close our hearing for today and we'll go into exec to discuss our issues of the day here. OK. Let's take a short break and then we'll come back.