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TALL XIV

Session 3 – “State Government: Leadership, Legislation, Laws”

Austin/Sonora, TX

January 20-24, 2015

Like the first 2 sessions, the Austin/Sonora session of TALL XIV exceeded my expectations in every way. I was overwhelmed by the quality of the agenda and the dedication of the TALL staff and alumni to formulate outstanding speakers that are relevant to each of us, both personally and professionally. I am excited about the opportunities and information that are forthcoming in the other sessions. This particular session put a slight twist on my expectations. It was much more formal being in Austin and especially during the inauguration. However, it was just as meaningful as the prior sessions, just in a different manner. The political sector of agriculture and rural America is something we don't consider on a daily basis. However, it is probably the most influential area and one that needs our upmost attention and dedicate. By weeks end, I had built a great deal of respect and admiration for our legislatures, staffers, lobbyist and all involved in the political realm of local, state and national government .

This trip I traveled with Mariano Lerma and Lee Chastain. This gave us a good 3 hours of fellowship. However, the trip didn't come without some initial hurdles! On the trip to Austin, we encountered severe fog, forgetting an inaugural ball ticket, and seconds away from not having a tuxedo for one of the passengers. Needless to say, it all worked out. We arrived in Austin with a smile on our face and prepared for whatever the next several days had in store!!!

Tuesday, January 20, 2015

Oath of Office Ceremony and Inauguration BBQ

Although this part wasn't required, most of us from the TALL class attended this inauguration of Texas Governor Greg Abbott and Texas Lt. Governor Dan Patrick. This was historical and I was proud to have the chance to witness this event. Immediately following the inauguration, there was a BBQ. After the inauguration events, the TALL class immediately met in the Capitol building annex to begin our session.

Overview of Legislation – Dr. Mazurkiewicz

Dr. Mazurkiewicz spoke to the group and explained how fortunate our class was to be here during this week and having the opportunity to witness this historical event. However, he also explained how this had been very difficult to plan and schedule all of the speakers because most of them had priorities surrounding the inauguration. He asked that we remain flexible during the week and just savor the moment and the opportunity. Needless to say, we are all very appreciative to the TALL employees for arranging an outstanding week with an outstanding agenda.

Joe Cox – Assistant Vice Chancellor of External Relations, Texas A&M AgriLife

Mr. Cox gave us a very summary explanation of Texas legislature and what actually happens in the Senate and House of Representatives. He explained they are in session for 140 days, every 2 years. He also explained that with Texas being the 12th largest economy in the world and with this inauguration, the power was being transferred. He talked about the importance of the 150 House members and 31 Senators. However, he also explained how the staffers and lobbyist were some of the most important people in Austin and who perform majority of the work in their respective offices.

The Honorable Kyle Kacal

Mr. Kacal replaced John Raney in the program. However, he ended up being one of my more enjoyable speakers. I really liked him because he was knowledgeable and an advocate for agriculture. He mainly focused on issues surrounding energy and agriculture. Both of these issues face every one of us in some aspect. For energy, he mainly explained why we have seen the drop in oil prices and how Saudi Arabia was strategically using it against Russia. For agriculture, he talked about water, personal property rights, commodity weights and transportation, and feral hogs.

The Honorable George P. Bush – Duties and Responsibilities of the Texas Land Commissioner

I really liked Mr. Bush and was extremely impressed with his resume. He referred to himself as a “Conservative Republican” and that as a member of the distinguished Bush family he said he approaches issues with a servant heart and the willingness to sacrifice. He stated that the Texas Land Office was responsible for the following:

- Protect personal property rights
- Look out for military veterans
- Custodian of rich Texas history

The General Land Office is the oldest state office and has been around since 1836. It is also responsible for managing and investing royalties so it can contribute funds to State Board of Education. This seems like a very worthy office within Texas government and I am confident Mr. Bush will be a great asset as the Commissioner.

Dr. Bryan Shaw – Responsibilities of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

The TCQ is responsible for air, water and waste. Dr. Shaw talked a little bit about moving around and spending time in Washington DC and Texas and that all his decisions were made using the “Why Not” attitude. Obviously him taking risks helped build a pristine resume. More than any other topic, he discussed “water”. He explained that water is a commodity that people have disagreed over for a long time. Mainly he talked about it being a “right”.

The Honorable Ryan Guillen – Appropriations, Border Security, Immigration and Priorities

Mr. Guillen was the youngest person ever to get elected to the House of Representatives at the age of 24. I was very impressed with him and he was one of my favorite speakers in this session. What impressed me most were his knowledge and the amount of information he told us within the limited time. He gave us a long list of the current and upcoming issues. He also talked about the budget and how funds are appropriated.

2015 Texas Inauguration – Future of Texas Ball

This was an outstanding experience. Most of the TALL class attended and rented tuxedos. This event was more for the experience since we were already in Austin during this event. We got to hear the Governor, fellowship with each other, see old friends (Drew DeBerry), meet new friends and hear Pat Green and Lady Antebellum. I really enjoyed the opportunity to attend this function!

Wednesday, January 21, 2015

The Honorable Lois Kolkhorst – Public Health and County Affairs

Ms. Kolkhorst was a great speaker and very knowledgeable. She talked about the Senate vote from the 2/3rds as it currently was to a 3/5ths. This was a hot topic amongst several of the speakers and would definitely have an impact on the future. She also talked about public health topics like dentistry, nurse practitioners, mental health in rural areas and county government. More importantly she talked about health care and focused on it continuing to be such a big topic.

Kevin Patterson – Water Issues Facing Texas and Duties of the Texas Water Development Board

He told us how this board had been around since 1957 and they're department was the good guys and the TCQ was the bad guys. He explained there are 16 water planning divisions and most of their work was done in lending money to political subdivisions. He also explained that water planning starts at the local level and they were primarily a support. He went on to describe the SWIFT project/Proposition 6 and how it would appropriate \$2.00 billion from the rainy day fund to help fund state water projects. He also gave details as to how a municipality would go about obtaining funding for water projects.

Jonah Parker – Scotts Miracle Grow

Jonah is one of our TALL XIV classmates and he quickly discussed some new campaign that Scott's and other supporters have regarding water conservation.

The Honorable Glenn Hegar, Jr. – Responsibilities of the Comptroller

I really liked Glenn Hegar's presentation. I was impressed with his political record. No question as a newly elected comptroller, he will have his work cut out for him. However, his reputation depicts he is a true conservative who will be fiscally conscientious with Texas funds and revenue. He explained that there are 2700 people in his agency and of that, 1400 are involved in tax collection. The biggest items in this session will be education and transportation/infrastructure.

Lindsay Kennedy – TALL XIII "Brazil" Presentation and Texas Ag Council meeting and lunch

This was a great opportunity for our class to see some video showing a glimpse of what to expect during the international trip. TALL XIII, Lindsay and her classmates did a fabulous job on their video. We also go to listen in on the monthly Texas Ag Council meeting as well as enjoy a meal sponsored by Texas Ag Council.

Tom Holloway – Chief of Staff for Senator Charles Schwertner

Mr. Holloway touches shortly on some of the issues that have already been discussed by several of the others such as agriculture, rural affairs, and health and human services. It was different hearing it from a staffer because they tend to have a different prospective and be just as knowledgeable about the issues and topics.

Gaye McElwain – Overview of the Texas Railroad Commission

Gaye told us how the Railroad Commission was established in 1891 and was the oldest regulatory department. Primary responsibilities were to regulate oil and gas and they hadn't done anything regarding railways since 2005. She stated there are 428,000 wells currently under regulation. Current use of time was spent on pipeline safety, natural gas utility refunding, hydraulic fracking, horizontal/directional fracking, injection wells and disposal wells.

A Tribute to Texas Leadership – TALL Alumni Reception

Like several of the other receptions we have had, this was a wonderful opportunity to fellowship with TALL supporters and sponsors. I really liked this reception because of the venue and location. The following were speakers and did an outstanding job discussing TALL and the impact of agriculture:

- Dr. Doug Steele – Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Director
- John Sharp – Texas A&M University System Chancellor
- Dr. Bill Dugas – Acting Vice Chancellor and Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Texas A&M AgriLife
- The Honorable Sid Miller – Texas Commissioner of Agriculture
- Jim Prewitt – TALL Foundation Board Chairman
- Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz – Professor and TALL Program Director
- Tanya Foerster – TALL Alumni President
- Marcus Hill – Ag Workers Insurance President and Chairman – HONOREE

All of the speakers spoke on topics relevant to agriculture, politics and leadership. Also, Cody White was awarded for selling the most fundraiser raffle tickets and TALL XIV was awarded for being the class who sold the most tickets. It was an enjoyable evening.

Thursday, January 22, 2015

Lt. General Joe Weber – Duties and Responsibilities of TXDOT

Infrastructure and transportation is an important topic in Texas and impacts agriculture. With General Weber's military background, it is my opinion he will be a great asset to TXDOT. Some of the statistics of TXDOT are:

- 7% of the departments expenses are manpower (opposite of most companies)
- 83% of TX roads are rural
- 1990's the department changed from the "highway department" to TXDOT
- 200,000 lane miles in TX
- 52,000 bridges
- 500,000,000 miles driven by TX drivers each year
- 3,500 TX drivers killed each year

General Weber said that he cared about driver safety and it was his primary priority, but the biggest challenges were money and fuel efficiency.

The Honorable Joe Straus, III – Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives

It was great pleasure to hear from Mr. Straus and he obviously has a great reputation and resume. He stated that it was his priority to educate people about the legislative process and work with all parties to derive at a bipartisan decision that is best for all Texans, regardless of the issue. It was great that we were able to take a group picture.

Jason Fearneyhough – Texas Department of Agriculture Deputy Commissioner

It was great hearing from Jason and what I liked most about his approach to TDA and Texas politics is that it will be fresh and unbiased. He has a strong reputation from his work out of state and most recently with the state of Wyoming. I think this could be a benefit to the department because maybe Jason will present ideas that haven't been thought of before in Texas agriculture. However, Jason could be at a disadvantage because Texas agriculture is much more diverse with many more commodities than Wyoming.

The Honorable Trent Ashby – The Appropriations Process and Natural Resources Concerns

I really enjoyed Mr. Ashby and I think he is a great advocate for agriculture. He discussed water being one of the biggest issues within the natural resources committee and proposition 6 and HB-4. He also touched quickly on the appropriations committee and the process of passing a budget. He put Texas legislation into perspective by stating that each House member represents approximately 165,000 Texans and each Senate member represents approximately 850,000 Texans. His main point to this is that the proposed change from 2/3rds required vote to 3/5ths in the Senate isn't going to be good for rural Texans. He also talked to us about HB – 61, which would instill the right to hunt and fish in Texas.

Visit with State Representatives and State Senators from our respective districts

I really enjoyed this opportunity. Michelle, Lee and I met first with Drew Springer of House District 68. He actually waited for us to come to his office before he left Austin. This was great and we talked a lot about education, transportation and the open carry gun discussion. We took a group photo and he posted it on his facebook page and stated support for TALL. Next, Lee and I met with James Keffer of House District 60. We mainly discussed transportation and the TALL program. He was a big supporter of hunting so we also discussed HB – 61 as mentioned by Trent Ashby. He also took a photo with Lee and me. Lastly, Lee and I met with staffers of Senator Craig Estes. They were busy but allowed us to stop by and discuss the TALL program and we thanked them for all of their hard work and dedication. Also, by walking around the Capitol building and locating each of these members, we learned the layout of the building and got to see the House and Senate floor. This was a great experience.

Kody Bessent – Legislative Affairs Director, High Plains Water District

Kody spent some time talking about his time in Austin and the importance of both being involved in legislative issues and having a relationship with the congressional leaders that represent your area and district. Kody also discussed the creation of the state groundwater districts and gave us updates as to what is being worked on within these districts. Most recently the discussion is about the energy industry and the use of brackish water and the process of desalination. During this process, the big question is can we still protect private property rights and still manage water as the most precious natural resource.

Clayton Wolf – Director of Wildlife, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Mr. Wolf spent a considerable amount of time discussing his department and giving details as to how it has changed over the years. In 1895, it was the Fish and Oyster Department and in 1963, parks and game departments merged. The department has 3100 employees made up of 10 divisions. 2 of the divisions are human resources, 5 are in the field and 3 are natural resources. There is 630,000 acres just in state parks alone. The other division is law enforcement. Currently there are 532 game wardens in the state that devote a considerable amount of time managing and regulating the states hunting, fishing and trapping.

Mary Luedeker – Government Industry Relations and Assistant General Counsel, Texas Animal Health Commission

Mary, one of our TALL XIV classmates, took time to talk to our class about the Texas Animal Health Commission. It was obvious that Mary is compassionate about her job and very knowledgeable. Mary informed us the commission generates \$10.0MM in annual revenue. There are 151 full time employees. There are 7 regions across Texas and 1 director who must be a veterinarian. There are 13 commissioners appointed by the Governor who each serve a 6 year term. There are also 75 inspectors around the state.

Reception at the State Capitol, Lt. Governor's Reception Room, Second Floor, Senate Chamber

I really liked this reception because it was a chance to see a historical part of the state capitol building, but also fellowship in a small and relaxed atmosphere. Texas Pork Producers and Texas Poultry Federation sponsored by providing refreshments and hors d'oeuvres. Mike Morrissey who is director of budget for Lt. Governor Dan Patrick spent some time giving details to the Texas legislative budget process. It was interesting to hear about the details that go into a budget for such a large economy.

Certified Hereford Beef Social

With the coordination of Lee Chastain, Mariano Lerma and Steven Kahla the Texas Hereford Breeders, Certified Hereford Beef and the Texas Beef Council sponsored a social. We had the opportunity to hear about updates with Hereford beef and also eat some great food from Hereford cattle. It was at the Texas Beef Council which was a really nice facility.

Friday, January 23, 2015

Dr. Richard Grant – Psychological Types: Practical Applications

The morning began by a breakfast sponsored by Texas Association of Dairyman. After that, we spent the morning performing an individual Myers Briggs self-assessment. As a result, I am an "ESFJ" which stands for Extravert, Sensing, Feeling and Judging. This is a great tool to determine who you are, how you respond to others and how others are similar and different than you. We found that many of us were both similar and different, just like it is with our families and coworkers. Dr. Grant made this experience really fun and I enjoyed this morning class.

Sonora, Texas

After leaving the hotel, I choose to participate in the "optional" Sonora trip. Although I was ready to be home with my family, I promised to dedicate 100% of my time towards TALL for the 2 years. I am thankful that I did, because it was a wonderful time and great learning experience. Once we arrived in Sonora, we checked into the hotel and made our way to the Old Sonora Ice House Ranch Museum. We had the opportunity to learn about the history of Sonora and Sutton County. After some time at the museum, we were treated with a dinner at Sonora's Historic Train Depot. This was a great meal. Lastly, Mr. Bob Malone was the keynote speaker for the evening. I think Mr. Malone was one of my most favorite speakers on this trip. He was very inspirational and everything he discussed was relevant to each of us and our lives. He talked about topics like agriculture, energy, dedication and leadership. This was a great beginning to the Sonora trip.

Saturday, January 24, 2015

Texas A&M Research Station- Sonora

We drove south of Sonora to the Texas A&M Research Station. It started with a chuck wagon breakfast from Ron and Melinda Springer from San Angelo. They also cooked us lunch during this visit. We began by hearing from Dr. Charles Taylor who is superintendent. He had been there for 20 years and was very knowledgeable about Sonora and Sutton County. Dr. Taylor gave us some stats about this area:

- 22 inches of annual rainfall
- 2200 feet elevation
- Highest concentration of "browsers" (goats and sheep) in the US
- Plants helped to get the research station started
- EPPBA – prescribed burning actually got started at the research station

Next, Jim Polonis from Sutton County and Caroline Runge from Menard County Underground Water districts talked to the class. They gave some detail as to the unique nature of groundwater in this area. The biggest thing they discussed was the Edwards Aquifer and how it was a cherished resource for this area. Next Sam Epperson, Alan Armstead and Stan Cottle talked about wildlife and ranching in this area. They discussed predator control, but what I think was most appropriate is they referred to “non-ag people” as a predator. Reason being, they are uneducated about predator control and the necessity of managing wildlife. Next we went outside and Seco Mayfield and Dr. Erika Campbell talked to us about sheep, goats, wool and mohair. They explained some of the research they performed and why this particular area and the demographics were ideal of sheep and goats. They discussed the times of harvest and how the markets responded to both quality and quantity. After this, we ate a great chuck wagon meal provided by Ron and Melinda Springer of San Angelo. The last thing we did while at the research station was to tour some of the station on the bus. Curry Campbell showed us some of the test plots and how prescribed burning has improved and changed the landscape and forage in this area. It helped with wildlife habitat, agricultural grazing and weed control.

After we left the research station, we drove to Dermody Ranch. Dermody Ranch is a deer breeding facility and hunting ranch. This was a really cool tour. We got to see some really big racks that had been raised at the ranch. Most of these were sheds that they kept as deer grew and then made them into mounts. We also got to tour the actual facility where they work the deer in terms of vaccination and breeding. Seeing wildlife enterprises such as this seem just as relevant to Texas as agriculture because it makes up a huge part of the Texas industry and revenue.

To finish the day and the Austin/Sorona tour, we traveled to X Bar Ranch where we enjoyed a great dinner and the opportunity to fellowship with supporters and sponsors of TALL. The dinner and wine was graciously sponsored by Christoval Winery. Lastly, Stan Meador presented to us about the diversity of ranching. He was specifically talking about X Bar Ranch and how his families operation had diversified into things outside of ranching/wildlife. They opened it up to the public and had even hosted bicycle racing. They decided to do this to help make it profitable and use this tremendous asset that had been in their family to make it an income generating enterprise.

Closing Remarks

I can't say enough great things about the third session of TALL XIV. As I said before, it exceeded my expectations in every way. The speakers, the agenda, and the TALL staff made it memorable. I am hungry for more and can't wait for April as we venture outside of Texas and begin experiencing agriculture on a greater scale. I have become close with my 27 classmates and can't wait to see what's in store for the rest of the TALL XIV. Thank You