



**Sarah Cortese Fitzgerald, #8**

**TALL XV**

**Session 3- Austin & Sonora / January 17-21, 2017**

**State Government: Issues and Politics- "Leadership, Legislation, Laws"**

The political sector of agriculture is something the normal producer (or non-producer for that matter) doesn't consider on a daily basis. Still, its influence is undeniable. Session three allowed us to see politics and policy first hand in Austin followed by a direct look at production agriculture in Sonora and West Texas. The combination of politics/policy and industry was extremely useful and allowed us to see the marriage of public and private that often exists in agriculture.

### **TUESDAY, January 17**

#### **"Atmospheric Water Demonstration"**

**Moses West, Joey Estrada**

Our tour began with a very eye opening tour of new technology by AWG Technology. They have developed a machine that takes water from the air in the form of humidity and converts it into drinking water. I was unaware that this technology isn't necessarily new but their machine operates on a much larger and economical scale.

With at least 30% humidity, each machine can produce as much as 3,000 gallons a day of clean water at a cost of \$1 per 55 gallons at this time. A point I found especially interesting is that the machine is not dependent on one energy source but can be run on electricity, diesel fuel, wind, solar and any other energy source available.

The uses and applications for AWG are almost limitless from military use to city utilities to recharging acquirers. I hope to hear great things from them in the future and appreciate what they are doing for Texas, the US and beyond in fixing our constant struggle for water.

#### **"Legislative Overview"**

**Mr. Joe Cox, Ms. Cristina Cornejo (Texas A&M AgriLife)**

"Democracy is a messy process." This quote by Mr. Cox could possibly sum up the Austin session for me. The messy nature inherent to democracy is undeniable but there is a beauty to the chaos as its success rests on the active engagement of its citizens.

Mr. Cox and Ms. Cornejo explained the general process of Texas legislature The Senate and House of Representatives are in session for 140 days, every 2 years. Their positions in External Relations and Legislative Affairs for AgriLife Extension Service cause them to be extremely busy during those 140 days. What I found just as equally impressive though was their comment that the work they completed the other 590 days was just as important with their outreach and education outside of the Capitol's walls.

### **“Agricultural priorities for the upcoming legislative session”**

#### **The Honorable Kyle Kacal**

Out of all those in the Texas Legislation, according to Representative Kacal, he is the only person actively engaged within production agriculture. His emphasis throughout his talk, fittingly so, was the importance of “telling our story.” Even more important he emphasized is reaching people in mediums they use like social media.

Kacal reminded us that it is also important to remember issues important to rural Texas other than those directly tied to agriculture like access to medical care and education.

He also sang the praises of ag leadership programs like TALL. He himself was part of a Farm Bureau leadership program and believes programs like those are vital in priming the ag leaders of tomorrow.

### **“Immigration & Border Issues”**

#### **The Honorable Ryan Guillen**

Mr. Guillen was the youngest person ever to get elected to the House of Representatives at the age of 24. An eight term representative, the vast amount of information he knew was impressive.

He covered a wide range of issues he felt important for us to know including private property rights, healthcare, dark money (issues with political non-profits), appraisal and private property tax reform and education.

I was especially interested in what Guillen had to say regarding border security and policy considering he represents South Texas. He didn't have much time to cover the subject specifically but stated that the expected shortfall in money available this biennium will prove difficult to finance the additional border agents and equipment that have been stockpiled in recent years.

### **“Agricultural Issues facing Texas”**

#### **Mr. Jason Fearneyhough**

If I could sum up Mr. Fearneyhough's talk into one question it would be, “Where does practicality meet regulation?” Within all subjects discussed- commodity prices, immigration & labor and FISMA for example- the struggle lies in crafting legislation that practically serves society and industry.

His discussion on the current struggle between Texas cotton and wine industries in regards to chemical overspray was especially interesting to me. More than just a chemical (makeup) issue, there is an

educational aspect regarding application as well that needs to be addressed. It will be interesting to see what place legislation has in this. Considering all the players in the game- \$2 billion wine industry, \$50 billion cotton industry and two chemical companies worth trillions- this isn't an issue that will go away quietly.

### **“Appropriations, Budget Transparency and Reform, Higher Education and Priorities for the 85<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session”**

#### **The Honorable John Raney**

John Raney discussed his experience in the Appropriations Committee as well as struggles encountered with the entire budget process. He also encouraged us to be an active participant, whether it be money or time, in the political process (which, encouragingly so, seemed to be a reoccurring theme). In his words, “If you sit on the sidelines, you get what you deserve.”

### **“Conserving Texas Land for Future Generations”**

#### **Mrs. Blair Fitzsimons, Mr. James Oliver**

Between 1997 and 2007, over 1 million acres of working lands were converted to non-agricultural use. Leaders from Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, Texas Wildlife Association and Texas Farm Bureau gathered November 2005 and convened a steering committee to address this increasing issue of rural land loss and created Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT) in 2006.

Agreeing that conservation easements can get a bad rap, Mrs. Fitzsimons and Mr. Oliver affirmed that TALT was set apart. Created by organizations created themselves to sustain production agriculture, wildlife and natural resources, TALT operates with the rights of the private landowner in mind under these guiding principles:

- Stewardship requires stewards.
- Focus only on private lands.
- Help landowners protect their lands.
- Trust the landowner to manage.
- Respect landowners' rights.

### **“Your Beef Checkoff Dollars at Work”**

#### **Mr. Richard Wortham**

We ended a long but information packed day in Austin with dinner sponsored by Texas Beef Council. We all appreciated the opportunity to wind down, while also learning about the Beef Council's efforts in Texas.

A member of the Texas BEEF Team myself (a running group sponsored by the council) I enjoyed learning about new initiatives going on.

**WEDNESDAY, January 18**

**“Duties and Responsibilities of the Natural Resource, Appropriations and House Administration Committees”**

**The Honorable Trent Ashby**

I truly enjoyed Mr. Ashby and appreciated his time with us. I’m also honored to have him represent a younger generation of politics.

He provided a general rundown of the three committees he serves on, spending the most time on Natural Resource and Appropriations.

*Natural Resource:* Approximately 1,000 people move to Texas daily. Accordingly, the goal for the Natural Resources Committee is the future and planning/preparing for future needs. Water is one of those future needs we need, more so, we HAVE to prepare for. In his words, “Texas is a thirsty state.” We also discussed alternative methods for water generation and aquifer recharge, including technology created by AWG Technologies which we visited Tuesday.

*Appropriations:* While Ashby discussed the appropriations process, the saying “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time” came to mind. With \$210 billion to handle, it is vital to split the process into articles and relevant subcommittees. He also reported that there was a \$6 billion slippage in state revenue, mainly oil & gas related. Accordingly, the state will have to make ends meet with less all around this biennium.

**“Visits with State Representatives and Senators”**

I appreciated the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone in initiating the visits with my representatives and senators. I recently moved from Lubbock to Jacksboro, accordingly I wasn’t familiar with Senator Craig Estes or Representative Drew Springer, Jr. I reached out to both offices and was unfortunately unable to coordinate visits with either. Nonetheless I took advantage of our time and visited with Senator Charles Perry, current chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.

**“Duties and Responsibilities of the Railroad Commission of Texas”**

**The Honorable Christi Craddick**

I’ve always wondered why the department tasked with oil & gas regulation is called The Railroad Commission. Ms. Craddick explained why. The oldest regulatory department in Texas, The Railroad Commission was established in 1891 to regulate the rail industry at that time. The commission has not actually done anything regarding railways since 2005 but concentrate on items like pipeline safety, natural gas utility refunding, hydraulic fracking, horizontal/directional fracking, injection wells and disposal wells.

Oil & Gas constitutes 30% of Texas economy in some form or fashion (40% before the recent slump). Accordingly it is an industry worth paying attention to. I was surprised to hear that, just with today’s technology, we have 100 plus years of reserves available.

Craddick is excited about the direction she sees the industry heading with expectations for zero to minimal water use in drilling in the next twenty years as well as improvements in technology.

#### **“Texas Ag Council Meeting/ TALL XIV Cohort International Seminar to the EU”**

##### **Chairman Darren Turley, Mr. Lee Chastain**

Walking into the Texas Ag Council Meeting, I was surprised to find leadership from organizations like Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, Texas Farm Bureau, Texas Sheep & Goat Raisers and Texas State Soil & Water Conservation. I’m glad to have them going to bat for Agriculture and collaborating with other like-minded persons and agencies.

After introductions, Mr. Lee Chastain provided a video presentation on the previous TALL class’ trip to the EU. I appreciate his time and preparation and am looking forward very much to our own trip to China next year.

#### **“TALL Alumni Meeting”**

##### **Mrs. Tanya Foerster**

We were able to sit in on the Alumni meeting. I appreciated the chance to see the opportunities that lay ahead as an alumnae, as well as meet, discuss and network.

#### **“A Tribute to Texas Leadership”- TALL alumni reception**

As with previous receptions, this was a wonderful opportunity to fellowship with TALL supporters and sponsors. The venue was absolutely beautiful and full of history.

I enjoyed hearing all the speakers. Their reverence toward the TALL program made me even more proud to be a part.

#### **THURSDAY, January 19**

##### **“Texas Oil & Gas Association: Duties, Issues and Initiatives of the Industry”**

##### **Mr. Todd Staples**

Having heard Mr. Staples speak in previous positions, I enjoyed hearing his take on the oil & gas industry as now part of the Texas Oil & Gas Association.

The mission of the Texas Oil & Gas Association is to promote a robust oil and natural gas industry and to advocate for sound, science-based policies and free-market principles.

The Texas Oil & Gas Association is the oldest trade association in Texas and represents every aspect of the industry. Some of their top concerns are:

- Work with Railroad Commission
- Maintain critical infrastructure of roads, pipeline and electrical

## **“The Responsibilities and Function of the General Land Office of Texas”**

### **The Honorable George P. Bush**

In 1836, the Republic of Texas Congress formed the General Land Office to manage the public domain. The charge was to collect and keep records, provide maps and surveys, and issue titles.

The rules and responsibilities established during the revolution continue to this day including protecting personal property rights and being a custodian of our Texas history. Bush especially held important the responsibility to maintain a sense of deference in regards to our state’s historic assets and landmarks.

In relation to private property rights, he affirmed that conservation is very important but there has to be a happy marriage with economic activity as well.

A positive thread ran throughout Mr. Bush’s comments. He had a sense of optimism toward the future of Texas and much pride in its current state, which I appreciated greatly.

## **“Rural America Strikes Back”**

### **Mr. Eric Opiela**

Mr. Opiela, TALL IX Alumnus, offered an absolute wealth of information in regards to rural America’s part in the 2016 Presidential Election. Most interestingly so with humor and relatability.

Rural America was the tipping point and reason why Hillary Clinton is not president. In the words of James Carville, “It’s the economy stupid.” Any sense of economic recovery experienced within the previous presidential term didn’t translate to rural America and was a big reason why Trump is now our president.

Overall, the main points I gained were:

- Both Republican and Democratic Parties have to compete for rural & suburban counties to win.
- In regards to our state, urban & suburban Republicans ignore rural Texas at their own peril.
- Rural schools matter (hot topic) as they are the biggest employers within a lot of counties.
- A Republican Texas is not impossible but once Texas falls to a Democratic Presidential Nominee, the Republican Party is null and void as it wouldn’t be statistically possible (considering electoral margins) for a Republican to win.

## **“Responsibilities and Duties of the TxDOT and the state of Texas Infrastructure”**

### **Mr. James Bass**

Texas is the second most populous state in the US & second in land size as well. We also export the most goods by state (14 years in a row). All that being said, it’s necessary to have and maintain a large infrastructure to handle transportation. 3,400 miles of interstate and 195,000 total lane miles to be exact. TxDOT, funded by vehicle registration fees and motor fuels tax, employs 12,000 to deliver a safe, reliable, and integrated transportation system that enables the movement of people and goods.

With much talk about changing weight restrictions for cargo, Mr. Bass stated that TxDOT strives to be forward thinkers as “we often plan for tomorrow in the lens of today.” Short sided thinking only does just that. Sells us short.

### **“Responsibilities and Duties of the TCEQ”**

#### **Dr. Bryan Shaw**

The TCEQ is responsible for regulation of air, water and waste. The three commissioner commission and agency, according to Dr. Shaw operates to ensure that there isn’t any appearance of government happening behind closed doors.

2,800 employees operate throughout the state funded at minimal cost to the government (which I found interesting: 82% fee based, 2% revenue and only 16% government funded).

### **“Responsibilities for the Comptroller, 2017 Revenue Estimates and 2017 Budget Projections”**

#### **Mr. Tom Currah**

Mr. Currah informed us they are projecting a 2.7% decrease in funds available in the next biennium. Knowing that numbers can be viewed many different ways, according to the context clues you have surrounding them, I asked “why”? Not necessarily a product of recession, there was \$7.3 billion available in carryover from the previous biennium.

Overall, the Comptroller’s office is seeing some positive trends for expected revenue (i.e. rig numbers, job growth). Texas was able to weather the recent storm of dropping energy prices as our economy is diversified. He pointed out that diversity is the key to weathering downturns as energy-dominant economy states like Oklahoma and Louisiana have experienced negative job loss in recent years.

I found it interesting, and comforting to an extent, how dynamic the department is and has to be. Numbers aren’t stagnant and the office must be constantly monitoring to be proactive in projections and response.

### **“TPWD Major Initiatives and Agency Responsibilities”**

#### **Mr. Carter Smith**

TPWD has deep roots in Texas with the first game law made in 1860.

While the key piece of legislation for TPWD was made in 1983, the office of the State Fish Commissioner was established 1879 (but abolished 1881 due to scandal). Other key dates are:

- 1895- The Oyster Commission established with first director hired as well as six game wardens.
- Early 1900s- first biologists hired
- 1923- State Park System established

Hunting provides a \$16 billion surge to the Texas economy annually. There are also currently 1,000,000 hunters, 2,500,000 anglers and 8,000,000 visitors to state parks- making TPWD just as vital as ever before.

### **“Oversight and Responsibilities of the Texas Animal Health Commission”**

#### **Mrs. Mary Thiel Luedeker**

Mrs. Thiel Luedeker, a TALL XIV Alumnus, offered a humorous and “real” prospective on the Austin trip and the program in general. I know we all appreciated her frank candor.

Considering the size of the agency, Thiel Luedeker said she had to be a jack-of-all-trades, essentially serving as a general PR actioner.

Important items she made sure to point out were:

- Mission is to protect livestock
- 13 member governor-appointed commission (10 of which directly represent industries)
- Agency is divided into eight regions.
- 185 employees operate under a \$22 million budget (70 of which are inspectors)
- 3 emergency management personnel
- 1 state funded lab

Considering the TAHC was established in 1893 to fight fever ticks, it’s interesting that things have come full circle with them combatting the issue now. With a 10 mile deep permanent quarantine zone on the border, USDA tick riders and specially trained employees, they are well equipped to fight the issue. The cooperation and assistance of the public/private landowners seems to be the determining factor in kicking the problem again.

### **“Reception at the State Capitol, Lt. Governor’s Reception Room”**

I enjoyed this reception for several reasons- it was a much-appreciated opportunity to experience such a historical part of our Texas Capitol Building and also chance to fellowship one-on-one in a small and relaxed atmosphere. Texas Pork Producers and Texas Poultry Federation sponsored the reception and also provided remarks. Mike Morrissey who is director of budget for Lt. Governor gave us a rundown of the Texas legislative budget process. He is truly a walking encyclopedia on the subject. TALL Alumnus ended the evening with remarks on his journey to becoming a state representative.

### **FRIDAY, January 20**

#### **“Texas Dairy Industry”**

#### **Mr. Darren Turley**

Having had firsthand experience with the Dairy Industry (my family sells alfalfa to producers along the Texas/New Mexico border), I joked we had breakfast on dairy time. A comment made in jest to the early mornings (and 24/7 hours) notorious in the industry.



Mr. Turley, also a TALL Alumnus, provided a rundown of the dairy industry. Having gained knowledge through previous speakers that week, we had an active discussion on several topics being able to relate them to real life applications including weight limits and restrictions on transport.

### **“Psychological Types: Practical Applications”**

#### **Dr. Richard Grant**

After breakfast, our morning centered on taking and application of the Myers Briggs self-assessment. As a result, I found I am an “INFJ” which stands for Introversion, Intuition, Feeling, Judging.

I found this extremely useful great tool to determine the type of person you are and how you can use that information to interact with others, whether similar or different. Dr. Grant made this experience lighthearted at the same time. I appreciated this session and have actually recommended Dr. Grant to my employer.

### **“Sonora: Visit at Old Sonora Ice House Museum/ Dinner at Sonora’s Historic Train Depot”**

#### **Mr. Bob Malone, Keynote Speaker**

The “optional” Sonora trip, in my opinion, was when our class really bonded. All but three in our class loaded up from Austin and headed west, stopping off in Fredericksburg for German cuisine on the way.

I was very impressed by the pride in Sonora. Locals have banded together to revitalize the downtown into a quaint and well-kept assortment of stores, restaurants, event spaces and the Old Sonora Ice House Museum which we were lucky enough to visit.

After our visit to the museum, we were treated to dinner at Sonora’s Historic Train Depot. The real treat however awaited us after dinner with Mr. Bob Malone’s keynote address on topics including politics, economy and oil & gas. A man who has truly done it all, what probably impressed me the most personally about himself was his graciousness and the manner in which he concentrated and focused on who he was talking to. Someone of his caliber (he was former VP of BP among other accolades) doesn’t get there by chance. He told us he prepared for four hours on his talk with us alone. A man of little compromise he said he approached business and personal life with value-based leadership.

### **SATURDAY, January 21**

#### **“Welcome and History of Sonora Research Station”**

#### **Dr. Doug Tolleson**

After a wonderful chuck wagon breakfast, we sat down to listen and learn about agriculture in West Texas, which was much more progressive and diversified than I originally thought.

Dr. Tolleson is the manager of the Sonora Research Station. Having taken the position just a few months ago, he pointed out that everyone else has been there over 20 years. Also, in 100 years, there have only been just eight managers including himself. There is a real sense of stability and dedication at the Station.

The Station began in 1916 when four local ranchers located land for, financed and established the Ranch Experiment Station. Ranching evolving from range to fences as well as drought and toxic plants were some of the hot topics of the day, some of which we are still discussing and addressing now.

Grazing management was one of the first projects the station tackled, becoming part of the larger community and hosting ranch roundups/field days. Today the Station is still very much vital, focusing on grazing management, prescribed burning and management of sheep and goats.

### **“TALT- Texas Agricultural Land Trust”**

#### **Mr. James Oliver**

Having already heard from Mrs. Fitzsimmons and Mr. Oliver of TALT, much of Mr. Oliver’s talk was recap. Oliver, also a TALL alumnae, also described his journey to his position with TALL as well as spoke to several misconceptions about conservation easements and projects they have on the horizon.

### **“Water Conservation”**

#### **Mr. Jim Polonis**

Water is a hot topic throughout Texas, especially in the sometimes arid climate of West Texas.

The need for regulation and preservation is a real one. Accordingly I found it interesting that the first water code in Texas was not written until 1949. There are now 105 water districts throughout Texas albeit not all-encompassing. Some areas of the state are not managed by any district.

A project that I found interesting was the West Texas Weather Modification Association. The cloud seeding program (encouraging rainfall) is run at an annual cost of \$325,000 through a four cent/acre assessment cost.

### **“Predation in Edwards Plateau and Texas Hill County”**

#### **Mr. Alan Armistead**

Modern predator control and wildlife management began in 1915 with the “biological survey” program. The need still very much exists. For example, we have 3.5 million wild hogs in the state of Texas. Increased levels of bacteria has been found in aquifers located in areas which hog and other wildlife management programs do not exist. Mr. Armistead’s work is more all-encompassing that I thought as it includes:

- Rabies control
- Disease monitoring
- Specific predator/animal control

#### **Mr. Stan Cottle**

Mr. Cottle explained the issues of predators within his specific area. He and several local ranchers, knowing the merits of predator control and management practices formed a 401c3 to provide programs

and education that might not have been available to individual producers. I found it encouraging to hear of people in the “private sector” addressing a problem on their own without depending on help from government or otherwise.

### **“Diversity in Agriculture”**

#### **Dr. Erika Campbell**

Dr. Campbell is the sister-in-law of our Mr. and Mrs. Curry Campbell (our hosts). Interestingly enough her “love story” began on the Sonora Research Station. Hearing of the station while at Cornell, she moved there to pursue her doctorate work and ending up falling in love with the neighboring rancher.

Her diverse background and roots were quite interesting and have provided useful as she has pursued making a living with her husband in an industry that can be fickle and unpredictable at times. Her answer has been diversification.

Previously running cattle, meat and angora goats and hunting operations, they first simplified somewhat by removing their meat goats and concentrating on building their angora genetics seeing an opportunity in that market. They then found the need for diversification beyond traditional agriculture found in the area. Grapes interestingly enough was their answer.

With soil profile similar to Spain, they have found success in growing several varieties predisposed to success in their climate. They now sell grapes to three different wineries in Texas. According to Dr. Campbell, “We leave the winemaking to the experts”.

#### **Mr. Stan Meador**

Stan Meador finished off the discussion on the diversity that can exist within a ranching enterprise.

His family was at a crossroads regarding management and operations of their operation, knowing it needed to work and support all involved parties. They knew they needed to diversify past ranching/wildlife. Mr. Meador, growing up with no intention of returning to a “ranching lifestyle” came back as a young adult with the idea to open up the ranch to the public for events (private and public) and recreation. They now find it profitable and were able to use an existing asset (land) that had been in their family to make it an alternative income generating enterprise.

### **“Sheep, Goats, Wool and Mohair”**

#### **Mr. Seco Mayfield**

The greater Sonora area (about four county radius) has been the historical center for hair sheep and goats in the US and even world, with its heyday being in 1950s to 1970s. Its biggest international markets are South Africa and England, with South Africa accounting for about 85% as most of the processing plants existing there.

## **“Discussion & Tour of Prescribed Burning”**

### **Dr. Charles Taylor, Dr. Doug Tolleson**

We boarded the bus for our last part of our trip to the Sonora Research Station. Dr. Charles Taylor, the previously retired manager, joined us on the bus and helped Dr. Tolleson describe the project.

When Native Americans and buffalo roamed the open plains, according to Dr. Tolleson, nature was able to follow a cyclical pattern of regeneration, often with large wildfires. The introduction of people however tinkered with the natural state and management of things. The purifying nature of prescribed nature still exists though and is found extremely useful in certain areas of the US.

The Sonora Research Station started the prescribed burning project about 60 years ago with hand clearing then grubbing a large section of their property. They then divided the land into smaller parcels, introducing prescribed burning at different intervals- none, every 12 years, eight years, four years and two years.

### **Evening at JL Bar Ranch & Resort**

Our evening at JL Bar Ranch & Resort was the perfect ending to session three. JL Bar Ranch & Resort is a 13,000 acre property opened to the public with high end hunting, lodging and recreational options. Its owners owned a company that they recently sold to Halliburton.

We began our night with a tour of the deer breeding program which was top-of-the-line in every way. Never seeing the artificial insemination process with deer firsthand I found the tour very interesting. We then retired to the lodge and were able to unwind as a group as well as socialize with some area ranchers capping of the night with a great steak dinner.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

I can't say enough great things about this session. The behind-the-scenes experiences, networking and speakers well exceeded my expectations.

I look forward to April as we venture outside of Texas and experience agriculture on a wider scale and am honored to be a part of TALL XV and the program as a whole.