

**Matt Okeson #15**

**TALL XVI**

**Session 3 – Austin, TX**

**January 15 – 18, 2019**

**Session Theme: Leadership, Legislation, Laws**



During the last session of TALL XVI, the cohort had the opportunity to see a variety of agriculture operations located throughout the Texas High Plains. However, session three took the cohort to our state capitol to gain understanding of the state legislative process and the importance of leadership. Before heading into the city, the cohort convened at Pecan Grove Farms and Nursery, where cohort member Travis Britt hosted everyone for dinner and a tour of the operation. I was very impressed with the operation and amazed the farm was less than twenty-five miles from the state capitol! The close proximity to Austin goes to show just how important the agriculture industry is to the state and the Texas economy.

### **The Texas Economy**

Prior to the session the cohort was divided up into five groups, which were tasked with preparing a presentation about each of the largest sectors of the Texas economy – oil and gas, agriculture, real estate, banking and finance, and tourism and recreation. Unlike many other state economies, the Texas economy does not rely solely on one major sector. In fact, the Texas economy is almost as diversified as the various geographic regions throughout the state. Of the top five sectors, oil and gas contribute the most to the Texas economy – almost 27% of Texas gross domestic product (GDP). Producing 40% of the country's oil and gas, Texas leads the nation in production and is expected to surpass Iraq and Iran in 2019 to become the third largest producer globally. Behind oil and gas, the agriculture sector ranks second in terms of contribution to Texas GDP for goods. However, Texas' agriculture sector utilized more than 77% of the state's land and employees one out of every seven Texans. While the cattle industry comprises nearly 50% of Texas agriculture cash receipts, the sector relies on a variety of other industries as well such as cotton, dairy, poultry, staple crops, and forestry.

The state's robust economy not only relies on goods but also on services too. Real estate, banking and finance, and tourism also contribute greatly to the Texas economy. With an ever-growing population, demand for real estate is on the rise. Residential, commercial, and rural real estate values continue to rise annually as industries continue to expand and unemployment remains low. Additionally, the banking and finance sector provides stability to the Texas economy as young companies and mature institutions alike require support to grow and expand presence throughout the state. Without this integral sector, Texas businesses would not be able to hire additional staff, invest in capital, and expand operations. Finally, the tourism and recreation sector impact the state's economy both directly and indirectly. With a variety of different eco-regions, tourism in Texas offers something for every traveler. Relying heavily on travelers from outside the state, tourism adds to the state economy and adds substantial tax revenue for local, state, and federal entities. Given the variety of sectors that contribute significantly to the state economy, it comes as no surprise Texas is ranked the 10<sup>th</sup>

largest economy in the world. Furthermore, the diverse sector portfolio allows the Texas economy to continue growing while others who rely on only one or two sectors contract.

### **The Texas Government's Executive Branch**

Throughout the week, the cohort had the opportunity to learn about the Texas government's executive branch through a number of speakers and also took part in a bit of Texas history. The session began with the witnessing of Governor Greg Abbott and Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick taking the oath of their respective offices. Having never been to an inauguration in person before, I was very excited to see it firsthand. During the inauguration, Governor Abbott spoke about the successes of his first term and outlined his priorities for the upcoming session. The Governor intends to reform property taxes so Texans can keep their homes, increase funding for education, improve teacher pay, and reform pensions. Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick's remarks echoed those of the Governor, and he also touched on the importance of working across party lines – something the Texas Legislature has been able to successfully accomplish during many sessions. Later that evening, a vast majority of the cohort attended the Inaugural Ball where the Abbott and Patrick families were introduced. There was also great entertainment provided by Aaron Watson and the King of Country – George Strait! I truly appreciate this once in a lifetime experience and will always remember being a part of it.

In addition to hearing remarks from the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, the cohort also heard from other members of the executive branch. Each of whom touched on the various roles and responsibilities of their offices within the state government. The Honorable Glenn Hegar, Jr provided insight into the state budgeting process and the importance of the Comptroller's Office. The Comptroller must provide the state legislature with budget estimates, which are utilized in developing the state's budget for the next two years. Next, Chairwoman Christi Craddick, explained how the Texas Railroad Commission regulates the Texas oil, gas, and alternative energy industries. As the regulating agency, the Railroad Commission provides oversight of more than 450,000 miles of pipeline, 500,000 active wells, coal mining, gas utilities, uranium mining, and alternative fuels. Commissioner Sid Miller from the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) also addressed the cohort and spoke about the great diversity of programs his office manages. Not only does TDA look after the agriculture industry, but the office also oversees programs related to consumer protection, nutrition, and marketing. With an industry as large and as important to the Texas economy, it comes as no surprise TDA employees over 700 employees and manages a budget of \$6 billion annually – larger than the entire budget for 31 states in the USA! Finally, the Honorable George P. Bush spoke about the purpose of his work as Land Commissioner. Not only does the Land Commissioner serve as the chief surveyor for the state, but the office also works to honor military veterans and support their transition from military to private sector life. As Land Commissioner, Bush also chairs two of the largest educational endowments in the country for both K-12 and collegiate education, which are funded by state-owned mineral rights revenues.

As the cohort heard from the various members of the executive branch, I started to understand the importance of each office in terms of protecting the state's economy and recognized common themes from the speakers. Given Texas' large oil and gas and agriculture sectors, it is critical the state government provide necessary support and oversight to ensure sustainable futures for both. However, I found it very encouraging that the different offices all spoke about being more of a partner to the private sector rather than a regulator. The different offices all focus on helping advance the private sector and recognize their successes are directly attributed to a growing, robust Texas economy.

### **State Agencies**

In addition to the executive branch, a number of state agencies also focus on supporting the private sector by providing essential services critical to a thriving Texas economy. These agencies work to provide the private sector and Texas citizens with a safe, sustainable, and supportive environment to live and work even in times of disaster. Throughout the week the cohort had the opportunity to hear from many of these agencies including: Texas A&M AgriLife, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Animal Health Commission, Texas Association of Counties, Texas Commission of Environmental Quality, and Texas Department of Transportation.

Agencies such as the Texas Animal Health Commission and the Texas Department of Transportation focus on implementing programs to promote safety for industry and for the state's citizens. For instance, the primary focus of the Texas Animal Health Commission is to protect health and marketability of livestock. Executive Director Dr. Andy Schwartz explained the importance of entry requirements and disease prevention programs in order to safeguard livestock and ensure opportunities exist for market participants. Similarly, the Texas Department of Transportation manages highways, transit, rail, aviation, and port activities to protect Texans on the move. Through their programs transportation in Texas is safer, less congested, and prepared for future growth with further infrastructure development. However, Deputy Executive Director Marc Williams emphasized there is still work to be done as there is still an average of ten fatalities per day on Texas roads.

Other state agencies focus on providing programs for a more sustainable environment. Over at the Texas Commission of Environmental Quality, agency workers are tasked with addressing a growing population producing more waste at a time when no one wants new landfills. Executive Director Toby Baker touched on many of the challenges his agency faces in regulating air, water, and waste in such a way that promotes a clean environment and a strong economy. Programs managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife also encourage a sustainable ecosystem. By working with landowners, the Wildlife Division Director Clayton Wolf and his team have established holistic management programs that protect and support a thriving wildlife population. All without a constant funding stream, as the agency relies only on funding through the state sporting goods tax.

Finally, other various state agencies such as Texas A&M AgriLife and the Texas Association of Counties focus on providing support to many facets of the state government and Texas citizens. Mrs. Mary Luedeker, Director of External Relations for Texas A&M AgriLife, discussed her office's role as a liaison for the state, explaining that AgriLife is not a lobbyist but rather a resource for information for the state government. Likewise, the Texas Association of Counties represents county officials from across Texas as a united voice in Austin. Additionally, the agency serves as a helpline for county officials requiring assistance implementing state programs. Regardless of whether an agency primarily focuses on safety, sustainability, or local support, each is important in protecting the Texas economy and Texas citizens by executing the law as outlined by the state government.

### **The Texas Legislature**

While the executive branch and other state agencies focus on implementing policy, the legislature is ultimately responsible for determining the direction of policy. Throughout the week, the cohort heard from various members of the Texas Legislature as they discussed different issues anticipated to be addressed this legislative session. Representative Ryan Guillen from District 31 touched on immigration and border security, explaining once what was not an area of high concern for the state is now at the forefront of the legislative agenda. Border security has become an increased focus for Texas over the last decade, and appropriations for border security funding have increased tenfold to more than \$800 million since the first funding passed in 2007. Representative Guillen expressed the importance of border security beyond just the border, explaining the need for border security programs even one hour inland from the border. However, in developing border security programs, the Texas Legislature must also consider private property rights – a major issue expected to be discussed this legislative session.

In addition to Representative Guillen, the cohort also had the opportunity to hear from Representative Tracy King, Chairman of the House Agriculture and Livestock Committee. Representative King spoke about some of the major issues he anticipates addressing in committee this session including the legalization of industrial hemp production, eminent domain, water rights, and transportation. There will definitely be quite a bit of work during the session that will have impacts on agriculture; however, Representative King explained that the legislature is set up for favorable results for agriculture as rural areas are much more well-represented this session than in past sessions. Despite the support, however, it is still critical now more than ever for those citizens in rural Texas to stand up, tell their story, and be heard.

The themes from Representative King's presentation continued to resonate throughout discussions with other members of the legislature as well. During an evening mixer with a few former TALL alumni now turned representatives, the cohort heard more about the importance of rural Texas having a voice in the state government. Representatives Kyle Kacal, Ernest Bailes IV, and Cody Harris explained that the Texas Legislature tends to work along more demographic lines than party lines. Opinions in the legislature are not as divided along party lines as in many

other states and even the federal government; rather, many issues in Texas tend to be divided more so along rural versus urban opinions. In fact, of the roughly 1,600 bills that pass during a session, less than 25 pass with votes along party lines.

Following conversations with the representatives, Mr. Eric Opiela dove deeper into the changing demographics in Texas and the impact on state politics. He validated the points many representatives made about Texas politics being divided along rural versus urban lines. As the state population continues to grow in more urban areas and dwindles in more rural areas, so shifts the balance of power in the legislature. More seats will continue to shift towards urban areas, while rural areas will lose a voice in the state government. With continued growth in the seven most populated counties in the state, Texas is essentially no longer a rural state. While these demographic shifts dilute the voice of rural Texas, they also increase the probability of more elected Democrats in the future too. Urban and suburban areas continue to vote more Democratic and are on the verge of tipping statewide elections to more Democratic candidates simply because of population shifts. This has implications on national elections as well, making Texas the next big swing state as it will be mathematically impossible to win a presidential election without winning Texas.

### **Trade Associations and Lobbyists**

While the Texas Legislature focuses on developing policy, a number of trade associations have presence in Austin in order to advocate for the private sector ensuring legislators implement favorable laws for industry. Although some perceive these associations negatively claiming they are only focused on protecting their interests, many of the trade associations the cohort heard from throughout the week are dedicated to advancing industries critical to the Texas economy. Given the importance of some of these industries to the state economy, it is imperative they have a voice in Austin and even in Washington, D.C.

Representing the largest sector of the economy, the Texas Oil and Gas Association (TXOGA) advocates for science-based research and regulation. As a representative of every phase of the oil and gas sector, TXOGA ensures the state's industry is heard on the world stage and encourages governments should not determine who are the winners and losers. Let the market decide! Similarly, the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association advocates for all 4 segments of the beef industry and implores legislators to work with the private sector to develop policy rather than to legislate against it. As explained by Mr. Arthur Uhl and Mr. Kaleb McLaurin, the private sector is in the best position to develop policies that protect quality, transparency, and traceability for the industry. The private sector has the most at risk from a potential issue as any given health issue could kill an industry altogether. No industry may be able to attest to this better than the Texas dairy industry. Started as a result of claims by a Waco mayoral candidate, the Texas Association of Dairymen strives to represent the 385 dairies across the state. However, damage to the industry was already done by the time the organization was formed and responded to the claims brought against the industry, as explained by Mr. Darren Turley, Chairman. Today, the association still works to provide

accurate information on major trends in the industry such as raw milk consumption. By providing factual information, the association hopes to eliminate the growing trend of raw milk consumption and protect the industry from any potential negative blowback as a result of impending public illnesses from consuming raw milk.

In addition to the industry-specific trade associations, a number of broader organizations exist in Austin that work to provide legislators with information that will help influence policy. Comprised of a number of industry groups, the Texas Agriculture Council works to build a coalition between all groups within the agriculture sector and provides a united voice for the Texas agriculture sector. During the legislative session, the Council meets once a week to review pending legislation, develops responses to potential bills, and provides accurate information useful to the entire sector. Additionally, the Texas Farm Bureau strives to be the voice of Texas agriculture at all levels of government. Starting at the county level, Texas Farm Bureau engages with people who don't understand agriculture as well as those that are impressionable. Through various divisions focused on outreach, media, and government affairs, Executive Director Si Cook and his team works to support all kinds of production models provided they result in a safe and sustainable food supply. Finally, other organizations focused on protecting individual liberties also lobby in Austin. Through their eight different policy centers throughout the state, the Texas Public Policy Foundation endeavors to work with the state government to advance policy. Unlike the trade associations we heard from, the think tank works on a multitude of issues spanning healthcare, education, fiscal policy, occupational prosperity, and many others. Through this model, the foundation can provide perspective on a wide array of issues and support more than just one particular industry or sector.

## **Leadership**

The Austin session not only focused on the legislative process, but also emphasized the importance of leadership as well. Members of the current cohort were given the opportunity to attend the TALL alumni meeting. During the meeting the alumni discussed fundraising, the regional structure, and activities for keeping alumni engaged in the program after completion. Sitting in on the meeting helped cement in my mind that this is truly a lifelong program; it does not end after the two-year curriculum. The TALL program also held a reception during the week to pay tribute to alumni and sponsors who have dedicated their lifetime to Texas agriculture. Following a keynote address by Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, the TALL program recognized all of the sponsors who provide support necessary to the existence of TALL. In addition, Mrs. Tanya Foerster was honored as the 2019 TALL Distinguished Alumnus, and Mr. Dan Taylor was presented with the TALL Lifetime Achievement Award. Both Mrs. Foerster and Mr. Taylor epitomize leadership and are shining examples of the type of leader I aspire to be for Texas agriculture.

The Austin session came to a close with a leadership seminar led by psychologist Dr. Richard Grant entitled "Psychological Types & Practical Applications". The seminar began with members of the cohort completing the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. Upon completion of the

assessment, we shared our individual results with the cohort, and I was very intrigued by the mix of personality types within our cohort. Not only did we complete the assessment, but the cohort also learned strategies for working with those with different type indicators than ourselves. While I have completed the Myers Briggs Type Indicator before, I have never before learned the practical applications and strategies for working with others as presented during this seminar. By far one of the best leadership seminars I have had the chance to complete!

While much of our time in the TALL program is spent learning about different agriculture operations and industries, we must remember that the agriculture sector extends beyond rural regions. To continue to be successful, agriculture must have supporters beyond rural Texas and beyond the private sector. Developing partnerships with those in the public sector will be critical to future success. Not only must agriculture have representation in the public sector, but it will be crucial for the sector to have leaders who can take agriculture to the next level. Having spent the week in Austin, I am further encouraged to engage with others about Texas agriculture and recognize the impact I can make on the future of the industry, even while living in an urban region.

# TALL XVI

## Session 3 – Austin, Texas

### Stephanie Bradley Fryer

#### **Monday, January 14**

##### *Pecan Grove Farms and Nursery*

We hit the ground running in Bastrop at Pecan Grove Farms and Nursery where one of our fellow cohort members works. After a brief social, we jumped on the back of a flatbed trailer pulled by a John Deere to see the Pecan Grove. Travis Britt, fellow TALL XVI, explained the pruning methods his operation has implemented that are similar to the practice of nut growers in California which stimulate the production of pecans while keeping the size of the tree manageable for harvest. We also saw trees growing in the nursery and discussed the process of grafting genetics from breeds of pecans that produce desirable fruit to a part of a tree that has a more desirable root system for the area. This process allows the company to produce optimal, high quality pecans while still taking advantage of the hardy root system needed for the trees to survive and flourish. Finally, we broke bread and ate barbeque before gearing up for our week in Austin.

#### **Tuesday, January 15**

##### *Governor and Lieutenant Governor's Inauguration*

Our first full day of our session began with witnessing the Texas Governor and Lieutenant Governor's Inauguration outside the Texas Capitol. Dr. Jim had us trek over early, and for good reason, we got front row views to witness all the pomp and circumstance of the event from start to finish. At only 5'2" a front row view is paramount for me to witness such an occasion! Music was provided by both the Texas Aggie Band and the University of Texas Band and they both added to the electric ambience in the air. Both Governor and Lieutenant Governor gave powerful speeches, were sworn in to their respective offices and after the event ended, we were set to begin our Austin session.

##### *Glenn Hegar, Jr., Texas State Comptroller*

We were lucky enough to secure a room at the Texas Capitol to host our speakers for the week. And, we started the week's speaker series off with a bang with the Texas State Comptroller Glen Hegar, Jr. The Texas State Comptroller (TSC) position is arguably one of the most important positions in state government. The TSC holds the purse strings and forecasts the budget for the entire State of Texas! Because of wise financial decisions in the past and Hegar's financial vision for the future, Texas operates well within budget and with a tremendous surplus of funds in the



“Rainy Day fund”. This is particularly impressive when you realize that the TSC must project a two year budget for the income and expenses of a state where 1,100 more people arrive per day and boasts the 10th largest economy IN THE WORLD – an economy larger than that of even the country of Russia. While numbers may normally bore a crowd, this financial lesson was exciting partly due to the positive state of our economy, but also due to Mr. Hegar’s charismatic presence. Who knew accounting could be so much fun!?

*Todd Staples, President, Texas Oil and Gas Association (TXOGA)*

Former Commissioner of Agriculture and now current President of TXOGA arrived after our visit with the TSC and spoke to us about the importance of the Texas oil and gas industry. Texas has a long history in this sector and the industry is particularly important to our State’s economy. Not only does production provide money to mineral and royalty owners which in turn allows to spend that money with other Texas businesses and industries, the severance tax placed on oil and gas is what funds the Texas “Rainy Day Fund” that allows our state to improve roads and possibly fund education in the future. Mr. Staples described the Texas oil and gas industry using what he called the 4 P’s: Production, Pipelines, Processing, and Ports. Production refers to the huge oil and gas reserves and the potential for future development in our state. In fact, Texas is currently responsible for 40% of the total crude oil production in the entire United States and through research and development, our state will only continue to produce more oil and gas. Secondly, Texas has more miles of pipeline than any other state which allows the industry here to easily get product from the areas where it is produced to the processing facilities. Next, the raw product must be processed to be used by the consumer and Texas hosts 30% of the refining capacity in the United States. And finally, the Texas gulf coast allows our state to export product out of our country, and by doing so, enhance the economy through these exports. As you can tell, Mr. Staples did a great job explaining the industry and its importance to the Texas economy. We all walked away with a better grasp of the industry.

*Mr. Bill Peacock, Texas Public Policy Foundation*

Mr. Bill Peacock of the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF) and TALL alumni gave an interesting presentation about the foundation and his experience with TALL. TPPF favors limited government and actively works to achieve that goal through its efforts.

*Texas Agrilife*

Another group that wears many hats across the state is Texas A&M Agrilife. After a brief overview of the structure of the Agrilife system, Agrilife representatives discussed issues facing their group during the current legislative session. Most interesting was their data that showed the rapid response of Agrilife to help those effected by Hurricane Harvey. Agrilife was able to get boots on the ground and assist those in need quickly and effectively. While this was an ad hoc response due to the massive devastation of Harvey, Agrilife’s data shows that their agency should be in place to continue to facilitate these efforts in the future as well.

*Inaugural Ball*

Many of us from the cohort, myself included, dressed in our black tie best and attended the Governor's Inaugural Ball Tuesday evening. The ball was a momentous occasion, but the evening was even more elevated by performances by Aaron Watson and the one and only George Strait. The event was definitely something that none of us in attendance will ever forget.

### **Wednesday, January 16**

*Honorable Ryan Guillen, Texas House Rep., District 31*

The Texas border is a hot topic not only in the state, but also nationally amidst the discussion of a possible border wall between our state and Mexico. So, it was particularly exciting to have a Texas State Representative from that area speak to us about the issues his district faces relating to this matter. Guillen states that violence on the border began around 2015 and at that time he helped pass legislation to enhance border security. Since that time, border security has steadily increased. Currently there are security measures such as border checkpoints, ground sensors to detect movement along the border, balloons with cameras to capture and aerial view, and even cameras in brush to detect illegal border crossing. Guillen mentioned the privacy issues this already causes for landowners at or near the border because not only are illegal immigrants caught on camera, U.S. citizens on their property are also subject to being filmed as well. The conversation then shifted to the possible border wall and its potential effects on those in his district. Landowners along the border are at risk of not being fully compensated for the taking of their land through the federal government's eminent domain power to build the wall. Obviously, the wall cannot be built in the middle of the Rio Grande river, therefore the structure would be built to the north of this river. While the landowners would be paid for the loss of property where the wall physically sits, they would not be compensated for the value of the property that would then sit to the south of wall, inaccessible for their use after the wall was built. Likewise, they would not be compensated for the loss in value for the property remaining to the north of the wall because of wall. All in all, we greatly benefited from the time Representative Guillen spent with us speaking about these timely issues.

*Representative Tracy King*

Representative Tracy King, Chairman of the House Agriculture and Livestock Committee was next on the agenda. Mr. King laid out numerous topics that would be big issues for the current legislative session. The first topic of importance are agricultural exemptions for property taxes and who qualifies for those exemptions. As with some past sessions, individuals who operate small urban farms would like to be eligible for ag exemptions that would reduce property taxes. Rep. King also discussed the issue of seed certification and restoring the Texas Department of Agriculture's ability to transfer money to fund this program, because currently funding rests on fees that are assessed on producers. Other top issues surround emerging agricultural industries such as olive oil and industrial hemp production. Further, water will continue to be a hot subject in our state, as will eminent domain reform. As a whole, it is shaping up to be a busy legislative session, particularly for the Rep. King and his Committee.

*Arthur Uhl and Kaleb McLaurin, Texas and Southwestern Cattleraisers Association*

Texas and Southwestern Cattleraisers Association (TSCRA) is a long standing group that has a significant presence at the capitol. Arthur Uhl and Kaleb McLaurin laid out many issues TSCRA faces this legislative session and the goals they have set to best serve their membership. One area that is of importance to the association is eminent domain. TSCRA is committed to increase landowner protections during the Texas eminent domain process and the session is certainly set up for TSCRA to attain that goal.

### *Texas Ag Council*

The group journeyed over to meet with Texas agricultural groups at the Texas Ag Council. We were lucky enough to be invited to listen in as the various producer groups ran through a bill tracker so that all members of the council would be aware and understand bills that were filed that were of interest to some of the members. The group works together to support or oppose bills for each other to strengthen the overall agricultural presence with legislators. Afterwards we viewed a video of the TALL class' trip to China. We ending our time with the ag council by eating lunch and taking time to network with the various members. Overall it was an excellent opportunity to see agricultural at work and working together for the benefit of all sectors.

### *TALL Alumni Meeting*

A look in to our future after our two years as the current cohort, we attending the TALL alumni meeting back at our host hotel. The focus of the meeting surrounded collecting dues, accounting, engaging alumni, and searching for future TALL members. TALL alumni hosted a successful event partnering with another conference in San Antonio and looks forward to similar events in the future. This event was able to engage TALL alumni that possibly could not attend other events throughout the year. It also allowed others to learn about the program to possible spark interest in applying in the future.

### *George P. Bush, Texas General Land Commissioner*

The Office of the Texas General Land Commissioner (GLO) is involved in many unexpected areas. Two notable areas are state historical sites and mineral interests owned by the state. Mr. Bush described plans the GLO has for one of the most iconic historical sites in Texas, the Alamo. He also described how mineral interests benefit the state overall and how his agency interacts with that process. It was an honor for Mr. Bush to speak to the group and learn more about the agency.

### **Thursday, January 17**

### *Christi Craddick, Chair of the Railroad Commission of Texas*

The oil and gas industry is extremely important to the Texas economy and the Texas Railroad Commission (RRC) is tasked with regulating this booming trade. Christi Craddick, Chair of the RRC took time to speak to our group about the status of the industry and also how her agency works to support and regulate oil and gas production. Craddick documented the numerous ways the industry impacts our daily lives, including all the petroleum products we use every day such as plastic, as well as the ways her agency keeps oil and gas companies in check so that they do not

violate laws or environmental regulations. After listening to Ms. Craddick, it is obvious as to why she chairs this extremely important commission. She is smart, charismatic, and a clear advocate for the industry and the regulations that surround it.

*Clayton Wulf, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)*

Texas is home to many different types of wildlife and activities surrounding wildlife, including hunting and fishing, are favorite past times for many Texans as well as others who travel to our state. Mr. Wulf of TPWD spoke to the cohort about challenges facing his department, most notably chronic wasting disease (CWD) which effects deer. CWD has the potential to be devastating to the deer population so TPWD actively monitors potential affected populations and is looking for answers to rid the state of the disease all together. Texas wildlife and opportunities to interact with Texas wildlife are important and I applaud the TWPD's work to protect and promote this precious resource and key industry in our state.

*Dr. Andy Schwartz, Texas Animal Health Commission*

As one of the largest animal agriculture states in the nations, the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) is a vital agency to Texas. Dr. Andy Schwartz, State Veterinarian, explained past and current health issues facing Texas. One particular issue of interest he discussed was the cattle fever tick. This tick can be carried and transmit disease through wild animals such as deer that are not vaccinated and monitored like domesticated animals. Therefore, the tick continues to be at the forefront of research and TAHC is exploring methods to control this problem.

*Commissioner Sid Miller, Texas Department of Agriculture*

Obviously, TALL members are attuned to issues in agriculture, but we all learned more by listening to Commissioner Miller describe the many roles TDA has. TDA's "Go Texan" program has one of the most recognizable trademarks in agriculture and TDA works diligently to promote and protect that mark. TDA also has many regulatory functions including being in charge of pesticide application compliance, weights and measures compliance, and credit card fraud by way of skimmers!

*Toby Baker, TCEQ*

Agriculture is no stranger to environmental regulation compliance so Mr. Toby Baker of TCEQ was an informative speaker for the group. Mr. Baker discussed current and upcoming issues in facing his agency and of course agriculture is at the forefront of many of those issues.

*Marc Williams, TxDOT*

Texas is not only large geographically but it is also largely traveled and therefore quality roadways and infrastructure are paramount to the state. Marc Williams for TxDOT gave an excellent overview of the many hats that TxDOT wears to ensure Texas' roadways are safe and also enjoyable to travel for both its residents and visitors.

*Si Cook, Texas Farm Bureau*

Texas Farm Bureau is not only an insurance company, but it is also a leading advocate for Texas Agriculture. Mr. Cook explained the business structure of the organization and also the broad reach TFB has across the state. TFB is very active on social media and is a great asset to Texas Agriculture in that respect as well.

**Friday, January 18, 2019**

*Darren Turley, Texas Association of Dairyman*

On the last day of our Austin session, we started the day bright, early, and well fed thanks to Darren Turley of the Texas Association of Dairyman. Mr. Turley shared the mission of his organization which is to represent milk producers in the state. As former dairyman himself, he has the background and expertise to effectively take TAD's message to the hill. As with all of agriculture, because operations are based in rural America and the sharp divide in Austin not along party lines but by population density of districts, Mr. Turley explained the importance of being involved in the legislative conversation now more than ever. One big item that continues to be an issue for his organization is raw milk. Bills have been introduced in several legislative sessions to legalize raw milk sales. TAD opposes this legislation because of the risk of food borne illness that could occur from consuming raw milk and an outbreak would cause the entire dairy market to suffer. Mr. Turley was also a member of TALL so he also imparted wisdom and advice for the group as we move forward on our TALL journey.

*Dr. Richard Grant, Psychologist*

The final item of our agenda listed a psychologist as our speaker. Admittedly, I did not know what to expect, but was pleasantly surprised when Dr. Richard Grant explained the items he would cover. We began with assessing our personality with the Myers-Briggs evaluation. After we calculated our results, Dr. Grant helped us work through the traits we had determined and how they related to the others in our group as well as how we can become more effective leaders by understanding not our own, but those who scored differently on the test. Dr. Grant was charismatic and entertained and ending our session on great note.

**DeLinda Hicklen #7**  
**TALL XVI**  
**Session 3 - Austin/Sonora**  
**January 14-19**

**"Leadership, Legislation, Laws"**

**Monday, January 14**

**Pecan Grove Farms and Nursery**

Travis Britt, a member of our cohort, works at Pecan Grove Farms and invited us to visit and tour the farm. We enjoyed a hayride tour of the orchard and nursery and a barbeque dinner at the headquarters. One of the owners, Pepe, joined us for dinner and welcomed us with a few remarks about the business and the employees.

**Tuesday, January 15**

**2019 Texas Inauguration Ceremonies**

Our TALL group staked out a prime spot on the Capitol grounds to witness the inauguration of Governor Greg Abbott and Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick. It was a reminder to me of the heritage and history of our great state and renewed my Texas patriotism! (A side note: the real Chuck Norris was seated onstage just behind the Lt. Governor!) Both Abbott and Patrick outlined their priority for this session - school finance reform, which will have to include property tax reform.

**Speaker session in the Texas State Capitol Annex**

Representative John Raney, District 14, reserved a meeting room for our use over the next three days. We heard speakers from a variety of state agencies and organizations, as well as several elected officials. I learned a great deal about the specific duties and functions of these agencies. Brief summaries follow:

**Texas Comptroller Glenn Heger Jr.**

**"Responsibilities of State Comptroller and the State's Revenue Projections"**

Mr. Heger has been comptroller since 2015. Prior to that, he served as a state representative and state senator from the Fort Bend County area and is a former rice farmer. He gave a broad overview of the responsibilities of his office: state budgeting, tax collection and official state revenue forecast given just before each legislative session starts so the legislature will know how much they have to spend. We had questions about what would happen if the estimate was wrong, which brought up the subject of the Rainy Day Fund (RDF). The RDF is a sort of state savings account that is funded through oil severance taxes. His office manages the RDF and is asking for authority to create a kind of endowment to invest the overflow from the RDF - it can only contain an amount equal to 6% of the total state budget. He believes the overflow should be invested and used to help fund state pensions and the like. The RDF will be a subject of discussion in several other speakers' sessions.

**Todd Staples, Texas Oil and Gas Association**

**"The Texas Oil & Gas Industry and the mission of the Association"**

Former Ag Commissioner Todd Staples is now President of the Texas Oil and Gas Association (TOGA). He gave some mind-boggling statistics about Texas' oil & gas industry in comparison to the rest of the world - Texas is behind only Saudi Arabia and Russia, and is quickly catching up to Russia. We receive \$11 billion in state revenue

from oil and gas - with potential for up to \$15 billion in the near future. 70% of United States crude oil exports come from Texas. Most experts believe that the Permian Basin region will keep producing oil for another 50 years or more. As he reminded us, oil and gas production are the backbone of the Texas economy and fund the largest educational endowment in the world. Severance taxes from oil production fund the RDF, which protects the state budget from shortfalls and has been used to fund many other projects. In his words, all Texans do better when oil and gas are doing well. His organization is the oldest trade association in the state and seeks to balance individual property rights and free enterprise with necessary government regulation. Our questions led to discussion about eminent domain issues, which he says are less common with oil and gas companies than with utility companies. He also discussed the road damage being caused by the heavy sand trucks and other oilfield traffic. Pipelines that are being built will help alleviate oilfield traffic, but TOGA would also like some of the RDF split off for road repair. In closing, Staples encouraged us to stay involved in politics at all levels.

### **Bill Peacock, Texas Public Policy Foundation**

#### **"The Texas Public Policy Foundation"**

TALL V alumnus Bill Peacock, who formerly served at TDA under Rick Perry, introduced us to the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF). He stated that their mission is to promote free enterprise by educating decision makers using academic research. As he put it, they are a "think tank" modeled on the Heritage Foundation, but focused on Texas. Funded by individuals, foundations and corporations, they select issues to study from past legislative sessions or from outside proposals that match their parameters. They appear to be a very conservative organization and focus their studies in that direction. While I have a strong difference of opinion with some views they advocate, such as opposition to the Farm Bill, it is beneficial to hear other perspectives.

### **Mary Luedecker and Julia Lancaster, Texas A&M AgriLife External Relations**

#### **"Upcoming Legislative Session and Working with the Legislature"**

Program coordinator Julia Lancaster reminded us of what agencies are contained in Texas A&M AgriLife: Extension, Research, Forest Service and Medical Veterinary Diagnostic Lab. TALL XIV alumnus Mary Luedecker, program director for AgriLife External Relations, talked about their priorities for the upcoming legislative session: school finance reform, which will have to include property tax reform; and Harvey recovery-related issues. AgriLife was very involved in Harvey recovery efforts on many fronts. Because they now have personnel trained in facets of disaster recovery, they will need money budgeted for them to continue these efforts and be prepared for future natural disasters.

### **State Representative Ryan Guillen, District 31**

#### **"Immigration and Border Issues"**

Rep. Guillen, from Rio Grande City, gave us an insiders' perspective on immigration and border security issues that affect our state and nation. After years of regular border crossings, he has stopped going into Mexico because of the insecurity in the border area due to drug cartel activity. He voted for the bill to increase border security in 2007. The Border Patrol is now five times bigger than when he was first elected and the increased Border Patrol and DPS personnel in South Texas has actually been economically beneficial for those communities by bringing in employment opportunities and residents. With all that said, he still does not believe the border wall is necessary or cost-effective. He cited some concerns with private property rights in relation to the location of the proposed wall and his concerns about the almost total surveillance in place in border areas - at what point does it violate the privacy rights of legal citizens? We asked many questions and would have

continued this fascinating discussion all afternoon if time had allowed. I hope the national debate over border and immigration issues includes people like Rep. Guillen, who are directly affected by these issues and have lived in border areas their whole lives.

### **State Representative Tracy King, District 80**

#### **"The Challenges and Opportunities facing Texas Agriculture"**

Rep. King is the former three-term chairman of the House Agriculture and Livestock Committee. (He was not put on that committee for the upcoming term.) That committee has oversight of TDA and AgriLife agencies, among others. Although he is a Democrat, as chairman he strove to be bi-partisan and include all committee members. In discussing the pertinent issues in the upcoming session, he noted that ag land valuations and exemption status will be part of the discussion of property tax reform and eminent domain reform will be discussed again, as well. Among the other ag issues he discussed were seed certification funding issues in TDA, hemp legalization, an olive oil check-off proposal, Harvey response, water issues and infrastructure (road) issues. Rep. King is very well-spoken and we would have asked questions for much longer than time would allow!

### **Arthur Uhl and Kaleb McLaurin, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association (TSWCRA)**

#### **"The Issues Facing the Texas and US Beef Industry"**

Mr. Uhl, Second Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer of TSWCRA, noted how the organization had moved over time from being mainly a cattle theft prevention association to now being known for their efforts to protect landowner rights. He also noted how all the beef industry - producers, feedlots, packers and retail - are closely connected and will all be affected by tariff and trade issues. The following is his list of priority issues facing the beef industry: declining political representation for rural areas due to population shift, market and trade issues, animal health issues, consumer expectations of quality and transparency, animal rights activities, production issues, eminent domain/landowner rights issues and labor issues. (Several of these items will come up over and over again this week, as they are universal to many segments of the agriculture industry.) Mr. McLaurin, Government Affairs Policy Coordinator, reiterated many of the points in Uhl's list and also gave us a real life example that illustrated the need for oversight of legislation - the story of the bill to make bestiality illegal, that was worded in such a way that it could have been interpreted to make artificial insemination illegal! TSWCRA tries to work with outside groups before things get to that point. For this session, his main focus will be making sure ag use exemptions remain in place during property tax reform debate and to fight for fair eminent domain rules protecting landowners.

### **Texas Ag Council meeting and lunch**

Until I started the TALL program, I was unaware of the existence of this council. Its membership is made up of lobbyists and trade association representatives from all sectors of Texas agriculture, with the purpose of joining together to monitor legislation and issues in agriculture for the good of all. (Three members of my TALL cohort regularly attend Ag Council meetings.) Now that I know its purpose, I am impressed by the cooperation among the different ag interest groups. We were not able to sit through the entire meeting, but the portion we did see involved the tracking of every bill proposed that might affect any segment of agriculture. Different members of the council take responsibility for a portion of the legislative agenda to compile a bill tracking list so that other interested parties can try to influence legislators to pass or defeat a particular bill. Ag Council showcases cooperation and teamwork at its best. After TALL XV alumnus Jennifer Blackburn showed the council a video about their trip to China, we were able to have lunch with members of the council.



## **TALL Alumni meeting**

### **George P. Bush, Texas Land Commissioner**

#### **"Responsibilities and History of the Texas Land Office"**

Mr. Bush explained how the Land Office was originally formed to clear land titles as Texas was settled and to honor veterans of the war for Texas independence and the Civil War. As he said, it is an agency rooted in tradition and history. When he took office in 2015, he focused on a business-like approach and waste-reduction that ultimately led to a reduction in personnel and increase in efficiency. He said their main tasks were asset-enhancement for the 13 million state-owned acres of land, protecting assets in court when necessary, and veterans services. As a Naval Reserve veteran himself, he has particular interest in the veteran services provided, such as suicide prevention efforts and transition to civilian life programs. The Land Office also gets involved in endangered species issues, as they affect landowners. Harvey recovery efforts were a big part of the last year, as they partnered with FEMA to provide housing and also a \$1 billion grant program to assist in rehabbing damaged homes - "mud & gut" program. They will also partner with HUD in a \$10 billion grant program to rebuild infrastructure and prepare for future storms. His priorities for the current session include a desire to have access to disaster-recovery funds prior to storms, rather than waiting for funding after the storm and for building code reforms to withstand future storms. He would also like to see the Texas Water Control Board make better plans and communications among the separate water districts.

Of course, one of our group HAD to ask Mr. Bush about the controversial Alamo issues he was involved in shortly after taking office. He graciously gave some of the back story and explained the timeline for restoration of the Alamo. (My TALL group actually saw some of the Alamo cannons being restored during our tour of the RELIS facilities in July.) A generous donation from Alamo-enthusiast and rock star Phil Collins requires the restoration to be completed within eight years, so work should be complete in about four years from now.

## **Eric Opiela**

### **"The Shift - 2018 Election and the Impact of Rural Texas"**

TALL IX alumnus Eric Opiela gave a fascinating presentation about the population shift from rural to urban and how that affected the 2018 election. Both Trump and Ted Cruz would have lost Texas if not for the votes of rural Texas. The growing population in urban areas of Texas means that by 2020, there will no longer be enough votes in rural Texas for Trump or Cruz to carry the state. This shift will have similar effects in state elections. Mr. Opiela broke down votes in many ways - by gender, education, age, economic status - but in all ways, it's obvious that rural Texas voters are losing influence rapidly. Redistricting after the next census will almost certainly reduce rural representation at the state and national level. What will that mean for rural Texas in the future? How will it influence property tax reform, education funding and other issues? These are some of the questions we will all have to wrestle with in the near future.

## **TALL Alumni Reception**

### **"A Tribute to Texas Leadership"**

The Austin Club was the setting for a reception that featured Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick as keynote speaker. Patrick recognized four state Senators that were present and reiterated his priorities for the session, as outlined during his inauguration speech. After his remarks, Dr. Parr Rosson recognized TALL Foundation sponsors. Then TALL XV alumnus Jennifer Blackburn presented the TALL Distinguished Alumnus Award to Tanya Foerster, outgoing TALL

Alumni President, TALL XII alumnus and Director of Advertising for Capital Farm Credit. Ms. Foerster's many contributions to the TALL program were deservedly recognized. Following that, Mr. Jim Prewitt, Chairman of the TALL Advisory Board, presented the Texas Agricultural Lifetime Achievement Award to Dan Taylor. Mr. Taylor has spent his life involved in agriculture, first as an agricultural science teacher, then as a cotton farmer and cotton ginner. Throughout his life, Mr. Taylor has advocated for agriculture and currently serves as President of the Board of the Bayer Museum of Agriculture and on the Texas FFA Foundation Board. He is also my father and I was thrilled to be present when he was honored!

**Thursday, January 17**

**Christi Craddock, Chair of the Railroad Commission of Texas**

**"Duties and Responsibilities of the Railroad Commission of Texas"**

Ms. Craddock introduced us to the inner workings of the second oldest state agency (second to the Texas Animal Health Commission). Although originally set up to regulate railroads, it now regulates oil and gas production to reduce waste and protect the environment. There are three elected commissioners, around 750 personnel and nine field offices, plus the main office in Austin. They regulate pipelines, gas utilities, mining and alternative fuels such as propane and geothermal. (Interestingly, wind and solar power are not currently regulated by any state agency.) One-third of U.S. oil production and one-quarter of natural gas production come from Texas, accounting for \$11 billion dollars, or 30% of the state economy. The Railroad Commission has important duties to regulate, issue permits and collect severance taxes to fund the RDF. The challenges cited by Ms. Craddock were personnel issues - they have high turnover because the oil field pays more; budgeting - the fee-based system fluctuates with the oil market and makes budgeting too unpredictable; and IT - the computer system needs updating drastically.

**Visit to the office of State Representative Dustin Burrows, District 83**

My state representative was not in the office today, so I met with his Chief of Staff, Ross Leake, and his Legislative Director, Sara Schmidt, to discuss some of the issues and priorities in our district. They were gracious with their time and I am glad to have met contacts in Rep. Burrow's office.

**Clayton Wolf, Division Director of Wildlife, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)**

**"TPWD Major Initiatives and Agency Responsibilities"**

He explained that the TPWD is funded primarily by the state sporting goods tax, but they are trying to get dedicated funding for the state parks. TPWD has two divisions - the operation of state parks and study and control of wildlife. There are 550 game wardens, who increasingly spend more time on law enforcement than on the functions typically expected of a game warden. Mr. Wolf is part of the Natural Resources division who deal with wildlife and fisheries. As he noted, most land in Texas is privately owned, so TPWD works with private owners to integrate wildlife into their land management plans and to enhance value by managing water resources. The wildlife division also monitors wildlife populations and regulates game limits. Two big issues his division faces are feral hog populations and Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in deer. Regarding the hogs, they are developing a toxin to control hog populations that won't harm other wildlife. He thinks they are still two years or more away from getting one approved. Regarding CWD, there is no vaccine or treatment available at this time, so they have to try to contain the affected deer population to prevent spread of the disease, which is more difficult along the border because Mexico does not have a CWD control protocol in operation.

Prior to his presentation, I had a chance to talk privately with Mr. Wolf and we had a lively discussion about the TV program Lone Star Law that features Texas game wardens. He noted that the wildlife biologists were a little envious of the game wardens featured on the show, but when they tried to show biologists on an episode, they were camera-shy! In all seriousness, this show has given viewers a better idea of what services TPWD provides in a large and climatologically diverse state.

**Dr. Andy Schwartz, Executive Director of the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC)**

**"The Responsibilities and Duties of the Texas Animal Health Commission"**

TAHC is the oldest state agency in Texas. Established in 1893 to deal with fever tick, their current duties are to protect the health and marketability of animals in Texas. Contrary to what many people believe, they are NOT responsible for animal welfare issues - those are handled by the sheriff's offices. Their duties include: animal disease surveillance, brucellosis testing, animal parasite identification, inspection of livestock at auctions, livestock shows and state entry points, and investigation into possible disease threats from other countries carried by imported feed ingredients and the like. TAHC is also still dealing with fever tick infestations all these years later and the border area is a hotspot for this problem. Dr. Schwartz also touched on their role during Harvey recovery. They helped recover lost livestock and distribute feed donations, among other things.

**Rick Avery and Garry Merritt, Texas Association of Counties (TAC)**

**"The Responsibilities and Duties of the Texas Association of Counties"**

Mr. Avery is the County Relations Office for TAC and a former AgriLife Extension staffer. He explained that TAC is basically a trade association for county governments. In Texas, counties are the bedrock basis for government and they share the same basic structure of county judges, county commissioners and county sheriffs. (This isn't the case for all states.) County government is responsible for many things, but primarily law enforcement, road maintenance, collection of property taxes and legal recordkeeping. TAC was founded in 1969 by representatives from other county associations to provide services to and advocate for county government employees and entities. They currently provide many services to participating counties, including continuing education for county officials, legal and legislative services, tech support and health and liability insurance pools for county employees and county properties. One of the group asked how TAC is funded - they receive dues from participating counties and the insurance pools pay management fees.

Mr. Merritt, a TALL XII alumnus, is General Counsel for TAC. His duties include assisting counties, and the associated pools and entities, with legal matters. He also works on the legislative side monitoring proposed bills and setting TAC priorities for legislative sessions. They track all bills that have the potential to affect county government - up to 6000 bills per session. One of their main issues is legislative mandates without state funding. Because county revenue is mostly from property taxes, they have no way of generating additional funds for state-mandated services that aren't funded. This creates problematic situations like the current housing of mental health patients in overcrowded county jails because mental treatment facilities don't exist in rural areas. Road maintenance funds the state receives from severance taxes aren't passed down to the counties, but the county is held responsible for road maintenance. For indigent health care, counties are required to hold 8% of the budget in reserve for this, but the state pays for none of it. These types of mandates are closely monitored by TAC. Mr. Merritt also passed along three leadership tips: 1) Be an expert on the matters you are talking about, by research and experience, but still able to listen to other perspectives; 2) Build and maintain relationships with others in your field; and 3) Be relentless but respectful - don't take no for an answer.

### **Visit to the office of State Senator Charles Perry**

All the members of my TALL group who live in Senator Perry's district met with him and were able to hear his objectives for this session and future sessions. Sen. Perry is focused on water issues, which is a crucial issue in our area of the state, and it was interesting to hear his perspective. He also shared a little of what it is like to serve as a legislator while also maintaining a professional career and family life back home. Sen. Perry is aware that agricultural is a big presence in his district and is committed to protecting our interests in the midst of property tax reform and its effect on school finance.

### **Commissioner Sid Miller, Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA)**

#### **"Texas Agriculture and the Responsibilities of the Agency"**

Mr. Miller, an eighth-generation rancher and former state representative from Stephenville, has a larger-than-life reputation in Austin from his years in the political arena. It was a treat to hear from him and get a taste of his no-nonsense approach to life. He administers the TDA, one of the largest state agencies. Its \$6 billion dollar budget is larger than many other states' total budgets! Texas has a \$100 billion agricultural industry, so TDA is a vital agency. Their duties are many and varied, but some of the major ones are the oversight and inspection of weights and measures (gas pumps), school nutrition programs, and Texas ag product marketing. The Go Texan marketing campaign is one of their most visible and successful efforts and continues to promote and find new markets for Texas ag products. They also license and regulate the application of crop chemicals and man bio-security checkpoints for interstate transport of ag products. Our group had many questions for Commissioner Miller on a variety of subjects, but my main takeaway from his session was his direct approach to obtaining his desired outcomes, regardless of the personal animosity he has faced due to that approach. He certainly intends to be a strong advocate for agriculture. As he said, everyone needs a farmer three times a day!

### **Toby Baker, Executive Director, Texas Commission of Environmental Quality (TCEQ)**

#### **"The Responsibilities of TCEQ and Upcoming Issues"**

Mr. Baker may have faced an uphill battle with this audience, as TCEQ has a checkered history with agricultural businesses. Mr. Baker has an ag background and made a point of outlining his approach to his job as balancing the cost of necessities against the necessary regulations. As he said, a clean environment and strong economy are mutually beneficial. He compared it to a house, with walls made of statutes of law and good science covered by a roof of common sense. At many times in the past, it seemed to those of us being inspected by TCEQ that the common sense roof was missing, so I hope his approach brings progress in that area! TCEQ duties include the regulation of air, water and waste quality. He said that their focus this session would be on regulation of concentrated animal feeding operations and their effect on the water supply; municipal solid waste facilities and where to put them; and the need for more air quality permit reviewers. There was a question from the group regarding the issuance of air quality permits in different areas of the state, with different climates, and how TCEQ makes allowances for those differences. For example, dust in the air in Lubbock is a whole different thing than dust in the air in Houston. There was also a question about how they monitor rights to irrigate from rivers - Mr. Baker outlined the steps in determining who has senior or junior claims to irrigate. Although Mr. Baker seems entirely reasonable and pragmatic in his approach, it remains to be seen whether or not TCEQ can develop a better working relationship with the agricultural operations that are vital to the state economy, without caving in to pressure from environmental groups not always using good science to back up their claims.

**Marc Williams, Deputy Executive Director of Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)**

**"The Responsibilities of TxDOT and the Importance of Infrastructure and the Funding Sources"**

Texas is a big state with a lot of roads and we were all interested to hear from Mr. Williams about the future of road maintenance and development. TxDOT oversees 196,000 miles of road and 54,000 bridges, with over 12,000 employees. They also oversee smaller airports, mass transit, railroads and maritime transportation. They focus on the safety of Texas roads and how to improve them for safety. He provided us brochures with facts and figures about TxDOT and websites for their road monitoring services. The questions and discussions that followed mostly concerned the impact of the energy sector on state roads, particularly in the Permian Basin and surrounding rural areas. As we know from experience, these roads were not designed to hold up to the amount and weight of oilfield traffic currently traveling on them. We wanted to know where the funds were going to come from to repair and maintain these roads. As he said, there are not funds specifically for this purpose, but TxDOT attempts to address the problems as they come up. I think all of us, including Mr. Williams, feel that the legislature is going to have to address this at some point. The group also asked about toll roads in Texas. Interestingly, he said that the government doesn't really want new toll roads, but instead would be advancing non-toll roads. He also pointed out that some of the new toll roads were not built by TxDOT, but were otherwise funded. One of our group complimented TxDOT's DriveTexas.org website on how useful it was during Harvey and how we know from our travels out of state that we have some of the best state roads in the nation.

**Si Cook, Executive Director of Texas Farm Bureau**

**"Farm Bureau 101"**

Farm Bureau has been around for 85 years and is the largest general farm organization in Texas. Headquartered in Waco, they are a non-profit entity with over 525,000 members. They have a state board of directors, divided into 13 districts, who send producer delegates to state meetings. They try to advocate for agriculture by engaging with those people who do not understand agriculture or who disagree with our practices and engage with and educate children through school and community programs such as Ag in the Classroom and others. Mr. Cook played their video for us and I was very impressed with their use of actual ag producers and their families to show viewers that ag families are just as concerned with the environment as the public, as it provides our livelihood. Farm Bureau also administers insurance programs for members - and that has become a big part of their organization. He outlined the different divisions of Farm Bureau, and what their functions are. The organization division operates the Ag Lead and Farm Lead programs (similar to TALL), the young farmer and rancher program, urban relations programs, such as Plant Ag, and the youth outreach programs. They have a government affairs division monitoring federal and state legislative affairs and operating the AGFUND PAC. Their media products division produces things like the video we saw and administers social media and websites. Mr. Cook's excellent leadership advice was that "your servant's towel needs to be bigger than your ego."

**Reception in the Lt. Governor's Reception Room, courtesy of Sen. Charles Schwertner, District 5**

This beautiful space was formerly an apartment for state officials, but after it was damaged by fire, it was restored to its original state and is now used as a reception room. After enjoying delicious refreshments, we had the privilege of hearing from Mr. James Grimm with the Texas Poultry Federation and Mr. Bob Turner, a TALL Advisory Board member and past state representative. After Mr. Grimm's update on the current status of the poultry industry in Texas, Mr. Turner shared some of his past experiences in the state legislature. At that point, Dr. Jim introduced the three state representatives present and presented one of them, Kyle Kacal, with an award making him an honorary TALL graduate. Mr. Kacal, from District 12, participated in the Farm Bureau

leadership program that is similar to TALL, then applied and was not accepted into TALL. Despite that, he has still been such a staunch and longtime supporter of TALL that Dr. Jim felt it was fitting to give him the award. Ernest Bailes IV, from District 18, is a TALL XII alumnus. As he shared his story of his road to office, he made it clear that TALL was a big influence on that decision. Cody Harris, from District 8, is a TALL XV alumnus, and he also felt the first call to run during his TALL session. Both of these men did not believe the other candidates for their districts would represent agriculture well in the legislature and ran to prevent their election. It was inspiring to hear from people who were in our shoes just a few years ago and to think about who in our group might be in state leadership in the near future.

**Friday, January 18**

**Darren Turley, Texas Association of Dairymen**

**"An Overview of the Texas Dairy Industry"**

While Mr. Turley's overview of the Association and its functions was educational, his outline of the circumstances causing the migration of dairies away from Central Texas into the Panhandle was fascinating and a little foreboding. Around 2009, water quality issues developed in the Waco area and the Waco mayor publicly blamed the dairies around Stephenville for contaminating the water supply. The TCEQ sunset review was going on, so they seized on the issue and took off with it. Scientific studies showed that the dairies were NOT at fault, but public opinion had moved so far in that direction that rules were set in that period that are still affecting dairies. This effectively closed most of the dairies in the Stephenville area forever. Interestingly, regulations and public opposition in California have driven some dairy operations to relocate to the Texas Panhandle, where there is acreage available and easy access to feed sources. While at one time there were 400 dairies in the Stephenville area alone, and other 400 around Sulphur Springs, there are now only 385 dairies in the state and 80-85% of them are in the Panhandle. He also talked of the challenges of working with raw milk producers and sellers. As he said, the general public does not understand the risk they take in drinking unpasteurized milk. Illnesses from drinking raw milk reflect badly on the whole dairy industry, but he believes it will eventually be legal to sell it in the store alongside pasteurized milk because of the public perception of it being "natural" milk.

**Dr. Richard Grant, Psychologist**

**"Psychological Types: Practical Applications"**

Dr. Grant's session was certainly one of the most entertaining, but was also very helpful and educational. I think the practical tips he gave for working with people of different personality types will be extremely beneficial to us. We started off by taking a Myers-Briggs personality type indicator test. After we "scored" our tests from his instructions, we were able to see what type we were and how we contrasted with others in our group. There were several entertaining group exercises to demonstrate the different ways we approach life and work. His humorous approach to presenting similarities and differences and his practical, useful tips for working with the different personality types to enhance group cooperation and output were what made this session so worthwhile.

After Dr. Grant's session, those of us who were participating in the optional weekend session traveled to Sonora. My traveling group made a stop at Cooper's in Llano for barbeque and stopped at the Powell Ranch headquarters for a short tour.

### **Old Sonora Ice House Ranch Museum and dinner at the Historic Train Depot**

The Sonora session was a welcome change of pace from the intense political atmosphere in Austin, to go to a place with real "boots on the ground" people. We started the session off with a tour of the museum and a chance to meet several of our Sonora hosts. The museum has many artifacts from its ranching history and its sheep and goat industry. We then enjoyed a delicious meal with many of the Sonora hosts and community members. Our speaker for the evening was Mr. Bob Malone, President and CEO of Sonora Bank, and a former executive with BP Petroleum. He has had an interesting and well-traveled life as an oil company executive and now as a bank officer and community leader in Sonora. He had many fascinating stories and background information from his previous job, but the real reason he was so memorable to us was his approach to the evening. Rather than reading down a list of what he wanted to say, he started off by asking us what we wanted to hear about and writing down our answers. From that point on, he answered our questions and taught us real lessons about effective leadership. The contrast between his past life as a world-traveling oil company executive and his current life as a small-town banker, rancher and community leader is significant, but his leadership experience and traits have been instrumental in both phases. This was another example to me of what a privilege it is to participate in TALL - there is no way I would have been able to interact with someone of Bob Malone's caliber in any other setting.

### **Saturday, January 19**

#### **Texas A&M AgriLife Sonora Research Station**

We started the day off with a chuckwagon breakfast - one of the best breakfasts I've ever had! We then heard from a variety of speakers on topics related to ranching in the area. A brief outline of their remarks follows:

#### **Dr. Doug Tolleson, Welcome and History of Sonora Research Station**

In operation for nearly 100 years, this station is known for its research on prescribed burning

#### **James Oliver (TALLVII), Texas Agricultural Land Trust**

The use of conservation easements to preserve working agricultural land

#### **Joel Pigg, Real Edwards Conservation and Reclamation District**

Description of this groundwater district and how it differs from other water formations

#### **Alan Armstead, Predation in the Edwards Plateau and Hill Country**

What predators live in the area and how they attempt to control them

#### **Sam Epperson, Preservation of Texas Wildlife**

A trapping club's evolution into a community funded predator control organization

#### **Dr. Erika Campbell, Diversity in Agriculture: High Cross Vineyard**

#### **Stan Meador (TALL VIII), Diversity in Agriculture: X Bar Ranch**

Diverse and non-traditional uses for agricultural land, such as grape production and agro-tourism, to add value and preserve ownership

#### **Seco Mayfield, Wool and Mohair**

Grading standards, uses and markets for wool and mohair

#### **Dr. Doug Tolleson, Discussion and Tour of Prescribed Burning Research Sites**

A trip "back through time" as we viewed prescribed burning research plots at different burn intervals

### **JL Bar Ranch & Resort**

We ended our session in Sonora with an enjoyable evening at this game ranch and resort. We were able to tour the white tail deer breeding facility and see some of the wild game in their fenced areas. After a quick look at the resort clubhouse, we got to shoot sporting clays in the resort's shooting course. I had never shot before, but I can now see how you could really get addicted to this activity! Of course, a facility this nice makes it twice as fun! After it was too dark to shoot, we had drinks and dinner at the resort restaurant, joined by the owner and host, Mr. James Archer, and several of our Sonora hosts and TALL supporters. Mr. James Powell, a longtime TALL supporter and board member, and Mr. Archer made brief remarks while we enjoyed our gourmet meals.

### **Closing thoughts**

Every TALL session gets a little more intense - this was no exception. While I am somewhat cynical about politics in general, this was a good reminder that the more local the politics, the more they affect our day-to-day lives. Speaker after speaker at this session, and in the last session, emphasized the importance of staying involved and in contact with organizations and political representatives that advocate for agriculture. In other words, I can't allow my cynicism to prevent me from advocating for the industry that is my livelihood and passion. If our county, state and federal representatives don't know what is important to us, they don't have an opportunity to influence legislation on that topic.

The second most important thing I gained from this session was an appreciation for the leadership experience of those working on our behalf at state agencies, lobby groups and trade associations. They were generous with their very limited time to share with us not only their work responsibilities, but also their leadership advice gained from years of experience. I don't need to waste this opportunity to learn from some of the best and the brightest.