

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Agriculture Committee January 20, 2026

Rough Draft

DeKAY: Good afternoon and welcome to the Agriculture Committee. I'm Senator Barry DeKay of Niobrara, Nebraska. I represent the 40th District. I serve as chair of this committee. The committee will take up bills and confirmations in the order posted on the agenda at the door. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to explain your position on the proposed legislation before us today to offer insights and information for our consideration. The committee members might come and go during the hearing, this is just part of the process, as members can have bills to introduce in other committees. I ask that you abide by the following procedures to better facilitate today's proceedings. Please silence or turn off your cell phones. Introducers will make initial statements followed by proponents, opponents, and neutral testimony. Closing remarks are reserved for the introducing senator only. If you're planning to testify, please fill out a green sign-in sheet that is on the table at the back of the room before you come up to testify. Please print, and it is important to complete the form in its entirety. When it is your turn to testify, hand the sign-in sheet to a page or the committee clerk. This will help us make a more accurate public record. If you do not wish to testify today, but would like to indicate your position on a bill, there are yellow sign-in sheets at the back of the room. These sheets will be included in the hearing record. If you have a written statement or other handouts, please have 12 copies and hand, and hand them to the page when you come up to testify and they will distribute those to the committee. If you do not have enough copies, a page will make sufficient copies for you. Please speak clearly into the microphone, tell us your name and please spell your first and last name to ensure we get the accurate record. No displays of support or opposition to a bill vocal or otherwise are allowed in a public hearing, offenders may be asked to leave. The committee members with us today will introduce themselves starting with my far left.

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

RAYBOULD: Jane Raybould, Legislative District 28, the center of Lincoln.

IBACH: Teresa Ibach, District 44.

DeKAY: And the far right.

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F. MEYER: Senator Fred Meyer, District 41, central Nebraska, north of Grand Island.

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

HANSEN: Ben Hansen, District 16, Washington, Burt, Cuming, and parts of Stanton County.

DeKAY: To my immediate right is the committee research analyst, Rick Leonard, and our committee clerk, Linda Schmidt, is seated over on the corner by Senator Holdcroft. Our pages today will now introduce themselves.

ESTEN HYDE: I'm Esten Hyde, I'm a business law major, and I'm from Auburn, Nebraska.

JOEL HENSON: I'm Joel Henson, I'm a political science and advertising and public relations major from Lincoln.

DeKAY: With that, we will open the hearing for the first item on the agenda.

IBACH: Today, we'll be hearing LB794. Senator DeKay, go ahead when you're ready.

DeKAY: Thank you. Thank you, Ag Committee. Good afternoon, Vice Chair Ibach and members of the Ag Committee. For the record, my name is Senator Barry DeKay, B-a-r-r-y D-e-K-a-y. I represent District 40 in northeast Nebraska, and I am here today to introduce LB794. LB794 would repeal the statutes related to the Healthy Soils Task Force. This bill is a result of the Revisor's Office informally reminding my office sometime last year that the task force terminated in law on January 1, 2021. The Healthy Soils Task Force was created by my predecessor, Senator Gragert, in 2019. This group was composed of individuals representing the Department of Agriculture, the NRDs, academia, production agriculture, agribusiness, and environmental organizations. One senator each from both the Ag Committee and the Natural Resources Committee also served as nonvoting members. The purpose of the Healthy Soils Task Force was to develop both a comprehensive Healthy Soils Initiative and an action plan to coordinate efforts to carry out such an initiative to achieve improved soil health in Nebraska. The group was required to submit its action plan as well as its finding and recommendations to the Agriculture Committee and the Governor on/or before the termination date of January 1, 2021. The task force ultimately completed its work in

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December of 2020. Functionally, LB794 is a statutory cleanup bill which repeals the Healthy Soils Task Force whose work has now concluded. This aligns with what the Legislature did last year when it passed LB346. LB346 reduced the complexity of state government by repealing and combining several outdated boards and commissions. I also want to add that this bill includes a one-time reporting requirement for the Department of Agriculture to electronically transmit copies of any documentation submitted by the Healthy Soils Task Force, such as the final report to the Clerk of the Legislature so that it can be published on the Legislature's website. The department already has these documented, publicly available on its own agency website. This reporting requirement is meant to ensure that the work of the task force can still be accessed by public at a later date. Finally, I want to point out that there is no fiscal impact to this-- to the state by passing this bill. With that, I would be happy to try to answer any questions. Thank you.

IBACH: Thank you, Senator DeKay. Are there questions from the committee? Senator Raybould.

RAYBOULD: Yes, thank you so much. I have a couple of questions. Is that final report readily available on the Department of Ag website or can we get that link sent to the Ag Committee?

DeKAY: It should be available on the Department of Agriculture's website now and it will be published on the Clerk of the Legislature so that you can probably download it off of the Clerk's website.

RAYBOULD: OK. And then I'm just kind of curious. So the task force was eliminated, what was the funding source of the task force originally? Who-- where did they get the funds to do the study?

DeKAY: I do not know the answer to that, but I'll get it for you, that happened when Senator Gragert was here.

RAYBOULD: OK. And the other question is, is there any unexpended fund balance? Are you aware of any?

DeKAY: I'm not aware of any, no.

RAYBOULD: OK. And-- but from this task force in the, the bill, the funds have always been permissible to transfer from the task force to the General Fund.

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DeKAY: I'm guessing there probably wasn't a lot of fiscal impact because this is probably appointed board so it wasn't paid to be on these boards. So this is more of a volunteer system.

RAYBOULD: One last question. So if it-- the report was done in 2020?

DeKAY: Yep.

RAYBOULD: How come they didn't release it sooner, or did they, and I just didn't--

DeKAY: It's probably been on the Department of Ag's website, so.

RAYBOULD: OK.

DeKAY: And this is just to make sure what we're doing is still available for what was concluded in the-- in that commission is available for future reference if needed.

RAYBOULD: OK. I'm always curious because of our current deficit. If there's any funds that can be probably transferred, I'd be kind of curious to, to know how much they are.

DeKAY: I'll find out if there are any and I'll report back to you.

RAYBOULD: OK, thank you.

DeKAY: Yep.

IBACH: Thank you, Senator Raybould. Are there other questions? Seeing none, thank you. Oh, sorry, Senator Hansen.

HANSEN: Thank you. The question may be a comment and kind of both, but it's kind of nice to see-- because this originally sunsetted, didn't it?

DeKAY: Yes.

HANSEN: I mean, it sunsetted. Yeah, I specifically remember this debate when we had this bill. One of the biggest contentions about this when it first passed it years ago was, it was going to go on in "perpetude," continue like we do all the other bills that we have, so it's kind of nice to see a bill sunset on a date it's supposed to, and we're moving on with it. So it's-- I hope we can continue this practice. I know the Ag Committee is doing a pretty good job with that, but. So thank you.

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DeKAY: Yeah, I appreciate it. It was supposed to sunset January 1, and they concluded it on December 31, I think, so.

HANSEN: Yeah. So it's nice to see it. Thank you.

DeKAY: You're welcome.

IBACH: Thank you, Senator Hansen. Other questions? Seeing none, thank you very much, Senator DeKay. We'll now ask for-- are there any proponents? Anybody that would speak in favor of LB794? Seeing none, are there opponents? And is there anyone here to testify in the neutral? Seeing none, would you like to close, Senator? He waives closing. I would note that there was one proponent and one neutral letter for support and for the record. And that will conclude our hearing on LB794.