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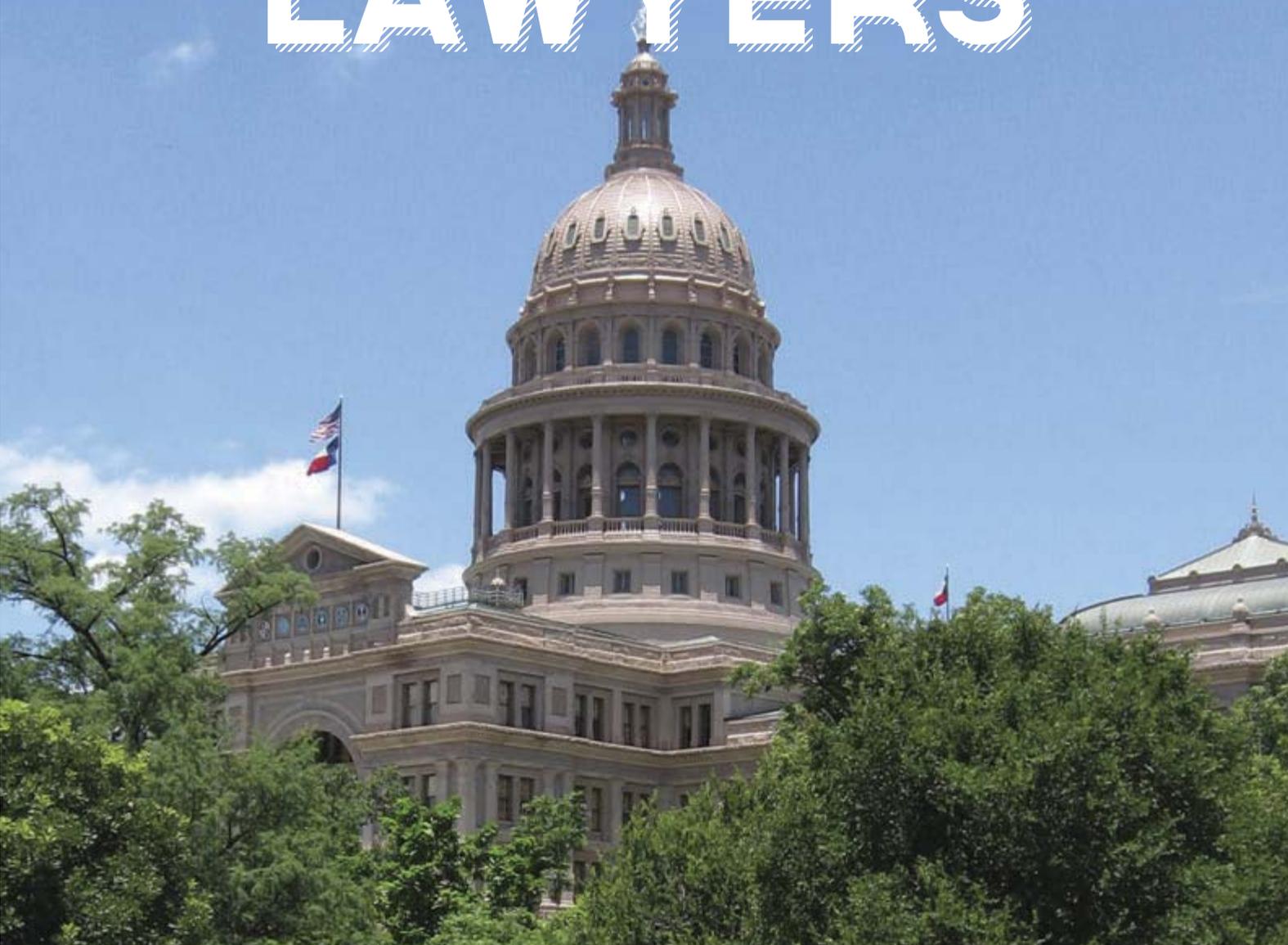
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Staci Semrad, *Portico Communications, LLC*

CAPITOL



LAWYERS



AT his Capitol office in May, state Rep. Joe Moody ('06), D-El Paso, recalled an inspirational message from his first week of law school at Texas Tech University.

Professor Brian Shannon closed his presentation to the incoming class with a film clip from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which portrayed lawyer Atticus Finch as virtuous, and told the students to go forth, always remembering the high calling of being an attorney.

"I don't think people in our society today think of lawyers in that way," Moody said. "So his message to us was that if we don't believe it's a high calling and profession to be respected, then how can we expect anyone else to think that?"

Moody is among a number of Texas Tech Law alumni committed to the high calling of their work in the state Capitol. These alumni hold powerful positions ranging from the House parliamentarian and the state education budget analyst to chiefs of staff, legislators, and a close advisor to the governor. Though their duties and positions vary widely, they share their legal training at Texas Tech and a desire to make a positive and lasting difference for the people of Texas.

For the Greater Good

One reason these alumni are motivated to excel in their jobs is the power their positions afford them to advance wellbeing on a large scale.

For Chris Griesel ('88), that means facilitating the democratic process. As parliamentarian and special counsel for the House of Representatives, he sits by the speaker during session and provides nonpartisan advice to members about the Texas Constitution and legislative rules and procedures.

From his office just outside the House chamber, he relayed his dogged loyalty and sense of duty with a smile: "Anyone who wants this job cares about that room out there more than anything else. They care about their 150 members and are willing to stand at a barricade in front of our chamber to repel the horde that tries to enter our space."

Other alumni at the Capitol are inspired to help vulnerable populations. A wish to help children motivated former elementary school teacher Emily Howell ('08) to apply to law school. She knew many excellent teachers who wanted to provide more, but had limited resources.

"I wanted to be in a position where I could do more for the children by doing more for the teachers," Howell said.

Last year, she became the public-school and higher-education budget analyst and general counsel for the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives. As such, she works in a support capacity, advising legislators as they decide how to allocate education funds.

"Being here in the Capitol has given me the knowledge that there are some really great elected representatives, who truly care about education issues and who are in good positions to



Rep. Joe Moody ('06), D-El Paso.

do the best that they can for our school children," Howell said.

As deputy policy director for Gov. Greg Abbott, Constance Allison ('95) also is in a position to help ensure the wellbeing of the state's children, among others. Her responsibilities include staying abreast of developing legislation, working with senators and representatives as they draft bills during the session, reviewing the nearly 1,500 bills passed that are sent to the governor's office for signature, advising the governor on policy ramifications of other issues, and working with executive-branch agencies to adopt rules to implement various bills.

"It is most satisfying when I know that a piece of legislation will have a significant positive impact on people's lives, such as a bill that will improve Child Protective Services and reduce incidents of child abuse or save children's lives," Allison said.

Rahul Sreenivasan ('07) also spoke about the fulfilling nature of his role. As chief of staff for Rep. Armando Walle, D-Houston, he spent countless hours working on legislation to resolve a recurring water outage problem in that district, for example. Though Sreenivasan says it's often an uphill battle for a minority party member to get a bill passed in the Republican-dominated House, he finds his work rewarding.

"Every job I've considered has had an element of helping people and a connection to doing the greater good," he said. "I feel very good about being a chief of staff for a member who



Rep. Dustin Burrows (04), R-Lubbock.

is very committed to public service and to representing his constituency.”

In the busy final days of the recent legislative session, Rep. Dustin Burrows (04), R-Lubbock, paused briefly to reflect on the importance of prioritizing measures that relate to the state’s most pressing needs, such as education and transportation.

“We need to take care of the things we need to spend money on first, and if we do that, then we can start talking about other things,” Burrows said.

This year, he worked on several bills, including one that would protect the livelihoods of farmers, and another that brought attention to the steeply rising costs of

pharmaceuticals.

For Moody, a pressing priority through the years has been criminal justice. Most recently, he jointly authored a bill that the governor signed into law in June that calls for the creation of a commission to review cases of wrongful conviction to help prevent their recurrence.

“You don’t want innocent people snagged in the process. That is a grave injustice,” he said. “Anything we can do to make the system less susceptible to those problems, the better for everybody. The more fair the system is, the more just the system is.”

He reached for a letter on his desk from the mother of the late Timothy Cole, a young

black Texas Tech student and U.S. military veteran who died in prison in 1999 after being wrongfully convicted of raping another student. In her letter, she thanked Moody for supporting legislation benefiting the wrongfully convicted, and a House resolution honoring her son.

“That letter was written to me six years ago, but I always keep it handy because it reminds me that there are very important things that we have to do here. And if I forget the story of Tim Cole, then I’m not doing my job,” he said.

Power Starts with Knowledge

Alumni at the Capitol credit their legal education at Texas Tech for preparing them for the work they do today.

The law school’s core classes teach students to think analytically and logically and are the building blocks of everything legislators do, Burrows said.

“That’s very important up here as we analyze policy—to take some of the emotion out of it and try to look at it from a logical perspective about what’s good for the region and for the entire state,” he said.

Law school also teaches how to consider issues from many different angles—a skill that comes in handy when trying to anticipate the unintended disasters of well-intended legislation, Allison said.

“Sometimes it’s just not apparent from a piece of legislation, but if you’re thinking critically and from different perspectives, you’re



Emily Howell (08), Texas House Appropriations Committee staff member.

going to have an easier time picking up on those unintended consequences,” she said.

Sreenivasan added that law school teaches students to write more concisely and strategically, “a crucial skill for politics.”

“Instead of just thinking about the policy idea you want passed, you also have to think about how you communicate that policy. How people feel about a lot of policy ideas really boils down to how you pitch them,” he said.

Moody mentioned a book from law school called *Texas Criminal Procedure*, co-authored by his Texas Tech Law Professor Charles Bubany. Moody keeps it at his desk at the Capitol and has referred to it multiple

times in past legislative sessions.

Griesel also spoke fondly of his law professors. Walking through the underground corridors of the Capitol, he occasionally stopped to point out wall photos of people with ties to Texas Tech who have served at the Capitol, including Chancellor Robert Duncan ('81) and the late W. Reed Quilliam Jr., who was Griesel's wills and trusts professor. As a state representative in the 1960s, Quilliam was instrumental in getting the appropriations needed to found the Texas Tech Law School.

Griesel expressed gratitude to those lawyers who have gone before him in serving the state: “I listen a lot to these ghosts on the wall that surround us, and that's why I keep coming back.”



Members gather around Parliamentarian Chris Griesel ('88) (seated) as they await Griesel's comments regarding the interpretation of the law on May 26, 2015.



Rahul Sreenivasan ('07), chief of staff for Rep. Armando Walle, D-Houston.

Unintended Careers

Some Texas Tech Law alumni who talk about unintended consequences are in jobs they did not anticipate. They arrived in their positions as the unforeseen but positive outcomes of circumstance, experience, and service.

“Each job built on the last one...I've never really had a plan. I've just done whatever came next, and it all worked out,” said Allison, whose journey to the governor's office included jobs with the state attorney general's office, a small law firm, a state senator, the former governor, and the former lieutenant governor.

Toward the end of law school, Howell discovered the Texas Legislative Council by chance and

soon went to work there helping legislators write education and other bills and amendments. Through that work she learned about opportunities at the Capitol and landed a job with the House Appropriations Committee last year.

“As with the Legislative Council, I'm not sure this job was my dream because I didn't really know that these kinds of positions existed... It's just something that I came across,” she said.

Perhaps no alum is more explicit in calling his job accidental than Griesel, who says he never planned to become a parliamentarian.

“I have a saying that anyone who wants to apply for this job should probably be disqualified, because they have the wrong idea of

what the job is. The job isn't anything to covet," he said.

A parliamentarian is called to serve the body and its membership, which requires considerable dedication and institutional knowledge, he said.

"You have to have a clear understanding of what the members need and want before you even step in. You have to be someone in that institution who has helped along the way," he said.

Griesel's career began with a job that his torts professor, the late J. Hadley Edgar, helped him secure with Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas Phillips. Griesel then worked for a prestigious law firm before putting in eight years of service at the Texas Legislative Council and later returning to the Texas Supreme Court as its rules attorney.

"It was a great precursor to this job of parliamentarian," he said, noting it taught him how rules were developed among the judges and applied in state courts, and gave him experience interacting with the Legislature.

He went to work for the House as deputy parliamentarian in 2004 and was appointed parliamentarian in 2011.

Grit and Stamina

Texas Tech Law alumni working at the Capitol value the enviable positions they hold, but insist their work is not as glamorous as it may appear.

Being a legislator is much more work than people probably realize, Burrows

said, noting that the House takes about 3,600 votes in a given session, many relating to major policy decisions.

"So it's a lot of early mornings and late nights just reading and having conversations with your staff and other members to try to understand what the policy implications are," he said.

Part of the job also involves reaching back to the district and visiting with people to get their input on upcoming legislative issues, which takes time, he said, noting: "A good way for a lawyer to look at it is, it's like having 170,000 different clients."

One of Howell's most vivid memories is watching the House debate the budget one afternoon this spring until about 6 a.m. the next morning.

"The members are so tired, but they do a great job of not losing focus as they go through the budget," Howell said. "It's exciting, and when they do the final vote and it gets passed out of the chamber, that's a real moment of satisfaction."

For her, passage is the reward for many long days and nights of her own spent working to help prepare the education section of the budget.

Though asked about awards and accolades, Howell, like other alumni, did not boast any.

"When you're working in a support capacity, it's more of a team effort. You don't have many individual honors," she said. "Your purpose is to help those elected members you work for. In some respect, their successes are yours."

Allison concurred: "There are no awards flying around up here. The governor is a very generous person with his kind words, but most of the things we do here don't make headlines, and that's fine. It doesn't matter if anybody ever knows."

She said her satisfaction comes from seeing the results of her work and making a positive difference

in others' lives: "Sometimes you have an opportunity to do something that is particularly meaningful. That will keep you going for a while."

—Staci Semrad



Sean Opperman, Mark McHargue, Preston Streufert, and Zachary Stephenson on the Texas Senate floor. Photo credit: Texas Senate Media Services.

OTHER CAPITOL LAWYERS

Mark McHargue ('90)

Legislative Director for Texas State Senator Craig Estes

Andrew Murr ('03)

Texas Representative, R-Kerrville

Sean Opperman ('10)

Director, Texas Senate Committee for State Affairs

Margaret M. Orgain ('12)

Session Analyst, Texas House of Representatives Research Organization

Jaime Pesantes ('14)

Deputy Director, Texas House of Representatives Committee for International Trade and Intergovernmental Affairs

Ron Reynolds ('99)

Texas Representative, D-Missouri City

Matt Schaefer ('05)

Texas Representative, R-Tyler

John T. Smithee ('76)

Texas Representative, R-Amarillo

Zachary Stephenson ('10)

General Counsel for Texas State Senator Brandon Creighton

Preston Streufert ('11)

Legislative Director for Texas State Senator Joan Huffman

Brian Thornton ('13)

Legislative Director for Texas Representative Dustin Burrows