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BY SHAWN MITCHELL,
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As of the printing of this issue, I will have been in the CEO role almost three full months. And in that amount of time I've come to gain a whole new appreciation for the work that TLABC does, and the commitment and energy of its board and members. I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to lead this organization.

And in my role as leader, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to thank Keri Grenier for all of her efforts on behalf of TLABC as President this past year, and to congratulate Sonny Parhar on his role as TLABC President. It is a pleasure to work with you both.

In the Fall I had the opportunity to attend the National Association of Trial Lawyer Executives (NATLE) Governance Affairs Conference (GAC) in Louisville, Kentucky. While you can read the full blog post at <https://tlabc.wordpress.com>, here's a precis of my thoughts and observations.

Attended by just over 100 TLA CEOs, their Presidents and government affairs aligned senior staff, the GAC was a great opportunity to network, learn how other TLAs go about their business, and attend a range of sessions focused on the challenge of lobbying government (both state and federal).

There were a total of 22 presentations and round tables, covering a range of topics and issues, during the three day event, including:

- Learning the language of the Conservative Culture (presented by Judge Kenneth Starr — yes, THAT Kenneth Starr)
- Creative ways to build relationships with lawmakers
- Engaging leaders and members in the legislative process — Making it meaningful and creating evangelists
- Self-driving vehicles
- Managing Member Expectations in the Legislative Arena

Taken from these and other sessions in which I participated, a few observations ...

TRUMPED

Almost without exception, American TLAs had spent the last 8 years doubling down on their relationships with Democrats and largely side-stepping Republicans. After the election results in 2016, most woke up terrified and unsure of what the future held for them when it came to advancing a legislative agenda on behalf of their members. Much of the conference was about sharing best practices on how to “speak Republican”.

BORN TO LOBBY

I was also struck by the very different posture or business orientation of the American TLAs compared to (what I am coming to understand about) Canadian TLAs. Even small associations are heavily invested in ongoing lobbying on a range of issues. The eye opener here for me was both the difference and the potential for us to explore being more invested in this activity beyond ad hoc campaigns.

EVERYTHING IS POLL-ITICAL

Given the extent to which TLAs are involved in lobbying, it follows that they are also becoming increasingly invested in polling and “testing the message.” There were a number of sessions on this topic, linking polling research to focus groups and the importance of not saying anything publicly on an issue until you'd tested your ideas and language in the field. Here again, at TLABC we have not had a history of behaving this way, but certainly we have seen the benefit of it most recently in the guidance we gained on positioning our thinking on no-fault and fixing the financial imbalance at ICBC.

IT'S ABOUT THE MEMBERSHIP, STUPID! (THINK JAMES CARVILLE, HERE)

One area where I believe we at TLABC still have lots of room to grow is on member engagement. American TLAs work very hard to be highly responsive to their members' concerns and to engage them in the association's work — beyond just the board and executive. They also have communication strategies that are focused on demonstrating the value that members receive from their TLA. This is something that TLABC does not do enough of.

WRAP UP

Overall, an excellent way for me to continue my orientation and onboarding at TLABC.

In coming issues I look forward to sharing my thoughts with you about TLABC and the work we do to support our members. And, as always, happy to hear your thoughts on this article or anything else you might like to fire my way. V