

New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Program

Seminar 4: State Political Process



The New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Program is committed to developing knowledgeable, multicultural leaders within the food, agriculture, and natural resource industries of New Mexico.

Santa Fe Trip

By Katie Lara

My goal for our New Mexico Ag Leadership trip to Santa Fe was to learn more about the legislative process. Having been in FFA in high school and serving in student government in college, I was familiar with parliamentary procedure. Still, I was interested in the state legislative bill process including how bills are presented, debated, and become law/vetoed.

During the trip, we had quite a bit of free time. My favorite visit within the allotted free time was sitting in on the Senate and House chambers debates. Observing the debates was educational, entertaining, and interesting. It was great to see the unique life/career experiences that the debating senators and representatives utilized to respectfully agree or disagree with their colleagues.

We also had many scheduled visits throughout our time in Santa Fe. Of the planned visits, my favorite was dinner with several lobbyists. I enjoyed hearing their perspectives and how lobbying is more about making connections than anything else. It was also great to see that although they all worked for different industries and companies, they worked together, which is how things get accomplished at the Roundhouse. It provided me with the opportunity to gain insight as to how bills are formed and shaped to fit the mold of their overall point.

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From our time in Santa Fe, the biggest thing I learned about how the state government works is cooperation. There is cooperation amongst lobbyist, senators, representatives, and their staff. Those that are tasked with this spend either 30 or 60 days in Santa Fe and they have one mission: to better the lives of New Mexicans. While they may approach things differently or have other ideas for improving lives, their intentions are pure. These groups must cooperate and work together to get bills through the committee, onto the floor, passed, and signed into law by the governor.



Get Involved in the State Political Process

By Katelin Spradley

New Mexico Agricultural Leadership's fourth seminar focused on the state political process. My goal for the seminar was to develop a broader understanding of the agencies and processes that impact agriculture and natural resources. My time with New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau has allowed me to become familiar with the legislative process, so I looked forward to expanding that knowledge base. When considering applying for NMAL, one of the most appealing aspects was the opportunity to network with others in agriculture and natural resources. I hoped to build connections with individuals involved in the legislative process and state government.

The part of the seminar that I enjoyed the most was our visit with Missi Currier, President and CEO of the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association, Ashley Wagner, Vice President of Government Affairs for NMOGA, and Laura Riley, Realtor and Owner of Verde Realty and Gavilan Solutions. Around 30%-40% of our state's budget comes from oil and gas, so the industry is often at the center of political discussions. It was interesting to visit with Missi, Ashley, and Laura about how natural resource industries navigate the state political process. Missi mentioned that many issues that impact the oil and gas industry also impact those involved in agriculture. Agricultural producers, as well as oil and gas producers, regularly interact with the NM State Land Office, and Laura shared her vast knowledge from her experience working there. The state political process can be complex and nuanced, and I enjoyed learning some "ins and outs" of the process.

One consistent theme across the individuals we spoke with was the importance of relationships in politics.

One consistent theme across the individuals we spoke with was the importance of relationships in politics. The agriculture and natural resource groups emphasized the value of working with legislators and legislative staff to fulfill their accomplishments. Our state government is tasked with achieving a momentous task quickly when they head into the legislative session and advocacy groups play an integral role. Our class gained a better understanding and appreciation for the work that is done in Santa Fe. Our government's structure encourages individuals to express their vision regarding the direction of our state's policy and funding. Compromise and collaboration are key components of that. Furthermore, our unpaid legislators take time away from their jobs and families to complete their work in Santa Fe, which we, Class 16, are very appreciative of.

Ultimately, this seminar provided us with the opportunity to spend time in Santa Fe and gain exposure to our state's political process. My main takeaway from the seminar was to solidify my belief that everyone should be involved in forming our state's law and the direction of our funds. While it can seem intimidating to get involved, this experience has shown me that overcoming any doubts and leaning into active involvement is beneficial. Building a relationship with your state representative and senator during and outside the legislative session is a critical first step. Advocacy groups can undoubtedly help New Mexicans understand and navigate the process successfully. There is no better time to start than now!

You Never Really Know What You Don't Know

By Julie M. Hughes

I planned to listen as Class 16 of the New Mexico Agricultural Leadership program hit the road for Santa Fe to review the state political process. I wanted to learn more about the process from various viewpoints. I valued hearing from experts whose behind-the-scenes knowledge brought new perspectives.

As one of the few citizen legislatures in the country, you must admire those who serve in the New Mexico Legislature; they dedicate themselves to serving the state and their communities, giving up time with their families, and taking time from their ongoing careers. However, many individuals working behind the scenes have a substantial impact on the outcomes. I truly enjoyed listening to the lobbyists we met with and their individual approach to their work. The relationships that these individuals form are critical to the process.

Candie Sweetser, Government Affairs Manager for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, provided a unique perspective. She has served in the legislature and is currently legislative liaison. I appreciated her sharing the differences in her experiences and how she approaches her government affairs efforts differently, representing a state agency.

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I also enjoyed the impromptu presentation by Tiffany Rivera, Director of Government Affairs for New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau. She shared the priorities of their member organization during a short budget session.

It was great to hear Missi Currier and Ashley Wagner, with the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association, discuss how oil and gas and agriculture work together in New Mexico. They were joined by Laura Riley, Owner/Realtor for Verde Reality and Gavilan Solutions. I valued learning how they work to broaden their ability to highlight their association's efforts and needs. Laura also provided a great deal of knowledge on the New Mexico State Land Office, where she previously served as Deputy Commissioner. It was interesting to learn some of the history of how New Mexico's public lands are managed to benefit education in New Mexico.

Finally, I was excited to learn more about the history of the Roundhouse, the only round capitol building in the country. I think my curiosity regarding the capitol's history is directly related to spending time walking in circles. Once you enter, it's almost like being on a racetrack – you move around the building lap after lap until the race is over for another year.

Ultimately, I enjoyed walking through the corridors and appreciating the beauty of the building.

Land of Enchantment in Legislation

By Emily Harris

People move around crowded hallways, not slinking, but rather bustling about with great purpose. Movies that portray attempts to track someone down for chitchat in the hallway are not far off from reality. Despite the short trip, the Roundhouse and Santa Fe are sights to see during the legislative session. I had the opportunity to work with some hard-working women who are passionate about their careers and go the extra mile for their constituents. Seeing the time and energy they burn through to make the Land of Enchantment more than just a namesake was tremendously humbling.

With this being my first time participating in the state legislature, my goal was to listen and understand. Sitting in on meetings for observation purposes, we heard from a current colleague who previously served as an New Mexico state representative and is now the Government Affairs Manager. We also listened to a previous colleague who has since moved into the private sector. Approaching these meetings with a learning attitude was essential for me as I am not well-versed in political processes and job titles.

I enjoyed every person who took the time to speak with NMAL Class 16. They all do meaningful work and spend countless hours working to make our state better year after year. Candie Sweetser of the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) spoke on her time as a state representative and the transition to working at the New Mexico Department of Agriculture. Tiffany Rivera of the New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau (NMFLB) spoke on differences in her current position from her previous role as State Director of Government Affairs at the NMDA and what the NMFLB was looking at during this year's session. Missi Currier and Ashley Wagner from the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association (NMOGA) were able to speak on the oil and gas industry in New Mexico. I found this to be fascinating since I have very little experience with this sector of agriculture. The importance of the oil and gas industry in New Mexico should not be understated and was made abundantly more apparent upon completion of our trip to Santa Fe. Laura Riley lent us her years of experience and knowledge over dinner with our NMOGA guests, which felt infinitely on brand for a seminar in Santa Fe during the legislative session. Her New Mexico State Land Office years were stories to be heard. Her present success in realty and consulting is a testament to her connections, relationships, hard work, and experience.

Connection is necessary for such a large group of people who represent an even larger population.

The importance of networking and relationships within the state legislative process was incredible to see firsthand. Connection is necessary for such a large group of people who represent an even larger population of people. It requires them to come together and vote cohesively to work towards creating a better state. Committee meetings were formal meetings with an air of informality as the public could come into these meetings to share their agreeance or opposition to bills going through the process. These meetings are also where questions and good discussion can happen in order to move the bill forward or to thwart its efforts. Cooperation and interagency connections are vital to provide clarity to questions regarding many bills. My respect goes out to all those involved, in any capacity, in the legislative process, for the time and energy that you put forth to make where we live even better.

Understanding the State Political Processes of the 56th New Mexico Legislature at the Roundhouse

By Bernadette Romero-Benally

The New Mexico Agricultural Leadership (NMAL) Class 16 attended the New Mexico legislature session at the Roundhouse from February 5-7, 2024. I observed that everyone kept saying the event would take place over the course of thirty days. We learned New Mexico Legislature is a sixty-day session on odd years that would include more bills than the thirty-day sessions.

The first day began with Candie Sweetser providing an overview of what would be discussed during the session. Candie works as a Government Affairs Manager for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA). She shared bills that she currently monitors for the NMDA. Class 16 was tasked to research and track some of her assigned bills while they went through the legislative process.

I decided to research and track the Rangeland Pest Mitigation Program - house of representatives Bill 173 (HB 173). I was interested in understanding how an agricultural bill gets introduced, the tracking process from the introduction to the Roundhouse, and what becomes of it in the end. During this process, I learned that the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) originally introduced HB 173. Paperwork from the NMDA to the Roundhouse was tracked. Brad Lewis, the NMDA Agricultural & Environmental Services Division Director, showed me the summary paperwork that he created for the HB 173 Fiscal Impact Report.

Although HB 173 went to the Appropriation Committee, it is currently in a status of 'bill died'. I learned that the term 'bill died' refers to a bill that has not been discussed/reviewed in an assigned committee. I asked Ms. Sweetser if HB 173 could be reintroduced at the next New Mexico Legislature session. She informed me that unfortunately, legislation carryover cannot take place. However, if a sponsor wants a bill in the 'bill died' status to be considered during the next year, it must be reintroduced.

Overall, the New Mexico legislative experience was inspiring! I realized the importance of building and maintaining relationships between policymakers, those who implement and interpret policy, members of the agricultural community, and other industries. I was truly impressed by many conversations that took place over dinner with a leading NM industry, the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association, and women of business. The women of business shared their years of experience with the New Mexico legislature and land/water statuses throughout the state. Thank you, NMAL, for the experience of a lifetime!



Members of Class 16 with Candie Sweetser

A Lesson in Civics

By Luther Dunlap

My goal for the Santa Fe trip was to understand the legislative process better and how bills are passed.

I don't know if I necessarily had a favorite visit on the Santa Fe trip. I enjoyed the whole three days we were there. I enjoyed sitting and listening to the discussions and debates on the House and Senate floors, listening to the different perspectives that each senator and representative had on bills that were being presented on the floor. I enjoyed attending committee meetings, seeing the bills presented in committee, and getting passed to the House or the Senate.

The one thing that I learned the most is the comradery that the senators and representatives have with one another. While they may have their differences (Democrat or Republican), they are long-time friends and work hard together for a better New Mexico.

During one of the Senate sessions, the New Mexico Senate recognized Senator Pete Campos of Las Vegas, NM, for his many years of service to the New Mexico legislation and the citizens of New Mexico. I have never had the opportunity to meet Senator Campos; however, after listening to all the great things said about him, I know that he has a love and passion for the great state of New Mexico and its citizens.

I don't know if I really learned much about how the state government works more than I already knew. However, I did learn that I may want to run for Senate or the House when I retire. I also learned that I love our great state of New Mexico and enjoy having discussions with others about our state and what we citizens can do to make it better.



Members of Class 16 with NMOGA Missi Currier and Ashley Wagner with Laura Riley of Gavilan Solutions.

Next Stop for Class 16... Southeast New Mexico

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