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**TALL XIV**

**Session 4 – “National Government: Issues and Policies”**

**Washington, DC, Maryland and New York**

**April 18-25, 2015**

**Saturday and Sunday, April 18 & 19, 2015**

Like the first several sessions, the DC/Maryland/NY 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. As we progress in the experience, each session introduces something new and different. Leaving Texas and being exposed to a different environment and hearing about national concerns was very interesting. By weeks end, I had built a great deal of respect and admiration for the northeastern part of our country along with the people, beliefs and behaviors they exhibited.

We traveled by plane, train and automobile to add to the experience. Once arriving in Washington, DC, we toted our luggage to the hotel, and settled in for some social time with fellow classmates. That evening, our class boarded a bus and took a “Washington after Dark” tour that included tourist sites such as Jefferson Memorial, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Memorial, Veterans Memorial, Capitol and White House to name a few. This was a fantastic initiation to DC and helped us first comers to have a layout of the city and the important destinations.

On Sunday, we were given a “free day” to tour the city and take-in the sites. Mariano and I toured most of the mall area, beginning at the Capitol and ending at the Lincoln memorial. The day also included Arlington National Cemetery and a Washington National’s baseball game. Although there was so much more to see, I am reserving it for the next couple of days in addition to a family trip later in life.

**Monday, April 20, 2015**

**EPA Regulations – Ronald Reagan Building**

Our group had a little trouble getting into EPA because of security and finding the right room. Nonetheless, once we found the right location, we got to hear from Tom Burke who is science advisor for EPA. Mr. Burke talked about both the science part and the regulatory part of EPA. He explained the departments 4 areas of focus are water and sustainability, energy and mineral studies, nutrients/ag systems and water systems.

### Pentagon Tour

This was one of my favorite tours of TALL. The Pentagon symbolizes honor, strength and security for America. Two military employees graciously gave us a tour of the Pentagon including the 911 memorial. Thanks to Jorge, we were honored to meet Admiral James A. Winnefeld, Jr., Vice Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff and he briefed us on current topics and gave us a coin symbolizing friendship with the military. It was a wonderful gift.

### USDA Briefing – James L. Whitten Building

TALL alumnus Jennifer Yezak served as our tour guide for the rest of this day and did a great job. It helped having someone who is familiar with TALL and DC, to keep us on task. We had a great lunch and then were honored to hear from Secretary Vilsak along with several of his senior staff (Michael Scuse, Lillian Salerno and Warren Preston). Hearing from the main representatives for USDA was very meaningful and significant to our trip.

### American Farm Bureau Federation

At this location we heard from individuals representing American Farm Bureau Federation and US Grain Council. Topics discussed were focused on economics and global strategies. They also discussed trade agreements and how it impacted both exports and imports.

### Dinner at Trattoria Alberto of Capitol Hill

This was a great evening and very relaxing. We were treated to a great Italian meal along with a wonderful presentation by Jeff Harrison. Jeff talked in depth about working on the new Farm Bill and all of the time and effort devoted to such a large task. He brought humor and reality to the process and made for an enjoyable evening.

## **Tuesday, April 21, 2015**

### Eisenhower Executive Office Building

This was a great location. It was on the White House grounds, adjacent to the White House and located in the Indian Treaty room. We heard from 4 White House staffers that spoke to us on topics such as international and domestic affairs, policy and weather. Just the atmosphere alone was very meaningful to being in Washington, DC.

### Rayburn House Office Building

Connie Humphrey, Chief of Staff to Congressman Ruben Hinojosa spoke to us about immigration, homeland security and responsibilities of the Finance House Committee. Immediately following her presentation, we went to the Longworth House Office Building where we ate lunch in the cafeteria. After lunch, we heard from Michael Horder of Representative Michael Conaway's office as well Matt Schertz, who is policy director for the House Senate Committee. Matt spoke in great detail about all the time devoted to the Farm Bill. It was nice to see Matt, because we went to college together and hadn't seen one another for about 15 years. I'm glad we got to focus on agriculture as we migrated around the congressional area.

### United States Capitol

This was the only time we entered the Capitol building and I'm glad we got to go inside. Senator Cornyn spoke to us in a small and private room. He was very honest and transparent in his opinion about topics. I liked this because it was much more intimate than when Senator Cornyn spoke to us in Amarillo. I appreciate him taking the time to speak to TALL.

### Longworth House Office Building

Representative Bill Flores from Texas was our last speaker of the day. I am glad that we got to hear from Cornyn and Flores back to back. I saw some similarities in what they discussed, but I also saw some differences. I liked hearing from experienced and senior members of congress because they tend to present a different outlook on topics versus myself or others with less knowledge.

### "Freedom's Son" – Ford's Theatre

This was an awesome experience and the fact that we got to see 1 of 2 of these shows and it was playing while we were in DC was perfect timing. I got to sit on the balcony, just across the theatre from where Lincoln was killed. My seat was front row, so I had a perfect view of the production. The entire show exceeded my expectation. The acting and singing was outstanding and the depiction of the Civil War era seemed "spot on". Thanks to Dr. Jim for including this in our session.

## **Wednesday, April 22, 2015**

### Bonita Farms – Darlington, MD

Immediately in the morning we loaded the bus along with our luggage and headed west to Maryland. As we entered the rural area, it became obvious how beautiful this part of the county is. Our first stop was Bonita Farms. This was a breeding and training facility for race horses. William Boniface showed us around the farm including the stud barn, breeding facility, and the other stall area including the race track. We also got to go in the office where he showed us all the silks their operation has used over the years. I didn't realize the horse racing industry was so significant in this area. Also at this facility, we were given a presentation by William Amoss. He worked for Harford County Government and gave us a very interesting and unique presentation about the Country Land Preservation. This was something I had not heard of, but seemed very interesting and important to this area. Mr. Amoss also served as our guide for the rest of the time in Maryland.

### Holloway Brothers Farm

This was another one of my favorite tours of this session. This farm was 4<sup>th</sup> generation and was located in a very beautiful area with a great deal of history. This operation was diversified with cattle, grain, hay and retail beef. We toured the farm by riding behind a tractor on a hay trailer. At one time, we saw a bald eagle flying and when we stopped at the backside of the farm, you could overlook the Susquehanna River and just to the south is where it flowed into the Chesapeake Bay. This was very impressive and enjoyable to see.

### Broom's Bloom Dairy

This was another great stop. This dairy had diversified in their operation because not only did they have an ongoing operation, but they also had a small restaurant operation and made fresh ice cream with many flavors to choose from. I enjoyed fresh clam chowder along with "dirt" ice cream! We then toured the dairy. This facility was different than what I had seen because each cow spent most of their time in one location. To help with comfort, they stood on a waterbed like pad and only left one or two times a week to move around.

### Riehl Farm

This was a real treat and something I had been excited about ever since receiving the agenda. The Riehl family is Amish and all of their ways and practices followed the Amish traditions. It was very interesting to drive this area and see all of the Amish farms. Sam Riehl showed us around his farm and discussed the ways they operated. At the end of the tour, we went into the store that Susie Riehl operated where they sold goods and crafts made by Amish families from around the community. I was able to purchase some great gifts and memorabilia for my family.

### Arrive in New York City, NY

After spending the day driving through parts of Maryland and Pennsylvania, we arrived in Manhattan to check into our hotel. We were closed to Time Square, so after getting settled into our rooms, several of us walked around taking in the sites. Although this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> time I had been in this area, it was if I hadn't ever been there before. So much to see and take in!

## **Thursday, April 23, 2015**

### New Fulton Fish Market

This was our first day in New York City and it started off early. We boarded the bus at 5:30 and headed for the fish market. We arrived later than other classes in the past, so a lot of the heavy trading was already done and we missed the rush. However, this was a cool experience. Behind Japan, this is the second largest fish market in the world and America's oldest fish market. It seemed like every fish possible was on display for buyers to purchase. Victory Sequinot, Security Director gave us a short presentation and they got to walk around and tour the market and speak with the vendors. I really enjoyed this tour.

### Mosner Family Brands

It was already cold outside and something we weren't prepared for, but neither were we prepared for the meat market. Nonetheless, this tour was really interesting. Owner and VP of Sales, Benjamin Mosner gave us a presentation and then took us on tour. Most of the wholesale carcasses in the plant are veal and lamb. However, this plant traded in almost every domestic and exotic meat you can imagine. They serve the 5 burrow area, so because every culture in the world is highly concentrated within this city; their goal is to meet the needs of their customers. I'm glad we did this tour.

### Hunts' Point Produce Market

Myra Gordon, Executive Administrative Director met us in the parking lot. She gave us a short synopsis of the market and then we toured. I think we toured about 6 different loading docks in this market. It was very large; in fact this is the largest wholesale produce market in the world. That is what made this tour so impressive. Because it is produce and the shelf life is limited, the product gets moved in and out very often. Therefore, there is a tremendous amount of volume that funnels through this facility on a daily basis. This facility is just a third party, providing lease space for producers/sellers to make their product available for buyers/end users. This was a very good and meaningful tour.

### Community Kitchen in West Harlem

This was one of my favorite stops on the trip. Not necessarily because of what occurred, but what it represents. Sheree Quiles, Administrative Manager gave us a short presentation. After that, we split into 2 groups because the facility was small. Our group first toured the food bank and pantry and then we met in the kitchen to enjoy an outstanding meal prepared by the volunteers. I was very impressed by the quality and quantity of the meal. It was humbling to not only see the volunteers providing this Godly service but also the individuals that rely on this service. Our class collected a donation to show our appreciation and support for the kitchen.

### Cornell Financial Engineering – Manhattan

At this location, we had 2 speakers. First speaker was Susan Bilotta, VP of the Federal Farm Credit Banks Funding Corporation. As an employee of Farm Credit, I really enjoyed and appreciated this presentation. Susan did a great job presenting the history of Farm Credit and explaining the unique structure of the system as well as how money becomes available to associations to lend to stockholders. Each of us received a print out that outlined the key functions of the funding corp and Farm Credit. Next speaker was Sal Gilbertie, President of Teucrium Trading, LLC. This gentleman was brilliant in this knowledge about commodity trading. He discussed how trading has evolved over the last 30 years and everything he has experienced in his career. The main topic he discussed was the speed of trading and how technology has changed the approach.

The rest of our evening was free. We took a group photo by the Merrill Lynch Bull. A small group of us purchased souvenirs, then toured Battery Park and the 911 memorial. We didn't have a lot of time, but had the opportunity to see some of the important areas of lower Manhattan!

## **Friday, April 24, 2015**

### De Buck's Sod Farm

This was our first tour of the day. This was about an hour drive north into upstate New York. Leonard, DeBuck, owner and operator got on our bus and led us on a tour of his farm. He talked about being an innovative producer where they specialized in turf grass. At the end of the tour, we got to walk out in the field and watch their son Greg give us a presentation on harvesting turf. This included cutting, rolling and stacking the turf on a pallet. This was an awesome demonstration. However, it was really cold and windy and at one time, it snowed while standing out in the field. Needless to say, we weren't prepared.

### Ruszkiewicz Onion Farm

This wasn't a very long tour. However, it was interesting. This was just across the road from DeBuck's. Paul and father, John Paul spoke to us about their farm and took us on a small tour of their facility. Mainly we got to see where they store their product. They considered themselves both typical and conventional in their practices.

### Cheryl Rogowski's Farm

This tour was a little different than the rest. Cheryl's emphasis was organically grown crops. This was a very natural look and she used that approach with all of her products. After she discussed her operation, we enjoyed a traditional Polish meal. It was very good and different than what I had ever eaten before. During lunch, Phil Giltner spoke to the group. Mr. Giltner is Deputy Commissioner with NYS Department of Agriculture. It was interesting to hear about the topics and obstacles in New York agriculture and how it compares and contrasts to Texas.

### Martin Nop Dairy

As the day was winding down, we drove about 45 minutes to Martin Nop Dairy. This was a small dairy in very good condition. I was impressed that the family was all involved in the operation and all took some interest to help keep in going. There were a lot of similarities to other smaller dairy operations in Texas and I imagine other areas of the United States. They shared the struggles of keeping a small generational operation viable.

### Crist Orchard

Jenny Crist, one of the owners gave us a tour of the processing, cleaning and packaging facility. She gave us a presentation about the history of the company and the vision their family had for sustainability. We also got to see the storage facility they recently built with the assistance of Farm Credit. This was the nicest, cleanest, most impressive facility of this session. It was obvious they had invested a great deal of time and capital into the longevity of their business. At the end, we were able to see some of the apple orchard. This was a very good tour to end this session.

We then drove approximately 2 hours back to the Bronx in New York City to enjoy a Yankees versus Mets baseball game. It was cold and we weren't prepared, so several of us purchased Yankee apparel to help stay warm and serve as souvenirs.

### **Closing Remarks**

I can't say enough great things about the fourth 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 July as we are back in Texas and headed to Houston/Galveston and the coastal bend region. 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