

MINUTES
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, March 13, 2019

TIME: 2:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW54

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Martin, Vice Chairman Souza, Senators Heider, Lee, Harris, Burtenshaw, Bayer, Jordan, and Nelson

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Martin** called the meeting of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee (Committee) to order at 2:25 p.m.

GUBERNATORIAL REAPPOINTMENT HEARING: **Chairman Martin** welcomed Britt Raubenheimer from Sandpoint, Idaho, under consideration for reappointment to the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Commission). **Ms. Raubenheimer** expressed her gratitude to the Commission for their support in helping her regain independence after her vision loss 20 years ago. The Commission sent a counselor to her home that helped her with basic livings skills like cooking, and provided training to use a computer and phone that "talk" to her, and to navigate around her community with confidence. Now she travels widely, including air travel, as she continues her career as an oceanographer. She hopes to continue to work with the Commission to ensure all Idahoans have the same training to remain independent and gain or retain employment. The Commission currently faces several challenges, including changes to the Workforce Investment Act (Act), which mandates a larger percentage of funding going to training for visually impaired youth transitioning from high school to higher education or into the workforce. While worthwhile, it comes with challenges in making sure funds are spent properly to avoid financial penalty and it also brings a reduction in funding for adult services. The Commission has been brainstorming efficiencies so that adults like her can continue to receive needed support and training as well. She hopes to continue to work with the Commission to turn challenges into opportunities.

DISCUSSION: **Vice Chairman Souza** asked Ms. Raubenheimer to elaborate on the allocation of funds for youth. **Ms. Raubenheimer** explained that the Act requires that 15 percent of the budget for vocational rehabilitation services be spent on pre-transition services, which is a significant spending increase. Complications arise in the restrictions placed on how that money can be spent. As an example, it covers adaptive software, but not the hardware to run it. Positive developments included youth leadership training along with expanded summer employment training and outreach to schools and employers.

Senator Lee commented that Ms. Raubenheimer's story is so impressive, that she remains fascinated by her professional background and asked her to share her story for the newer members of the Committee. **Ms. Raubenheimer** shared that she still remembers how scary it was to even walk to her mailbox. The Commission gave her the support to continue her work as an oceanographer. She goes into the field to collect observations and then completes the analysis on a computer. The Commission provided the skills training to do the analysis, to make presentations and to travel. She just returned from Boston; she has been recruiting for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) doctorate program. Significant to her continued success is her ability to navigate space, to walk here from her hotel, to move through an airport, and to travel across the country. She depends on hearing. She scuba dives for work and has some advantage to fully sighted divers who trained in high visibility. She is able to construct frames under water and attach instrumentation in low visibility, murky water. Once she surfaces, she again relies on hearing and a diving buddy to locate the boat.

Senator Bayer asked Ms. Raubenheimer how many clients come through the Commission and how many facilities there are in Idaho. **Ms. Raubenheimer** reported that there is a residential facility, an additional training facility, a vocational rehabilitation program, an independent living program, and an adaptive equipment store. Some clients receive individual attention in their communities. There are roughly 800 clients annually that come through the independent living program, another 100 being put back to work through the vocational rehabilitation program, about 50 receiving sight restoration assistance, about 20 students in the summer program and up to 75 students receiving transition services support. There are currently 12 clients in the school.

Senator Heider asked Ms. Raubenheimer to provide some information about the American Geophysical Union (Union). **Ms. Raubenheimer** explained that it is an organization made up of scientists, and federal and state agencies, who are members interested in geophysics: oceanography, planetary physics, and meteorology. The Union meets annually in San Francisco and about 20,000 members attend that meeting. The Union endeavors to ensure good communication between the public, agencies, and academics. She works closely with members that include the Army Corps of Engineers and Geological Survey.

Senator Heider thanked her for continuing to support the Commission and complimented her for being so proactive.

Chairman Martin noticed that Ms. Raubenheimer was accompanied by a service dog and inquired about him. **Ms. Raubenheimer** introduced her dog, Hugger. Hugger is critical to Ms. Raubenheimer's ability to navigate an airport or new city. **Chairman Martin** shared with her that the Committee was smiling in admiration, thanked her for her willingness to continue to serve, and commended her ability to conduct herself and overcome obstacles.

ADJOURNED:

There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Martin** adjourned the meeting at 2:50 p.m.

Senator Martin
Chair

Margaret Major
Secretary