

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee January 30, 2020

BREWER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Tom Brewer. I am the Chairman of this committee and I'm from the 43rd Legislative District. Our committee-- well, some of our committee members are here, some are actually presenting in other committees. So I will start on my right with Senator Blood and have them do introductions.

BLOOD: Good afternoon. My name is Senator Carol Blood and I represent District 3, which is western Bellevue and southeastern Papillion, Nebraska.

LOWE: John Lowe, District 37, southeast half of Buffalo County.

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

KOLOWSKI: Rick Kolowski, District 31, southwest Omaha.

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

BREWER: And to my right is Dick Clark, the legal counsel. To the left is Julie Condon, who is the committee clerk. And she'll be the one that you give your green sheets to. And we've got Ashlee as our page, tucked over there. And with that, we're going to go ahead and go into some do's and don'ts here. We'll start with your cell phones. Make sure they are in the quiet mode or off if you have any other electronic devices that make noise. Please understand senators may be either using their computers or their phones to receive messages. There are some requirements to get back and forth to other committee hearings today so don't think they're not paying attention. They're just trying to make sure they're in the right place at the right time. If you wish to record your attendance here today, we ask that you would fill out the white attendance sheets that are back on the table. If you wish to testify, I need you to fill out the green sheets and bring them up, give them to Julie. If you have materials to pass out, be sure that you have 12 copies. If you don't have 12 copies, the page can help you make copies. Any letters submitted-- and we do have that list, we'll read it at the end here-- need to be submitted by 5:00 the day prior to the hearing. With that said, our first bill up today will be LB850. Senator Pansing Brooks, welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

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PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Chair Brewer and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. I'm Patty Pansing Brooks, P-a-t-t-y P-a-n-s-i-n-g B-r-o-o-k-s, and I represent Legislative District 28, right here in the heart of Lincoln. I'm here today to introduce LB850, which authorizes the placement of a monument at Fort Donelson National Battlefield, celebrating the heroic success of the First Regiment Nebraska Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War. I want to give you a little background on how this idea came to my attention. This past Thanksgiving, I learned from my cousin, Steve Guenzel, of an effort he and others of the Civil War Round Table of Nebraska have initiated in order to place a monument to the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry at the Fort Donelson National Battlefield. Fort Donelson is located in western Tennessee. As I heard the story, I was struck by similarities to our recent successful placement of the inspiring Standing Bear statue in the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. Standing Bear represents a significant contribution to diversity and a very positive advancement of law, which happened in our great state. The Standing Bear statues in the U.S. Capitol, as well as here on Centennial Mall, tell a remarkable historic Nebraska story to all visitors to our capitol buildings, both in D.C. and Lincoln. Similarly, this bill, LB850, will allow another remarkable historic Nebraska story to be told in perpetuity. In February of 1862, the Civil War had been going quite badly for the North. And Ulysses S. Grant's victory at Fort Donelson was the first major victory of Union forces in that epic war that defined this nation. Nebraska, of course, was just a territory during the Civil War, but it contributed two regiments to the war effort. A little under 4,000 soldiers, approximately one-third of the Nebraska territory's military-aged men and one-ninth of its entire population served in the Union armies during the war. The numbers may seem small, but percentage wise, it is very impressive. The First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry was mustered into service in the summer of 1861 and served until it was mustered out in 1866, which-- making it one of the longest-serving units in the Civil War. At Fort Donelson, the First Nebraska played a very important role in Grant's victory, which then helped propel him to national prominence, eventually leading to the Union-- leading the Union to victory in the Civil War. This is truly an amazing and little-known piece of Nebraska history. If you have ever visited a Civil War battlefield, you'll most likely notice that many monuments have been placed to honor the units that, in Lincoln's words, "hallowed" those battlefields. At present, there are two metal signs that mention the First Nebraska, one at Fort Donelson and the other at Shiloh Battlefield. Both of these signs mention numerous

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units from other states and are not likely to bring much attention to Nebraska. The fine service of the soldiers Nebraska contributed to the war effort, particularly at Fort Donelson, deserve something more. And I am-- I think that the following testifiers will tell you some of the quotes that were, were said at the time about our Nebraska regiment. These groups-- these are groups such as-- excuse me-- the fine service of the soldiers contributed to the war effort, particularly at Fort Donelson, and they deserve something more. There are groups such as the Civil War Round Table of Nebraska and the Sons of Union Veterans that have offered to spearhead efforts to raise the funds needed for this effort. So this is not something that will require any tax dollars. A modest monument to the First Nebraska at Fort Donelson National Battlefield will call attention to the significant contribution Nebraska made to the Union's success in the Civil War, which brought an end to the scourge of slavery in this country. The testifiers behind me will expand on these fascinating parts of our Nebraska history and also talk about the process of making this-- the placement of this monument a reality. With that, I ask you to advance LB850 to General File. And also, I just understand that it's the opinion of counsel here, legal counsel, that the appointment power that has been given to the Government Committee Chair for vacancies instead needs to go to the Secretary of State. I'm fine with that simple cleanup and I understand it could happen within committee when you are "execing" on this bill. So I hope that you can do that. And I'll help work with counsel further if there's any other need. So thank you for listening to this and I hope you enjoy the stories you're going to hear today.

BREWER: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks and thank you for bringing this bill. I wasn't as familiar as I should have been with some of the history and, of course, once I found out, I was given a book that did a good job of bringing that whole battle together and the part they played. So thanks for your staff for, for sharing that. It was interesting enough. I read the whole book one night, which I probably needed to sleep, but oh, well.

PANSING BROOKS: It was also from my cousin, Steve Guenzel, so--

BREWER: Well, I-- this is a story-- you know, so many stories-- the history is lost if someone doesn't do something to capture it.

PANSING BROOKS: Yes.

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BREWER: And I just think what you're doing is wonderful. Anyway, with that said, let's open it up to questions. Seeing none, all right. What we're going to do today-- because we can see by how full the room is-- we're going to, we're going to have to testify in three-minute increments. So you'll get the green light for two, the amber for one, and then, then the red light. Part of that is just to kind of expedite being able to, to get through all the business here today. So for the historians, I'll need you to just give us the Reader's Digest because I think-- how do I put it? This is going to be a, a pretty easy decision. So we just need to make sure that, that we hear as, as much as we need to and, and find out more about the events that we're going to be doing the memorial for. Are you going to stick around for closing--

PANSING BROOKS: I will.

BREWER: --or do you have another?

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

BREWER: OK, thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Chair.

BREWER: All right, let's go ahead with our first testifier. Oh, yeah and I'm assuming you're a proponent?

GAYLA KOERTING: Yes.

BREWER: Good because we're not letting any others up today.

[LAUGHTER]

BREWER: Just kidding, just kidding, for the official record. All right, as soon as the light comes on, you can begin.

GAYLA KOERTING: Hi, my name is Gayla Koerting, G-a-y-l-a K-o-e-r-t-i-n-g. I'm a member of the Lincoln Civil War Round Table and I have a doctorate in Civil War military history from Kent State University. This afternoon, it is my privilege to provide testimony in favor of LB850, authorizing a monument to the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry Regiment at Fort Donelson National Battlefield near Dover, Tennessee. I will be providing a brief overview of the battle, the role that the First Nebraska played, and the major outcomes of this battle that occurred between February 12 to February 16, 1862. In fall

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1861, Kentucky ended its neutral stance as a border slave state and officially entered the Civil War under Union control. The war had been going badly for the North, with early losses that included Bull Run, Carthage, and Wilson's Creek. Ulysses S. Grant at that time was a garrison commander at Paducah, Kentucky. He saw an opportunity to enter the northern part of Tennessee, a Confederate stronghold, and take control of both forts Henry and Donelson. Note that Henry W. Halleck, commander of the Western Theater Department of Missouri, disliked Grant. However, despite Halleck's misgivings, he finally permits Grant to conduct this operation. On February 6, Fort Henry fell to Union forces. His forces proceeded to march 12 miles to capture Fort Donelson and arrived there on February 12. Fort Donelson proved to be difficult to besiege since it was very well fortified with a number of rifle pits, cannons, two water batteries, and three miles of trenches surrounding it. Northern forces were impeded by a number of issues, including inclement weather, lack of supplies, and during the first few days of the battle, the Union gunboat fleet proved ineffective. However, Confederate leaders knew that it was only a matter of time before Union reinforcements would arrive. They had already opened up escape routes along two main roads and planned to move their forces out to Nashville. Union lines were overextended and their troops had already retreated against rebel charges. At this critical juncture in the battle, Confederate Brigadier General John B. Floyd made a huge blunder. Floyd orders his men back into their entrenchments to resupply them before escaping. Grant was absent from the field on the morning of the 15th. He was visiting Naval Flag Officer Andrew Foote, who was wounded during the initial phase of the conflict. Disregarding Grant's orders to stay put, Union Brigadier General Lew Wallace, in command of the Third Division, took the initiative and immediately plans a counter action to move reserve troops into position after hearing enemy gunfire. Wallace sets up a defensive line along Wynn's Ferry Road, a road that has a pronounced dip in it. The First Nebraska was placed as the first line of defense with support columns directly behind them in case they faltered. The First Nebraska proudly proved themselves, repulsing three charges by four Confederate regiments. They held the line. This was an impressive feat, given the fact that the First Nebraska had only been mustered into service several months before and had never endured heavy combat. Their action earned the praise of Wallace, who wrote in the official record, they met the storm, no man flinching, and their fire was terrible. To say they did not well is not enough. The Battle of Fort Donelson proved significant in the following ways: first, geographically, Kentucky would remain in the Union. The North got

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control of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers as vital transportation routes. The Union also began making strides in the Western Theater, particularly a year later when Grant captured Vicksburg, thereby controlling the Mississippi River. Secondly, Ulysses S. Grant began to make his mark as a military commander. He became a national hero for the terms set up to the Battle of Fort Donelson and earned the nom de guerre "U.S. Unconditional Surrender Grant." This moniker set the tone for his military actions throughout the Civil War. More importantly, he gained the attention of President Lincoln for his tenacity and aggressive nature as a commander. President Lincoln finally found a general who was willing to fight and strike at the enemy rather than retreat. Thank you for your time.

BREWER: Thank you for your testimony. And being a history major, a slightly-interested individual in military history, that was a great synopsis. So there was no way I was going to stop you. Red light or not, you were on a roll.

GAYLA KOERTING: [LAUGHTER]

BREWER: We need to hear the rest of that.

GAYLA KOERTING: Three minutes was hard enough--

BREWER: Well, and you did great so I-- and I kind of pulled the rug out from underneath you by changing the time there. So thank you for that. Questions? Thanks for taking the time to do this because now we've got the picture.

GAYLA KOERTING: OK, thank you very much.

BREWER: All right, next testifier. Sir, welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

TOM DAWSON: Thank you. My name is Tom Dawson, D-a-w-s-o-n. I'm a retired juvenile court judge from Lancaster County. I'm also a United States Marine combat veteran and I'm a member of the Civil War Round Table of Lincoln. I appear today in support of LB850. I've been to 24 Civil War battlefields, including Fort Donelson, and observed hundreds of dedicated monuments. These monuments not only recognize individual units, but states from both the north and the south. The monuments provide a moving history of our Civil War and the participants' role therein. Because of my war experience, I'm able to appreciate and picture the battles and the movement of troops. The monuments are a

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critical part of piecing together those battles. Although Nebraska was not yet a state and had a small population, it still made a significant contribution to the war effort. The First Nebraska played a very significant role in Grant's victory at Fort Donelson. A monument would draw well-deserved attention to something this state should be extremely proud of. As a vet, I would very much appreciate some recognition for those Nebraska Civil War soldiers and the positive attention such a monument would bring to the state of Nebraska. I got her time back.

[LAUGHTER]

BREWER: You did great. And the nice part is, you know, she shared the story and then you've, you've got the monument piece of it, too. And I, I couldn't agree more. You know, when you go there and that display tells the story of what happened, you can almost feel like you were there. And maybe that's the, you know, the old soldier in me, too, but I couldn't agree more. All right, questions? Yes, sir.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Dawson, thank you for your service. Semper fi.

TOM DAWSON: Semper fi.

KOLOWSKI: And I just want to say thank you for what you've done with your background and in your love of history, putting this together and sharing it with us today. Thank you, sir.

TOM DAWSON: You're welcome.

BREWER: Very good. Senator Lowe. Oh, Senator Hunt.

HUNT: Thank you, Chairman Brewer. Thank you very much for sharing your story, for sharing that information. I regret that I have to go introduce a bill in another committee, but I wanted to take a little moment to thank all of you for being here today. And thank you for what you've done.

BREWER: Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you, Chairman, and thank you for being here today. As one who has now attained the age where I stop at every roadside monument sign and irritate my sons to death by doing so--

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[LAUGHTER]

LOWE: --it's nice that Nebraska is going to be recognized in another state.

BREWER: All right, we know how he's going to vote on this.

[LAUGHTER]

TOM DAWSON: I think.

BREWER: All right, thank you for your testimony.

TOM DAWSON: Thank you, senators.

BREWER: OK, next testifier. Welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs. And that's an awesome tie, awesome tie you got on there.

STEVE GUENZEL: General Grant. Thank you. Members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, my name is Steve Guenzel, S-t-e-v-e G-u-e-n-z-e-l. I'm a practicing lawyer, but I appear today as the secretary/treasurer of the Civil War Round Table of Nebraska, a 501(c)(3) organization that promotes the study of the Civil War and has done so since 1989. The late Jim Potter, a lifetime historian with History Nebraska, was one of the founding members of our roundtable. Until his death in 2016, I believe he was the leading authority on the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry. He authored one book on the role of Nebraska in the Civil War and he edited, edited the Civil War diary of a soldier that served with the First Nebraska through most of its service. When I brought up the idea of a monument to the First Nebraska to Jim, it was he who said it should be at Fort Donelson in northwestern Tennessee. In 2010, my wife Judy and I visited the superintendent of the Fort Donelson National Battlefield. At that time, we were told they would prefer a historical sign rather than a monument. With that in mind, I asked Jim Potter to write something up that could go on that informational sign and I am thrilled that he was able to do that before we lost him. In 2017, we went back to Fort Donelson, met with the new superintendent, who told us that things have changed. Now they preferred a monument to an informational sign. He told us that only states can request monuments to be placed on national battlefields, which is why LB850 is before you. While the superintendent must officially remain neutral on monument requests, I perceived that he was personally excited about this request. My

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thought is for a modest granite monument, maybe two feet by two feet, maybe three or four feet high with a bronze plaque on the side with the writing that Jim Potter had written. We have every right to be proud of what our Nebraska soldiers did at Fort Donelson. General Wallace had no ties to Nebraska and that's no reason to exaggerate when he wrote in the official record that the First Nebraska alone repelled the charge of a force of Confederates four times the size of the First Nebraska; four Confederate regiments attacking the First Nebraska and a battery right next door. Stopping this charge prevented the rebels from escaping from Fort Donelson, which was key in this important victory. Afterwards, the national press, as we know they can do, renamed U.S. Grant "Unconditional Surrender Grant." His commander, Halleck, would undoubtedly have fired him if things had not gone so well at Fort Donelson. Who knows if that had happened, what it would've taken for Grant to get back into control? This is a story that Nebraska deserves to have appropriately told and highlighted.

BREWER: All right, you did great on time so thank you for that. Real quick, the-- I'm a bit of an enthusiast. Can you give me the name on those two books to make sure I add them to my list here?

STEVE GUENZEL: This is Standing Firmly by the Flag: Nebraska Territory in the Civil War, 1861-1867. I think you could get this in the gift shop here in the building or at the Nebraska History Museum.

BREWER: All right and the second one?

STEVE GUENZEL: The second one is Marching with the First Nebraska. This is a great story. This fellow wrote this diary in German. It was found in Oregon. A German language speaker in Oregon found it, connected up with Jim Potter here, and we have this edited version. Now, this did start-- he didn't join the First Nebraska until after Donelson. So Donelson is not discussed here, but it certainly is here.

BREWER: All right, thank you. All right, questions? Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you. And thank you for coming today. Do you know what the inscription will be on the monument?

STEVE GUENZEL: Well, first of all, I don't know that this is absolute. There are going to be other people that have some say. But we have-- I think, as I said from the leading authority, a suggestion, a starting point and I have that, which I'd be happy to leave with you.

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BREWER: OK. All right, additional questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

STEVE GUENZEL: Thank you.

BREWER: OK, additional testifiers, come on up. Welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

ERIC BACHENBERG: Thank you, Senator. My name is Eric Bachenberg. That's E-r-i-c B-a-c-h-e-n-b-e-r-g, good German name, yeah.

BREWER: Yeah.

ERIC BACHENBERG: And I work for the Department of Health and Human Services. I've been a state employee for 40 years. I have a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in museum studies from the University of Nebraska. I belong to several groups, including the Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War. As a matter of fact, you saw us last Lincoln's birthday. We posted the colors for the Legislature and we're going to do it again this year. We hope to make that an annual event. The Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War is an organization that-- well, the Grand Army of the Republic was the first fraternal organization of Army veterans founded ever, 1866, for Union Army veterans. It was limited to Union Army veterans. They knew they weren't going to last forever. In 1885, they created the Sons of the Union Veterans to be a perpetual organization, which is what we are. We have a-- department of Nebraska with about five or six camps here in Nebraska. Lincoln is Shiloh camp. I am the senior vice commander of Shiloh camp. We support this bill. We do everything; one of our functions is to support recognition of Civil War veterans and their contributions. That includes placing monuments and preserving gravesites of Union veterans. As a matter of fact, the last weekend in June, the city of Wahoo will be observing their sesquicentennial. And one of the functions is they have a Union veteran who died in the 1890s, but no marker was placed on his grave. We are going to do a headstone dedication as part of the sesquicentennial. So we do everything we can to support, both in-person and financially, monuments recognizing contributions to the Civil War. We are constantly playing up the history of the First Nebraska Regiment. And there's really not more I can say that would not replicate what has already been presented, so--

BREWER: All right.

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ERIC BACHENBERG: Thank you for your time.

BREWER: Oh, hang on here before we let you get out of here. Have you, by chance, had a chance to go to Fort Donelson and see the battlefield?

ERIC BACHENBERG: No, I have not. I don't get out of the state very much.

BREWER: But I, I-- we kind of mandatorily had to-- when I was stationed at Fort Campbell, it was something that was that close enough because I actually-- even though it's Fort Campbell, Kentucky, most of it is in Tennessee; the, the base itself.

ERIC BACHENBERG: Yes.

BREWER: So that was one of them that we got the bus ride to, but-- all right, well, quickly, questions? All right, seeing none, thank you for your testimony--

ERIC BACHENBERG: OK.

BREWER: --and the history lesson. OK, any additional testifiers for LB850? All right, are there any testifying in the-- any opposition or neutral? Seeing none, Senator Pansing Brooks, welcome back.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. I just-- I want to thank all the testifiers for coming today and, and speaking in such a scholarly manner. I think you were all so taken aback by the scholarly nature of this history that you missed the opportunity to ask my cousin, with whom I grew up, terrible questions about me. So I'm really pleased that we got past that.

[LAUGHTER]

PANSING BROOKS: So, with that--

BREWER: Well-- all right, well, I think we're richer for the experience. So thank you for bringing this bill.

PANSING BROOKS: I am too.

BREWER: And we will be "execing" in the very near future on this. And we will give you an update as quick as we have some results for you.

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PANSING BROOKS: Great, thank you, Senator Brewer. Thank you, committee.

BREWER: All right, thank you for coming. That will conclude-- after I read in-- let's see. We had-- oh, we have no letters, so I won't read them in. That concludes LB850. And we will go ahead and swap out and get ready for LB911. And on LB911, if we can have those that plan to testify come up to the front? And I would ask that we're-- we may have a lot of testifiers. I don't know that we have-- I don't know if we have anybody in neutral or opposition. So if we can, you know, try and cover new ground so we don't spend the whole afternoon here. But I think the general feeling is this is pretty darn good idea. But with that, we're going to let Senator Quick share why it's a good idea. Senator Quick, welcome in the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. You may begin whenever you're ready.

QUICK: Good afternoon and thank you, Chairman Brewer and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Dan Quick, D-a-n Q-u-i-c-k, and I represent District 35 in Grand Island. I have introduced LB911 on behalf of advocates for veterans in Hall County. This group expressed a desire to maintain and expand the existing Grand Island Veterans' Home cemetery by making it a state veterans' cemetery. I was approached by this group last year and have worked with them since to bring this idea forward on their behalf and on the behalf of all veterans in our state. The Grand Island Veterans' Home cemetery remained after the veterans' home was moved to Kearney. Recently, that land and cemetery was transferred from the state of Nebraska to the city of Grand Island. The process of turning it into a state cemetery can be lengthy, so it is important to start this process as soon as we can. As I understand it, the first steps would be to pass legislative intent and prepare a program statement, which LB911 does. After that, the Department of Veterans' Affairs would be able to apply for federal grant money and reimburse a process that can take several years. The program statement is important in order to understand the undertaking-- what the undertaking would be and what would be required of the city, the county, and the state in this process, such as financial responsibilities and how many additional acres of land would be needed for future expansion. The bill also contains an important provision that would permit the city of Grand Island to give the land back to the state. I think you will hear today how important it will be to our veterans and their families, specifically in central Nebraska, to have a state cemetery located closer to home. We have a state veterans' cemetery in Alliance and

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national veterans' cemeteries in Omaha and further west at Fort McPherson, but Grand Island is an ideal location. It would be meaningful for our veterans and their families to continue to celebrate and honor our veterans at this facility. It is important to me that this bill is successful, which is why I have spent the last interim meeting with many stakeholders-- as many stakeholders as I could. I'll continue to work with everyone involved to make sure this bill meets the, meets the goals. I want to express my thanks to the Department of Administrative Services, the Department-- the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs, and the Governor's Office for meeting with me on this issue, as well of all those who have met with me in Grand Island as I learned more about what is needed to move forward on this. My hope is that this bill will allow us to bring everyone to the table and work together, work through all the small pieces required to make this happen for our veterans in central Nebraska. I want to thank you for your attention to this issue and I'm happy to try and answer any questions you might have.

BREWER: All right. Thank you, Senator Quick. Questions? The way it's envisioned right now, is there, is there, like, a design or is it kind of just in the, the stage where you're just getting permission and then they'll, they'll work through the design of what it will look like?

QUICK: Yeah and I'm sure they'll-- someone behind me will be able to answer that further--

BREWER: OK.

QUICK: --but I know-- currently, there's-- the cemetery is there and I know there's a testifier of the bill that will tell you it's getting near full, it's getting near capacity. So I know there's land surrounding it, which is agricultural land, and that we just have to see the number of acres that we'd needed for future expansion. I know there's been talk of maybe 20 acres, something like that. And so it's really all ag land, but then there's some wells out there, too, so we have to see what, what would work the best.

BREWER: Do you know how big the footprint currently is, as far as acres that--

QUICK: I, I can't--

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BREWER: I think, I think-- I'm getting hand and arm signals that the ones that are going to follow are going to take care of that.

QUICK: Yeah, they'll be able to tell you exactly.

BREWER: I don't mean to bother you with that. Well, thank you for this bill. Obviously, I, I think it's a great idea. And we're going to hopefully get a whole lot more details here, but thanks for bringing it. Will you be able to stick around for closing?

QUICK: Yes, I will.

BREWER: Good. Thank you. All right, so now we'll go into testimony on LB911. Please come on up. Welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

DANIEL NARANJO: Thank you so much. Good afternoon. To Senator Quick, we thank you. Senator Brewer and all the committee members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on LB911 establishing a Nebraska veterans' cemetery from the existing Soldiers and Sailors Cemetery in Grand Island. My name is Daniel Naranjo, D-a-n-i-e-l N-a-r-a-n-j-o. If you speak Spanish, it's Naranho [PHONETIC]. I'm a funeral director and a funeral home owner at All Faiths Funeral Home, there in Grand Island. My purpose today is to ask for your support for LB911. To share some historical background, the Grand Island Veterans' Home, formerly known as the Nebraska Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, was established in 1887. Excerpts taken from the Senate Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twentieth Regular Session held here in Lincoln on January 4, 1887, it reads, "whereas, there are many old soldiers in Nebraska who, from wounds or disabilities received while in the Union Army during the rebellion, are in the county poorhouses of this state; therefore, be it resolved, that is the sense of this Senate that a suitable building be erected and grounds provided for the care and comfort of the old soldiers of Nebraska in their declining years." Now as we fast forward in time, the state of Nebraska, through the direction of former Governor Dave Heineman, moved the veterans' home to Kearney, Nebraska. A home can be moved, but not the cemetery. The veterans' home moving has left over 1,600 men and women buried at this holy and sacred ground. These are 1,600 men and women who served and they were members or residents of the Nebraska Veterans' Home system, who are buried at this cemetery. There are 1,600 soldiers who are veterans of the Civil War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq. They fought for you and I so that we can have the freedom of

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democracy to sit at this table to decide what our fiduciary and moral responsibilities are. By adopting LB911, as Nebraskans, we will assure the continued care of these veterans resting on these holy grounds provided-- and to pride-- to provide future burials for the men and women who served or are currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. As a funeral director, I can share with you that last year in Hall County, there were an estimated 100 veteran funerals. Many veteran families choose-- chose to have their loved ones buried in a private cemetery other than a national veterans' cemetery. Usually the reason that I hear is because of the great distance from Grand Island; 150 miles to Fort McPherson National Cemetery, there at Maxwell, and about 150 miles in the opposite direction to Blair. Once again, with your support, passage of LB911 will allow the 1,600 veterans and future veteran burials the dignity and honor which they so honorably deserve. And I will conclude now with lest we forget. Thank you so much.

BREWER: Thank you. And being an old soldier in his declining years, I appreciate your testimony.

[LAUGHTER]

BREWER: Questions? All right, I, I do just have a couple-- you probably have as, as good of familiarity-- do you got a rough estimate of how many are currently buried on the existing cemetery there?

DANIEL NARANJO: Yeah, at the existing cemetery, there's just over 1,600. There's not a lot of space left for any new burials and that's the reason for the expansion. But again, you know, these are all veterans or their dependents that are buried here. And they were all members of the Nebraska Veterans' Home. Once again, you know, I just can't reiterate enough that the home can move, but the cemetery is still here. I just feel that it's the state of Nebraska and our responsibility, you know, to continue to honor these veterans who are buried at this cemetery.

BREWER: Yep, I couldn't agree with you more.

DANIEL NARANJO: And I thank you for your service as well.

BREWER: Well, thank you and thanks for your testimony. All right, next testifier, come on up. John, welcome back to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

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JOHN HILGERT: Thank you, Senator. Good afternoon, Chairman Brewer and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is John Hilgert, J-o-h-n H-i-l-g-e-r-t, and I am the director of the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs. I'm here today to testify in support of LB911. I would also like to thank Senator Quick for introducing LB911 and Senator Brewer for cosponsoring the bill. We support the establishment of a state veterans' cemetery in Grand Island. This would be the second state veterans' cemetery in our state. The first and currently, the-- and currently the only state veterans' cemetery in Nebraska is in Alliance. If you haven't visited our cemetery in Alliance, I would invite you to do so. Our operation in Alliance would give you a feel for what a state veterans' cemetery is regarding its scope of operations, as well as the standards to which we must adhere. We support the establishment of a state veterans' cemetery in Grand Island and LB911, but we do have some concerns with some aspects of the bill. We support a program statement that would include the elements needed to make a competitive application for federal funding as well as documenting the cost of the vision as well as the necessary actions needed to establish the cemetery. Let me address, though, that program statement. First, let me be clear that this project was not included in the Governor's budget. It would be more appropriate that we discuss including funding for this program statement in the Governor's budget in the next biennium. However, I am willing to work with Senator Quick to investigate if there are other sources of funds other than general funds which might be available that could fund this legislation this session. Second, the Department of Administrative Services has worked diligently with the city of Grand Island and the larger community with respect to the surplus state property in Grand Island. And I thank them for the work they have done. Any transfer of city land, which represents the Grand Island's Veterans' Home cemetery as well as any additional land that will be needed to establish a state veterans' cemetery should be transferred to the state only when the application for funding is approved from the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs' National Cemetery Administration. We would ask that language in the bill be added to memorialize this request. Third, I want to acknowledge the work completed not only by Grand Island, but Hall County, which together have shown tremendous support to veterans in all aspects. The functional process of applying for a federal cemetery grant is a state function. And I would involve and work with local visu-- with local officials to produce a vision that satisfy a federal criteria as well as their vision in establishing a place of honor for those departed heroes, their eligible dependents, as well as a

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manifestation of the support of the community of Grand Island and Hall County that they have for our veterans. One hundred percent of the development cost of a state veterans' cemetery is paid for by the federal government. However, a 10 percent up-front cost of the total amount needs to be on hand before the project is funded. It is our understanding that a community committee has already established to fund the 10 percent up-front cost of construction. It's also my understanding that a significant amount has already been pledged. The amount that is needed, of course, will be determined upon completion of the program statement. I stand ready to go forward on this exciting project and seek successful follow-through on this bill. I would also observe that geographically, in the handout that I had distributed, it would fill a gap between Fort McPherson, the national cemetery, and also the national cemetery in Springfield, Nebraska. In summary, there are some technical issues that need to be addressed, but I am confident that working with our legislative partners, local leaders, and our federal partners, LB911 can be a successful start to the process that will result in a beautiful facility that serves as hallowed ground for our nation's heroes. That concludes my testimony.

BREWER: Thank you for your testimony. And with the opening comments on the facility in Alliance, I couldn't agree more. I spoke there, both at Memorial Day and Veterans Day. I don't know who designed it, but it is, it is well laid out. There is a spot so that when you want to have a service there, it's, you know, arranged so that it can be done and done very professionally. The roads are laid out so there's proper width and everything, so that being able to move a lot of vehicles, you can do relatively easy. So I think-- is there bells or chimes that are set up out there that ring on the hour?

JOHN HILGERT: Yes, there are, Senator.

BREWER: I mean, it, it's just a nicely laid out, well-maintained place. And you just-- when you, when you read through that commitment we made to our veterans, I think whoever designed that was, was thinking of them when he did it. So hats off to whoever did that. Questions? All right, as far as some of the discussion that you had referenced, the funds, if we vote on this and, and it's all thumbs-up and we go forward, the, the 10 percent, do you think that is already something that is designated or is that something that is going to have to be part of that first step in order to be able to get the federal funding or--

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JOHN HILGERT: Sir, yes. It will be something that we need to have cash on hand and spending authority to, to, to spend before we get federal funding. However, the program statement tells us how much this project is going to cost. For example, the federal government, again, will pay for the entire project, except for the land. We need to know what that number is; 10 percent of what? That project, also, that what they will pay for is what's available in the state veterans' cemetery program. There may be other things-- you mentioned the chimes. That's not a developmental-- that's, that's something that the local community has provided, our folks in Alliance. There may be things that Hall County and the city of Grand Island would like to see. That program statement-- my vision, the program statement would say, here's what the federal government will pay for. If you want other things, this is what they cost. And then what is the amount that we need to have, cash on hand, before they fund us? And that number is 10 percent of the allowable cost so that would need to be cash on hand. But again, we need to find out what that number is. The folks in Hall County and Grand Island, if they visited the cemetery in Alliance, they may see that, for example, the federal program may not provide everything that you see in Alliance. So we want to be very, very clear and I plan on working very closely with the representatives from the city and the county as we go forward so that their vision is inculcated with this program statement. Once we get that 10 percent up-front money, it's my understanding that there's a committee organized that will-- similar to the committee in Alliance-- that will cobble together that 10 percent up-front money.

BREWER: All right. Well, again, the concept-- I think I've got a, I've got a visual on that. You know, what we're hearing today is, is this something that we think we should do? And it's conceivable with-- or available, in this case. You know, the hardest thing to find with most of this is the land. It isn't necessarily the money in some cases. But in this case, I think we'll find out here that that may be something that is not as concerning, as with a lot of situations when it comes to cemeteries.

JOHN HILGERT: And again, we'll, we'll-- I will work with Senator Quick to find alternate funding for that program statement other than general funds.

BREWER: I got you. All right, no questions and thank you for your testimony. And we'll have our next testifier come on up. Welcome to

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the Government, Military-- Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. You may begin whenever you're ready.

DONALD SHUDA: Good afternoon. First, I would like to say our county commissioner chair, Pam Lancaster, had planned on being here today and was able-- unable to so I am handing out her statements that she would have read to you. Good afternoon, Senator Brewer and members of the Government and Military Affairs Committee [SIC]. My name is Donald Shuda, S-h-u-d-a, and I am a veteran and also the Hall County Veteran's Service officer located in Hall County. Thank you for allowing me to come forward in support of LB11 [SIC]. This legislative bill would continue the legacy started in 1887 by the residents of Hall County in caring for our nation's heroes. Passage of LB911 would allow those veterans and their families a choice of being interned [SIC] in a cemetery that shows respect and dignity to those who served this great nation. As has been said before, currently, there is no state or national veterans' cemetery in central Nebraska. As our veterans and their families age, travel becomes more difficult. With the creation of a state veterans' cemetery in central Nebraska, this would allow families to have their loved one buried as close as possible to their place of residence. This would allow for them to visit their loved ones on special days such as Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and other days that are important to them. The men and women who sacrificed for our country should be recognized for their bravery and this is the proper way to honor that sacrifice. I have had the privilege of visiting Arlington National Cemetery several times and each time, it still makes one feel humbled by those who are buried there. State veterans' cemeteries are run under the same guidelines as national cemeteries. There is no greater feeling of respect and appreciation for the men and women who have served than to realize the sacrifices they have made. And there is no preference given in a veterans' cemetery. Each grave site has the same grave marker with the name of those who served, regardless of rank. Our central Nebraska veterans and their families deserve no less. Thank you.

BREWER: Thank you, Don. All right, questions? Yes, go ahead Senator Lowe.

LOWE: And thank you, Mr. Shuda, for being here. It's been said that there is farm ground close to this. Is there an agreement with the farmer to maybe purchase some of the ground or--

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DONALD SHUDA: And I'll let our city administrator address that in more detail, but that's-- that land is currently owned by the city of Grand Island.

LOWE: OK.

DONALD SHUDA: And I'm sure Jerry is going to be addressing that. So there is land available, though--

LOWE: OK.

DONALD SHUDA: --yes.

BREWER: Yes, go ahead, Senator Hansen.

M. HANSEN: Thank you, Senator Brewer and thank you for being here, Mr. Shuda. And maybe this is a better question for the city administrator, but can you kind of give us some of the history of how we got where we are, where the city owns the cemetery and some extra land?

DONALD SHUDA: Well, there was the land that's around it-- 640 acres, I believe, with the state. And the land was transferred to the city when the veterans' home moved to Grand-- or to Kearney, rather. And again, I would let the city administrator address that.

M. HANSEN: OK, thank you.

BREWER: Additional questions? Before we let you go, Don, I do want to thank you for-- a lot of people don't realize, unless they spend time around veterans and especially veterans that are challenging-- challenged to try and get support they need, you have been a landmark in the Grand Island area to make sure the veterans who aren't getting care or, or need help, get help and--

DONALD SHUDA: Thank you.

BREWER: --you, you have just been a, a force there that has been so supportive of everyone. So thank you for your service, both in uniform and now what you do.

DONALD SHUDA: Thank you, sir. That's very nice, thank you.

BREWER: All right, thank you for your testimony. All right, next testifier. Welcome to the Government, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee.

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JERRY JANULEWICZ: Thank you, Senator Brewer. Senator Brewer and members of the committee, my name is Jerry Janulewicz; first name is J-e-r-r-y, the last name is spelled J-a-n-u-l-e-w-i-c-z. I am the city administrator for the city of Grand Island. And my past careers have been with the county attorney and the city attorney. I won't repeat and expand upon the, the need and purpose for establishing the state's veterans' cemetery in central Nebraska. I think there's plenty of, of testifiers that you will hear from today that will address that issue. I'm here mainly to address two sections of, of LB911. That is Section 2, which would allow this-- if adopted, would allow the city of Grand Island to convey land to the State Department of Administrative Services for the cemetery purposes. Section 3 of the bill, if adopted, would allow the city to make that transfer without going through the, the usual process, which requires notice to the public and the public having a 30-day period of time in which to object or file remonstrance against the transfer. That section, Section 3, was-- actually both Section 2 and Section 3 were inserted into the bill at my request just to make the process easier. Section 3, the elimination of the remonstrance period, was due in part to concerns about timing. The bill, as it's drafted, has the date of September 15, 2020, by which the title must be transferred. So there's a lot of, a lot of steps that need to be done. If we were to try and meet that schedule, there needs to be-- we need to decide what land we're talking, have a survey done, work out details regarding the, the farm tenant that's on this property. So that was my concern; it's just the timing issue. If that timing issue were to go away, we could live with the remonstrance period because I don't see that the voters of Grand Island would object to the transfer of this property. But that's the purpose for Section 3, in case there's questions. To answer the questions of Senator Brewer, the original cemetery at that site consists of land that was transferred to the state by the popu-- citizens of Grand Island in 1887 and that's 3.79 acres. In 1919, the state purchased additional lands of 2.28 acres. So the total footprint of the cemetery, as it exists today, is just slightly over six acres. That land is in the southwest corner of a large tract of land the city of Grand Island received from the state following the move of the-- actually prior to the, to the veterans' home residents being moved to Kearney. That larger tract of land consists of approximately 103 acres, of which approximately ten acres is a, is a shelterbelt. So we have 93 acres that are currently leased to a farmer. It's irrigation farmland, gravity-fed irrigation. On this land are two irrigation wells, so those-- that's part of the details that would need to be

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worked out before the transfer of the land to the state. I'd be happy to answer any other questions that you may have.

BREWER: OK, thank you for your testimony. Real quick, then, is there a-- are we looking at the whole 103 or 93, whatever-- I mean, I guess the shelterbelt about could be usable ground if you've got a bulldozer handy, but--

JERRY JANULEWICZ: Sure.

BREWER: Are you looking at the, the whole 93 then or 103 or a portion of that?

JERRY JANULEWICZ: What's been brought forward as a request, at this point, is to transfer the current existing cemetery of six acres--

BREWER: Right.

JERRY JANULEWICZ: --and request for 20 additional acres.

BREWER: Very good. OK, questions? Questions? All right, looks like we're going to let you go easy.

JERRY JANULEWICZ: Thank you.

BREWER: Thank you for your testimony. All right, next testifier. There you go. You got to turn in that green slip. Welcome to the Government Committee.

JAY VAVRICEK: Well, thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here. And as a former mayor of Grand Island, I appreciate public service and I appreciate your leadership in serving the best interests of people of Grand Island and obviously, Nebraska. And with that said, my name is Jay Vavricek. It's spelled-- I'm following Janulewicz, by the way. But my name, Vavricek, is spelled V-a-v-r-i-c-e-k, and I'm proud to support the legislation that's coming before this committee for a number of reasons. And it's easy to maybe look at-- ahead and think of the hurdles we overcome. But I've seen in our community where, indeed, we can embrace challenge and be successful. And I wouldn't be here if I didn't feel that the people of Hall County, Grand Island wouldn't meet the challenge to have something that would be admirable for the state of Nebraska to call home for its veterans. And with your approval to advance LB911, I believe greater citizen participation will be realized, greater appreciation for veterans' service will be fostered, greater access and fairness to future veterans, with respect

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to veterans' benefits and also a message will be heard loud and clear. The efforts are underway to make Nebraska a more veteran-friendly state. And I think that's a goal of the administration, as obviously many of you here-- and I, I can't tell you how proud I am to support your many efforts because veterans in our community are well respected. And I know that's what you're trying to do is honor their service. And service is what this is all about. And the efforts here before you are meant to compliment the state veterans' cemetery in Alliance, a well-respected, fine facility. It's 240 miles away from the members of the Central Nebraska Veterans' Home in Kearney. And many of those individuals may not be eligible to-- for internment [SIC] in or near Grand Island unless LB911 goes forward. So I think that's a measure that promotes patriotism, but also more family members to honor the burial services and potentially even visit those graveside individuals occasionally. Secondly, it's my belief future veterans could be eligible for some of the benefits that were extended to others a year ago or two years ago or even 50 years ago and are now buried in the Grand Island veterans' cemetery. Expenses that may be higher, for example, for-- well, the city of Grand Island's cemetery fee structure or similar policies that other cities have-- we do not notice any difference in burial expenses in a veteran or spouse. I think eligibility also will be broadened to-- in today's world, for other burials to occur, not only with a veteran, with a spouse and potential dependents. So going forward, while funding is a concern, obviously, there is grant funding. And it would be available from the veterans administration, where they will cover-- and according to their website, it indicated up to 100 percent of the development costs for an approved project, including operational equipment. But with a partnership of federal dollars and with the cooperation of the city of Grand Island's local veterans group-- and, obviously, the, the people of Nebraska believe it's a vision that's worthwhile and one that we'll all be proud to see come about and be a reality. With that, I-- once again, I appreciate your service and in many ways and the opportunity to testify and see some of you once again.

BREWER: All right, Jay, thanks for your testimony. Questions? The, the city of Grand Island, through its support for the veterans-- for, for those that don't keep up with some of the activities they have out there-- have probably been the busiest and the most supportive when it comes to the hero flights and getting folks back to see the memorials. And that's a great tribute to the community. And, and so I, I, you know, I think you're perfectly on track with what you're saying here,

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that that community will embrace the veterans on this. It will be no issue at all.

JAY VAVRICEK: Thank you. In fact, many members of that committee are here on the home for heroes committee that have sent Vietnam veterans, World War II veterans, Korean War veterans to D.C. And incidentally, I ran out of time, but the city of Grand Island, a few days ago, passed a unanimous resolution to advance and support this bill as well as-- gratefully, we acknowledge the city of Kearney did as well. So that's--

BREWER: That's correct.

JAY VAVRICEK: --that speaks well for the cooperation of central Nebraska.

BREWER: And that-- they do have-- which now-- I don't know, we'll see when we're all done, but they do have a letter in support of it, from the city of Kearney, so yes. Speaking of the city of Kearney. John Lowe.

LOWE: Speaking of the city of Kearney, Senator Brewer-- thank you, mayor.

JAY VAVRICEK: Former mayor.

LOWE: Former mayor.

LOWE: Isn't that nice. I would-- thank you. I would just like to thank the, the city of Grand Island and Hall County for what they've done for our veterans. And it's been just amazing and you guys did a great job. And, and now that we house the veterans' home, I mean, what you guys did for them in the past is just remarkable. Thank you very much.

JAY VAVRICEK: Thank you.

BREWER: OK. Any additional questions? Thank you for your testimony.

JAY VAVRICEK: Thank you, Senator Brewer.

BREWER: All right. Next testifier, come on up.

MIKE PONTE: This will be a short one.

BREWER: Well, welcome to the Government Committee.

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MIKE PONTE: Thank you. My name is Mike Ponte, P-o-n-t-e. I'm an Army Vietnam veteran and I am-- I currently hold the position of the board chairman of the United Veterans Club in Grand Island, which represents the American Legion, the VFW, and all of their auxiliaries. And to show the support, a letter of support from each of these veterans organizations has previously been provided to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. So I hope you've received those. And we're supporting-- you know, the passage of LB911 would continue to honor our veterans and their families in all the area. That's all I have. Thank you.

BREWER: Wow, you did keep it short.

MIKE PONTE: Short.

BREWER: You're a man of your word. OK, questions? All right. Thank you and we do have the letters here. They are all in the official record.

MIKE PONTE: Thank you.

BREWER: Thank you. All right, additional testifiers in support of LB911? OK, any testifiers in opposition? It wouldn't be a very popular thing if you were, but-- and any neutral? All right, with that said, Senator Quick, come on back.

QUICK: Thank you, Chairman Brewer. And also, thank you for your service to our country. So first, I want to thank all the people who came down to testify from, from central Nebraska and it's been great to work with them on this piece of legislation. You know, at times we were trying to figure out how we get there. And it's been great to work with Director Hilgert as well and, and everyone that's met with us from DAS to the Governor's Office to talk about it. So I'm willing to work with, with Director Hilgert and, and Senator Brewer as well and the committee to try to figure out how we can make this-- bring this legislation forward to honor our veterans because I think that's truly important for, for-- especially for central Nebraska, where you heard earlier, where some choose to be buried at a private cemetery just because their families are close to there. And they'd love to be buried at a cemetery that honors veterans, but sometimes you just have to choose to stay closer to home. And I think this will, will benefit them greatly. So-- but, thank you and that's all I have.

BREWER: All right. I'm going to kind of deflect a question--

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QUICK: Yeah.

BREWER: --that's the beauty of being the Chairman. John, how large in acres is the cemetery in Alliance?

JOHN HILGERT: I believe it's about 22.

BREWER: OK, so they would be roughly the same width.

JOHN HILGERT: Again, I would hesitate to say that until the program statement is done.

BREWER: Oh.

JOHN HILGERT: You'd have to look at the lifespan of the cemetery, what the federal government believes-- how many burials should be anticipated. So the offer of 20 acres, I think, is symbolic, in a way. It shows the commitment from the city to this project. But whether it's 20 or 25 or 18; who's to say until the program statement is complete, sir?

BREWER: Good point. I was, I was--

JOHN HILGERT: It should be at least as large, probably larger because of the population in central Nebraska.

BREWER: OK, now that's the answer I was looking for.

JOHN HILGERT: Yes.

BREWER: Thank you. I didn't mean-- I just-- I figured if I ask you that, you wouldn't know it, so--

QUICK: Yeah.

BREWER: --I'd go ahead and get him up.

QUICK: And I think that's why that program statement is so important--

BREWER: Yeah.

QUICK: --to do first. We have to have-- and that's what this legislation basically does, is-- allows us to do the program statement so we can find out what we need to have.

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BREWER: Well, we're going to be addressing his accounts after-- because this is a good idea. It's just something that we need to, to push forward. And, you know, we'll, we'll be "execing" real soon on that. But I, I just ask that you kind of help us work on, on those details so we get things tweaked because it's, it's hopefully going to be an agreement. This is a, a good idea, we just want to make sure and figure out how to do it right. So that the one--

QUICK: That's correct.

BREWER: --that's with their-- does what we needed it to do. OK, Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Quick for bringing this. And sometimes things work out in mysterious ways. With the number 9/11 so important in America, how did you get that number?

[LAUGHTER]

BREWER: How did you do that?

QUICK: It, it was meant to be.

BREWER: All right, seeing no other-- we thank you for your testimony and for having this bill. Well, let's see, as we get ready to close on LB911, we have 17 letters in support. And here's the beautiful part; we have no opposition and no neutral. So with that, we will close the hearing on LB911 and we will transition to LB896. Senator Erdman. Senator Erdman, welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. I don't want to put a pressure on you, but we've had two very positive, interesting presentations. We look forward to yours now.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Chairman Brewer, I appreciate that. Committee, it's nice to be with you this morning-- this afternoon. I represent District 47, which has ten counties in the Panhandle of Nebraska. My name is Steve Erdman, S-t-e-v-e E-r-d-m-a-n. I'm here today to talk about LB896. And you'll notice I didn't say introduce. I had received a notice this morning, late this morning from the Department of Defense and from the Air Force. And the information that I got from the colonel there said the Department of Defense has decided not to testify in support of LB896 and therefore, the bill is no longer needed. So what I'm here to ask is that you would hold this bill in committee and not advance it.

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BREWER: You know what? I think we can do that.

ERDMAN: Thank you.

BREWER: And this was an Air Force colonel?

ERDMAN: Yes, it was.

BREWER: OK. Just remember, that's all you had to say. Well then, I thank you for your opening and your closing. And we will, we will go ahead and close on LB896. Oh, yes. I'm sorry. We did, we did put this out for public. So I'll go ahead and let you step away.

ERDMAN: I will, thank you.

BREWER: We'll see if we have any opponents, proponents--

ERDMAN: All right, thank you.

BREWER: --and neutral. All right, any proponents? Any opponents? Any neutral? Since he closed, I didn't know-- since he, since he chucked the bill--

[INAUDIBLE]

BREWER: Yeah, that's fine.

[INAUDIBLE]

BREWER: Yeah. We can do that then we record your presence here since we didn't really have a bill. And then because we just-- we don't want to work you any harder than we have to here and I appreciate it. And with that, would you like to close on your-- good. All right, with that said, then we will close on LB896. And I don't think we had any letters to read in for LB896. Oh, we did have one letter, sorry, it is from telecommunications. Too many letters. Yes, it was one letter in the neutral capacity. All right, we just have to trust you on that. There was one letter in the neutral capacity. It's somewhere in the pile. So with that, we will close on LB896. Thank you, Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you.