

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Agriculture Committee August 1, 2024

**HALLORAN:** All right, Mr. Dinsdale, we will start. I'll have a few words to say first, just technical words to start a committee hearing, and then we'll proceed to give you the floor.

**TOM DINSDALE:** OK.

**HALLORAN:** Welcome to the Agriculture Committee. I'm Senator Steve Halloran, I'm from Hastings, Nebraska, and represent the 33rd Legislative District. I serve as Chair of this committee. The committee will take up confirmation 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 confirmation before us today. Committee members might come and go during the hearings. This is part of the process; they have other hearings as we have bills to introduce in other commu-- committees. I ask that you abide by the following procedures to better facilitate today's proceedings. Please silence or turn off your cell phones. If you're planning to testify, please pick up a green sign-in sheet. I think the only testifier here is familiar with that. Fill it out in its entirety. Give it to the clerk-- committee clerk, and this will help us keep a more accurate public record. If you do not wish to testify today, but would like to be a-- record your name as being present in the hearing, there's a separate white sheet on the tables that you can sign for that purpose. This will be part of the official record of the hearing. When you come up to testify, please speak clearly into the microphone. Tell us your name, and please spell your first and last name to ensure we get an accurate record. There'll be a 5-minute limit for testifiers. And with that, Mr. Dinsdale, we appreciate your willingness to re-up for the fair board, the State Fair Board. You've got some experience with that. And I'm going to introduce the, introduce the senators on the, on the committee for, for your benefit, starting at my far left. Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Yep. I am Senator Jana Hughes, District 24, which is Seward, York, Polk, and a little bit of Butler County.

**BREWER:** Tom Brewer, representing the 43rd Legislative District, which is 11 counties of western Nebraska.

**IBACH:** Teresa Ibach, District 44, 8 counties in southwest Nebraska.

**HALLORAN:** My far right.

**RIEPE:** I'm Merv Riepe, District 12, which is part of one county, and District 12 is Omaha, Millard, and the little town of Ralston.

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**HOLDCROFT:** Rick Holdcroft, District 36, west and south Sarpy County.

**HALLORAN:** To my right is committee research analyst Rick Leonard, and to my left is committee clerk Rod Krogh. And with that, Mr. Dinsdale, welcome. We will give you the floor. We appreciate your experience on the State Fair Board, and we'd like to have you have the opportunity to speak to us and give us some of your background on why you wish to continue that position.

**TOM DINSDALE:** Well, thank you very much. First of all, Senator, Senator Halloran, I want you to know how much I appreciate your willingness to do this over the phone. It's just making it a lot easier for me. And we're just, just going through the-- getting our business done for the month of July, and of course to-- getting geared up for the State Fair, so I really appreciate you letting me do this long distance. So thank you for that.

**HALLORAN:** You bet. Go ahead, Tom. Give us some of your background and, and why the State Fair Board is important to you.

**TOM DINSDALE:** OK. Well, I've been a-- I've been an auto dealer here in Grand Island for 23 years. Several years ago, we bought a dealership in Hastings, so we have that. We just finished our remodel there. I grew up in Palmer, Nebraska, which is a small town in Merrick County. And I've always been about the fair ever, ever since it came to Grand Island. We got involved early; in fact, we sponsor the beef barn. And this year, we're also-- we also kicked over the auto, the auto deal, where it used to be Anderson Ford, now it's going to be Tom Dinsdale Automotive is the official vehicle of the State Fair. We're very proud of that fact. I started out becoming a member of the 1890s [SIC]-- of the State Fair Foundation Board. I was on there for a couple of years, and then I had an opportunity to join the, the State Fair Operating Board and so I kind of jumped at that chance, and I had a lot of support from other board members that I had met. And, first of all, I, I'm pretty sure you're all aware that this is a working board, I mean, truly a working board. We meet once a month, we don't take anything lightly. We've got several committees that are destined to improve the State Fair, improve the facilities, improve the entertainments, and pushing Nebraska. It's not uncommon, for during the fair, to see board members helping, helping some of the people that are bringing animals to the fair. It's not uncommon to see them helping load or unload their livestock. It's a lot of work, but we get a lot of satisfaction out of it, too. And I think the, the people that are bringing their animals appreciate board members taking an active role. So that's

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about all I can tell you about the State Fair; we're looking forward to [INAUDIBLE] in 3 weeks from tomorrow.

**HALLORAN:** Well, Tom, it's good to hear some board members are willing to get manure on their boots in the process, so.

**TOM DINSDALE:** I, I was-- I grew up with manure on my boots.

**HALLORAN:** There you go. All right, I'm going to open it up to members of the committee that may have a question for you. Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chairman Halloran. Thanks for offering to do this again, Tom. And I'm just kind of curious what you see-- I know I've always gone to the State Fair, loved it when it was in Lincoln, showed at it there. I think the facilities you have now are-- they're just even so much better. I wish ev-- I wish everybody from Lincoln and Omaha would make the trek out there once, because I think it's just a way nicer experience. And you've done well. Had some financial issues the last, you know, couple years. What do you-- so I think-- and it sounds like we're past that. What do you see the, the future-- like, what do you see challenges are in the future? And what do you think that, that you're doing well to, to just keep improving it, and keep getting people coming, things like that?

**TOM DINSDALE:** Well, the challenges for the fair as I see it-- number one is always money, and we appreciate what the Legislature does for us. I think the foundation needs to step up a little bit. I'd like to see [INAUDIBLE] the foundation board members. I think that'd be advantageous to everybody involved. We also realize there's a need for an equine center, there's a need for expanded area, ground, there, there are a couple parcels that are for sale; I think they're ridiculously priced right now, but I really think that we're going in the right direction. Also, maintenance upkeep is a big part of our job at the fair, because everything that-- everything is new once, you know? There comes a time when it has to be fixed. We ended up buying all our own panels for the livestock shows, that's been a big help. The way we run the vehicles in and out of the fair has become more streamlined, so we don't have the bottlenecks that we used to have. I appreciate the fact that they're having some indoor concerts, as well as outdoor concerts, and I just-- I think it's a great experience for people who attend, attend the State Fair really enjoy it. I try to meet new people every year, ask them where they're from. A lot of people from Iowa come to our Fair; a lot of people from Kansas and South Dakota. And it's a gratifying experience to meet some of these

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people that may have even bought vehicles from us. I hope that answers your question, Senator.

**HUGHES:** No, that does. Thank you so much.

**HALLORAN:** Yes--

**IBACH:** Ibach.

**HALLORAN:** Senator Ibach.

**HUGHES:** It's summer.

**IBACH:** It's summertime. That's right. Thanks, Tom, for your service so far. And I know you-- this is Senator Ibach. I know that you do do a lot, both personally, and as a member of the board to enhance the, the fair experience. Recently we've had some, some amendments, or some language in our proposed bills that will alter the lottery funds that the State Fair gets. Have you had any discussions on the board regarding those alterations and, maybe, how you would move forward with the funding-- amended funding?

**TOM DINSDALE:** Honestly, we have not have that discussion.

**IBACH:** OK.

**TOM DINSDALE:** I'm on the finance committee, as well as the grounds committee, and we have not had that [INAUDIBLE].

**IBACH:** OK. Thank you.

**HALLORAN:** Thank you, Senator Ibach. Senator Riepe.

**RIEPE:** Thank you, Chairman. Again, Tom, thank you for your willingness to serve, and thank you for joining us today. The question that I have echoes a little bit of Senator Hughes's question. I represent of an urban section; I'm out of Omaha. And my question would be is, how can we promote more attendance from the urban markets out to support the fair? And I, I grew up as a Iowa kid, and so the Iowa State Fair was always a big place, and it's pretty nationally known. Have you guys-- do you have a benchmark State Fair like the Iowa that you kind of look at and say these are things that we can do?

**TOM DINSDALE:** I'd like to see us to get to attendance of 4-- 400,000 to 500,000. That's not undoable.

**HUGHES:** What is it now?

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**TOM DINSDALE:** We expect-- we started a, a campaign a couple years ago, we had billboards in Omaha, and I think that helped. But I still think we're asking more awareness, and Iowa does a great job with their state fair. And I think by attending that we get some ideas, and our staff gets ideas of what they're doing over there, and how we can make that work for Nebraska. I honestly feel like we have something to be really proud of at the State Fair, though. But as always, you know, it's-- you got to do more things. You got to get more, more involved. We're improving the lighting at the fair. Parking areas are much better than they used to be, because we've had the opportunity to do the-- to rock and drain, and put in some culverts to [INAUDIBLE] water. And also some new irrigation systems that went into the, the field that we call, we call the "TD Landing."

**HALLORAN:** So, Tom, Senator Hughes asked the question, you didn't hear it. But what was last year's attendance? Do you know-- have that number?

**TOM DINSDALE:** 3-- was it 330,000, I believe.

**HALLORAN:** OK.

**TOM DINSDALE:** Don't hold me, don't hold me to that, but I'm, I'm pretty sure that's pretty close.

**HALLORAN:** Sure. I assume there's been-- several years ago we had some dramatic rains during the fair and, unfortunately, the imagery of one of the vendors in a kayak comes up to mind.

**TOM DINSDALE:** I remember that.

**HALLORAN:** Yeah, that was kind of unfortunate, front page. But on that note, I think you mentioned culverts and drainage some. But can you elaborate on that? Have-- is the parking-- is there pave-- is there more paved parking or drives into the parking area? Anything like that?

**TOM DINSDALE:** Yes, and I, I imagine you're all aware of our master plan that was devel-- developed several years ago. We spent probably 6 weeks in our meeting room, in our-- in the dealership here with the board members, trying to prioritize what needed to be done at the fair. Of course, drainage was number one. And also, you know, the, the new buildings, the upkeep, those things are always going to be important. The lighting is-- we're going to light the "Cowboy Way" this year, which goes east of the midway. And I don't know if that answers your question or not.

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**HALLORAN:** Well, I'm sure there's ongoing efforts to make it drain, drain better, but if you can't control the weather, I guess that's, that's something we'll have to work with, but. Any other questions from the committee?

**TOM DINSDALE:** It's going to be a lot better this year, though, I'm sure.

**HALLORAN:** OK. I don't see any more questions from the committee, but we will have the opportunity for any proponents to come up and testify. Any proponents?

**TOM DINSDALE:** We would also, we would also like at some point to be able to enlarge the barn bar in the east barn, that can get really crowded in the afternoon, which is a good thing.

**HALLORAN:** Good.

**TOM DINSDALE:** But-- and, and our, our people who work those places, they're doing a good job, too. We've cut down on the, the lines waiting for a drink or a beer. Also, you're probably aware that it's an open campus now, so you can buy a cocktail and walk around the entire fairgrounds with it; that's helped liquor sales a lot. It's also helped ease the over-- overflowing bars, if you will.

**HALLORAN:** Well, you couldn't see it, but there were several thumbs up on that comment from the committee members. That's good.

**TOM DINSDALE:** I appreciate that, because I sat in with the State Patrol 2 years ago; decided to ask them if they would support us on that.

**HALLORAN:** I know you got an excellent volunteer force there, too. I've got to say, my compliments to the many volunteers that show up in their yellow shirts and help everybody that needs any assistance.

**TOM DINSDALE:** We couldn't do it without them.

**HALLORAN:** No. All right, don't see any questions. No proponents? Any opponents? All right, well, it looks like you're free to go. We will Exec here shortly, Tom, and, and get, get the word back to you on the committee's decision, so.

**TOM DINSDALE:** Thank you all for the opportunity.

**HALLORAN:** All right, well, thanks for joining us.

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**RIEPE:** Thank you.

**HALLORAN:** Talk to you later.

**TOM DINSDALE:** Bye-bye.

**HALLORAN:** All right, we'll move into Exec here real quick, which means--

**RIEPE:** I'd make a motion to go into Exec.

**HOLDCROFT:** Second.

**HALLORAN:** All right. There's been a motion and a second. Don't think we need roll call for that. All in favor say aye.