

Oklahoma Agricultural Leadership Program

Class XVII

Scribe Notes

Seminar 7

April 15 - 17, 2015

“State Government, Political Party System, and Oklahoma Water Issues”

Wednesday Apr. 15

Scribe: Kirby Smith

Tommy Thomas, Oklahoma Legislative Consulting Group LLC

Former state legislator turned lobbyist, Tommy Thomas, began our day at the state Capitol. He reminded us of all the successes government had helped with such as vaccinations for tuberculosis and polio, and cleaning up waterways. He emphasized how important it was for constituents like us to talk to our legislators. He said elected officials hear from lobbyists like him every day but not from folks like us.

Senator Eddie Fields

Sen. Fields focused on policy and launched what would be a theme for this seminar: the idea that most legislative issues are not divided by party but by rural versus urban. He spent time discussing the current proposed Right-to-Farm bill. He commented that this bill should unite all agriculture groups but there has been some challenges with that. He answered questions on Right-to-Farm, teacher retirement, school consolidation, and taxes.

Representative Leslie Osborn

Rep. Osborn focused her time on the budget. As a former small business owner she spends a great deal of time on fiscal bills. She said up until one month ago, our state had experienced the highest revenue we have ever seen. We don't have a revenue problem, we have a spending problem. She is running for Speaker of the House and emphasized her desire for our state to move to a zero-based budget. She discussed education at length and said three agencies account for 53% of the budget; they are all education-related. She answered questions on the lottery, negative national attention, teacher salary, and public universities.

Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives

Chris Meyers, General Manager/CEO

Chris discussed what a consumer cooperative is and how it differs from other coops. There are 900 electric cooperatives across the U.S. which serve 42 million consumers and are in 80% of the US counties. Less than 10% of farms had electricity in the 1930s but by 1953 that number had grown to more than 90% of farms. OAEC was formed in 1942. He discussed some of the forces that are changing the traditional electric coop model including climate change, renewable energy, endangered species, distributed resources, smart grid, and cybersecurity.

Sid Sperry, Director of Communications

Sid introduced the major communications project, *Oklahoma Living*, the OAEC magazine that began in 1948 and now has a circulation of 321,000 and an online presence.

Anna Politano, Oklahoma Living Managing Editor

Anna discussed the ways *Oklahoma Living* is changing the way they communicate with their audience by providing an online publication as well as a hardcopy. In 1950, 37% of *Oklahoma Living* readers were full-time farmers. In 2014, less than 9% were full-time farmers. That has meant a great deal of change to their publication. They host focus groups to make sure they are producing a product that fulfills the wants and needs of their readership.

Kenny Sparks, Director of Legislative Affairs

Kenny told us about the OAEC Legislative app that is available. It features all of the Oklahoma state legislators, statewide elected officials, and Congressional delegation. It is a quick reference guide for their districts and contact information as well as information on the electric coops throughout the state.

Catreana McMullen, Manager Public Safety and Emergency Response, Williams Companies, Inc.

Catreana discussed the 2.9 million feet of pipeline that is unregulated because it is in a rural area. She discussed some of the risks associated with this and how it can be avoided by landowners.

David McMullen, Supervisor Pipeline Operations and Manager Storage Operations, OneOK Gas Transportation

David focused on pipeline safety and all the ways companies work to ensure public safety including air and foot patrol. He discussed the common indications of a pipeline leak and how to avoid an incident. He also briefly touched on the 6000 head gilt development operation that he and Catreana own.

John Patrick Lopez, Vice President of Operations, Lopez Foods

John Patrick thinks the future of the agriculture industry in Oklahoma is dim because it is becoming increasingly hard to recruit young people back to agriculture and for it to be a viable career. Lopez is the sixteenth largest Hispanic-owned business in the United States and the largest Hispanic-owned meat processor. The Oklahoma City facility we toured was built in 1992. Lopez has 500 employees and 16 processing lines. It's one of two facilities in the US that produces the McRib for McDonald's. John Patrick spoke at length about McDonald's as it accounts for the vast majority of their business. He said they are close to finalizing a deal with Chipotle. When questioned why Chipotle, a notoriously anti-traditional agriculture restaurant chain, would want to do business with a place that serves McDonald's, he simply stated, "That's how high McDonald's standards are." Lopez is one of only five plants that handle beef for McDonald's, one of three sausage plants, and one of two Canadian bacon plants. Lopez is the only one that has all three lines (beef, sausage, and Canadian bacon) under one roof. John Patrick spent a great deal of time visiting with us and wanted our feedback of the tour we took of the facility. He was greatly interested in our thoughts and was appreciative of our visit.

Thursday Apr. 16

Scribe: Justin Street

We started our day at the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry (ODAFF) at 8:00 a.m. We were met by Mrs. Cheri Long and Mrs. Jamey Allen. Our first speaker of the day was Mrs. Blayne Arthur. She talked about her main goals of her job which include working with legislators. Some of the main issues Blayne is working on currently are the Right-to-Farm bill, a bill about open records, and a bill about animals in disasters.

At 8:45 a.m., Secretary Jim Reese gave us an overview of Oklahoma agriculture. Oklahoma's agriculture industry produces \$7.3 billion revenue annually; \$5.4 billion in livestock and \$2 billion in crops. One of the biggest battles facing agriculture is feral hogs, and if a person brings feral hogs into Oklahoma from another state, it is considered a felony.

We left the meeting room to take tours of the seven different labs at the department. The seven labs were dairy lab, general chemistry lab, seed lab, serology lab, pesticide lab, water lab, and weights and measures lab. We were split up into groups of four or five people and were able to tour two labs. I had the opportunity to tour the serology and water labs. At the serology lab, they test for brucellosis (Bangs disease) in cattle, pseudorabies in swine or feral hogs, and equine infectious anemia (EIA) in horses. Brucellosis is very much under control these days. At the water lab, they test for water pollution for lagoons.

Once we finished up with the labs, Chief Jerry Flowers talked to us about his team and their work doing investigative services for agriculture. Oklahoma has 11 agents who cover all 77 counties. Some of the things that they investigate are crimes involving cattle, heavy equipment, and timber theft. They also are involved in some homicides, drug trafficking, and feral hog movements. Chief Flowers told us about working with NPR and PBS on some stories about their work. We also saw all of his equipment and his pickup.

In front of ODAFF, they have plots of crops that are grown in Oklahoma. That is where we met Mr. Mika Anderson who was working on preparing a plot for summer crops. Some of the summer crops were corn, cotton, grain sorghum and sesame. Mr. Anderson had many vegetables already planted and was using plasticulture with the irrigation system for those vegetables.

Lunch was provided by ODAFF. During lunch, the Marketing Development Services talked to us. The first department that talked to us was from the Farmers Market division and the speaker was Mrs. Ashley Bender. Mrs. Bender told us there are 70 registered farmers markets in Oklahoma. To be a farmers market there must six or more growers. The oldest farmers market is Norman's farmers market and the largest is Cherry Street in Tulsa.

The second speaker during lunch was Jason Harvey who is the agriculture marketing coordinator, and grants and loan administer. Mr. Harvey told us about farmer diverse loans for crops and livestock producers. This loan is up to \$10,000 and your application is reviewed by a 10 person board.

Mrs. Cheri Long talked to us about Ag in the Classroom. She is a part of a three-person crew that travels to all 77 counties. Their main focus is students from preschool to the 8th grade. They assist teachers on developing projects about agriculture and also educate teachers about agriculture. They also work with organizations like the Girl Scouts. Their website is www.agclassroom.org/ok for more information.

The last speaker was Mrs. Julie Sears who talked to us about Made in Oklahoma (MIO). To obtain the Made in Oklahoma designation, a product must have been made or grown in Oklahoma. This organization assists companies at marketing events. There are a little over 400 members of Made in Oklahoma. The organization is preparing to open a store at the Oklahoma State Fair and will have only MIO products.

We departed ODAFF at 12:30 p.m. and made our way down to Bricktown to meet with Producers Cooperative Oil Mill. Mr. Brandon Winters gave us a history of Producers Cooperative and of the products they produce. They crush cotton and canola seed. They pull two grades of lint off the cotton seed. One grade will go to be put in pillows or in money. The

second grade goes to cellulose. Cotton seed hulls go to cattle feed or is used in the oil field. The cotton seed hull is 42% protein and canola is 36% protein. Canola is 38% oil. The drought has been very concerning in maintaining an adequate seed supply. We toured each of the buildings and saw each part of the process, from unloading the seed to pumping the oil to the holding tanks.

At 3:00 p.m., we arrived at Blue and Gold Sausage which is a family owned company. Mr. Brett Ramsey talked to us about how the company was started by his father who was an agriculture education teacher and began by making sausage from show pigs. They have been in business for 44 years. The first year they made 600 pounds, and this year they produced 3.5 million pounds. They work with 1,200 groups, but the main groups are FFA chapters in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, and Arkansas. We toured their facilities and saw their new cold storage. They have 8 full-time and 45 part-time employees.

We drove up the road to the Arcadia Round Barn. We were going to do community service there, but circumstances did not allow that to happen. We toured the round barn and learned about its history. It was very neat to see the architecture of the barn. The barn actually fell down and was reconstructed.

Our final stop of the day was at Pops restaurant where we enjoyed some good old American food.

Friday Apr. 17

Scribe: Crystal Cowan

State Water Plan – Julie Cunningham

- Gave an overview of the state water board does
- Spoke about water transfer and water concerns
- There are 4700 lakes and private water sheds in Oklahoma
- Mentioned the drought and that the last 30 years have been above average for rain fall
- Talked about ground water law

OSU Associate Professor of Ag Economics – Dr. Shannon Ferrell

- Gave a widespread overview of water legal issues in Oklahoma
- Touched on fracking and had great points

DEQ – Scott Thompson

- Spoke about regulating injection wells
- Discussed reclaimed water standards
- Touched on re-using water

Chickasaw Nation, Ambassador At-Large – Neal McCaleb

- Spoke about two federally recognized sovereign treaties concerning water; one of those dating back to 1906 (Oklahoma became a state in 1907)
- Mentioned Kiamichi watershed
- Explained that tribes want a solution that works for everyone and tribes do not want to be paid for water
- Wants respect for legislation that was been handed down

Cotton Farmer and Lugert-Altus Irrigation District Manager – Tom Buchanan

- Thoroughly explained the water situation and history in the Lugert-Altus Irrigation District

- Illustrated how much water is in Oklahoma and how much runoff water we lose
- Explained how runoff water could be sold to other cities and money earned could be used to develop infrastructure to transport excess runoff water to drier, more arid locations in Oklahoma

Open discussions with speakers –

- Speakers answered questions on all aspects of issues concerning water, current legal issues, fracking and anything else