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Transcriber's Office

Agriculture Committee
March 17, 2011

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Agriculture met at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 17, 2011, in Room 2102 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on gubernatorial appointments. Senators present: Tom Carlson, Chairperson; Norm Wallman, Vice Chairperson; Dave Bloomfield; Burke Harr; Russ Karpisek; and Tyson Larson. Senators absent: Lydia Brasch and Steve Lathrop.

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay, if I can have your attention. Welcome to the Agriculture Committee and we're going to be a little more informal today than we normally are. So I'm going to do things a little differently, and we'll start over here with Senator Bloomfield. Tell them where you're from, who you are, where you're from, and whatever else you want to tell them. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: Don't get too carried away here. We could be here all afternoon. (Laughter) Dave Bloomfield, I represent District 17 out of the north corner of the state, Dixon, Dakota, and Wayne County. I was appointed by the Governor to fill the position that Bob Giese resigned from. I was appointed in December. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: And I am Senator Burke Harr from Omaha and District 8. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR WALLMAN: Senator Norm Wallman, District 30, Cortland, Nebraska. I have Beatrice, Homestead National Monument, (laughter) and south part of Gage County. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR KARPISEK: Russ Karpisek from Wilber, and about it. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. And I'm Tom Carlson from Holdrege, District 38. To my right is Rick Leonard, our research analyst for the Ag Committee. To my left is Barb DeRiese, committee clerk, and our page is Kate DeLashmutt from Burwell, and so she will be helping out today however she can. I want to compliment Senator Harr on his nice green jacket today. (laughter) And Senator Larson, you need to introduce yourself, where you're from, and say whatever else you want to say to a certain extent. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LARSON: Senator Larson. I'm from O'Neill, Cedar, Knox, Pierce, Holt Counties. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. We're here for a confirmation hearing, but let's start with Joe and each one of you just tell us who you are and why you're here. [CONFIRMATION]

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JOSEPH McDERMOTT: My name is Joseph McDermott. I'm the executive director of the Nebraska State Fair. I'm here to support Lowell. [CONFIRMATION]

VAN NEIDIG: I'm Van Neidig from the State Fair Board from Battle Creek representing the Northeast District. [CONFIRMATION]

BILL ANGELL: I'm Bill Angell. I'm the new livestock superintendent for the Nebraska State Fair. I'm here to be way behind Lowell. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

LEE WEIDE: I'm Lee Weide with the Nebraska Cattlemen and I manage the Beef Pit restaurant at the State Fair. [CONFIRMATION]

PETE McClymont: Pete McClymont, Nebraska Cattlemen, here to support Lowell in his confirmation. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. So with that Lowell, you come forward, if you will. Take the chair there, and we are recording this today so I will ask you to tell us who you are, and spell your name for the record, and then tell us whatever you would like to about yourself and why we should confirm you. [CONFIRMATION]

LOWELL MINERT: Okay. Thank you. I'm Lowell Minert, L-o-w-e-l-l M-i-n-e-r-t. I'm from Dunning, Nebraska. Just give a brief history. I went to high school when the university run the high school at Curtis before it became a tech school. Graduated from there and came to UNL in ag college, animal science and range management. Also was in NROTC program. I got my commission in the Navy the same time I graduated. Served time in the military. Came back to the family ranch and started building a registered Angus operation. Started working with 4-H as a leader and being from one of the smallest populated counties, Blaine County, in the United States, not just Nebraska, our fair is very limited, but we did put on a rodeo and had a pretty good 4-H livestock deal. Today their livestock is almost nonexistent. The horse projects has pretty well taken that over in various forms in that area. But I've been on a larger scale, I think, than just a county. Of course, I can mention, our kids was in...our three children were in 4-H but they also was in the Junior Angus Program and that included on a national level where we showed in venues across the country from Dallas to Des Moines to Wichita to Kansas City. And so had an opportunity to observe a lot of those areas. And then I moved on to...was on...served on the board of the American Angus Association for six years. And there's 15 members on that board. We worked with a budget of about \$13 million. Also while I was on that I became involved in the Certified Angus Beef Program, which is an entity of the American Angus Association, and became chairman of that board, and we also had a budget of about \$13 million. And I think it's probably up around the \$20 million mark today because it's a very successful program. So in those ventures and also national conferences and tours I've had the opportunity to be across

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the country at some of the venues as...things like the Nebraska State Fair be involved with. For instance, two years ago we had a World Angus Forum in Calgary. We were up there during the Calgary Stampede. I saw some things that I really liked. The cleanliness and the volunteer force that they had of keeping that place clean. They had hand washing stations all over the grounds. You didn't have to go very far to find one. And up in that north country they use a lot of buildings of those, like, I call them canvas top buildings and they get along really good in the winter. Apparently, well, apparently there's getting to be more livestock facilities in this part of the world now with them, too, but those work very well for a lot of their facilities up there at the Calgary Stampede. Also that same year had the opportunity, my wife and I and another couple, through the support of the Nebraska Beef Council, represented Nebraska producers and assisted the Beef Council at the New York State Fair. And we spent two days there at the fair manning the booth, helping with cooking contests, and interacting with consumers from a producer level. We'd like to go back and do that again. The position I'm moving into is probably going to make that impossible because that fair was the same time as Nebraska State Fair, but it was a real nice experience. The booth that we had was in the corner of the dairy building. Of course, dairy is huge back in New York. And they had about five places where they served ice cream in a lot of lounge areas. So it was Grand Central Station for the State Fair. And they had between 50, and I guess they didn't, I guess, while I was there, but up to 100,000 a day come there to the fair. And so it was a great experience in representing the Nebraska Cattlemen. Couple of other things came to mind as I was driving down here. Back in the late '70s, I was president of the Nebraska Angus Association, and the State Fair and Ak-Sar-Ben both felt that there was a limited number of straight Angus, Hereford, so forth, that didn't warrant having a separate division in the market cattle division. Obviously, being a breed representative we didn't look kindly on that and worked with the State Fair Board, worked with the staff at the university and they came up with four divisions, a heavy weight steer, cross bred steer division, market heifer division, and a British breed division. We didn't get what we totally wanted but at least we kept a British breed division intact and so we had more numbers that way and everybody was happy. I'm pleased of the fact that that same structure is still in use today at the Nebraska State Fair. Also I was chairman of the grounds committee when we had the national junior show at Ak-Sar-Ben in 1990. And shows were struggling with what to use for bedding for cattle. Of course, the straw had been the norm for a long time and then they started trying to use sand. A different stock show tried to use the sand and there was major problems with that. And there just had been a little interest in grinding up trees for wood chips and bedding. Well, we pulled five semi-loads of chips into Ak-Sar-Ben, and Chairman Berg was head of Ak-Sar-Ben at the time. He didn't know what he was going to do with all this stuff when we got done, and the nursery in Omaha came and he shoved it out the door and they picked it all up and they were tickled to death to get it. And I think all major shows pretty much went to chips ever since. So that's just observation, some things I always had an interest in. I would hope that serving on the State Fair Board, I would be able to contribute. I feel that one of the areas that I have been able to contribute is, the gentleman who just

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introduced himself behind me, I was at the fair this year and a good friend of mine that's on the board, but it was Labor Day weekend and the things were going great, talking about what we needed to do in the future. We needed to get this livestock deal going, make better use of these facilities besides just State Fair time. And said we need to get a livestock person in here and I just happened to have lunch with Bill Angell about two weeks before that in Fort Collins. And I thought he might be available, so I give him a call. And in December I got a call from the State Fair Board member and said he'd taken the job. So I guess with that I'll... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. All right. Thank you for telling us a little bit about yourself. Any questions of Lowell of the committee? Senator Harr. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: I'm going to show my ignorance. But it says you're chairman of the Seedstock Council. What is Seedstock? [CONFIRMATION]

LOWELL MINERT: Seedstock is registered breeders. Cattle producers that register their cattle and we raise bulls for the commercial producer to turn out with their cows. And so we involve the registry and that's the reason I was involved with the American Angus Association, and then became a representative for that association. And that's...the Nebraska Cattlemen have a Seedstock Council, Cow-Calf Council, Farmer-Rancher Council, and the Feedlot Council also. They have a council structure and then they also have a committee structure. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: Okay. And then this is completely off topic, but we've had some discussions in here about branding country, counties where you brand and where you don't. What is your opinion on branding, or... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR BLOOMFIELD: Brand inspection? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: Yeah, brand inspectors. [CONFIRMATION]

LOWELL MINERT: Well, I think that there is a need for brand inspection. Obviously, a lot of us in cow country would like to see that the whole state was in a brand area, but that just...that line was set up years ago, and it's kind of a sacred line that it's pretty tough that they ever change it. There are concerns that the cattle don't get inspected when they go out of that line and, you know, maybe there's some recommendations down the road that could maybe help that. I know I'd seen one where maybe even if they could just inspect the sale barns because...that aren't in the brand area, possibly could help. And then the other thing is the financial side of it where the Nebraska Brand Committee has struggled a little bit, and of course they need to...I'm sure, really need more funds. And I think that's a stopgap thing of having a minimum charge. I felt they needed one for a long time because I felt pretty guilty of calling somebody out to inspect one or two bulls, the cost and expense of doing it. So some changes that way. As far as

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doing away with the inspection, I think we still need to have inspection, so.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HARR: Thank you. I appreciate it. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you. Any other questions? You...going to the World Angus Forum, of course being a part of the Calgary Stampede that's a big pull, I suppose, for that, but in what you've seen in facilities out here, what other potential do you see for use other than the State Fair, bringing groups in? [CONFIRMATION]

LOWELL MINERT: Well, there's a lot of potential in the junior breed show type thing that's in the summertime when the facilities wouldn't be needed for the State Fair. And I haven't had a chance to talk directly with Bill but I know that there's a lot of interest and, hopefully, he's even really got some things going in that area. And I think that can only expand. It will take a little time because a lot of those commitments are at least two years out. So, you know, you can't expect it all happen immediately. But even the Angus Association is the largest one of the group and the biggest concern I would have for the Angus doing, not saying that they might be able to do it, and Bill probably can answer this better, is rooms, because it is a big event in the Angus world. And it takes a lot of rooms to the point where quite a few years ago Lincoln didn't have enough rooms for us to do it. Now I'm sure they probably do, but there's other things. You know, I don't know about the rodeo area but that's a possibility. I just think we need to be...not only using the facilities, but help the community of Grand Island. A couple of weeks before I got nominated for this position, I ran into some past neighbors that live in Grand Island now that lived up in our community, and they mentioned the fact that their \$200,000-plus home, there's \$4,000 in taxes. And it kind of hit home to me. And so, Grand Island is paying pretty good and I guess I would like to see anything that we can do to help that area and that community along the way I think would be beneficial for them and for the state. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. I've got two other questions. You've been to the New York State Fair. How do our facilities compare? [CONFIRMATION]

LOWELL MINERT: Oh, the new facilities, it's no comparison, really. Their livestock was a lot...first of all, their livestock deal was somewhat more limited too. But, yeah, it's an old facility. They would be comparable to the facilities they had in Lincoln, I would say.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Last question. You graduated from Curtis in 1958?
[CONFIRMATION]

LOWELL MINERT: Right. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR CARLSON: Did you play football? [CONFIRMATION]

LOWELL MINERT: No, I didn't play football, I wrestled. I didn't play football.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Oh, okay. Well, then I didn't wrestle against you. I thought maybe we played football against one another, so. (Laughter) Any other questions of Lowell? Okay, hearing none, thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

LOWELL MINERT: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Now the next phase, do we have anybody that wants to testify as a proponent of the appointment of Lowell Minert? [CONFIRMATION]

JOSEPH McDERMOTT: Senator Carlson, members of the Ag Committee, my name is Joseph McDermott. That's J-o-s-e-p-h M-c-D-e-r-m-o-t-t, and I'm the executive director of the Nebraska State Fair. I am here to testify in support of Lowell. I think, as he testified, he has considerable knowledge, experience, and contacts in agriculture, specifically in livestock. And, you know, we have about 350,000 square feet of brand new livestock exhibition space in Grand Island. Obviously, we will put it to good use during the Nebraska State Fair. As a matter of fact, that is one area that we believe will grow significantly. Outside of the dates in the fair, as Lowell mentioned, we need to work with the city of Grand Island, work with Fonner Park to bring shows into those facilities. And that is happening now. I think somebody like Lowell with his contacts can maybe help speed that up. You know, we have recently lost three board members. Lowell is replacing one of those board members, and each one of those three had some significant knowledge and experience in the livestock world. And so, I am very pleased to see that Lowell is coming on to the board to help replace some of that knowledge. Another gentleman that's sitting in the room, Van Neidig, he rolls off the board here at the end of the year and again he has considerable knowledge. So as board members are leaving the board and coming back on, it's good to see that we're replacing them with qualified people and the type of people that we need. So that's all I have unless you have any questions. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Any questions of Mr. McDermott? Seeing none, thanks for testifying. [CONFIRMATION]

JOSEPH McDERMOTT: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Anyone else testifying as a proponent? [CONFIRMATION]

PETE McClymont: Good afternoon, Chairman Carlson and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Pete McClymont, P-e-t-e M-c-C-l-y-m-o-n-t. I'm

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vice president of legislative affairs for Nebraska Cattlemen and we're here, obviously, to support Mr. Minert's confirmation today. Lowell was being Lowell. He was extremely humble in talking about his background to have served on the Angus Association and then again with CAB. CAB, as Senator Karpisek probably knows, it's the most successful breed association that's promoted its end product and it has great pull through with restaurants. I think, if I'm not mistaken, Outback will feature things that have CAB logos. So, you know, for him to have been a part of that, that is a huge thing to be on that, and then during their time of growth, he was a part of that. Also, too, he's been very active in our association. As he said, he's chairman of our Seedstock Council which is our purebred council. And so...he also failed to mention that he's been on the local school board and has been president of it. So if you can referee people in their management of their education issues and their students, I think he's more than qualified to be on the State Fair Board. So it's the old adage, if you want to get something done, give the job to a person that's busy and got a full plate. And Mr. Minert is definitely one of those individuals, so we're here to offer our complete support in his confirmation to the State Fair Board. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Good. Any questions of Pete? Senator Larson.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LARSON: Will he be able to continue to serve on the Cattlemen Board?
[CONFIRMATION]

PETE McClymont: Absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR LARSON: All right. I didn't know. Otherwise, he might have been opposed...(laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Any other questions? Okay, thank you for your testimony.
[CONFIRMATION]

PETE McClymont: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Any other proponents of the appointment of Lowell Minert? Anyone in opposition to the appointment? And anyone want to testify in a neutral position? All right. Seeing none, that closes the confirmation hearing. Lowell, thank you for coming, and... [CONFIRMATION]

LOWELL MINERT: I failed to mention. I wanted to thank the committee for scheduling this to match when I had to be in Lincoln tomorrow. I sure appreciated it. Saved me another trip down here. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CARLSON: Oh, well, glad we could do that. These people are anxious to get

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out of here because we're on recess really, but. Well, we have closed the hearing. Now I've got to hold these people for a few minutes for Executive Session so thanks for coming and I'll ask you to leave. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]