

Stephen Erik Loyd #17

TALL XVII

Session 3 - Austin/Concho Valley (Virtual)

January 11-15, 2021

COVID protocols and the rise in cases throughout the state caused this session to move entirely to ZOOM with virtual meetings taking place throughout the week. Fortunately, while being in person would have been beneficial in some cases, our speakers and presenters did not hold back on the amount of information delivered, and we still got an amazing session under our belts.

### **The Honorable Dade Phelan, State Representative District 21**

The session started off quite well and in a unique way. With the new legislative session, a speaker must be chosen and typically is already set going into session. However, Mr. Phelan spoke to us the day he was going to be elected as the new Speaker of the House so it was special insight. His main topic was regarding the Upcoming Legislative session and their goals, of which the two most important are the budget and redistricting. An interesting take Mr. Phelan brought up is that despite the numerous ZOOM or online meetings taking place during this pandemic, deals don't get done on ZOOM, they need to be done in person.

### **Texas Beef Council - Molly McAdams**

Mrs. McAdams, who is the current Executive Vice President of the Texas Beef Council, spoke to us regarding the history of the council and the steps that organization has made toward pushing beef out to the world market. I have a vested interest in this particular council because of the field I am in, and my father-in-law served on the board back in the 1980s. I found it interesting that, in order to grow the beef brand, we must reach and serve people where they are at. With this new generation, the important thought process and questions to ask are if beef good for me and is it good for the planet? If we can answer those questions positively, then we are on the way to growing the beef brand.

### **Texas Public Policy Foundation - Dr. Kevin Roberts**

I was not that aware of what the Texas Public Policy Foundation did prior to this talk, but Dr. Roberts laid out their responsibilities perfectly. I did appreciate the semi-optimism about our country in his talk. While I do consider myself a realist, sometimes it is just good to look on the bright side. One of the most important take aways from his talk was that their organization

focuses mostly on the state level, although they do keep a small office in Washington D.C., and that they work to identify solutions and not just focus on problems.

### **The Honorable George P. Bush - Texas Land Commissioner**

I have voted for Mr. Bush since he first started to run for office, and his presentation only reinforced my decision to vote for him. He presented the responsibilities of the Texas Land Office clearly and just a few of the things that he is personally working on. I do appreciate the fact that he has such a passion for history, especially regarding the Alamo, and I will definitely take him up on his offer to receive the VIP tour of the Alamo.

### **The Honorable Sid Miller - Texas Ag Commissioner**

Sid Miller is definitely a character and very passionate about Texas in general, and you can see this in his demeanor and the way he carries himself, even in his office decor. I especially liked that he spoke his mind and didn't really care what other people think. The one thing that was of personal interest was the vast amount of programs that he and his office is involved in. One interesting tidbit was that his office was responsible for the inspecting of the ping pong balls for the Texas Lottery.

### **Luis Saenz - Chief of Staff for Texas Governor Greg Abbott**

With the start of the legislative session, it seems as though some information he was providing was a little guarded. Understandably so. It was good to hear that some of the things the governor's office is focused on in this session is ramping up vaccinations and the expansion of broadband, especially to rural areas. I, personally, appreciate this since I live in the middle of nowhere and internet can be hit or miss.

### **Bill Peacock - Policy Consultant/Principal, Tortilla Coast Consulting**

A little more pessimistic or realistic probably than previous speakers; however, that did not mean the information wasn't as valuable, especially regarding oil and gas. The explanation of the rivalry between the Makems and Takems was interesting and how it relates to how things are done in the U.S. is amazing. He did make sure to point out that 2021 will probably not take a turn towards freedom and limited government. Since he was a TALL Alumnus, it was nice to hear his take on the international trip, which they took to New Zealand.

### **Toby Baker - Executive Director Texas Commission on Environmental Quality**

The TCEQ was another commission that I had heard of in passing, but was not all that familiar with the extent to which they, as he said, regulates pretty much everything air, water, and

waste. It is a large commission with almost 3000 employees and Houston being the biggest office. The most important piece of information, that I was unaware of, was the fact that federal environmental laws are delegated to those state wide that can do it so Biden repealing many of Trump's orders would not affect Texas too much because TCEQ is already the delegated entity in the state of Texas.

### **The Honorable Ryan Guillen - State Representative District 13**

As a someone who is now in his 19th year in the legislature, Mr. Guillen has great insight into the ins and outs of the Texas legislature. He was greatly concerned over redistricting due to the fact that many voters are moving towards cities which should be frightening for rural representatives. Another interesting point Mr. Guillen brought up was that every member may have their own rules as to meetings, the public will be allowed to view because it is required by the state constitution.

### **The Honorable Cody Harris - State Representative District 8**

Mr. Harris, another TALL Alumnus gave us great insight into why he decided to run for office and the fact that everything he learned that allowed him to be a representative he learned in TALL. While that may seem like an over exaggerated statement, after being in TALL for a bit, I can certainly see where he is coming from. TALL is about relationships, plain and simple. Mr. Harris pointed out that you can do everything right from a process prospective, but if you can't make the relationships and be trustworthy, than you have not shot to succeed.

### **Eric Opiela - Attorney and TALL Alumnus**

The statistics that Mr. Opiela brought was incredible. I found it very useful that he had looked at the evidence of fraud in the presidential election and found that there, of course, was fraud, but not enough to change anything. He was pretty pessimistic about things, but he had a lot of great information. An interesting piece of information regarding this past election was the fact that there was a fundamental realignment of hispanics to the Republican Party, which I found unusual given past voting records. Also, in the whole big picture, Texas is gaining 3 U.S. House seats, while California and New York are losing seats.

### **The Honorable John Raney - State Representative District 14**

We heard from quite a few state representatives during this session and they all spoke on key issues for this legislative session and Mr. Raney was no exception. An issue that Mr. Raney brought up was that many rules were going to have to be adjusted in the House, especially with regards to COVID, for example allowing ZOOM meetings.

**Marc Williams - Deputy Executive Director Texas Department of Transportation**

Mr. Williams presented a lot of great information, especially with regards to the highway and interstate systems. I was unaware that Texas has over 80,000 center line miles of state maintained highways and over 55,000 bridges and bridge structures, which is 27,000 more than any other state. While TXDOT does a great job maintain and patrolling these roads and highways, it is a sad fact that it has been 20 years since we have had a day in Texas with no road fatalities. Hopefully, we can #EndTheStreakTX.

**Dr. Andy Schwartz - Executive Director Texas Animal Health Commission**

The amount of vaccines that we at our ranch administer is quite a few, and Dr. Schwartz touched on many of them during his presentation. One he touched on was Brusulosis, which thankfully due to the vaccine program, has been eradicated from Texas since 2008. One interesting fact that I did not get a chance to ask him about was that there was a case of anthrax reported in the panhandle. Our county borders other counties that usually have high number of cases reported, and I was wondering how the feral swine can transmit this disease if at all.

**David Kostroun - Deputy Executive Commissioner Texas Health & Human Services Commission**

Mr. Kostroun focused much of his presentation on the Medicare Program, which his organization oversees, and it is astounding the number of people that must be on that program. With such a large population to take care with these programs, the staff at the HHSC must be large, coming in at more than 30,000. One interesting point Mr. Kostroun mentioned was that he believes the COVID vaccine is safe and effective, but it will probably be close to middle to end of summer before we start getting some semblance of normality.

**The Honorable Glenn Hegar - Texas State Comptroller**

As our chief tax collector and state economy monitor, Mr. Hegar, as the Texas State Comptroller, as a tremendous responsibility, especially when it comes to stating how much money the state of Texas expects to receive in the next two years so the legislature can create a budget. With a budget of over \$126 billion dollar annually, only being \$1 billion budget deficit is not too bad considering the circumstances. Also, Texas is in a much better position financially than most other states.

**Lt. Colonel Ron VanderRoest - Texas Parks and Wildlife Law Enforcement Division**

Since we have a deer lease at our place, the information the Lt. Colonel presented was vital to our operation. The hunting industry is very large, as he pointed out saying that \$12.2 Billion is spent annually in Texas by hunters. We take it quite seriously here. I was unaware of the television program that Andrew Dusek asked about so I will have to check into that at some point.

### **The Honorable Todd Staples - President of the Texas Oil and Gas Association**

I like the fact that Mr. Staples is a die hard Aggie. Hard to beat that. I know oil and gas is important to the state of Texas, however, I did not know the extent. It is fascinating that 400,000 Texans had a direct paycheck from the oil and natural gas industry, with even more being indirectly impacted. There is a little concern with the incoming Biden administration, with the main concern being the permitting process, but Texas will always thrive because we are Texas. An important takeaway, or advice Mr. Staples gave us, was that if we are under 35, make friends with people over 35. If we are over 35, make friends with people under 35 so you are always plugged in with what is going on.

### **Mike Morrissey - Budget Director Office of the Lt. Governor**

It was definitely a treat to get to hear from Mr. Morrissey regarding the office of the Lt. Governor and the steps to pass a bill. He has had a lot of experience in politics, especially Texas politics, being involved for more than 36 years. He took quite a bit of time explaining the exact process a bill goes through in order to get passed. A fun note, which I guess the U.S. Congress could take a few notes, is that all bills are available on hard copy before it is ever voted on so there will be no need for the “we have to pass it in order to know what is in it” comments. Also, with almost 7500 bills normally be introduced during a legislative session, only 1500-1700 ever get to the governor’s desk. It is a tedious process to say the least, which lead quite well into the last two speakers of Tuesday.

### **The Honorable Kyle Kacal - State Representative District 12, Honorary TALL Alumnus**

### **The Honorable Ernest Bailes - State Representative District 18, TALL XII Alumnus**

Mr. Morrissey mentioned that a lot of bills are introduced each session with only a few making it to the governor. These two men are the epitome of the relationship side of politics that must be done in order to be successful. These men are friends and from different parts of the state, but have to work together in order to accomplish both their own goals and well as their combines goals for the state. As a former TALL Alumnus and an honorary TALL Alumnus, these men, along with previous speakers, stressed that relationships are key. Relationships are the key to politics, which is what is primarily focused on in TALL.

### **Si Cook - Executive Director/COO Texas Farm Bureau**

Wednesday morning started off with hearing from Mr. Cook about Texas Farm Bureau and what they are involved with throughout the state. As a board member on one of the county farm bureaus that covers several counties, I have had the opportunity to meet Mr. Cook and knew much of what he was speaking about. However, it was good to get a refresher on everything Farm Bureau.

### **Darren Turley - Executive Director Texas Association of Dairymen, TALL XII Alumnus**

Dairies, for some reason, are not as interesting to me as some of the other topics that have been addressed. It might be that I worked on one when I was a kid and did not enjoy it. I don't know. However, Mr. Turley did a great job explaining the dairy industry and dairy issues. I was a little concerned with the fact that we eat a football field worth of pizza in a lifetime. I might need to cut back on that.

### **The Honorable Christi Craddick - Texas Railroad Commissioner**

While railroads are in their title, they haven't dealt with railroads since the 1980s when they were deregulated, but they decided to keep the name. Mrs. Craddick explained how the Railroad Commission is setup, with the 3 commissioners rotating chairmanship, of which Mrs. Craddick is the current chairman. The Texas Railroad Commission has a tremendous job of regulating oil and gas throughout Texas. There was talk about regulating the price of oil in a meeting last year, but they chose not to and have not done that since 1973. With the tremendous work this commission does, it is surprising that it is almost an entirely fee based agency.

### **J.C. Essler - Executive Vice-President Texas Poultry Federation**

Unfortunately, I live in the part of Texas that broadband is available, but it can be a little hit or miss at times. During Mr. Essler's presentation, I was in and out of service so I didn't get as much information as I would have liked. I did see that people sometimes, although not all that often now, use chicken litter as a filler hay type thing for feeding cows. Interesting note.

### **Kody Bessent - VP of Operations and Legislative Affairs Texas Ag Council, TALL XII Alumnus**

Mr. Bessent provided a lot of information regarding incoming Biden administration and who he is planning on appointing to different positions. While we are and should be concerned about some of the agenda of President Biden, Mr. Bessent took a more optimistic tone saying it might not be all that bad for agriculture. It certainly won't be good, but it might not be too bad.

A concern for us out here in West Texas would be the reinstatement of the WOTUS Rule, but water is a concern everywhere.

### **Van Gaskins - Howard and Martin County Farmer and Businessman**

Out here on our ranch, we have oil wells as well as the new wind turbines. I was here when the negotiations were taking place for the wind turbines and Mr. Gaskins definitely hits the nail on the head when he says give them only what they ask for and nothing more. The people that lease the land tend to want to take and take and take, and push the limit as much as possible. Hearing from Mr. Gaskins and his immense experience in oil and gas leasing in the #1 area for producing oil in the world, is extremely useful. Also, having Joe Will Ross on as well to answer some legal questions was great. It is an interesting note that it is pretty much universal that these companies leave gates open. All of them do it. Must be in their employee contract.

### **Doug Wilde - Farmer In Tom Green and Glasscock Counties**

I attend church with Mr. Wilde so I'm very familiar with his operation and the person he is. His passion for the Concho Valley is incredible, and he provided a lot of information that was pertinent to me because of my own location. As with many people out here, he has started using the H2A program for seasonal guest workers because finding help is not easy. Of course, we all have our challenges throughout the state, but water and land cost tripling in the last 10 years are just a couple of these challenges.

### **The Honorable Alvin New - Commissioner Texas Transportation Commission**

Mr. New provided so much information that it was hard to keep up and was a little overwhelming at times. This is a good problem to have and one that happens quite a bit during this TALL program. The design of the road system and the interstate systems is extremely detailed and well thought out, even though the construction seems to take awhile. Mr. New also explained how the gas tax per gallons works in the state of Texas, which was enlightening.

### **Stan Meador - VP Sales and Marketing Texas Pacifico**

Mr. Meador went into great detail on the history of Texas Pacifico and how it is related to GrupoMexico. The different types of materials that are transported on the line is pretty interesting and seems to mirror the needs of the oil industry. COVID obviously greatly affected his industry, as it did so many others, and I would be concerned if I was in Mr. Meador's position because of the steep decline since 2018.

**Dr. Michael Salisbury - Dean of College of Graduate Studies and Research at Angelo State University**

Both my wife and I have spent considerable amount of time at and attending Angelo State University throughout the years so I am aware of what they offer. However, I was not aware of the size of the ag department. Probably the best stat that Dr. Salisbury spoke of was that ASU was in the top 50 schools with the least student loan debt, which is important to any education, in my opinion. This is coming from someone who has student loan debt, too.

**Dr. Doug Tolleson - Associate Professor**

The Sonora Research station, which started back in 1916, was started by a group of ranchers with a forward thinking attitude, and, according to Dr. Tolleson, has continued in this forward thinking attitude, albeit the technology has changed a bit. Being from my area, I completely understand the need for prescribed burning. We do it from time to time. It was interesting to hear that they are using LiDar data collection to help with determining the effects of burning to certain areas.

**Joel Pigg - General Manager Real Edwards Conservation & Reclamation District**

Mr. Pigg went into great detail regarding the proper way to maintain and set up a well, especially with regards to well management and keeping a log system. When I moved to the ranch a few years ago, all of the wells we currently use on a daily basis were already put in and have been in for many years. The information Mr. Pigg offered will be extremely useful should I need to add additional wells or replace the ones we already have. It was hard to comprehend that less than 1% of water is actually available for human consumption.

**Alan Armistead - District Supervisor Wildlife Services**

Predators make raising some animals quite difficult in this area. I guess that is why those wild cat hunts are such a big draw. For our particular ranch, the feral hog situation is probably the most important. I do wish there was a way to eradicate them, but Mr. Armistead pointed out that they are a maintenance thing and never going to get rid of them. They are just too prolific and become sexually mature at such a young age. Also, I was unaware of the amount of black bears that are in Texas. Good information to know.

**Dr. Reid Redden - AgriLife Research San Angelo**

It was a good to hear from a YouTube star, as Mary pointed out in her introduction. I have always heard that you raise cattle for respectability and sheep/goats for money. Mr. Redden definitely pointed out that that is the case, at least as this point. I like how he pointed out that

by looking at the numbers as to the different ethnic groups, the consumer side of sheep and goat meat looks good in the future.

**Bob Malone - Executive Chairman, President & CEO First Sonora Bank Shares and Sonora Bank**

Mr. Malone has been around the block and probably knows the state of our country and state better than most so his talk covered many areas, not just banking which is what I expected. One thing he mentioned was that nothing is getting accomplished right now at the national level because everything is too polarized. Only by personally stopping this divisive rhetoric and bringing everything together, even if you disagree on things, can we move past this pandemic and get things accomplished. I pray we can do that.

**Conclusion**

With this session being completely virtual, I believe we lacked the true experience of what this session could be and usually is like. That being said, we did have a great group of speakers that presented a lot of information. Zoom makes it hard to really ask many questions because some people tend to overpower over others when it comes to asking questions. Also, other than the two Zoom night socials, we didn't have much time to really bond anymore as a class, although I did speak to several outside of our sessions either in person, on the phone, or through text. I am glad to hear so many of our speakers speak so highly of Mary Gonzales. We have not had the time to get to know her very well due to her schedule, understandably so. It was good to hear everyone speak so highly of her. Overall, this session was very good considering the difficulties of being virtual.

Kate Fred  
January 29, 2021  
TALL XVII

### TALL Narrative 2 - Austin/West Texas

Our first speaker was Speaker Dade Phelan. What an honor it was for us to have the opportunity to listen to and speak with our new Texas Speak of the House. One of the questions that was asked was: “How do you get the attention of a legislator who doesn’t know anything about the issues (agriculture) you care about?” His answer was:

- You need to remind them about the vitality of agriculture
- Talk to them in real time (real life)
- Talk to someone face-to-face if possible
- Constantly remind them about the vitality of agriculture

Even though we were primarily talking about and discussing agriculture, I believe these points could go for any topic, and is something to keep in mind when discussing topics with people who hold different beliefs than you. This could not ring more true with our society and world today. He mentioned the best way to communicate with others during this interesting time is by email, conference calls, zoom meetings, face-to-face when possible, and also smaller group meetings, which are just as impactful. He did however mention that deals don’t get closed on zooms, which is why with the vaccine, of course, we need to get back face-to-face meetings.

The Texas Beef Council Executive VP Dr. Molly McAdams gave some interesting insight into the Texas Beef Council as well as the Beef CheckOff. The primary focus for both at this time is growing beef demand and moving forward with diversity. All Plates of Life advertising generated 291.1 million impressions statewide via digital, streaming TV,

pandora and paid searches. Digital platforms allow for more flexibility and a cheaper avenue. The Texas Beef council is also using influencers to grow beef demand and get information out to the influencers' following. They recently decided to partner with past-NFL player Eddie Jackson as Chief Recipe Officer. During the pandemic/shutdown, more people were searching for recipes due to being homebound and cooking more to pass the time. Therefore, social media has become more important than ever, especially for advertising. Some of the biggest challenges for growing beef demand are:

- There is a lot of misinformation out there
- There are always going to be alternative competitors
- Educating consumers about beef
- Must be able to answer the questions:
  - Is beef good for me?
  - Is beef good for the planet?

Chief of Staff Luis J. Sainz helped to remind us the powers of the Governor are as follows: advocate for change in certain areas/for bills, power of appointment for almost any state agency, and power to veto. I found it very interesting that he said Texas leads the number of COVID-19 vaccines distributed. The push is for 65 years or older to receive the vaccine as well as 60 years with a disability. I was also very pleased to hear that there is a major effort in the Governor's office to back the blue. It is very concerning to me that there are some people who believe in defunding the police, so I was glad to hear that this is not the case in Texas. Two major topics that will be discussed during the session will be human trafficking and homelessness. Also, topics that are always discussed are agriculture and oil/gas. Another interesting fact from the Chief of Staff was the state alone (Texas) is the 10th largest economy

in the World by itself. I also enjoyed that he said Texas is a big state, a conservative state, and a state critical to the country, so they know not to pick on us.

Eric Opiela, attorney and fifth generation TX rancher, gave some very interesting insights into the 2020 election, redistricting, and demographic changes. He has we have a country that has lost its faith, and believes a lot of people do not understand how an election win actually works. The statement that is made “there is no evidence of election fraud” but there is a difference between no evidence and can't being able to prove. Election fraud occurring is way too easy to happen. He has looked at the evidence and believes the result is legit. I know many people in our nation do not believe that this election was legitimate, and I don't believe we will ever know for sure. 77% of Republicans believe there was widespread fraud in the presidential elections; 60% overall consider Biden's victory legitimate. Eric said you can have fraud and still have a legitimate election. I guess this would depend on how much fraud was going on. It's not unprecedented for states to question the election votes. What is precedent was what happened after the election. He also said the reporting of the events was not completely accurate. We are creating 3 political parties: democratic party, the republican party is split (Trumpers and Never Trumpers) (republican party is really no more).

When you have a triangle effect happening there will always be a group that goes to the far right or far left extreme. When you ban speech from half of the population, they will not just be quiet and go away, that half will continue to brew until they blow. These people will find somewhere else to go to speak their minds. Not to mention you are going against the Constitution when you ban free speech. In a “normal” election, you will always have one side that disagrees with the outcome of the election, but both sides continue to have confidence in the election. However, that is not what happened in 2020 where we have one side with no confidence in the election results. When you have 60% of people that have no confidence in the election, they just don't turn out and this is a problem!! Our country has been divided for a while and it started back in 2010 and has grown. Trump did not cause people to believe what they believe. Their beliefs

continued to grow with Trump in office. When looking at an election map, very little has changed in the last 4 years. States that are considered the “blue wall” Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan. The blue wall went blue once again. 2 states went blue for the very first time in modern history Arizona and Georgia. Texas did get more democratic, but did stay red. North Carolina stayed in the Republican party. We have a rural/urban divide.

We have shifts happening that we have never seen before. In TX 50 % latino areas are turning consistently more red and 50% white are turning consistently more blue. TX is beginning a realignment due to race (primarily). First time ever, TX has some counties turn red. Not sure if this is Trump related or a fundamental shift happening. TX has grown at an average of 18%. If you're not growing your voice is decreasing. Rural TX voice is decreasing tremendously because the rural areas are not growing. The TX panhandle will probably lose a whole Congressional District when the realignment happens. The Lubbock/Amarillo area will combine and the panhandle will lose voice. This is concerning. Travis County area will be split into different districts and will gain more voice. Collin and Denton County will gain more voice also. These areas are gaining in population therefore more voice. Going back through my notes, I found Mr. Opiela to be very informative and interesting. Very glad he spoke to us and welcomed other people's thoughts and opinions.

Another speaker I found to be very compelling was Lt. Colonel Ron VanderRoest from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Law Enforcement Division. Mr. VanderRoest first told us the responsibilities of a Texas Game Warden, which is the enforcement of the Parks and Wildlife Code, all TPWD regulations, the Texas Penal Code and selected statutes and regulations applicable to clean air and water, hazardous materials, and human health. He also told us their mission is to manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. He spoke about the 13 different divisions within the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which I had no idea was broken into so many different sections. I was glad to hear

that visitation to state parks actually went up during the pandemic, which makes sense. People were getting bored inside their homes and wanting to get outside.

Van Gaskins, Howard and Martin County farmer and businessmen, provided some really great advice when leasing land. He said when talking with someone about leasing land to give them what they ask for and nothing more. If they ask for more down the road that usually means there is activity such as oil and gas prices going up. Another thing he mentioned is that it is really important to invest in an attorney. Best money you will spend. Also, when leasing land to make sure to have the rights to your water. Really great advice from Mr. Gaskins.

Doug Wilde is a dry land cotton farmer in the Tom Green and Glasscock Counties. I really enjoyed him sharing about the farming production in the San Angelo area. Coming from a cotton producing background, I find it very interesting to hear about the different ways other cotton farmers grow and tend to their cotton fields. My dad is always coming up with unconventional ways of doing things especially in his farming, so it's fun to hear when others are finding unconventional ways on their farms.

We had a great week filled with many different speakers from many different backgrounds and many different viewpoints. It was very informative for me, especially about the, at the time, upcoming legislative session. I thoroughly enjoyed listening and learning from all these different people. I look forward, hopefully in person, to the April session.