

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Agriculture Committee March 02, 2021

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HALLORAN: Welcome to the Agriculture Committee. I'm Senator Steve Halloran. I am from Hastings, Nebraska, and I represent the 33rd Legislative District. I serve as Chair of this committee. We are going to abbreviate the opening statements that I normally make as the Chair because, except for the committee members, the room-- the room is-- is unattended. The committee will take up the bills in order to posted on the agenda. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to express your position on the proposed legislation, in this case, appointments before us today. I'm going to ask the committee members to introduce themselves, that are here today with us, starting from my left, Senator Cavanaugh.

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

GRAGERT: Tim Gragert, District 40, northeast Nebraska.

BRANDT: Tom Brandt, District 32, four counties in southeast Nebraska.

BREWER: Tom Brewer, District 43, 13 counties of western Nebraska.

B. HANSEN: Ben Hansen, District 16, Washington, Burt and Cuming Counties.

HALLORAN: We have with us today Rick Leonard, the committee analyst, and Rod Krogh, our committee clerk. We also have with us Reid Preston and Jason Wendling, who are fine, outstanding students from the University of Nebraska. All right. The business before us today is a confirmation hearing for the gubernatorial appointment to the State Fair Board, Mr. Tom Dinsdale. And just for the record, for those that might be watching, as well, state statutes provide for an 11-member State Fair Board, 7 of-- of whom are selected from each State Fair District according to the bylaws of the board. Four members are appointed by the Governor, three of whom are appointed to represent the business community of each congressional district and one representing the business community of the host community, which is the gentleman who has been appointed by the Governor, who is on the phone with us today. And with that, I'm going to introduce Tom Dinsdale. Mr. Dinsdale, it's-- if you have a statement that you'd like to provide us as an opening statement, the microphone is yours.

TOM DINSDALE: Senator Halloran, first of all, I would like to thank you and your committee member for allowing me to do this over the

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phone. I know this is a little out of context, but I left Nebraska before I even realized I was being appointed to the State Fair Board, so thank you for allowing me to do it this way. If you want to know anything about me, I grew up in Palmer, Nebraska. My family's been involved in agriculture in Nebraska for over 100 years and in banking for about 70 years. I've been a car dealer in Grand Island-- we're starting our 19th year of that. I'm-- I'm honored and excited to be appointed to the State Fair Board. I was previously on the 1868 Foundation Board, and I want to see the fair grow and prosper. I see a need to sell the fair to all parts of Nebraska, as well as our neighboring states. I've had a lot of conversations over the years with people from Missouri, Kansas, Iowa. They think we have a good thing going and I-- I know we do too. I'd just like to do a little bit better. I feel it's our obligation to see the success of the fair and that also that our-- our people are get-- our-- our Nebraskans are getting their money's worth because after-- after all, the fair really belongs to them.

HALLORAN: OK.

TOM DINSDALE: I've been on-- I've been on the Fonner Board, Stuhr Museum Board, Stuhr Foundation Board, Grand Island-- Grow Grand Island Board, Trinity United Methodist Church Board, and I'm presently a-- I'm a board member of board of Pinnacle Bancorp.

HALLORAN: All right, sir. What do you do in your spare time?

TOM DINSDALE: In my spare time, I'm in Arizona. [LAUGHTER]

_____ : [INAUDIBLE]

HALLORAN: Well, you had such a long laundry list of things that you're participating in, in your community, I-- I was just jokingly suggesting you must not have a lot of spare time, but you are a busy person. Are there questions from the committee for Mr. Dinsdale? I'm sorry--

TOM DINSDALE: Yes.

HALLORAN: Senator Groene.

GROENE: Thank you, Chairman. Mr. Dinsdale, as we all know, the fair has had some financial questions lately. I'm glad to see a businessman

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coming on board who knows there's two sides of a ledger. What is your view on what's happened there with the financial situation and the money management at the fair?

TOM DINSDALE: Well, I-- I think it was really unfortunate to have that-- have that happen. We've been the sponsor of the Beef Barn for several years now, and so we feel like we have a real interest in what happens, not just on the fairgrounds, but in the fair office. And so we were very distraught when we heard that-- that we had some problems of malfeasance going on there. But I'm convinced that the board that you have is strong enough to pick up the pieces and go on and go forward and-- and put it all behind us and make a better fair than it's ever been before. I think the public's kind of getting that idea too. For a while I feel like they were kind of down on the fair saying, you know, they didn't know what they were doing and we had some people who were kind of running rough-- rough-- roughshod over-- over maybe the board and even the Legislature at that point. And I think now it's pretty clear that that's-- that's-- that's ancient history and everything's going to be back to the way it should be.

GROENE: So you're pretty confident with the new management there? Have you met with them?

TOM DINSDALE: Yes, I am.

GROENE: All right.

TOM DINSDALE: I got a chance to visit with Mr. Ogg the first time director came to town last summer, and I had about a half-hour to sit with him in his office and I was impressed with, first of all, his demeanor, his ability to be straight with-- with me. And-- and he's so enthusiastic about the fair, and I think that goes a long way. I was really delighted that he would give me the time of day because I know he had a lot of other things to do at that point. But anyway, I had a really good conversation with him. I've had a couple times to be with him since then, and my opinion has not changed a bit. I think he's a solid leader in all regards.

GROENE: All right. Thank you.

TOM DINSDALE: You're welcome.

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HALLORAN: OK, thank you, Senator Groene. Any further questions from the committee? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chairman. And thank you, Mr. Dinsdale. This is John Cavanaugh. So you're just coming onto the board now, but obviously it's going to be presenting new challenges. It sounds like there's maybe a casino right outside the fairground there. You guys have any plans how to-- I guess, interactions going to go with that?

TOM DINSDALE: I don't have any idea, and I'm not on the Fonner Board anymore, so I don't know what's going to happen there. But obviously, I think it's going to be good for Nebraska. I hope it is. But my main concern right now is make sure that the fair works the way it should.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

HALLORAN: OK, thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Any additional questions? The-- the-- the last real State Fair I went to was in 2019, prepandemic, and it was a great fair. I-- I--

TOM DINSDALE: Yes, it was.

HALLORAN: I even witnessed Noah building his ark, as I remember, right there on the fairground. [LAUGHTER]

TOM DINSDALE: Yeah, we were all involved in that, weren't we?

HALLORAN: But-- but in spite of-- in spite of the unusual amount of rain, I think the fair did an extraordinary job of transporting people in and out because the parking lot was quite an issue. And so that raises an-- that raises my-- a question I might have is, do you foresee-- do you foresee anything being done constructionwise on the parking areas?

TOM DINSDALE: Well, when I was on the 1868 Board, there was a lot of-- a lot of talk about graveling the lot, and I think a lot of that's been done now. I'm not really sure to what extent, but I know they're working very hard with the Fair Board on trying to alleviate that problem. And also, I know that Bill has real vision for some outdoor concerts and some other ways to expand the fair, and I-- I-- I think he's all over it.

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HALLORAN: OK, and not everybody understands this, maybe everyone does, but the-- the-- for example, the parking areas clearly belong to Fonner Park. Is that-- that's correct, right?

TOM DINSDALE: Yes.

HALLORAN: Right. OK. Any additional questions, comments from the committee? I think we're good, Mr. Dinsdale. We appreciate you joining us today.

TOM DINSDALE: Well, thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

HALLORAN: All right, look-- look forward to meeting you in person.

TOM DINSDALE: Senator Halloran, I-- I believe we've met a time or two before, but I'd like to do that again, of course.

HALLORAN: Well, we have-- I'm sure we have, but I'm looking forward to meeting you after you've been appointed to the-- the board, so.

TOM DINSDALE: Thank you, sir.

HALLORAN: All right. That concludes our hearing today for the appointment for Tom Dinsdale to the State Fair Board.