



## Director's Letter

Howdy, Advocates.

Hope you had a wonderful holiday season and are ready for the 86th Texas Legislature!

Members of the 86th Session were sworn in Jan.8, and both parties face new dynamics in each chamber. Rep. Dennis Bonnen of Angleton was elected as this session's Speaker of the House. Bonnen previously served as the Speaker Pro Tempore in the previous session and has been a member of the Texas House of Representatives for over 20 years. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick released the Texas Senate committee assignments late last week. Sen. Brandon Creighton will now serve as the Chairman of Higher Education, and Sen. Royce West will be his vice-chair. Speaker Bonnen also released the Texas House Committee assignments. Please see the articles below for more details on these and other committee assignments.

Last month, I had the pleasure of meeting newly elected Texas Rep. Cody Harris of Palestine. Harris was a graduate of the Class of 2006 and earned his bachelor's degree in political science. He is also the president of Liberty Land & Ranch. A Q&A with him is below.

The 116th Congress is back in session in our nation's capital. Sen. John Cornyn has been assigned to the Committee on Finance, the Committee on the Judiciary, and the Select Intelligence Committee. Sen. Ted Cruz has been assigned to four committees: Commerce, Science, and Transportation; Foreign Relations, the Judiciary; and Rules and Administration. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi is expected to release the House of Representatives committee assignments within the next few weeks.

Lastly, we are less than a week away from "Orange and Maroon Legislative Day" and look forward to a productive day at the state capitol. Both Texas A&M University and the University of Texas come together for a day of advocacy in

hopes of maintaining research funding to benefit both schools. More details are below.

Thanks again for your continued support of the Advocacy program, Texas A&M, and The Association of Former Students.

Gig 'em,

Dave Fujimoto '17

Director of Strategic Engagement



## Aggie Spotlight: Cody Harris '06

Harris is a freshman representative for House District 8 in Central Texas.

**Q: Please provide some short biographical data about where you grew up and what led you to attend Texas A&M.**

"My dad was a successful real estate developer in the '70s and '80s. When the oil market collapsed and the savings and loan crisis hit, my parents lost everything nearly overnight. We moved from Tyler to Palestine, where all of my extended family lived in 1990. Not knowing what else to do, my dad decided we would become farmers. He rented a 100-acre pasture that we would turn into a crop of produce. I was 7 years old at the time, and every morning, my parents, two brothers, sister and me would get up at 5 a.m. and go work the crop until dark. We harvested our watermelon, sweet corn, cantaloupe and cucumbers and sold them on the side of the road. That's how we made ends meet until my dad got back on his feet and became a real estate broker. Little did I know how much agriculture would play into my future. My grandfather, Arvel Harris, attended Texas A&M during World War II as he trained as a pilot in the Army Air

Corps. Two of my siblings attended A&M, which led to my first tastes of the Spirit of Aggieland. I was fortunate to be there for the final on-campus Bonfire in '98 when my brother was a junior and I was in high school. Texas A&M was the only school I applied for during my senior year of high school. I didn't have a backup plan because, in my mind, no other school was even an option. I'll never forget the day I walked to the mailbox and opened my acceptance letter."

**Q: What activities did you participate in during your time at Texas A&M? How did these activities, and your unique Aggie experience, prepare you for your career and time in public office?**

"As a fish, I was in the Aggie Band in B-Battery and on the drumline. I brought my high school sweetheart with me to A&M and decided I'd rather get married early and finish as a non-reg. That was one of the hardest decisions I had ever made, and I questioned dropping out of the Corps for years afterward.

I participated in the Student Conference on National Affairs during my sophomore year, as I was a political science major and closely followed anything related to national politics.

For the remainder of my time at A&M, I worked and studied. My wife and I were married at the beginning of my junior year, and we had our first son two weeks after I graduated.

The core values that are part of the culture at A&M helped to develop my character as a business professional. The importance of service was something I held very deeply. As I moved home to start my career, I immediately began looking for opportunities to serve my community. I started the Palestine Young Professionals Network, became a board member of the Palestine YMCA, board member of the Palestine Area Chamber of Commerce, served at our church and coached our kids' sports teams."

**Q: Describe your post-college career and your decision to enter public service. What role do the Aggie Values play in your life & career?**

"I started a company called Liberty Land & Ranch, which is a farm-and-ranch real estate brokerage focused on teaching landowners to become stewards of this great gift called Texas. While we now operate throughout Texas, Oklahoma and Colorado, our core business is Texas ranch sales. In 2016, I was fortunate to be selected for the Gov. Dolph Briscoe Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership Program through Texas A&M Agrilife Extension. In this program, 23 other industry leaders and I traveled around the state and nation every quarter studying the effects of government regulation on the ag industry and rural communities. It was during this program that the lightbulb went off for me. I learned that rural Texas is underrepresented in our state government. In the Texas House of Representatives, rural legislators are outnumbered 3 to 1. But, it was really during our trip to California that I began to understand the gravity of that statistic. California is known for being the poster child for government regulation. Their dairies, farms, and ranches are all being forced out of business solely because of the overbearing cost of state regulation. Why? Because the rural areas of California lost their representation in their state government. The

urban legislators wrote broad legislation that their constituents demanded, which hurts rural communities and kills agribusiness. It was also on this trip to California that I learned that my incumbent state representative would be retiring, leaving the only candidate to be a young man who grew up in Highland Park – not exactly the most rural town in Texas – and had moved to our district just a couple of years earlier. Ideologically, I agreed with this candidate, but I knew he didn't have the experience needed to effectively represent our rural district. That's when I decided to throw my hat into the ring."

**Q: What are the biggest challenges you think you will face as an elected official? What are your biggest individual or group accomplishments prior to serving in the legislature?**

"I think the biggest challenge will be getting other urban legislators to understand and be sympathetic with the issues that affect rural Texas; and that, if we don't preserve and protect our rural communities, what we all love about Texas will be lost forever. The end result is that Texas will become just another California, and none of us want that.

My biggest accomplishment is my family. My wife and I have four children. Three biological boys ages 12, 9, and 7; and our little girl (4), who we adopted when she was 2. My family is more important to me than anything. If a man cannot be successful as a husband and a father, then all of his other accomplishments are worthless in my opinion."

**Q: What is your favorite memory from your time at Texas A&M?**

"That's a hard question to answer. There are so many great memories from my time in Aggieland. My wife and I still say we're "going home" whenever we get a chance to go back. If I had to pick, it would be marching into Kyle Field for Midnight Yell. The sound of the drumline playing the cadence while we were marching through the tunnel is something that gets embedded into your core."

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## Patrick Announces Texas Senate Committee Assignments

"Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick named 14 Republicans and two Democrats chairs of the Senate's 16 committees, meaning no gains for the chamber's minority party despite an increase in the number of committees."

To read more about Senate committee assignments, please click [here](#).



## Texas House Speaker Dennis Bonnen Names Committee Chairs

"Of the five Texas House committees considered to be the most powerful, three will have new chairs this session.

State Rep. John Zerwas, R-Richmond, will again head the budget-planning Appropriations Committee, the House announced last week. State Rep. Charlie Geren, R-Fort Worth, will retain his post as chairman of the House Administration Committee."

Read about the rest of the House committee assignments [here](#).



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## Opinion: Effects of Government Shutdown on Higher Education



"The University of Arizona has a grim message for professors on its website: If the partial government shutdown stretches on, the impact on research and science will only grow. New funding? Don't count on it. Payment on existing grants? On pause. Peer-review of pending grant applications? Postponed."

Read more from The Chronicle of Higher Education [here](#)!

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## Orange and Maroon Legislative Day 2019

On Feb. 5, Aggies and Longhorns will unite for a day at the Texas Capitol to advocate for higher education. Learn more [here](#).

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