

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Executive Board February 24, 2025

HANSEN: All right. Good afternoon. Welcome to the Executive Board. My name is Senator Ben Hansen. I represent the 16th Legislative District in Washington, Burt, Cuming, and parts of Stanton Counties. And I serve as chair of the Executive Board. I would like to invite the members of the committee to introduce themselves, starting on my right with Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: Rob Clements, District 2.

McKINNEY: Terrell McKinney, District 11.

BALLARD: Beau Ballard, District 21.

IBACH: Teresa Ibach, District 44.

DORN: Myron Dorn, District 30.

FREDRICKSON: John Fredrickson, District 20.

ARCH: John Arch, District 14.

JACOBSON: Mike Jacobson, District 42.

HANSEN: Also assisting the committee is our legal counsel, Benson Wallace; our committee clerk, Natalie Schunk; and our committee pages, Sam and Jacob. You know this about our, our policy and procedures. Please turn off or silence your cell phones. We'll be hearing two bills, and we'll be combining them into a single hearing today. On each of the tables near the doors to the hearing room, you will find green testifier sheets. If you're planning to testify today, please fill one out and make sure to iden-- identify which bill or bills you will be taking a posi-- a position on, and hand it to the page when you come up to testify. This will help us keep an accurate record of the hearing. If you are not testifying at the microphone but want to go on record as having a position on a bill being heard today, there are yellow sign-in sheets at each entrance where you may leave your name and other pertinent information. Also, I would note if you are not testifying but have an online position comment to submit, the Legislature's policy is that all comments for the record must be received by the committee by 8 a.m. the day of the hearing. Any handouts submitted by testifiers will also be included as part of the record as exhibits. We ask if you do have any handouts that you please bring 12 copies and give them to the page. We use a light system for testifying. Each testifier will have three minutes to testify depending on the number of testifiers per bill. When you begin, the light will be green. When the light turns yellow, that means you have one minute left. When the light turns red,

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it is time to end your testimony and we'll ask you to wrap up your final thoughts. When you come up to testify, please begin by stating your name clearly into the microphone, and please spell both your first and last name. I would ask that you also state which bill or bills you will be testifying on. The hearing will begin with each introducer giving an opening statement. After the opening statement, we will hear from supporters of the bill, then from those in opposition, followed by those speaking in neutral capacity. The introducers of the bills will be given-- then be given the opportunity to make closing statements then if they wish to do so. On a side note, the reading of testimony that is not your own is not allowed unless previously approved. And we do have a strict no-prop policy in this committee. So with that, we will begin the hearing with LR25CA, which is my bill. I will, I will come up to testify-- or, to open. Excuse me. And then we'll follow it with LR7CA. So after I open, Senator Dorn then will come up and open on his bill as well. And we'll combine kind of both them together so we can have-- kind of make things more efficient. So I will start with mine.

IBACH: Thank you very much. You can go ahead with your opening, Senator.

HANSEN: Thank you, Vice Chair Ibach. Good afternoon, members of the Executive Committee. My name is Ben Hansen. That's B-e-n H-a-n-s-e-n. I will be discussing LR25CA today, a constitutional amendment that will be placed on the ballot for a vote of the people in November. Currently, a senator's salary cannot exceed \$12,000 a year. While some travel miles are reimbursed, this salary is less than 20% of Nebraska's median income. The motive behind limiting a senator's pay is out of respect to taxpayers. Prevention of corruption, ensuring fiscal responsibility, and maintaining the thought that being a senator is more about service than personal financial advancement are all reasons that can be applied to keeping our salary at a minimum. On the flip side, though, requiring someone to dediva-- dedicate half of their year to preparing for and attending the legislative session while committing the rest of the year to meetings and community engagements for only \$12,000 could be seen as counterproductive. The national average for the annual salary for legislators was \$39,216 in 2021. Nebraska makes it very difficult for people working normal jobs to be able to represent their communities as a state senator. The demands of the position with such a low salary isn't sustainable for a small business owner, a mother with children, or someone with a normal job that would never let them leave for half the year. This has led to a majority of senators who represent the state being either from organizations, retired, or people who have had time to establish a successful business

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of their own. I am not undermining any of us who are serving as senators and the, and the notable work that is done by the Legislature. Each senator brings their unique experience to better this body, and I believe as a whole we represent Nebraska well. However, I'd like to attract even more groups of qualified candidates who can bring their own set of skills and expertise. I would like to see senators from diverse walks of life be able to devote their time to represent people like them. I originally wrote LR25CA to remove the dollar amount and leave salaries more flexible as time changes. As written, each member of the Legislature would be paid at the minimum wage rate and receive health insurance paid by the state with equivalent benefits to those offered by Medicaid. How many hours they would be paid for will be set by the Legislature. After further discussion, I've decided to bring AM375-- and I will hand that out now if one of the pages wants to come up here and grab it. As state senators, we work for the people of Nebraska, and our salaries should be set by them. AM375 would require a nonpartisan, independent legislative salary commission to be established. The members of the commission would not include any current or former members of the Legislature, their spouse, legislative employees, lobbyists, judges, elected officials, or any current or former employee of the state. The commission mem-- the commission members would not benefit from personal gain. Instead, they would be nonpartisan and nonbiased. 22 other states set senator salaries through commissions, so this isn't something new. Nebraska has been paying our senators the same since 1988. Cost of living has dramatically increased, increased since then, and it is time we do something. There have been attempts to increase the salary over the years, but the ballot language looks like senators are trying to make more money. This approach leaves it up to the commission, not the senators. I also have heard concern about the amendment addressing two topics on a single-subject ballot requirement. It addresses both the salary and the insurance part that I had in my previous bill. If this becomes an issue, I'd be willing to remove the insurance portion because I don't want to muddy the waters. I'm thankful for Heidi with Civic Nebraska and her help on this. I believe 20-- LR25CA with AM375 is something that the senators can get on board with, and the language would gain the support of Nebraska's voters. With that, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.

IBACH: Very good. Are there questions from the committee? Senator Arch.

ARCH: So-- two questions. One, is there an effective date?

HANSEN: Yes. It's on there. 2029. That's when the sa-- that's when the, the salary will be set. So--

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ARCH: In the amendment it's in here?

HANSEN: Yes. So we would have-- so if we pass it, it gets voted on by the people--

ARCH: OK. I see, I see that.

HANSEN: And the, the commission has to be set up. And then they have to meet and determine that. And then that would be in 2029.

ARCH: Is there, is there a process for establishing the commission?

HANSEN: That would be up to the Legislature to decide once this gets passed to the ballot, I'm assuming. Whether through the governor or, or whether through the Executive Board or--

ARCH: It would have to be some enabling legislation.

HANSEN: Yeah. But we're putting in there specifically who can and who cannot be on it--

ARCH: Right.

HANSEN: --which I think is important.

IBACH: Very good. Thank you, Senator. Senator Jacobson.

JACOBSON: Well, with two bills here, this one really kind of started out as a-- you're talking about more a, a-- an hourly kind of minimum wage. I, I presume it would still be a salary as opposed to an hourly wage. I'm not-- I'm-- guess I'm trying to figure out--

HANSEN: Like what the commission would determine?

JACOBSON: Yeah. I, I'm, I'm assuming that we're talking about some kind of fixed salary amount as--

HANSEN: Yes.

JACOBSON: --opposed to trying to track overtime and--

HANSEN: Yes.

JACOBSON: --all the nightmare that would go with that.

HANSEN: Yeah. And what I originally had in my previous bill with the minimum wage, I-- it wouldn't be up to me because I'd be gone two

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years. But I would envision it as saying we get 40 hours a week minimum wage while we're in session, 20 hours a week while we're not in session. Keep it simple. No punching in or punching out of clocks, no overtime, but that would be-- set our salary. But with this, the commission then would determine what they feel is appropriate for the, the Legislature.

JACOBSON: And I presume that, you know, looking at what we do-- particularly as you get further west-- some of us spent more time down here during the summer, during the off season, if you will. But I think we still see the Legislature as being citizen legislators. And, and it's kind of envisioned that many would continue to have real jobs, spend time in their districts. And so as you're in rural Nebraska, you know, there would be an expectation that you would be working long hours during the session and likely spending time back in the district off session. So when we start looking at salaries beyond what's being-- you know, what, what, what we're currently doing, what would be those expectations for outside the legislative session times?

HANSEN: That would be-- according to my amendment, that'll be up to the commission to determine. Yeah. Whether they view that as laudable or not, I don't know. I mean, they could say, well, while we're in session, you get this much. And while we're not in session, you get this much. I would assume they'd do it like a salary, like most other states do. This way, they're able to kind of sit down, nonpartisan, nonbiased, say, look, what are, what are other states doing? How much time do we put into this? What's appropriate? Maybe they think \$12,000 is appropriate and they stay at that. Maybe they-- it's 15. You know what I mean? But at least we're seeing-- we're having a commission that's established to determine that, made up of citizens, which-- so we're still recognizing the citizens determine our pay.

JACOBSON: And one last question. Would there be any expectations when you're doing that to consider-- as an example, the Speaker. OK. I'm going to make the assumption that Speaker Arch spends more time here than anyone else does as an elected senator. And then you're going to have committee chairs that are probably going to spend more time, particularly Appropriations, Revenue, and so on. And then there are a number of senators who really have more free time and, and, and are not-- that are not really leading a committee or in the leadership. Would you envision that that would-- that there would be some differential pay there?

HANSEN: There could be. I'd have to look and see what other states do on that specific. If they pay their speakers or their House majority

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leaders or House minority leaders more, I'm unsure. I would assume this is something the commission will look at and say, hey, look. What do other states do? You know, that's the way I see this. I, I would assume we want to kind of be in line with not just cost of living but also maintaining the idea that this is not-- this is not a career. And it shouldn't be. You shouldn't get paid too much where you just leave everything behind and this is your career. I don't want that to happen. I would assume the commission would then also recognize that. But maybe they recognize some people put more time and effort than others, such as a speaker or, or committee chairs, and they should be paid 10% more. You know. I don't really know for sure.

JACOBSON: Thank you.

HANSEN: Yeah. And also, I, I want to mention one more thing, if I could. Senator Dorn and I are working on this together. So we're both-- we, we figured it's kind of helpful. You know, both, both of us brought bills that were similar, having to do with pay. We both thought this was a, a better idea than what both of us presented. And so we like this idea. I'm glad Civic Nebraska came and helped us out with this.

IBACH: Very good. Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none. We will-- are we on to Dorn? OK. Thank you, Senator Hansen. We'll invite Senator Dorn up to give his opening statement.

DORN: Thank you. And we, we have a handout prepared also. Good afternoon, Exec Board. My name is Myron Dorn, M-y-r-o-n D-o-r-n. I represent District 30, which is all of Gage County and southeastern corner of Lancaster County. Excuse me. I'm here to represent LR7CA. That's a constitutional amendment that I brought. It seeks to increase Nebraska state senator yearly pay from \$12,000 a year to \$30,000 a year. If passed by the Legislature, the proposal would go on the next general election ballot in November of 2026. For some pers-- some perspective, the last time senator salaries were increased was in 1988, and it went from \$4,800 to \$12,000. In an article from governing.com in December 2022, if Nebraska senator salaries just would have been adjusted for inflation and not any kind of, I call it, other increase, the salaries today would be \$30,000. In your handout, you'll also see-- and this is from NCSL, the National Conference of State Legislatures-- which they just did our survey for all of the employees of, of the state of Nebraska-- that Nebraska's Le-- Legislature job equates to more than 2/3 of a full time job. They list all the states in there. There's a map in there. It shows the different ones that were considered full time or-- ours is considered more than 2/3, or what's about 70%. There's also information on each state's pay and per diem if

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they have any. This low pay limit who can consider running for the-- this low pay limits who can consider running for the State Legislature. As you know, my district is up in two years and I've personally spoken to people who would like to run, but they have flat out told me, I can't take the financial viability that it would take while being away from their full-time jobs. One other side note that I put in here. The Nebra-- the League of Nebraska Munici-- Municipalities, they ask if we would say that they were in favor of this because they have their meeting going on down at the Cornhusker. And I said I would mention that in my meeting. Also, Senator Hansen and I have visited several times about his amendment, and I am in full support of his amendment to his LR25CA about establishing the commission. And to some of your questions-- yes, some of that has to be all worked out yet. How-- it, it lists in there some who can't be on the commission, but then how that commission's elected or chosen or whatever, that would need to be worked out. And the, the, the same thing with your comment and stuff. I, I think it's important that we have something like that so that that commission now can look at if NCSL is right and we're at a 70% job, job-- that's a full-time job, they can now look at that and adjust our salary accordingly. Will they adjust something for a Speaker? That's probably going to be something up to them. You know, different levels for different people. But that's all part of the discussion yet, but very much in support of that. I've been visiting with Senator Hansen several times about it.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Are there questions from the committee? I just have one. Oh, go ahead. Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: Thank you, Vice Chair. Thank you, Senator Dorn. You commented that \$30,000 is a-- an inflation amount. How did you figure the inflation percentage?

DORN: The-- this is just if they took that-- I, I don't know. It was from that, that survey that they did or, or, or-- I forget who it was here, something.com or whatever. It was just-- if you took just the regular inflation that we've had since 1988, the salary today would be [INAUDIBLE] \$30,000.

CLEMENTS: All right. I just put into the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1988 to 2025, \$12,000 becomes \$32,947. So I think it's-- \$30,000's very close.

DORN: Yup. Pretty close. All right. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Thank you.

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IBACH: Thank you, Senator Clements. Other questions from the committee? I just have one. And maybe you guys have talked about this a little bit, but do you envision revising other terms of the-- of, of-- the reimbursements, all the terms that we currently have? Because, I mean, as outlined, we have per diem, we have mileage, that type of thing. Do you think a commission-- have you talked about how they might approach that?

DORN: We have not-- we have not, I call-- talked about those kind of details yet other than-- I think, as Senator Hansen mentioned, part of his amendment here, it includes now health insurance. If we put something on the ballot, is that more than one subject then? And that, that's something that may have to be answered by, I call it, maybe the Attorney General or something. So that it's one subject yet on the ballot. So I don't know if that also would be something else. If not, we can put that in there so that that commission could look at those different things also.

IBACH: OK. Very good. Senator Jacobson.

JACOBSON: Well, to that point, would you, would you be better served to put on the ballot to establish a commission to review and, and be ab-- in other words, would you be better off to just do the commission part and these are the things that they could look into, as opposed to doing anything-- trying to set an initial salary or any other benefits but leave it to the commission?

DORN: I think that's the intent of the amendment, is to leave that to comm-- to the commission, and then they would make the recommendation of what-- where to set that at, and maybe some of these other guidelines with it.

JACOBSON: And what I'm thinking is skinning us down to where it would just-- the ballot initiative is to create a commission.

DORN: Yeah. Create a commission. And I, I think-- just so you also get this perspective. Right now, we are in-- it's a constitutional amendment. So to change any salary, it has to go in front of the vote of the people. Establishing a commission now and having them be responsible for setting the salary takes that outside of a constitutional amendment. So to change a salary in future years wouldn't have to be voted on by the people. So that's part of the discussion. We can have more discussion on that, but that's also part of the discussion of not to let the Legislature, I call it-- the Legislature sometimes, as I've been up here, will, will quite often

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say, well, I don't want to vote on increasing my salary because when I run for reelection, people will say, you voted to increase your salary. This commission would now take that outside of the Legislature doing it. So that's kind of some of the thought process. Senator Hansen and I have visited, like I said, several times about this. There's another lady back here that's going to talk some more about this. But this then would put it so that we don't have to come back in, what is it, 37 years and see if we can change the salary or whatever. So that we don't put it in front of the people and the people vote on it. Understand very much why we have the people vote on it, but yet we can't change it for 37 years. So.

IBACH: Thank you. Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: I don't see an effective date. I assume this would be a November of 2026 election. Would you, would you wanting-- to start this January 1 of 2027 right after that?

DORN: No. There is, there is an amendment. I think Senator Hansen mentioned that, even, it, it is in '29. There is an effective date of '29. It would be in the '26 election, though, and-- where it would be on the ballot. And then you have to have time to set the commission up, appoint the people, and then they have to have time to have some meetings to get-- bring something forward. And so it shows then the date when this would become effective. So it's--

CLEMENTS: I was just looking at--

DORN: --three, four years out there.

CLEMENTS: The way yours was filed didn't have that. But Senator--

DORN: Yeah.

CLEMENTS: --Hansen's does have the 2029.

DORN: Mine basically we're going to just hold or whatever. And Senator Hansen's-- I will be part of that also then, being on-- a part of his with his amendment onto his LR.

CLEMENTS: Thank you.

DORN: Yeah.

IBACH: Very good. Are there questions? Seeing none. Thank you very much. I'm sure you'll both come up and close. Any proponents? Welcome.

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HEIDI UHING: Hello, senators, Vice Chair of the committee, and other members. My name is Heidi Ewing. I'm public policy director for Civic Nebraska. I'm here today in support of LR25CA, brought by Senator Ben Hansen. My name is spelled H-e-i-d-i U-h-i-n-g. Our organization supports legislation that protects this nonpartisan institution and makes it more representative of Nebraskans. And we believe this measure with Senator Hansen's amendment is one of the most important measures before the Legislature this session because it resolves a long-standing problem in our state constitution. While there is much to be grateful about and how our Unicameral was uniquely structured, our state's inability to properly address the problem of senator pay is truly a bug in the system. When George Norris was advising on the structure of our new unicameral, he had intended for state senators to be decently paid and advocated at the time for a \$2,400 salary in 1934. According to the resource you just mentioned, Senator Clements, today that would be just under \$58,000 annual salary. He lost that fight, however, and so here we are today. This idea of an independent legislative salary commission has become a common practice in nearly half of the states. NCSL reports this method being used by 20-- 22 states, including our neighbors Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. NCSL categorizes legislatures into three types: full time, hybrid, and part time. While the Unicameral was conceived to be a part-time Legislature to ensure that average Nebraskans would serve, NCSL now considers Nebraska to be a hybrid state, in which legislators devote 74% of a full-time job to their legislative duties. Of this category, the average legislator pay is \$41,000. Close observers of the Legislature know that to do this job well, it is at least a full-time job. We expect senators to give it their all and prioritize the service to the state, but the low pay does not reflect that expectation. We put future senators in a bind who have something to offer our legislative process but need to feed, house, and insure their families. The breadth and nature of our state's policy has grown more complex in recent years. These officials are determining policy on topics from fiscal measures to health care, criminal justice, and modern technology challenges. Due to partisan backlog at the congressional level, more complicated issues are falling to state legislators-- legislatures for resolution. The impact of senator's work on the lives of Nebraskans is arguably greater than that of most well-paid professionals. Senators' compensation should reflect this level of expertise while taking into account the late nights, loss of privacy, and sometimes, unfortunately, intimidating threats that modern senators endure. While some Nebraskans may feel they are getting a good deal by paying our state senators so little, the low level of pay means that most retired-- mostly retired, semi-retired, or independently wealthy Nebraskans can even afford to serve. An imbalance like this in

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the body prevents our state's policy outcomes from being truly representative of the average Nebraskan's experience and perspective. Those who do manage to serve but still need regular income are often forced to balance at least one other job, often causing them to use their time at the Legislature for competing outside duties. Do we really want our lawmakers to be distracted by other work or have to balance other potentially competing interests? Nationwide, the number of legislators averages to about 148 people per state. At just 1/3 of that number of lawmakers in Nebraska, we have already won the frugality argument. Indeed, because of our small, single house, there is a greater need for each senator to carry their weight and be allowed to give their full attention to the work of the people. Serving as a state senator is already a sacrifice. The campaign trail is hard, grueling work. Upon their successful election, many senators and their families are frankly surprised to learn just how much time and energy it requires to be a state senator. Even a quick trip to the grocery store in their district can turn into a work meeting. The time away from families, particularly during the late nights of hearings and floor debate, is already a sacrifice that senators and their families are enduring. We mustn't also expect them to do so while being paid a fraction of the average Nebraskan's income to support the household in their absence. We need more working-class Nebraskans, more parents, more diversity of experience in this body to keep it working best for us. When the pay is better, more candidates can run for these offices, and democracy is strengthened when voters have more choices for who will be representing them. Nebraska is an important state with sophisticated policy needs. We need a future of lawmakers whose diversity of experience continues to be up to the task.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Are there questions from the committee?
Senator Ballard.

BALLARD: Thank you for being here. I, I know that the Legislature has to set up this commission if this passes, but what do other states do? Where is this commission housed? And then is it under the governors or the legislature? Do we have to confirm?

HEIDI UHING: It can be all over the map. It could be the-- under the Executive Board. It could be under the legislators-- legislator planning committee. It, it really would be entirely up to you. I think-- you know, we could do a deeper review of the details of how other states have imp-- implemented it, but that would entirely be up to the Legislature to decide in 2027.

BALLARD: OK. So other states-- it's all over the map in other states.

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HEIDI UHING: It really is.

BALLARD: OK.

HEIDI UHING: And, and, and that was news to me. I, I did not realize that this was sort of a trend that had taken over states since Nebraska had really looked at this pay issue in, in 2020-- 2012, I believe it was, the last time it was on the ballot. But it, it would to-- totally be up to the body how you want to do it. And, and I think-- in some states, they even allow a hearing process for commission members to hear public input where they could consider, you know, these suggestions that you are making about breaking out to have different brackets for salaries depending on role of legislators. But I, I think that bringing into the process a role for the public to provide input would be a really good idea, but that's for a later session to decide.

BALLARD: OK. Thank you.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Are there question-- Senator Jac-- Fredrickson. Sorry.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Vice Chair Ibach. Thank you for being here and for your testimony. So one thing you said that kind of struck me-- and I believe this may have been from either CSG or NCSL. I forgot which one you mentioned-- but classifying Nebraska as a hybrid Legislature. My understanding was historically, we've been classified as a part-time Legislature. This is an interesting shift towards that. Can you maybe shed some more light on--

HEIDI UHING: Yeah.

FREDRICKSON: --that classification shift?

HEIDI UHING: The, the language used when the Unicameral was structured in 1934 was very much based on the idea of a part-time citizen Legislature, and that meant that the body was made up of people who weren't professional legislators living in Lincoln all the time and having distance from the people that they represented, but rather people who still lived in their district or near their constituents, available to them on a regular basis to bring that input here to Lincoln to-- for their decision-making. And so I imagine in 1934, you know-- as Patrick O'Donnell would say, all, all of the easy bills have already been passed. You know, the, the, the bills that people are considering today are more complicated, I would imagine then, 1934. Would be an interesting review to see how many bills that were introduced today versus then or how many bills are passed by bodies

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today versus then. My guess is that NCSL has determined that the workload has increased in those 90 years to the degree that it does require additional senator time in order to do the job effectively. And so the hybrid category that we fall now is at-- an expectation of about 94% of a full-time job.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you.

IBACH: Thank you, Senator Fredrickson. Senator Arch.

ARCH: Thank you. And this may not be your question. It might be-- it might be for the introducers as well. But I, I'm just thinking about process here. So the commission then has authority to set the salary. Is that something that is a recommendation to the Appropriations Committee? Does the Appropriations Committee have to--

HEIDI UHING: Confirm.

ARCH: --confirm and then it has to be part of the budget, which could change, I mean, every, every year. So it sounds like there's still maybe a required vote of the Legislature at some point to get it into an actual appropriation.

HEIDI UHING: Good point. Yes. Because they're part of the budget package is a bill confirming senator salaries, that that-- that's where it would come back into play.

ARCH: So then it would actually get-- I mean, the appropriation bill would get to the floor, the budget bill would get to the floor, and we would have a debate on senator salaries--

HEIDI UHING: Yeah.

ARCH: --on, on the floor.

HEIDI UHING: That's a good point. I suppose it--

ARCH: That sounds fun.

HEIDI UHING: --could even be-- maybe you could be sick that day.

ARCH: OK. Thank you.

HEIDI UHING: But I, I think that's a good point that you make, that it would be-- had-- it-- you-- it would come back to you again.

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IBACH: Very good. Thank you. Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you very much for your testimony.

HEIDI UHING: Thank you so much.

IBACH: Are there other proponents? Anyone speaking in favor of this bill? Thank you. Welcome.

GAVIN GEIS: Good afternoon, members of the Executive Board. My name is Gavin Geis. That is G-a-v-i-n G-e-i-s. I'm the Executive Director for Common Cause Nebraska. We are testifying in support of both these bills today and in support of the new amendment. And although we haven't had a chance to see it, we are supportive of the idea. We are supportive for many of the reasons that have already been listed here today. It's clear this work is worth more than \$12,000 a year. There is just no way around that. You all do more work than \$12,000. We also believe that an increase in salary would increase those who can serve. It is no-- it is-- it, it is no underestimation that people choose not to do this job because they can't imagine living on \$12,000. That's just reality. I can't imagine living on \$12,000. It would stop me. I'm not considering it, but it would stop me. The last point and the on-- the different point we would make is that we think Nebraskans need to invest in their legislators. That is something that we need to be doing as constituents. Right now, we pay about \$0.30 per constituent for your time. That is how much each of your constituents pay you. Meanwhile-- well, before meanwhile, that's about \$588,000 a year on senator salaries, right? And now the meanwhile. The meanwhile is-- meanwhile, there are millions of dollars being spent to influence you, right? There are millions of dollars being spent on lobbying and entertaining, food and drinks and events and on campaign finance. All this is being spent to influence you. Whether it works or not, there are clearly people who are valuing your time and your energy and your experience and your input more than your constituents are when it comes down to dollars. We think as an organization that we need to be investing more heavily in all of you to reaffirm who it is you work for. Now, I'm not-- that's not to cast aspersions on anyone here. You all know who you work for. But when it comes to value of the dollar, we think there is a disparity here between the special interests that are at work here-- and I am a lobbyist, so I won't hide that. But there is a disparity between the constituent and the interests that are working in the Capitol. The last thing I will say is just on the amendment. I would encourage you all to consider putting into the amendment who would be the deciding body for this commission. For me, that is the biggest hang-up I have with it. If that's not in there, who's to say what it comes out-- when it comes down to a debate in the Legislature?

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Will you all get to decide the people that sit on the board that decides your salaries? That feels like a conflict. It feels like an easy angle of attack for anyone who wants to go after this amendment if it goes on the ballot. It seems like the first thing that I would consider going after-- although we're supportive in general, so I'm not going after it. I want you all to be paid more, but please consider where you're going to place the deciding body for this commission. One suggestion I would have is potentially the, the Judicial Nominating Committee. I feel like that is removed enough from this body, from the Governor's Office, that it may be a fair place to consider putting a deciding decision for the commission. Thank you. We are very supportive. I appreciate the time.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Are there questions from the committee? Senator Jacobson.

JACOBSON: So to be clear, you're thinking that being a lobbyist is a much better gig than being a state senator.

GAVIN GEIS: That is very clear. And it-- yeah, you could see that from the number of legislators who eventually become lobbyists, right? It is a gateway to the lobbying dollar, so yes.

JACOBSON: Thank you.

IBACH: Very good. Thank you very much. Are there questions? Seeing none. Thank you very much for your testimony.

GAVIN GEIS: Thank you.

IBACH: Other proponents. Welcome.

CINDY MAXWELL-OSTDIEK: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Cindy Maxwell-Ostdiek. That's C-i-n-d-y M-a-x-w-e-l-l-O-s-t-d-i-e-k. Vice Chair Ibach and members of the Executive Board. I am a board member of Nonpartisan Nebraska, which was organized several years ago to promote and protect the unique nature of the Nebraska's Unicameral government. Nebra-- Nonpartisan Nebraska has testified at prior hearings to promote good government, and that's why we're here today. Nebraskans need to revisit the low salary, which was last raised by the citizens nearly 40 years ago, and the state has been fortunate to have many elected officials who believed in the Unicameral and were willing to sacrifice their own fiscal well-being to be part of the lawmaking process. But it is a disservice to those men and women to in-- not increase to a level which reflects the current cost of living. Senator Dorn has proposed a salary of \$30,000, while Senator Hansen has proposed a wage based on

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minimum wage plus health insurance. Based on in-- initial introduction, Nonpartisan Nebraska believes both bills have merit, and we suggest the two be merged so the base salary is set to \$30,000 while health insurance is provided as part of the salary package. The administrative chore associated with monitoring the hours for minimum wage suggests it can be problematic, and we believe a flat salary would be preferable. Most individuals working in similar fields do receive health insurance as part of their position. And we've not seen the amendment regarding creating an independent commission but believe increasing the salaries of state senators will open the door to many Nebraskans who have an interest in serving but are unable to participate because the wage is not a livable wage. Broadening the pool of prospective candidates will enable younger Nebraskans to participate and without being beholden to an employer for time off to attend legislative duties. We believe this is good for business, for the state, and for the Legislature, and we urge this committee to forward the bill to the floor for discussion. And we hope that you will secure a place on the ballot for this proposal in 2026.

IBACH: Very good. Thank you very much. Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you for your testimony. Other proponents. Welcome.

CORRIE DAY: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Corrie Day. I am the Senior Policy and Compliance Manager at the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table. C-o-r-r-i-e D-a-y. We're informally called the Nebraska Table. We're a statewide, nonpartisan nonprofit working to ensure communities are connected and engaged with civic engagement processes year-round, and we strive to make the political process accessible for Nebraskans. We support LI2-- LR25CA on the grounds that it commensurately compensates the members of the Legislature for their efforts and time spent aiding the citizens of Nebraska. As Ms. Uhing has discussed, we are a hybrid Legislature, so our peers includes states like Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma, Colorado, and others. Out of our peers, however, we have the second-lowest annual salary, with only Texas coming below us at \$7,200 per year. However, even then, their senator per diem is \$200-- \$221 a day regardless of what session they're in or how far away they live from the Capitol. And even that's still \$70 higher than how far away our senators live. Similarly, when it comes to health care, we are in the minority of making our senators pay for their health care instead of providing it in at least some capacity. Our peer states in this category include Wyoming, West Virginia, and South Dakota. Wyoming and South Dakota both have a maximum of 40 days for a legislative session, while West Virginia has a maximum of 60 days. Not only do we have a minimum of 60 days, as you know, there's

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also special session periods-- the most recently of which we had this previous summer. As the theme of the proponents have already stated, it's long overdue to give members of the Legislature the compensation they've earned. The current \$12,000 salary not only underpays our senators but deters many fi-- many qualified and passionate Nebraskans from running for office. It's fairly safe to say that, as we've discussed, many people know one or several individuals who would be very qualified to run but simply cannot afford it. But it doesn't have to be this way moving forward. Ushering a new era of pay and health care allows for the everyman to run for office without fear of going into debt or creating substantial financial hardship in their lives. In summary, although we are a hybrid model, we often miss our marks that our peers are hitting when it comes to compensation and health care. By supporting this amendment, it'll not only appropriately compensate the members of the Legislature but also allow more Nebraskans to run for office without fear of financial difficulty. For these reasons, the Nebraska Table encourages the Executive Committee to advance LR25CA. Thank you for your time.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Evidence that everything is not always bigger in Texas.

CORRIE DAY: Exactly.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Are there questions from the committee? Senator Jacobson.

JACOBSON: Thank you. I guess I wanted to drill down just a little bit-- and I'm not picking on you. I could have asked any of the presenters, but this, this thought of health care provided seems problematic to me because this is still a part-time job. And even the, the numbers that we're talking about would still reflect a part-time salary. And fact of the matter is if you really looked at health care costs, you're probably talking about doubling even the highest number on the salary. I mean, I think if you look right now at, at what schools are spending on, on benefits, it's over \$38,000 a year. So-- I mean, how, how, I, I guess, supportive are you on the idea of providing health care benefits in addition to a salary increase?

CORRIE DAY: I think-- the Table hasn't discussed this too much with me, so I don't want to speak too far out of my designated lane. But, I mean, I do think it makes a lot of sense. Health care, as everyone knows, is becoming more and more expensive. So if there's more deterrents for the job, it's going to even further to decrea-- decrease who can run. So I mean, the goal of the Table is to make rules like

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these accessible to people as much as possible. So removing as many deterrents as possible is an important goal.

JACOBSON: Well, and, and it-- just to follow up, I, I mean, if you're working part time at a job, you're not entitled to benefits. You're, you're getting a part-time salary or part-time, I, I guess, hourly paid wage. I-- and I just from-- personally, I look at this from the standpoint if we're going along the theme of it's part time, we could significantly increase the fiscal note if we were to try to include health care benefits, recognizing that there would still be many senators that already have their own health care and a family plan and so on and really would not take advantage of it. Others would. And it just-- I don't know. I'm just raising the question. Does it become more problematic to try to include that? Or would we just leave it to the commission and they make the decision?

CORRIE DAY: Yeah. A couple other states also have hybrid options for health care, where it can be partially state sponsored, fully state sponsored, or up to the individual member of the legislative body. So if you know, you have, for whatever reason, a really high population of married senators one year, maybe it's not as necessary to provide that as an essential benefit. You could look at that model as well, making it more optional. So it's not completely required, but certain senators who may need it have that choice as well.

JACOBSON: Thank you.

IBACH: Thank you, Senator Jacobson. Other comments from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you very much for your testimony. Other proponents. Welcome.

JENNIFER CREAGER: Thank you. Vice Chair Ibach, members of the Exec Board. For the record, I'm Jennifer Creager, J-e-n-n-i-f-e-r C-r-e-a-g-e-r. A registered lobbyist for the Greater Omaha Chamber. Also appearing today on behalf of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry in support of LR7CA, in support of LR25CA, and in support of the amendment. I have not seen the amendment, but Senator Hansen and I did have a conversation about this concept in January. I do actually have some polling that was shared with me that was conducted last summer, so I'll give you some-- share some of that with you, which I think-- on this specific issue of a commission. The business community has always supported both a term-limit extension and legislative pay increases. The bottom line is we just need to do better about extan-- expanding this public service opportunity for people. And when you think about people in the prime years of their earning potential, it,

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it's really a barrier to getting a full representation of the members of our state. As far as polling-- sorry. I believe this was conducted last summer. So the initial question was-- oh, and-- sorry. The Lincoln Chamber of-- I'm also here for the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce. I just got that text. I was waiting on that, so. Apologize for that. The first question was this amendment would create an independent commission responsible for setting state senators' pay in Nebraska. And so at the outset of that question, 66% said that they would vote for the-- that ballot in a simplified ballot. 6 in 10 said they would prefer this sort of system over the current system even when told that a vote of the people is required in the current system. If specified, the new system would also include a vote of the people. Nearly 7 in 10, or 68%, said they would prefer it to the current system. And 1 in 4-- about 1 in 4, 24%, of Nebraska voters said they think sen-- state senators are paid too much. But also fewer than 1 in 5 say they are paid too little, about 18%. And a plurality just isn't sure. So they think the takeaway from this is folks get uncomfortable when they think about senators setting their own pay, but also most of them just have no idea how much senators make in general. So I thought that that-- those poll numbers would be instructive to you as you continue this conversation. But to the extent that the business communi-- community can be helpful to all of you as you proceed, we would like to do so. Thanks.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Senator Jacobson.

JACOBSON: Could, could you tell me again? So how many thought that \$12,000 was too high?

JENNIFER CREAGER: Hopefully they don't live in your district. 24%.

JACOBSON: OK. Thank you.

JENNIFER CREAGER: Yes.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Any other questions from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you for your testimony. Are there other proponents? Welcome, other Mr. Hansen.

JOHN HANSEN: Madam Vice Chair, members of the committee. For the record, my name is John Hansen, J-o-h-n; Hansen, H-a-n-s-e-n. I am the President of Nebraska Farmers Union and also their lobbyist. Our organization was very heavily engaged in the creation of the nonpartisan, Unicameral system and-- in part to get rid of the impact of partisan politics, and the other main reason, when you go back and you look at the history, was to save money. So I'm not sure where we

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landed on the whole business of trying to pay senators more money when Senator Norris did it. But during the 35 years I've been in this position, we have consistently supported efforts to try to more fairly and appropriately compensate folks who take the time to invest in the, in the Unicameral system and that it's important to have that be something that is attainable and doable for people of average means. And so in my other hat that I wear as the secretary of our Farmers Union Political Action Committee and also in, in this hat, I, I work with a lot of potential candidates. I have a lot of frank conversations. It's a wonderful job. If you want to make a difference, it's something that you ought to think about. And then when we get to the logistics of how does this work, actually, and what does it take, there's an awful lot of, of really good, qualified people, especially younger people, and people of average means who just have to honestly look at this whole prospect of getting paid \$12,000 a year and saying, we just can't afford it. On the other hand, I've done this job for a very long time and I've also-- in my previous life as a public official, I interfaced with the Legislature. So I guess all told, it's about 51 years. So I've also known an awful lot of former state senators, one of which just passed away this last weekend, Senator Bill Burrows. And for-- Bill oftentimes would, would say, you know, my wife and I, we, we, we never did really get past that patch in that discussion because I deeply wanted to do it. And she said, honey, look at the money. And it was-- he said it was a bite for us. I've also seen former state senators who did not have health care, and unfortunately it, it led to divorce. It led to financial problems. So what we're doing now is not working. So what can we get away with? So I like the, the Dorn approach in that it's simpler. Simpler is good. I like the Senator Hansen approach, in that I would like-- if I had my druthers who I thought we could sell it to citizens, is to come up with a, a commission that was both independent and somehow accountable but not in a direct way to the Legislature. So we avoid that conversation, Speaker Arch, on the floor. That's complicating. And I think it's going to take a broad-based effort in part of a lot of people to be able to make this dog hunt. With that, I'd be glad to answer any questions.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you.

JOHN HANSEN: Thank you.

IBACH: Other proponents.

JOHN HANSEN: And good luck.

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IBACH: Other proponents. Seeing none. Are there any opponents? Anybody in the opposition? Not-- sorry.

JOSEPHINE LITWINOWICZ: Before we start, I want to address this point of dignity. And-- been trying to work for a couple of years, you know. The current AG, I took it personally. He talked with me [INAUDIBLE] disability-- peop-- people with disabilities.

IBACH: Can, can you state your name and spell it for the record?

JOSEPHINE LITWINOWICZ: J-o-s-e-p-h-i-n-e L-i-t-w-i-n-o-w-i-c-z. I want to continue for a second because the current AG-- and that's what I took personally. He targeted me, and I have the proof. So I say [INAUDIBLE]. I want this done quickly. I don't care if anybody knows. Well, now they do. But at least he'll know. Because what he did to me, it cost the disabled people a lot. Anyway. For this bill, I-- let's, let's-- I mean, it, it sounds like there's a lot that can be done. If there's a commission for them and-- they're separate, but-- can you eliminate one? Because it still might-- I'm pretty cynical about-- and I wanted to say that, why don't you also put it in there that anybody on Medicaid can, can be a state senator and they-- they just keep their benefits and they don't get nothing else. Because I'll come. I'll make it here somehow. Can we do that? Will you also let me participate? I'm not just saying will you. I want to participate. And-- I don't know. This \$30,000 is not tied to inflation. And you can adjust it with a commission. And-- I don't know. It-- this is a-- it just-- ah, man. I guess I don't understand why we can't have it tied to inflation. Because it-- we, we're already below-- we're setting it below what inflation would have accounted for, from what I understand. And so why can't it be tied to inflation? Because there's always going to be an interest. Anyway. Will the insurance be on a separate thing? And can you just refuse one or the other? I-- and we'll-- we have a committee hearing after the commission comes up with its results, because apparently it can change. And it would be great if then-- because I support something with-- tied to inflation. Because otherwise it's going to happen again. And you're-- basically, you're keeping the Democrats out. I'm an Independent. But any-- for good reason on both sides. But I want you to think again about letting me participate. And not just, eh, OK. Seriously. Put it in. Why not? I mean, what would that be? I just get my benefits and the pay or the stipend. You know, I, I say it's, it's a low wage, but I can volunteer and have good bennies. So just let me participate.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you very much. Are there other-- there other

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opponents? Seeing none. Is there anyone in the neutral? Neutral position? Seeing none. We will ask the senators to come back and close. While they do that, we had-- Senator Dorn's LR7CA, had 45 proponents, 8 opponents, and 2 in the neutral. Senator Hansen's LR25CA had 57 proponents, 7 opponents, and 0 in the neutral. Senator Hansen.

HANSEN: Thank you. I didn't get a chance to share this with you earlier, but there was a poll that was done for people in Nebraska about the idea of this exact amendment, and they came up with 66 potential voters would be in favor of something like this and 24% would be against. If this if this language came from them in the ballot, that's what the polls showed. Per diem is not included in this amendment. That is something that is separate. And so whatever the commission decides, they will not be deciding on per diem as opposed to senator salary. I do, I do know which is the language we're work-- going to work with the Attorney General and the Secretary of State to make sure the language is appropriate. We're not expecting any challenges in the future. The reason why we can't-- we have to pick 2029 is because you can't change-- according to Article III, Section 19 of our constitution, you can't change senators' salary except the beginning of a full term. That's why you have to do it in 2029, January 1. I want to say thank you to Civic Nebraska again for all their help and then helping us also, if this goes through, communicating this to the people. Letting them know-- letting them know what, what it's about and the idea that we are not taking them out of the process. They are still the essential means to our salary. I just wanna make sure we're not-- we're not trying to do a workaround for the citizens of Nebraska. They are the ones determining our pay. Just like they always have. We're just streamlining the process, making it more effective too. And also, I think, I think-- the Speaker brought up a good point about this would have to then be an appropriation. That's something we'll have to discuss on the floor. I think the idea that we're making this a citizen-led commission I think gives me, I guess, some comfort knowing I can vote for something that's not-- I'm not increasing my pay. I'm just agreeing with what they're saying. So this comes on the floor. I don't-- I wouldn't expect a fight. It could be. But this is not us determining our pay. This is the citizens of Nebraska, and we are agreeing with them. Now, if they give us \$200,000 a year, I might vote against that. I highly doubt that's going to happen. I'm expecting this would be a very educated process, working with NCSL, doing pay studies, seeing what we can-- you know. That's, that's where I see this. And if that's something that needs to be more specifically written in the language after this passage of the ballot, the Legislature can determine that. Then so be it. I'm OK with removing, removing the

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health care portion. I mean, if that's going to cause a problem, I think, if we're going to see that be kind of two subjects we're worried about. [INAUDIBLE] something I'll talk to the Attorney General and the Secretary of State about some more. The idea is-- I think Jacobson brought up a point about part time doesn't expect benefits. The problem is, though, we got business owners and people who are not employed by anybody who don't have the ability to, to have health insurance. And this might be one of the only ways they can get it. And so kind of looking out for our state senators. And we could also look at maybe making them on the state employee benefits as well. Instead of doing like a, a Medicaid kind of version, you can just make them-- the sta-- same as the state because they are technically an employee. Then you won't have to worry about the appropriations or any of that kind of stuff. And I didn't know for sure if it was a statute or a constitutional change when it comes to per diem or even health care. I didn't know that. I, I was just thinking about that. If we decide to give ourselves-- or, put a-- put ourselves on the state employee benefit roll, I don't know if that's a-- it has to be a constitutional change or not. Because it's technically not money that's getting appropriated to us as it is a health care benefit. So I don't know. That might be something we can look into. So. With that, I'll take any questions.

IBACH: All right. Senator Jacobson.

JACOBSON: Well, to your last point, that's kind of what's gone through my mind, is it seems to me that the per diem-- so for those that don't know how that works that are watching, is there's mileage, which is really kind of standard mileage rates. And then we're compensated so much per day. I don't know. It's \$150. I think if you live within a certain distance from Lincoln, it's up to \$155 a day, which would cover either staying in a motel or staying at your housing and your means, for which you will be audited. And if you don't-- can't show that you've used it all, you would be subject to re-- reimbursing that. So it's really expense-- hard expense reimbursement. So that-- on top of the \$12,000 shal-- salary, you're not expected to also cover your room and board and meals and everything because that pretty much nullifies the salary and then some. So, so that, that would be my question, is it would seem to me that that is something different than salary, but it would be good to know that answer. And, and I would also say that as I look out at-- as I'm not mis-- if I'm not mistaken, your county commissioners, in most cases with NACO's help, have-- most all of them are paid a salary plus health insurance benefits, which is a pretty tall number for a group-- and I'm, I'm going to-- I'm going to get emails on this-- for meeting Monday mornings. OK? And, and that-- but

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it's certainly not a full-time job. And I realize you do much beyond your Monday morning meetings, just as we do. But I, I, I get very-- I get a lot of indigestion about making this a job that I'll go do this because I could make more money than I'm doing something else. I mean, this still needs to be-- I don't think any of us ran for the Legislature because of the money. And what we're trying to do is try to take some of the sting off of those who aren't, as was indicated, self-employed, retired, or semi-retired. But we, we seemingly get diversity within the Legislature in spite of that. But it would just probably take some of that off. By the-- if-- you know, it seems to me that even at \$30,000, you're still well below the poverty level. So if you're looking-- talking about a living wage, that's a whole different story than just compensating for a part-time job. But is that some-- I mean-- so in, in terms of the per diem, I'm with you. I'm not sure if you know for sure whether that would have to be included or whether that's something that's different.

HANSEN: I'll look into it further, but I'm pretty sure this does not affect the per diem. That is something that is a separate issue. Yeah. We're talking about just strictly senator salary.

JACOBSON: Thank you.

HANSEN: That's what I-- that's where I wanted to keep it. I didn't want to touch per diem.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you very much.

HANSEN: Thank you.

IBACH: We'll ask Senator Dorn to come up. He's waiving close. So we will close the hearing on LRCA-- LR7CA and LR25CA.