

Andrew Dusek #6
TALL XVII
Session 8: Washington DC & North Carolina
April 23-30, 2022

Leadership, Legislation, Laws

As my Southwest flight banked on final approach to the runway at Regan National Airport, I could see the National Mall and the various National Landmarks surrounding it, I began to get excited. I had never been to Washington D.C. so this would be a new experience for me, and I knew I would have a great time spending the week with Cohort 17 who I hadn't seen in a few months. We were fortunate in that the first two days of this session are set up to allow us time to explore the city and get our footing before hitting the week full speed on Monday. We were able to take a night tour of the National Mall and see the various monuments lit up, and the following day we spent time at the various Smithsonian Museums, Arlington National Cemetery, the National Cathedral, and more. The cohort had a great time taking in the sights, but we were ready to hit the ground running when Monday morning came.

Monday, April 25

We navigated the busy DC streets over to the USDA headquarters, and after getting checked in, settled down in their conference room where we got an introduction from Mia Mayberry who is a deputy director for the agency. We had a handful of speakers lined up and first heard from Hubert Hamer, an administrator for the National Agricultural Statistics Service. He spoke of how the agency is using technology to better analyze crops and yields for when they don't get all the farmer surveys returned or answered, which is their biggest challenge in collecting data. We also talked with Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, about the new climate-smart commodity programs the USDA will start to implement in the coming years. Kevin Shea is an administrator with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and told us about their current concerns with the avian influenza and African swine fever outbreaks currently going on and the various steps they are taking to try and mitigate and track them. We talked with a few other individuals, and the main takeaway we noticed is that the current leadership within the organization is very climate focused while also working to create better market opportunities and tackle food safety and security.

After departing the USDA, we made our way over to the Rayburn House Office Building where we had a meeting scheduled with Representative Michael McCaul who is the Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He told us they had been briefed on the Ukraine situation for months before the conflict kicked off and were working on additional sanctions and non-military ways to intervene in the conflict to try and deescalate it. He also spoke to various relationships the US maintained with other countries in NATO and how vital it was to keeping those in good standing so that the US would have people they can count on should we have any issues or conflicts of our own with other countries.

Next, we headed over to the Russell Senate Building, and after taking a quick group picture on the Capital steps, headed inside for a meeting with the US Senate Committee on Agriculture. They explained that climate and sustainability programs will be a big focus of the upcoming farm bill and that their work was already beginning even though it wasn't set to expire until 2023. One important note I'd like to make that stuck out to me, was when fellow classmate Joe Patranella asked if any of them had background or grew up in agriculture, and only one of them grew up on a vegetable farm in California. I know that people can transition in their careers and be very good at what they do even if they didn't grow up in that environment to start with, but it surprised me that they didn't have people with more of an ag background working on the committee. Following the Senate Ag Committee, we talked with Andrew Cooper, a legislative assistant for Senator John Cornyn. He assured us that the Senator keeps a pulse on the ag community and their needs and will fight against overregulation and reach from various state agencies that could affect how producers are able to raise their crops. The first day was a busy one and getting the opportunity to visit and have discussion in the very offices where big political decisions were made every day was an incredible experience.

Tuesday, April 26

Our morning began at the headquarters of American Farm Bureau Federation, where we had a presentation from Dan Moore, their Executive Vice President. He told us that producers need to do a better job of communicating with their politicians and getting involved in the process, no matter how busy they are. He opined that it's less about who exactly is in political offices, but more about who they surround themselves with, the staff and assistants are usually doing a lot of the legwork when it comes to researching bills and the like and can have just as big of an influence, if not bigger, on legislation passing when it comes time for a vote.

After a quick group photo on the AFBF rooftop we took the metro over to the Bush School of Government and Public Service. Retired Lt. General Jay Silveria was our first speaker and an impressive one. He talked about the various tactical failures of the Russian Army that the US has observed and emphasized why keeping our military and defense budget well-funded and trained was so important in today's world. He spoke with a quiet confidence about the war that you knew he knew what he was talking about but didn't have to brag or be showy about it.

Following a quick lunch, we returned to the Bush School to listen to a couple of presentations from industry people and first up was Chandler Goule with the National Association of Wheat Growers. Naturally he talked about the Ukraine crop due to the conflict and he told us that the international balance sheet isn't as tight as one might think, that the current markets have a lot of "conflict premium" in them currently and that we aren't facing a huge shortage, however, should the conflict affect next year's crop the story could be different... After Chandler was Sarah Gallo with the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Innovation Organization. She informed us on the various agriculture companies that were joining the biotech space and how much the industry has grown. One of the interesting topics she discussed was the negative perception behind gmos, but the fact was that most food safety outbreaks in past several years have come from organic/non-gmo crops.

The Longworth House Building was our next stop of the day to have a meeting with Representative Glenn Thompson from Pennsylvania and the House Ag Committee members. Rep. Thompson stated that he truly believes agriculture is the lifeblood of our country and spends plenty of time trying to educate his fellow peers in the House on the importance of it, even if their district doesn't rely heavily on ag receipts, so it was nice to hear that he was very dedicated to the industry and trying to help it in any way that he could. We finished the day as guests at a dinner organized by Texas Farm Bureau as they had organized a fly in for Texas producers to meet with their state reps that week, we enjoyed a nice meal and got to talk with some fellow Texans that are also involved in agriculture!

Wednesday, April 27

We loaded up on the bus and headed out of town towards North Carolina where the remainder of our session would be spent. After presenting our homework assignments and catching up on what the rest of our week would look like, we pulled into the farm headquarters for Fleming Brothers Farms for our lunch. One of the two brothers who owned the farm, Rob Fleming, told us the history of their farm and the various crops they grew which included soybeans, cotton, and even the stevia plant for the artificial sweetener. While there we also got an overview of North Carolina's ag economy from Dr. Blake Brown, which was a good to get some background on the various things we would see over the next several days.

After lunch, we got back on the bus with full stomachs and drove to our next stop at Mother Earth Brewery where we took a tour of their facility and did some beer tasting afterwards. While walking around their equipment we learned about the different types of hops and how different forms of them are used in brewing and how much the taste of an alcoholic drink can be affected by small changes in the hops. They sourced all organic ingredients for their mixing and hoped to contribute to sustainability practices by buying from farm operations with similar goals and ideals.

The day's schedule finished with a dinner at King's Restaurant in Kinston where we enjoyed some good seafood. After dinner we had a nice discussion/debate with some of the NC Ag leadership program folks on the intersection of agriculture and politics and what we as the cohort thought were areas of improvement in Washington DC. A general consensus was reached that we need more people with ag backgrounds that truly understand what the industry needs employed up there. After some good commentary we headed off to the hotel to get ready for the next two days, while the day had fewer stops than a normal TALL day, we were pretty worn out from all the traveling.

Thursday, April 28

Our morning began with a tour of the North Carolina Port Authority Cargo Terminal in Wilmington. While driving around the facility on the bus we learned that originally hog processors were transporting meat over multiple state lines, paying extra taxes, and dealing with extra hassles in general, so a few businesses decided to build the port facility there to ease logistical strain and the rest is history. The port exports many agricultural products from timber, to pork, to poultry and even imports a things like pork bellies as well. Their cold storage setup is very impressive in how they keep everything at

proper subfreezing temperatures to ensure no quality loss and they can track any container on their yard at any time to see where it's at or needs to be.

Following the port, we headed over to Live Oak Bank and heard from their founder and CEO James Mahan about how they wanted to revolutionize how loans are processed and handled from the ground up. Their bank high prioritizes employee retention with benefits like a full gym that college campuses would be jealous of, subsidized meals at the cafeteria, and many other perks they have to retain the right people. They hire professionals that understand the industry they are lending in, so when a veterinarian has a question about their business loan, the loan officer actually knows the ins and outs of the industry and can better service them and their needs.

Next up for the cohort was a trip to Warren Farms, a diversified operation growing tobacco, corn, cotton, soybeans, and raises cattle and hogs. We got to see a tobacco grow house where the plants are started and then transplanted in the field by hand on the back of a tractor. I was surprised to learn that the price of tobacco (about \$2 per pound) has not changed very much over the last couple of decades, and that similarly to many other regions of agriculture, they had large issues sourcing enough labor for their operation. The farm had diversified as most of the kids wanted to come back and farm, creating a need to expand into other areas such as the livestock side of the operation.

The last stop of the day was a reception at the North Carolina Farm Bureau offices where we met with several members and alumni of the North Carolina Ag Leadership Program. We heard several testimonies about how their program had catapulted its alumni into various leadership roles and changed how involved they were in their local and state matters and enjoyed some great hors d'oeuvres afterwards.

Friday, April 29

The final day of our TALL session began at the Troxler Center, named for the current Commissioner of Agriculture for the state, Steve Troxler, where we toured the new facility which was equipped with several BSL level 3 labs and spaces to better handle the different needs that might arise from working on animal necropsies. They employed a lot of modern technology to help keep workers safe and ensure proper safety precautions are taken in all the work they do.

We headed over to the University Club at NC State for a lunch and to listen to a few speakers, the first of which was Dr. Sandy Stewart to talk about the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and how their agriculture sector has changed over the decades to meet current demands such as them becoming such a large pork processing state and exporter. The next presentation from Andy Curliss with the SAS Institute was one of the most eye opening of the trip, and quite possibly my entire TALL experience. Andy showed us the investigation he has done into some of the top philanthropic groups run by billionaires showing they have a concentrated effort to paint various parts of agriculture in a negative light and how they are going about doing it. It really was concerning to see how they used misinformation and false facts to further their anti- agriculture agenda and hearing about some of the people already affected by some of their activities.

The group made a quick stop at the local farmers market close to campus, which happens to be the second largest in the nation, before heading over to the NC State Dairy to hear from Dr. Rich Bonanno who is the Director of Extension in the state. He spoke to the importance of maintaining their ag focus at the university and educating not just students but the public around them as the city of Raleigh slowly grows towards their beef center and dairy house. We finished the busy day with a tour of Howling Cow Creamery and got to try some of their delicious ice cream, where we said goodbye to the various NC Ag leadership folks who had helped make our trip through the state a fantastic experience.

Saturday, April 30

I boarded my flight back to Austin with the familiar feeling of information overload from another busy week with the cohort. Not a minute of the week was wasted as we got to see how politics in DC really worked and how the farm bill was put together/collaborated on. We learned how the North Carolina Ag Leadership program operated similarly to ours and the various issues they dealt with in their state. I have definitely come around to the idea of; we need more people that understand agriculture in Washington DC, there just aren't enough of them up there. I also believe that in general, agriculture needs to do a better job telling its own story and not let its opponents dictate the playing field, too much time is spent on the defensive as opposed to being in front of publicity issues. North Carolinians were experiencing similar problems with sourcing labor just like operations here and we are hoping a concentrated effort from multiple states will be able to get some changes on the books to programs like the H2A visa and others. It was great to continue broadening my experience in agriculture, and while some of the things we saw and learned about showed the industry faces some tough challenges ahead, I still believe some good work is being done in the wings to help support and bolster its position for the future.

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April 2022

Narrative – Blair Krebs, 13

The TALL Cohort XVII traveled to the East Coast for the eighth session, which included stops in Washington D.C. and North Carolina. For previous cohorts, this session included stops in Pennsylvania and New York, which I was disappointed where not included in our session. I think those regions would have given the cohort a different learning experience from what we have already seen. That being said, I appreciate the session and visits that were put together for Washington D.C. and North Carolina.

The session in Washington D.C. started with a nighttime tour of the monuments and some free time to explore our Nation's Capital. Monday morning, we got started at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) building at their historical boardroom and table. A thank you to Jennifer Yezak with Texas A&M for putting together the program in Washington. Mia Mayberry, the USDA's Deputy Director of Intergovernmental Affairs in the Office of Congressional Relations welcomed us to the facility, along with other USDA staff. Mayberry highlighted the Secretary of Agriculture's five priorities.

After the welcome and some housekeeping announcements, Hubert Hamer, the administrator for the USDA – National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) spoke to us about his role and that of NASS. They are the "data collection for the USDA" with 12 regional offices and 23 satellite offices, as well as a small amount of international staff to help make data from other countries better. They provide 450 reports on an annual basis and the census of agriculture, which has a 73 percent response rate.

Robert Bonnie, the Undersecretary for the Farm Production and Conservation agency, which leads the Risk Management Agency (RMA), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) spoke to the group. Undersecretary Bonnie has led the charge in developing the Climate-Smart program to combat Climate Change that is "producer led, incentive based, and collaborative." He noted that they want to work as a collaborator, not a dictator, and recognize what agriculture and rural communities are already doing. He also noted that measuring and monitoring would be an important part of the program. When asked about how it would be tailored to each crop, he said they would be "focused on the outcomes and then let the producers find the way there." This the only way to handle the incentive-based program with all the diversity within agriculture. There also needs to be work done to tell the narrative for agriculture, as well as communicate to the industries and Congress.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) was represented by administrator Kevin Shea, who noted the service celebrated their 50th anniversary. APHIS role is to "keep pests and disease out of the country and control the ones we already have." He noted the thin line they have to walk to "balance not being a burden to business, but also protecting agriculture." He also stated that most of the risks come from people and things, less from food or agriculture, because those are inspected. They are currently handling issues such as Avian Flu and African Swine Fever.

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Erin Morris, the Associate Administrator for the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), spoke about their programs. Administrator Bruce Summers was unable to attend. AMS' role is "to help facilitate the marketing of agricultural products," running programs such as Federal Marketing Orders and Research and Promotion Boards provided through law.

We then heard from Agriculture Research Service (ARS) Administrator Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young who presented information and slides on the programs, projects, and locations that the ARS covers. Dr. Young also explained how research priorities get established for each program within a 5-year rotation. This was something I was especially keen on hearing, since I do a lot of work with the ARS pecan program and it is currently going through the 5-year review.

Later we met with U.S. Representative Michael McCaul, who is the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, at the Rayburn House Building. Representative McCaul had recently traveled to Poland and of course had in depth insights on the war in Ukraine due to his work. He shared much of the current happenings in the region, including what he believes Russia's next moves and intentions will be. He also discussed the importance of the ports and crops in the region, including what supporting countries are doing to try to help keep Ukraine's economy going.

Next, we made the trek to the Russell Senate Building for a meeting with the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to meet with eight representatives from the committee. They spoke about the start of the Farm Bill process, which is done every five years. They each spoke about different components, and touched on what groups need to do to work within the Farm Bill, as well as concerns for certain carbon credit and Climate Change policies. They also noted that 80 percent of the Farm Bill is the nutrition aspect, and budget and ratios of each project usually do not change.

In the same room we were joined by Andrew Cooper, the Legislative Assistant to Senator John Cornyn, who handles agriculture, trade policy, and appropriations. He spoke about dealing with tariff issues being a new frontier for Congress, since the Cold War. India was one of the countries he discussed further. He noted that one in seven jobs are in agriculture, so it is important to handle important issues.

Tuesday morning started out with a short walk to the American Farm Bureau Federation office to meet with Dale Moore, the Executive Vice President. The American Farm Bureau Federation is the nation's largest agricultural organization. Moore mostly spoke about his over 30 years of experience in Washington D.C., working for the Bush Presidency, as well as Congress.

Then we headed to the Bush School of Government and Public Service near the White House to meet with several speakers including, Lt. General Jay Silveria, who is the Executive Director of this Bush School in Washington D.C. We heard about the school and its programs, Lt General's thoughts on Ukraine, and received a tour of the facility. The school noted that they are the

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biggest presence of Texas in Washington D.C. with the exception of the state government. It allows for “great conversation in the space” and has “the expectation that we are in the middle of the action and policy.”

Sarah Gallo, the Vice President of Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Innovation Organization, spoke about her role and how they help bio-tech companies find a successful path to the market. They also work to “increase their members freedom to operate.”

Chandler Goule, the Executive Director of the National Association of Wheat Growers, spoke about his experience in Washington D.C., as well as wheat production in Ukraine. He noted that a reduction in wheat production out of Ukraine, which is expected to be 50-70 percent less, will cause food insecurity, first in the Middle East and Africa, but then could cause worldwide issues. He also spoke about sustainability and fundraising for their organization, which no longer can be reliant on dues alone, but will need other revenue.

The group then departed for the Longworth House Building to have the privilege to meet with U.S. Representative G.T. Thompson, who is the ranking member of the House on Committee on Agriculture and his policy director, Josh Maxwell. Representative Thompson spoke of the importance of agriculture and the Farm Bill. When asked about the Climate Smart policies, he noted that for him to be a part, they have to make sense for agriculture and not create an undue burden on producers. Policy Director, Maxwell, who is a Texas A&M graduate, then followed up on the discussion.

We were supposed to end the evening with a show at Ford’s Theater, but were not able to attend. However, our cohort was invited to a reception with the Texas Farm Bureau, as they happen to be in town for their member legislative event. The reception included dinner and a program to kick off their Washington D.C. event.

Our group then had an early departure from Washington D.C. and hit the road for a three and half our bus ride to North Carolina. We started at Fleming Brothers Farms in Scotland Neck, N.C. with lunch, introductions, and speakers. One speaker was the President of the North Carolina Farm Bureau who noted that North Carolina is the third most diverse in agriculture in the nation. We then headed towards Kinston, N.C. to tour Mother Earth Brewery. The brewery is a local establishment that has had success in beer and other beverages. We ended the evening at King’s Restaurant with discussion about agriculture and issues both in North Carolina and Texas.

The next morning, we woke up and headed out to Wilmington, N.C. to visit the port. Our group has visited two larger ports during previous sessions in Houston and Corpus Christi, Texas. The Port of Wilmington is smaller, but setup for agriculture with specific cold storage to meet the needs to producers.

We then met at Live Oak Bank headquarters in Wilmington, N.C. for lunch, a tour, and presentations by their staff members and President. Their bank has a unique setup to

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accommodate particular industries and work within government programs. Next the cohort headed for Warren Farms in Newton Grove, N.C., who farms a number of crops. However, we got to see tobacco in the greenhouse and the field. The final stop of the evening was in Raleigh, N.C. for a reception at the North Carolina Farm Bureau office with industry members and alumni of the North Carolina Agricultural Leadership Program.

On the final day of the session we toured the Steve Troxler Agricultural Sciences Center for the North Carolina Department of Ag, which is a brand-new state of the art research facility that does work with both plant and animal sciences. It handles high level cases for the area, including necropsies.

Afterwards we headed to the University Club for lunch and presentations from the Assistant Director of Agricultural Services, Sandy Stewart, Chairman of the North Carolina Ag Partnership, Peter Daniel, and the National Director of Strategic Initiatives at SAS Institute, Andy Curlis. Curlis use to work for the Dallas Morning News. He spoke about how 58 percent of consumers have positive feelings to agriculture, but highlighted the wealthy individuals funneling money into particular organizations and programs that could be considered anti-agriculture. When asked about a solution to combating these narratives, he noted community organizing and getting agriculture's story heard are things that can be done.

The final stops of the trip were to tour the brand-new Plant Sciences Building on North Carolina State's campus and the North Carolina State Dairy, Howling Cow Creamery. The Plant Sciences Building only opened two weeks prior and is an impressive building for research and education. The rooftop had an immense greenhouse and the building had new technology. The North Carolina State Dairy is a research and learning facility for the school and industry. We met there with Dr. Rich Bonanno, who shared about his experience and the station. We finished the visit with a sweet treat from Howling Cow Creamery! The processing plant and lab create ice cream and sweet treats, with the revenues going back into the program.

Much of the group met for one final dinner and flew out the next day. Thank you again to the planners and those who made the visits to each location possible.

Steven R. White
Member – TALL XVII

Session 8 Narrative
Washington D.C. & North Carolina

Saturday - April 23, 2022

We began our experience in Washington D.C. with a night tour of the monuments around D.C. We visited the Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam Memorial, the White House, the WWII Memorial and the National Mall area. Visiting these memorials at night is a wonderful experience. I have to say though that the tour guide, Eric, made the experience even better. He knew an amazing amount of information about each monument and much more about Washington D.C. itself and American History in general. He really was an outstanding tour guide.

Sunday – April 24, 2022

Sunday was a free day for our group. Several of us got up and began the day by visiting Arlington National Cemetery. We then went to the American History Museum. We had lunch on the National Mall and ended the day at a Washington Capitals hockey game.

Monday – April 25, 2022

We began the day at the USDA building. Jennifer Yezak was the coordinator for the entire D.C. trip and did a wonderful job. She seemed to know everyone as well as the ins and outs of how Washington D.C. ran.

The room we met in had a large meeting table in it. It seemed like a typical table that would be in many meeting rooms in Washington. However, we were told that this table was used for a meeting between President Ronald Regan and British Prime Minister Margret Thatcher.

Mia Mayberry began by outlining Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack's top five priorities, those being, Climate change, Advancing Racial Justice, creating more and better market opportunities, food and nutrition and finally making sure the USDA is a great place to work for everyone.

Next, we heard from Mr. Hubert Hamer. Mr. Hamer is the Administrator of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). He explained that NASS is the data collection arm of the USDA. NASS employs 800 federal employees, and they release 450 reports annually.

We then heard from Mr. Robert Bonnie. Mr. Bonnie was appointed by President Biden to serve as Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. He spoke at length about climate change and how USDA intends to continue to make it a main priority. He understands that producers want and need to remain profitable. But how do they balance the need for reasonably priced farm products with climate change initiatives? This is one of the questions he is trying to answer.

We next heard from Kevin Shae. Mr. Shae is the Administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. His main role is to “keep ag healthy”. One of the current issues he and his group are working through is avian influenza. This particular disease is a particular problem in turkeys. They are also working very hard to keep African swine flu out of the United States.

Some successes that Mr. Shae spoke about was the eradication of the screw worm in cattle, brucellosis and boll weevil eradication and maintenance across the cotton belt.

In short, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service regulate the movement of plants and animals to minimize the spread of diseases. They also try to encourage other countries to operate similarly using science-based methods. APHIS employs 8500 people across the United States and in twenty-five foreign countries.

Next, we heard from Erin Morris. Mrs. Morris is the Associate Administrator of the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service. This group is responsible with all grading and inspection services, including classing offices around the country. Some notable programs AMS is working on is Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), a bioengineered labeling program, the National Organic Program and the Commodity Procurement Program.

Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young also spoke to us at the USDA building. She currently serves at the Administrator of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). The mission of this group within the United States Department of Agriculture is to deliver scientific solutions to national and global agricultural challenges.

We also heard from Dr. Venus Welch-White with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). She did a great job of explain how EPA and USDA work together on issues of the day.

At this point we departed the USDA building and headed for the Rayburn House Building. Here we met with U.S. Representative Michael McCaul, the Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Mr. McCaul gave our group a very upfront and frank discussion on the war between Ukraine and Russia. He discussed his thoughts on why it is happening and how it will eventually end. He discussed what the war means for the United States as well as the rest of the world.

Next, we walked to the Russell Senate Building where we met with several staff members who worked for members of the Senate Ag Committee. We heard from Catherin Thomas, Jeromy Whitley, Carley Essa, Coleman Garrison, Andy Recetis, Karen Fletcher, Brooke Taylor and Dudley Hoskins.

These folks discussed how they were actually at that time in the first week of the new farm bill process. They discussed how this bill would get written. They focused on issues that would be important in this particular farm bill such as, the climate and nutrition, however as stated above farmers must be profitable and the farm bill has to recognize and allow for this.

These staff members also detailed how learning from producers and other stakeholders in agriculture is so important. They do not and cannot know everything, so they do rely on other and outside sources to gain information.

The final discussion of the day came from Mr. Andrew Cooper. Mr. Cooper works directly with Senator John Cornyn of Texas. He is the eyes and ears for the Senator when it comes to agriculture.

This first day in Washington D.C. was a great start to our week. We were given a ton of information from many different people working on several different issues.

Tuesday – April 26, 2022

Tuesday morning began with a meeting at the Washington D.C. Farm Bureau office with Mr. Dale Moore. Mr. Moore is the Executive Vice President of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Mr. Moore explained that the overall goal of The American Farm Bureau Federation is to be an advocate for the country's rural farmers and ranchers in Washington D.C. They work to get people together at county levels and to build coalitions so that the ideas and needs of the American producer are heard at the federal level.

Mr. Moore told some wonderful stories about working with many past elected officials including Presidents. He left me with a better understanding of how relationships are vital to getting things done and that is especially true in government. This is the exact message we heard during our Austin session when discussing State government.

Next, we made our way to The Texas A&M Bush School of Government & Public Service. This is a school designed for working professionals in D.C. We were greeted by Mrs. Alice Yates who works for the Bush School.

Our first speaker was retired Lt. General Jay Silveria who serves as the Executive Director of the Bush School. He has an amazing past and recently retired as three-star General overseeing the Air Force Academy.

As you can imagine Lt. General Silveria spoke quite a bit about the war in Ukraine. He gave us some insight into aspects of the Russian invasion that we may not be hearing on the news.

Sarah Gallo who is the Vice President of the Agriculture and Environmental Biotechnology Innovation Organization spoke to us next. She gave us her background as a marine biologist and how she transitioned to a lobbyist and now is in a non-policy job. Today she focuses on helping biotechnology companies market products in a world where "biotech" has become a bad word in some peoples' minds.

Next, we heard from Chandler Goule. Mr. Goule is the Executive Director of the National Association of Wheat Growers and spoke very well and was able to relate to the group the path that took him from growing up in Stephenville to Washington D.C. The topic of Ukraine came up pretty quickly in this discussion. He noted that, by their estimation, 50% to 75% of Ukraine's wheat crop is not being harvested.

We left the Bush School, got on the Metro, and walked to the Longworth House Building for a meeting with U.S. Representative Glenn Thompson. Mr. Thompson is the Ranking Member on the House Committee on Agriculture. Mr. Thompson spoke to us about how important it is to be involved in industry groups and government if we are so inclined. He made it clear that developing a meaningful farm bill is his top priority on the Ag Committee.

This concluded our time in Washington D.C. It was a wonderful and very fast paced two days. We spoke to many well-informed people that do seem to have a passion for attempting to keep agriculture and agricultural producers at the front of the minds of decision makers in our Nation's Capital.

Wednesday – April 27, 2022

On Wednesday morning we checked out of our D.C. hotel, loaded a bus and headed south to North Carolina. Our first stop was at Fleming Brothers Farms in Halifax, North Carolina.

The two Fleming Brothers farm tobacco, cotton and corn in the area. Here we met up with the coordinators of the North Carolina portion of the trip. They are with North Carolina Farm Bureau and were very welcoming and gracious hosts.

At Fleming Brothers Farms we had a wonderful lunch catered by a man that is also a cotton mote bale buyer. Here we also heard from several area ag leaders, many of which were with us throughout our time in North Carolina.

From Fleming Brothers Farms we headed to Mother Earth Brewery in Kinston, NC. This business was created and is operated by two locals from the Kinston, NC area. Their goal is to create excellent beer through quality craftsmanship, civic responsibility and environmental stewardship. We were able to see the beer making process at Mothe Earth. Of course, the highlight was sampling some of the finished product.

Wednesday evening, we had dinner at Kings restaurant in Kinston. We were joined by several area ag leaders who told their story to the group.

Thursday – April 28, 2022

Thursday morning, we loaded the bus and headed south to Wilmington, NC which sits on the Atlantic Coast. Here we visited the North Carolina State Port Authority. We were given a driving tour around the port of Wilmington where we saw stacks and stacks of containers waiting to be either loaded onto an outbound ship, or onto trucks headed inland. We also saw a mountain of wood chips waiting to be loaded onto ships and taken overseas.

The highlight of visiting the Port of Wilmington was the cold storage area. The cold storage facility at the port is a fairly new facility. Here we met Chuck McCarthy who is President of the Port of Wilmington Cold Storage.

Of course, cold storage is needed to keep fresh meat products frozen for both export of U.S. product as well as import of foreign meat products.

We were given a tour of the cold storage areas. The most impressive area being the blast freezer which is maintained at -20 degrees Fahrenheit. This is by far the coldest temperature I have ever experienced. In this room they can fully freeze a chicken carcass in a matter of hours.

We left the Port of Wilmington and headed to Live Oak Bank. Here we were given a tour of a very impressive campus which is not your normal bank building. There is a building which is strictly a gym, outside meeting areas, and well thought out office space that cultivates collaboration.

We were served lunch in a meeting room at Live Oak Bank and the President James (Chip) Mahan spoke to our group about how Live Oak Bank came to be. They specialize in SBA loans to small businesses, specifically veterinarians. From here they have grown to be known as a lender specifically tailored to small businesses around the country.

From Live Oak Bank in Wilmington we drove to Newton Grove, NC and visited Warren Farms. At Warren Farms we focused mostly on the process of growing tobacco. We were shown tobacco plants started in greenhouses. Then we went to a field where they were transplanting the small plants that came out of the greenhouses into the field. Here they will grow and finally be harvested and dried in kilns specifically made for drying tobacco leaves. They explained to us that most all tobacco is grown under contract with places like Phillip Morris. A great deal of N.C. tobacco is also exported to China.

Thursday evening, we were given a wonderful reception at the North Carolina Farm Bureau building in Raleigh. We were able to meet with and hear from many different alumni of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Leadership Program, which is very similar to the TALL Program.

Friday – April 29, 2022

We began our last day in North Carolina touring the new Steve Troxler Agricultural Sciences Center. This is a very new 225,000 sqft building that is part of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture. The Troxler Center contains offices and labs for food and drug protection, standards, structural pest control and pesticides.

We then went to the University Club where we heard from Dr. Sandy Stewart, Assistant Director of Agricultural Services, Peter Daniel, Chairman of NC Ag Partnership and Andy Curliss, National Director of Strategic Initiatives at SAS institute. These three individuals spoke to our group about issues facing agriculture in North Carolina and across the U.S. They also focused on how North Carolina State University was a leading force in trying to solve many of the problems facing the agricultural industry, not just at the producer level but also processors and end users.

After lunch at The University Club, we drove to the new Plant Sciences Building on the campus of North Carolina State University. We were given an excellent tour by Mr. Geoff Bock. This recently completed building is a state-of-the-art facility with classrooms, laboratories and a massive greenhouse on the roof. It was evident that everyone associated with NC State University was very proud of this recent addition.

We then were given a very in-depth description of some of the new and innovative things NC State University is doing in its College of Agriculture and Life Sciences from Associate Dean Rich Bonanno.

Our last stop on Friday was at Howling Cow Creamery. This is a working dairy farm and creamery on NC State University land. We were treated to ice cream and a wrap-up of our North Carolina trip.

The North Carolina portion of the week was marked with excellent visits and tours, however the people that set up the week were exceptional. I need to mention Dr. Bill Collins who is a retired faculty member in the College of Ag and Life Sciences at NC State. He was extremely knowledgeable about the entire industry. Linda Andrews with North Carolina Farm Bureau was also instrumental in our excellent week.