

Transcript Prepared By the Clerk of the Legislature
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Judiciary Committee
April 02, 2014

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Judiciary met at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 2, 2014, in Room 1113 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on a gubernatorial appointment. Senators present: Brad Ashford, Chairperson; Steve Lathrop, Vice Chairperson; Al Davis; Amanda McGill; and Les Seiler. Senators absent: Ernie Chambers; Mark Christensen; and Colby Coash.

SENATOR ASHFORD: So Rosalyn, you are here to talk about the Board of Parole so why don't you get started. [CONFIRMATION]

ROSALYN COTTON: (Exhibits 1 and 2) Good afternoon, Chairperson Ashford and Senators. My name is Rosalyn Cotton, and I'm here this afternoon for confirmation. I have been a board member since August 1, 2005. At that time I was appointed to the Board of Parole by Governor Dave Heineman to fill a three-year term of former chairperson Ken Vampola. The appointment was effective until September 9, 2008, and I was reappointed by Governor Heineman to a full six-year term which is effective until September 9, 2014. On March 17, 2014, I was reappointed by Governor Heineman to a six-year term which will continue to September 9, 2020. Senators, I've taken 9.5 years as a board member very seriously. I have been involved in numerous offender reviews, hearings, revocation hearings, public speaking engagements, mentoring, and leadership programs. Based on the results from offender reviews and hearings is when decision-making process begins. Parole is to prepare, select, and assist offenders who, after a reasonable period of incarceration, could benefit from transition. In my opinion, parole is very important component of the criminal justice system because it can ensure public protection through conditions of parole and provisions of supervision services. This is accomplished by collaborating while working with parole administration, probation, treatment providers, social workers, and other sectors of the criminal justice system. As a result of hard work by the members of the Parole Board and parole administration, there are currently 1,188 parolees on parole. Also it is important to know that parole administrator Cathy Gibson-Beltz shares with the board success stories as parolees who are also working hard in their community. I believe that good parole supervision, high-tech programs such as electronic monitoring, CAM, SSAS, and graduate sanctions all ensures public protection which leads to success. This is why transition is so important, and to hear success stories is very rewarding. Senators, with that, I would like to close and ask for your support with my confirmation to this position. I can assure you that I will continue to research evidence-based practices that will assist with selecting the best candidate for making the best decision to parole offenders. I do believe that parole can make a difference for communities, families, and offenders. I'm honored to serve as a member of the Nebraska Board of Parole. Thank you, Senator Ashford and Senators. And at this time, I'll answer any questions. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ASHFORD: I don't see any. Let me...yeah, and you're doing a great job for

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us, Rosalyn, so... [CONFIRMATION]

ROSALYN COTTON: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ASHFORD: ...at least in my case, and I'm guessing everybody else that's here, you're not going to have any problem being confirmed. Let me ask you...let me...in fact, we're honored that you decided to do an additional period of time. Let me ask you a question though. You have in the last couple of years, by doing paper reviews and other things, you've been able to parole a number of...quite a significant number of offenders in the last, you know, 24, 36 months. And you've done that pretty successfully as I see it. Let's go to the front end a little bit. We have 80 percent of our inmates are in the institution for less than three years. Senator Seiler's bill, LB999...Senator Davis is here. Senator Seiler's bill, LB999, accomplishes a great deal because it allows us to deal with mental health issues at a separate facility, in this case the Hastings Building 7 Regional Center. But the other group, and that's I think a significant part of our reform, but what I want to be able to try to shore up this front end area where we have so many inmates getting out without parole because they're there for quite a short period of time. I guess I'll just ask you an open-ended question. Do you have any thoughts on how we might be able to, without paroling, but be able to help some of those shorter-term offenders reenter? Do you have any ideas on how that could be accomplished or what we should look at? [CONFIRMATION]

ROSALYN COTTON: I think one of the...and I'll only speak for myself, one of the big things that we could take a look at is if you have a reentry coordinator that can coordinate reentry and we can collaborate with parole administration and possibly probation, if we could do that on the front end I think we could be successful. When I talk about collaboration, I think it's very important to know that sometimes it's harder to get everything on the inside in many of the institutions. But if you establish some type of rapport with outside agencies and we have a reentry coordinator that can do that and work with other agencies, then we'd be able to do something like that with the short end, front end. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ASHFORD: Okay. What if we were to theoretically, hypothetically, if we were to...LB907, which is the reform, some of the reform measures that we're...before the Legislature talks about reentry. And we're or I am and the committee is looking at ways of enhancing this sort of reentry process. If we were to put a reentry program or reentry coordinator position in the Parole Board itself, how would that work? How would that reentry coordinator work with the department? How would that reentry coordinator work with parole administration? How would you...if we were to structure something like that, how would that work? Just give us a general, because obviously you haven't seen the proposal, but could you see that working if the Parole Board would have that responsibility? [CONFIRMATION]

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ROSALYN COTTON: And again, as one board member, I have a vision. And what I could see is once we develop what is needed, particularly for that position, I can see once again creating what we need to have so the offenders know what they have to do, create that position and then we can again go back and coordinate that. I think programming would be the biggest challenge, but I think it's something that we can coordinate and again offer to offenders on the front end so that they wouldn't have to basically do time in prison. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ASHFORD: So theoretically someone has a year and a half, effectively a year and a half sentence, our bill talks about an 80 percent review process. Theoretically that parole coordinator could work with the department to in effect come up with a plan that could include GPS or other kinds of...that you use already, correct, in the parole... [CONFIRMATION]

ROSALYN COTTON: That's correct. That's correct. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ASHFORD: And if you... [CONFIRMATION]

ROSALYN COTTON: I think important is to know that when you have programs, defined programs that can be utilized in the community, as long as you have somebody to coordinate all that... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ASHFORD: Right. [CONFIRMATION]

ROSALYN COTTON: ...on the front end, then we can just continue to collaborate with other agencies on the outside. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ASHFORD: Okay. I mean that's very powerful I think. Any questions of Rosalyn? Very impressive credentials so... [CONFIRMATION]

ROSALYN COTTON: Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ASHFORD: ...glad you decided to go forward again for some more of this. Well, this is...we're going to have all of these new reforms, and you're going to be in charge of getting them going. [CONFIRMATION]

ROSALYN COTTON: Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you. Does anyone else wish to talk about this nomination? All right. The nomination hearing is closed. [CONFIRMATION]