

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

HOLDCROFT: --Senator Rick Holdcroft, representing Legislative District 36. And I serve as the chair of this committee. The committee will take up the nominees in the order posted. This public hearing today is your opportunity to be part of the legislative process and to express your position on the proposed nominees before us, although I don't see a lot of other testifiers. If you are planning to testify today, please fill out one of the green testifier sheets that are on the table at the back of the room. Be sure to print clearly and fill it out completely. Please move to the front row to be ready to testify, because we're really crowded in here today. When it is your turn to come forward, give the testifier sheet to the page. If you do not wish to testify but would like to indicate your position on a nominee, there are also yellow sign-in sheets back on the table for each bill-- for each nominee. These sheets will be included as an exhibit in the official hearing record. When you come up to testify, please speak clearly into the microphone. Tell us your name and spell your first and last name to ensure we get an accurate record. We will begin each nominee hearing today with the nominee opening statement, followed by any proponents of the nominee, then opponents, and finally anyone speaking in the neutral capacity. We will finish with-- we will not finish with a closing statement. We will be using a three-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light comes on, you have one minute remaining. And the red light means that you are finished. Questions from the committee may follow, which do not count against your time. Also, committee members may come and go during the hearing. This has nothing to do with the importance of the nominees being heard. It is just part of the process, as senators may have bills to introduce in other committees. A few final items to facilitate today's hearing. If you have handouts or copies of your testimony, please bring up at least 12 copies and give them to the page. Props, charts, or other visual aids cannot be used simply because they cannot be transcribed, although we would like samples of your art. Well, not really. Please silence or turn off your, your cell phones. Verbal outburst or applause are not permitted in the hearing room. Such behavior may be cause for you to be asked to leave. Finally, committee procedures for all committees state that written position comments on a nominee to be included in the record must be submitted by 8 a.m. the day of the hearing. The only acceptable method of submission is via the Legislature's website at nebraskalegislature.gov. Written position letters will be included in the official hearing record, but only those testifying in person before the committee will be included on the committee statement. I will now have the co-- the committee members with us today introduce themselves, starting on my left.

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ANDERSEN: I'm Bob Andersen, representing District 49, the northwest county of Sarpy County, Omaha.

DeKAY: Barry DeKay, representing District 40, which consists of Holt, Knox, Cedar, Antelope, northern part of Pierce, northern part of Dixon County.

J. CAVANAUGH: John Cavanaugh, District 9: midtown Omaha.

QUICK: Dan Quick, District 35: Grand Island.

CLOUSE: Stan Clouse, District 37: Kearney, Shelton, Gibbon, and Buffalo County.

ROUNTREE: Victor Rountree, District 3, representing Bellevue and Papillion.

STORM: Good afternoon, Jared Storm, representing Butler, Colfax, Saunders County, District 23.

HOLDCROFT: Also, Senator Cavanaugh acts as the vice chair of this committee. Also assisting the committee today: to my right is our committee research analyst, Micah Chaffee; to my far left is our committee clerk, Barb Dorn. Our pages for today-- committee today are not the usual two. Tate Smith, right? Tate Smith of Columbus, a junior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, majoring in political science. And-- you'll have to introduce yourself.

BRYLEY CARABANTES: My name is Bryley Carabantes. I'm a student from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, majoring in mathematics and economics.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you very much. OK. Today's agenda is posted outside the hearing room. With that, we will begin today's hearing with gubernatorial nominee Julie Jacobson. Come on down. Welcome to the General Affairs Committee.

JULIE JACOBSON: Thank you. Chair Holdcroft and members of the General Affairs Committee. My name is Julie Jacobson, J-u-l-i-e J-a-c-o-b-s-o-n. And I am from North Platte, Nebraska. I am very grateful that Governor Pillen has considered me again to serve on the Nebraska Arts Council Board. I have previously served on the board from 2015 to 2018 with an appointment under Governor Ricketts and from 2005 to 2011 with appointments from Governor Heineman, and served as the board's chairman during my second term. I have circulated copies of my resume for your reference. As you can see, after spending 20 years as a biochemist for USDA and the Department of Agriculture, I have had the

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General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

wonderful opportunity to serve in my community as an organizer volunteer in many capacities. Both my husband and myself support the arts and humanities and see firsthand the impact of cultural arts on rural economic development. Active participation in the arts teaches teamwork, relationship building, creativity, and numerous other life skills. At a young age, I found my voice in music, science, and mathematics. No matter who you are or where you come from, the arts play a vital role in helping us make sense of our lives and the world around us to express emotion, to communicate, and to explore the depths of our imaginations. Because of my strong beliefs in the power of the arts for everyone, I was the incorporator of Arts Study League of North Platte and served on the original grassroots boards of North Platte Children's Museum, where we restored the Carnegie Library building and creativity [INAUDIBLE] Arts Council that converted the old 1929 post office building into our Prairie Arts Center. After 23 years of extensive work on Sheldon Statewide and Arts Across Nebraska Boards, we have seen thousands of our students and residents inspired, educated, and seen thousands of them creatively motivated. These programs, and many others, are supported by the Nebraska Cultural Endowment and Nebraska Arts Council funding. It is therefore an extreme honor to be able to serve on these boards to represent west central Nebraska and continue networking people, programs, and community needs because of my sincere appreciation for the impact it makes on the state of Nebraska. Thank you for your consideration on my confirmation and the time you give so generously to our state.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you, Mrs. Jacobson. Are there any questions from the committee? Yes, sir. Senator Rountree.

ROUNTREE: Thank you so much, Chairman Holdcroft. And thank you so much, Ms. Jacobson, for your testimony. And your resume is very extensive here and-- so you have a lot of experience that you're bringing to the council. When you were on the council, what kind of improvements or things would you like to see, enhancements that you would like to see in the council?

JULIE JACOBSON: Well, what happened kind of in the interim is now they have these creative arts districts. And so I'm anxious to, you know, really get a hold of that and, and see the, the funding that can make that work in all the communities, because before we had the statewide initiatives that kind of worked the arts across the state, and that sort of thing, so they could be in all 93 counties. And so I'm anxious to kind of work, work on that and, and see how that will all connect all of us, you know, and, and bring the arts to everyone, so.

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General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

ROUNTREE: All right. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

JULIE JACOBSON: You're welcome.

HOLDCROFT: Any other questions from the committee? Yes, Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chair. Thanks for being here, Ms. Jacobson. Always a pleasure to see you. I just wanted to ask, what's a bassoon?

JULIE JACOBSON: Oh, a bassoon? OK. It's a double reed instrument. It's very tall. It's kind of a monster of a-- in-- and in symphonies, it has that sound like-- OK. I'm trying to-- I'm trying to think of the sound. Well-- OK. Do you know what an oboe is?

J. CAVANAUGH: Sort of.

JULIE JACOBSON: Oh, sort-- OK.

J. CAVANAUGH: I'm not very literate when it comes to music.

JULIE JACOBSON: Well, it's kind of the base instrument to the oboe, but it's a-- it-- you know, the eerie sound. So in, in all the musicals, if you hear this eerie noise, that, that would be either an oboe or a bassoon, so.

J. CAVANAUGH: And, and where can we see the Sandhills Symphony?

JULIE JACOBSON: Oh, the Sandhills Symphony. We're so proud that we still have a symphony in our community. And we perform at the Mid-Plains-- what do I want to say? The theater. And, and we do that. We have a spring concert and we have a Christmas concert. And it's just so wonderful, you know, having guest artists come in and, and perform with us and that we have that opportunity, you know, to use the talents that we have been given and all play music together. So. Are you a musician?

J. CAVANAUGH: I-- obviously.

JULIE JACOBSON: Oh, you're not. OK. All right.

J. CAVANAUGH: I, I've been--

JULIE JACOBSON: But you've played in sports--

J. CAVANAUGH: --not that you're allowed to ask me questions, but.

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General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

JULIE JACOBSON: Do you do sports?

J. CAVANAUGH: Not exactly.

JULIE JACOBSON: Not-- OK. Well.

J. CAVANAUGH: I'm more of a, a lover of music.

JULIE JACOBSON: It's kind of a teamwork thing, only, only using music instead of sports, but, yeah.

J. CAVANAUGH: Well, thanks-- your willingness to serve.

JULIE JACOBSON: Thank you.

HOLDCROFT: And did you start off with the clarinet then and move to the bassoon?

JULIE JACOBSON: You know, I play the clarinet, but I actually started with the saxophone. And I play that in jazz band still. Yeah. And, and sometimes in church, I'll play the-- like, the straight-- I'm a straight soprano that, that I will use for descants for the choir, so. Yeah.

HOLDCROFT: We, we really appreciate your, your sacrifice. You know, you have that burden as a-- of a husband [INAUDIBLE].

JULIE JACOBSON: I wondered if somebody was going to mention my-- OK.

HOLDCROFT: Despite him, I think you'd do a wonderful job and, and supporting us and, and-- if there are no other question-- yes.

CLOUSE: [INAUDIBLE] got a couple of them, but.

HOLDCROFT: Oh.

CLOUSE: Thank you, Chairman. Heartland Singers.

JULIE JACOBSON: Yes.

CLOUSE: I was, I was a charter member of Heartland Singers. I don't know if you knew that. Yeah.

JULIE JACOBSON: I didn't know that.

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General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

CLOUSE: And our Redeemer Lutheran Church, you must have got there in '98 about when we were leaving. So it was the same church we went to, so.

JULIE JACOBSON: I didn't know you were Lutheran, so that's great.

CLOUSE: Well, I'm not now, but I was.

JULIE JACOBSON: Oh, you're not now.

HOLDCROFT: Senator, Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: So you said you played the saxophone. Did you play the alto or the bass sax?

JULIE JACOBSON: I play the alto mainly. That's my main instrument. But I do have a soprano sax too. My daughter was really a good clarinetist. Yeah.

DeKAY: OK. I never was a reed instrument player. I played trombone, so. So do you think you'll be able to apply the commitment that this appointment will require with the schedule that you lead?

JULIE JACOBSON: Yes. I, I always make time for the arts. They give me joy.

DeKAY: OK. Thank you.

CLOUSE: I have another question.

HOLDCROFT: Yes, Senator Clouse.

CLOUSE: Creative art district, they have one in North Platte too?

JULIE JACOBSON: Yes, we do.

CLOUSE: How, how many are there statewide? Do you remember?

JULIE JACOBSON: Thank you. 38. Because, I mean, it, it keeps growing. You know, it, it started out and, and-- so it, it's just kind of an amazing new thing that I'm anxious to find out a lot about because, like I said, it reorganizes everything. Kind of like a new districting, I think, with the--

CLOUSE: Thank you.

JULIE JACOBSON: Yes.

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General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

HOLDCROFT: I played the trombone too. Maybe we could get up a band. Some brass.

JULIE JACOBSON: Hey, I don't think they've ever had a senator band. That'd probably be kind of cool.

DeKAY: We could get Clements.

HOLDCROFT: Any other questions? Of course.

ROUNTREE: Since we got a trombone player--

HOLDCROFT: Senator Rountree.

ROUNTREE: Thank you. Chairman Holdcroft. Since we have a trombone player, I was a trumpet player. And today, I blow the shofar. So-- shofar? The shofar--

JULIE JACOBSON: Yeah. What is a shofar?

ROUNTREE: It's the Jewish-- it's the ram's horn.

JULIE JACOBSON: Oh, how interesting. So is it above a cornet?

ROUNTREE: Yeah. It sounds just like a cornet--

JULIE JACOBSON: It sounds just like a cornet. So it's brighter than a-- yeah. Than the long trumpet. OK.

ROUNTREE: But it's the sound of the calling of the assembly.

HOLDCROFT: You'll have to compete with Senator Clements. He plays it also, and he's played it in the, in the Capitol building.

ROUNTREE: Oh, well, we might have to [INAUDIBLE].

HOLDCROFT: Yes.

JULIE JACOBSON: Yes. Oh, yeah. He was in the university marching band.

CLOUSE: I was French horn.

HOLDCROFT: Holy cats.

JULIE JACOBSON: That's-- that's right. You must have a good ear. [INAUDIBLE].

CLOUSE: Well, I told the girls I had good lips [INAUDIBLE].

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General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

HOLDCROFT: OK.

JULIE JACOBSON: I didn't need to know that.

HOLDCROFT: Any other questions? [INAUDIBLE]. Yes, Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: One, one comment: Senator Storm looks like he might have played the cowbell.

STORM: I can do the cowbell. More cowbell.

DeKAY: All right. That's all.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you very much.

JULIE JACOBSON: You're welcome.

HOLDCROFT: Are there any proponents for this nominee? Any other opponents for this nominee? Any the neutral testifiers on this nominee? There were, for the record, no comments received on any of the gubernatorial appointments, so. With that, we will close our-- and-- this-- the first nominee. The second nominee could not make it today. She left a letter, which I've-- did you-- have we passed out the letters [INAUDIBLE]. We'll get you the letters before we exec. There were two nominees that could not attend and then-- and submitted letters. Next nominee up then is Jeanne Saler-- Salerno? Did I say that right, Salerno? Welcome to the General Affairs Committee.

JEANNE SALERNO: Thank you. I'm pleased to be here. I'm from Omaha, specifically downtown Omaha. Just a couple of blocks from the office of the National-- the Nebraska Arts Council. Well, I want to say, first of all-- which may be my best claim to fame-- is I too played the bassoon. And, yes, I started on the clarinet. And what I'd like to know, did any of you twirl the baton?

HOLDCROFT: Can't say that I did. I was a drum major.

JEANNE SALERNO: I did that too. You couldn't, you couldn't march in the band with a bassoon. I'm pleased to be here to apply for a full term. I've been on the council for a year. I was approved a year ago this month to fill out an unexpired term. So now I am applying for a full term. I too grew up in south central Nebraska. I got to know the whole state in one way or another. Relatives, friends, whatever you-- whatever conferences or so forth you did from a great medium-sized town, Cozad. Was a little bigger than some. So I feel like I understand the cultural resources for the whole state and not just Omaha,

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General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

including the needs. I was also a past president of two statewide boards, which I enjoyed immensely. Working with people all over the state. In Omaha-- well, I'll, I'll go back just a little bit. I am an 18-year-old-- 18-year board member of the Museum of Nebraska Art in Kearney, having served as a past president. And I'm back on the board. That is really an amazing gem in our state. Actually recognized by the Legislature in the late 1970s after it was formed in Kearney by the Kearney faculty members in the art department. And the State Legislature actually passed a law that recognized it as the Museum of Nebraska Art. And then it restored-- and this was long before my time-- in the late-- early '80s an old post office. And then a capital campaign was conducted to raise money to expand that museum. And now, in my past years, we have just completed-- almost completed, almost there-- a capital campaign to raise \$38 million to double the size of the Museum of Nebraska Art. So we have always appreciated very much the support of the State Legislature. In fact, there was money allocated from the Legislature when we first began that. My other experience in the arts has been the curator of the extensive contemporary art collection owned by Kutak Rock law firm in Omaha, of which I've been a general administrator for over 40 years. I'm almost retired and probably should be, but I keep going back for little projects. During that time, I coordinated an art collection that hangs throughout the Omaha Building, which is an historic building in downtown Omaha. 11 stories of around 700 pieces of art. That has been quite an education for me in terms of art appreciation. And I'm also on the board of Gallery 1516 in Kearney-- in, in Omaha, which is not only a, a gallery that exhibits artwork, works of art primarily by Nebraska artists, but also has become a performing arts venue. So my experience with the art and the art world is extensive, and I feel as a community volunteer for all these years that, that I'm also exp-- familiar and experienced in cultural arts as well, and the humanities.

HOLDCROFT: OK. Thank you very much. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Rountree.

ROUNTREE: Thank you, Chairman Holdcroft. And thank you so much, ma'am, for your [INAUDIBLE] involvement from start to finish. But could you talk just a little bit more about Gallery 1516? I think I got a chance to walk through there [INAUDIBLE].

JEANNE SALERNO: It's, it's a, it's a restored building that was at one time a livery stable. And then it became the, the home of Avis rent-a-car. And they rented cars out of there. It was sort of the supply room, I guess. And Patrick Drickey, who is a professional photographer by career, retired from that, owned a studio near--

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General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

connected to that building, and turned it into a gallery. It's small, so it doesn't have lots of room, but it's a beautifully done-- have you been there? Did you say? But he has really expanded it into performing arts as well. It's not just art, but performing arts. And he's constantly thinking up something new to do with that. And I-- because of my involvement with MONA, the Museum of Nebraska Art, and lived just down the street fro-- at that time from that gallery, I became the connection from MONA to that gallery and am now on the board. But it is really not part of MONA. He's a very independent gallery now and successful at it.

ROUNTREE: All right. Thank you so much. It was a nice gallery.

HOLDCROFT: Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chair. Thanks for being here, Mr. Salerno. I've also been to 1516, and I was there when they did a documentary about the cranes.

JEANNE SALERNO: Oh, yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: So about two years ago, maybe, maybe three-- longer than that. But my question was more about the art at the Omaha building, Kutak. How's-- how-- is that open to the public? Can--

JEANNE SALERNO: It's really not open to the public, no, in, in terms of just people walking in. It's really not a museum. It's well-known. And one of my jobs over the years was to conduct tours that were organized in advance. And I don't know that we ever turned down a group that was truly interested in it. It was usually during the off-hours, since it's actually a, a law firm most of the day-- or, all day. The, the collection is primarily what was owned by Bob-- Robert Kutak, who was the principal founder of the firm, and a man of his own resources who collected art. Lived, lived very frugally otherwise. Didn't do any-- his apartment was small, and supposedly he stored art in his oven. But he collected a, a large amount of contemporary art, mainly from fledgling-- done by fledgling artists. And he has been-- he passed away 40 years ago. We have not-- we don't have an art buying budget, but we have a large collection that has lasted beautifully. And it hangs all over the law firm.

J. CAVANAUGH: Oh. Great. Well, I'll have to look into that. It's a great building, anyway. I have-- I-- [INAUDIBLE] quite a few years, but I love that building. So thank you.

HOLDCROFT: Senator DeKay.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

DeKAY: Thank you. Is that located in, in downtown Omaha?

JEANNE SALERNO: Yes, at 17th and Farnam.

DeKAY: 17th and Farnam?

JEANNE SALERNO: Mm-hmm. It was Omaha's original skyscraper. It was designed by Stanford White in the late 1800s and was purchased by New York Life in the early 1900s. And as I said, it was known then as Omaha's first skyscraper. Then the Omaha National Bank purchased it from New York Life. And the Omaha National Bank moved to be the primary tenant of the Woodmen building.

DeKAY: And you said that acronym was MONA?

JEANNE SALERNO: That's the Museum of Nebraska Art in Kearney.

DeKAY: OK. OK. Thank you.

HOLDCROFT: Yes, Senator Storm.

STORM: Thank you. Thank you. Are you familiar with the Bone Creek Museum in David City?

JEANNE SALERNO: I sure know about it. I have not been there, I'm sorry to say.

STORM: So they're, they're moving to a new facil-- well, they, they're taking an old-- there was an old Ford dealership and-- David City. Old building. They called it the Goodyear building. And they're redoing it all, and they're moving to that building here. But it's pretty neat.

JEANNE SALERNO: It is.

STORM: And I'm not [INAUDIBLE] art, so I don't know. But it's agrarian art, is that-- which I don't know what that is, but it's-- and it, it's on one of two in the nation. Is that right? Of agrar--

JEANNE SALERNO: I feel like I've been in it because I've heard so much about it. And I'm sorry to say I haven't been here.

STORM: And they-- yeah. A lot of grants. And it's-- but it's-- pretty new facility. So. Just gonna run that by you. So thanks.

HOLDCROFT: Any other questions from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you very much, Ms. Sa-- Salerno. Are there any opp-- I'm sorry-- proponents for this nominee? Any opponents? Any in the neutral? Well,

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General Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

that will close our session for nominee. This nominee, there were no comments received for the record. The next nominee also submitted by letter, Karen Harris. So we will consider her in exec based on her letter input. Anything else, Barb. OK. With that, that will close our hearings today, the nominees. We are going to have an exec here, so we conclude--