

Sul Ross Group (SRG) Bulletin 12

15 October 2020

Virtual Silver Taps, or Actual

On Tuesday, 6 October 2020, a “virtual” Silver Taps was held to honor Texas Aggie Victoria Walker. There has been a lot of chatter about the virtual mode, particularly on social media in light of permitting several thousands of people into Kyle Field to attend a football game. In fact, the Mays Business School Caucus to the Student Senate Speaker posted a letter voicing their disagreement – stating that we have not adapted. They said, “In absence of the Traditions Council’s preservation of traditions, we urge you, Mr. Speaker, to lead where they cannot.” On 8 October, The Eagle reported on an interview with TAMU President Young. In it, Young addressed this and said that the Traditions Council had “decided” to hold the ceremony remotely. He then went on to say, “I think we ought to have done it in person and we ought, going forward, to do it in person with appropriate precautions.” The Traditions Council then followed by saying that the ceremony format is “being revisited.” Question: who is in charge and could we just pick up the phone and offer some mentorship? The good news is that it was reported in [The Eagle](#) today, 15 October, that future Silver Taps will be done in person with precautions.

Kyle Field, 10 October 2020 - Fightin’ Texas Aggies 41 – gators 38!



On a bright, warm Saturday morning in Aggieland, the fightin’ Texas Aggies and their 12th Man faced off against the 3rd ranked and “vaunted” reptiles from Florida at 1100 on Kyle Field. As we know, Coach Fisher has “a history” with the gators from his “Noles” days. And he also has a history with Coach Dan Mullen who - an interesting character who has been trying to poach committed player recruits to the Aggies. So, things were predicted by Aggie players in the press conferences to be a “bit chippie.” And they were at that.

One heck of a contest ensued with the good guys (always the winners) outscoring the adversary! The 12th Man was fantastic in their support and made a difference in the outcome which drew some (very complimentary for us) comments from Mullen in his presser afterwards.



Mullen thought that it to be significant that the Texas A&M “crowd” made a difference in the outcome as reported by the gator beat writer, Graham Hall of [The SPUN](#). “It was pretty jarring to see how many Aggies were there considering the ongoing rise in COVID-19 rates around the country. The Aggies

reportedly let in 30,000 fans in for today's game. To me, it looked like far more than that."

Florida governor Ron DeSantis recently gave sports teams the go-ahead for full capacity at stadiums, including the state's college football teams. "So far, it doesn't sound like teams are prepared to take him up on it, but if Florida wanted to pack the stands, it could legally do so next week with LSU coming to town."

Mullen said that "it was pretty significant the Texas A&M [12th Man] crowd made a difference. Hopefully, the university administration follows the (Florida) Governor's ruling," Mullen said after the game, "to let us pack the swamp and give us the home-field advantage that Texas A&M had today. Absolutely - I want to see 90,000 in the swamp next week" he said. "The entire (Texas Aggie 12th Man) student section, it must have been 50,000 going crazy."

Coach Fisher was asked about all this in his press conference on Monday after the game, and if the Aggie fans were a key factor? He said yes! He also mentioned that they were at only "22% capacity," and that he could not wait until the other 78% got back in Kyle Field. Coach said that Aggies are the most loyal and involved fans in college sports. Gig 'em and BTHO the "bell clankers" next Saturday!

TAMU Presidential Search Firm Replaced

On 7 October, we learned that the presidential search firm, Isaacs-Miller, had been replaced by the Dallas firm R. William Funk and Associates.

The Protest on 26 July, and Threats



In Bulletin Ten (29 September 20) we commented on the 26 July protest at the Sully statue and here it is again:

"At the protest at the Sully Statue on 26 July, there was a confrontation between six former student "ole Ags" and some football players. Out of courtesy we are omitting names here although we have them all for sure. There was a threat made by one of the players and we have verified it by talking to the former student Ags who were there. We also confirmed that they, the former students, wrote a letter to both Chancellor Sharp and President Young describing the details of what happened, and the threats that were made by the individual to three of the ole Ags. To date, no answer has been received regarding corrective action and resolution. They are considering giving us a copy of the correspondence they sent the leadership. And they told us that if their inquiry goes unanswered much longer, they very well may pursue it via legal action. We shall stay on this and provide updates."

As an update, we now have a copy of the letter that the former students, who were there in front of the statue that day, sent to the TAMUS Chancellor. It states that rather than proffering charges, that the Chancellor deal with the young man's threatening actions

within the TAMU student codes. The letter also asks that he be considered for removal from the football team, cancellation of his scholarship, expulsion from TAMU, reported to the SEC, and issued a criminal trespass warning for life should he attempt to return to campus. To date, no response has been received, and the individual remains listed on the team's roster.

Gaines Statue Site

The Texas Aggie Magazine, September-October 2020 issue, page 25, states that the "new art installation" honoring Gaines and the 12th [Texas] Legislature will stand "*in a frequently visited area between the new Student Services Building and Rudder Plaza.*"

Dear Mr. Bjork

You may have left out a group of Texas Aggies from your list below...AGAIN! Seems you have been here long enough now to learn this. Either you don't know or perhaps it's an oversight. We cannot imagine that you would do it on purpose since you get most of your resources from former student donors.

"Howdy!

9 October 2020

With all of the hard work over the past several months in preparation for fall sports to begin, I am pleased and proud that we have successfully kicked off Texas A&M athletics for 2020-21! I am beyond impressed with the hard work and dedication our entire athletics department has shown to get us to this point. This entire process has only highlighted how the Aggie Core Values of Respect, Excellence, Leadership, Loyalty, Integrity and Selfless Service are the fabric of the Texas A&M community.

I want to say THANK YOU to everyone who helped get our student-athletes, coaches, staff and fans equipped for the unprecedented and unique season that COVID-19 has brought us. I specifically want to thank the following team members who have worked relentlessly to adapt to the changes and surprises we have recently faced:

THANK YOU to our student-athletes who have been resilient and adapted so well to all the new procedures and protocols they now must endure to compete.

THANK YOU to our Sports Medicine, Athletic Training, Sports Psychology, Performance Nutrition, Sports Performance and Sports Science teams who prepared our student-athletes for return to workouts, practice and competition.

THANK YOU to the 12th Man Foundation who adjusted our stadium seating plans several times and resealed Kyle Field and our other venues to accommodate only 25% capacity.

THANK YOU to 12th Man Productions who has increased our social and digital presence as we have adapted to this new virtual world.

THANK YOU to our Facilities, Events, Game Management and Field Crew who implemented an entire new stadium and game operations plan.

THANK YOU to the Texas A&M University leadership who has guided our entire campus through this pandemic and brought us all safely back to campus.

Everyone listed above, and many more, have worked so hard to give us the opportunity to participate in and host sporting events in our facilities this Fall and beyond. Tomorrow at 11 a.m. we host our second home football game in Kyle Field against the Florida Gators, and it is

always a privilege to play at Kyle Field. Those attending the game in person will see the protocols we have implemented to host fans as safely as possible. This is where we need the Aggie selfless service now more than ever. In order to BTHO COVID, and for Texas A&M to continue to have the best home field advantage in college football, we must do our part at all times! You must wear your face covering the entire game unless you are eating and drinking and stay in your assigned seats when yelling for our team. When you enter Kyle Field, when you stand or sit in your assigned seats, when you walk around the concourse and when you leave, wear your face covering. We are asking you to show great leadership and commitment to excellence on Saturday at Kyle Field in support of the work we have all done to this point. These two simple acts will not only allow us to continue to yell at Kyle Field on Saturdays but also are the only chance for the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band and tailgating to possibly return to the gameday experience. We appreciate the support of our donors, season ticket holders, fans, and everyone associated with our great University and athletics program for all of your support. I hope to see you soon at an Aggie sporting event - wearing your face covering of course!

Gig 'Em! Ross Bjork

Your former students (and doners) are the ones, because of their love for this Institution and in support of your Department, give back so you can have all the stuff you mentioned here! Because of them, you have the scholarships to the world's greatest University, the best facilities, and the promise to the recruited athletes, from your coaches, of a prosperous life due to The Aggie Network. They ARE the 12th Man! C'mon Man!

SRG Board Invited to Meet with Commission

The SRG President was notified that the Commission on Diversity, Inclusion and Equity (and Representations) wanted to speak to The Board about their work on the TAMU President's charter tasks – and what we may think about where the Commission is on them. Since we wrote them on the 6th of August about what our key issues of interest are, the SRG gladly accepted the invitation and looked forward to the interchange. The SRG letter would be the basis on which the SRG Board inquired and exchanged views. The meeting was scheduled for Monday morning of the 12th of October. For your reference and review, here is the letter we sent the Commission on 6 August:

6 August 2020

From: The Sul Ross Group Board of Directors

To: John Hurtado, '91 and Jimmy Williams, '83, Co-Chairmen of the Commission on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (and Representations), TAMU

Dear Gentlemen,

Since our 28 July letter, we, the Sul Ross Group Board of Directors, have now read the press reports about your first Commission meeting, and how you have organized and assigned your responsibilities. We applaud your focus on balance and the broader (and causal) issues. In that regard, and since we agree that this is correct, we offer some thoughts here about our views for

your consideration as you proceed. The Sul Ross Group (SRG) has been interested and involved in digging into many related issues for some time now. We trust that these will be useful to you during your challenge.

If we all love our great Institution, and we believe that we are set apart transcendently from any others (which we do), this is derived from our rich history of selfless service, our sense of duty culture, our core values system, and resultant traditions which bind us together as one wherein the parts equal a sum greater than the whole (and our strength). This Spirit, which others covet but cannot replicate, is definitely worth preserving as we march along into modernity - for a multitude of noble reasons - which we also believe. Thus, the leadership, including the administration, faculty, and coaches, all need to understand it, embrace it, nurture it and explain it to all newcomers (not that they don't, to some degree for sure). What has happened in the past two months has revealed some serious and embarrassing voids where the "optics" have been pathetic if we believe "We are the Aggies; the Aggies are we!" We in our cohort group of elder Texas Aggie former students, some 18,000, believe we well understand all this, and we shall be most pleased to assist in any way we can in a mentoring, supporting and enlightening manner.

Diversity: First, we believe it is vital, but we also believe, in the literal sense, by itself is divisive. That would be the opposite from "E Pluribus Unum." With inclusiveness it becomes a unified sum larger than the parts. What is missing in the narrative at TAMU is the vital, "inclusive," welcomed integration and assimilation into what we are as described above! You should therefore review the Diversity Program here, including the leadership, The Council, its representation, The Plan, the process it produces, and the objectives therein. You will note (aside from the required compliance with federal and state law) that what we have said here about assimilation is never mentioned. It may be that what really occurs is the opposite. If so, that needs to change, and if we cannot get buy in, then some people need to be let go with their replacements possessing a fresh sense of understanding and purpose.

Racism: Racism is unacceptable given our core values! We look forward to learning what you report about the recent charges of "systemic racism" and that you also read what Professor Thomas Sowell says about it. We also assume you are going to review the system of reporting it, investigating it, correcting and/or punishing those involved in episodes of racist activity, and the consequences for those who abuse it by false claims of it. And as you indicated in your remarks, reported by the press, we applaud that you intend to keep outcomes in balance and in historical context!

"BLM": The expression is one thing, but the organization is a Marxist, radical entity. So, in your work, you should sort this out before you proceed. The organization is the antithesis of our Constitutional Republic and TAMU for that matter. We know that those who feel offended use this expression, but there are a multitude of other Texas Aggies, who have worked for social justice for a lifetime, are likewise offended because they truly believe they "are not the enemy!" You need to square this particularly with the younger group on your team and understand that there are always "three sides to every story!"

Comportment Standards for Professors and State Employees (Public Servants): We would not have a great University without great teachers and faculty members. But the past two months has exposed some who are not of such high caliber, particularly in one of the Colleges. Out of this, we want to know and understand the specific and clear standards of comportment as conditions for (State) employment at TAMU. If they do not exist, then we really have a problem to fix. Subject matter is one thing but being a professor does not include agenda driven and

radical political activism. Given the call to duty to teach, it seems (like in the military), there should be a standard of apolitical, balanced professorship. And these should be outside the umbrella of academic freedom and tenure. The question is “What are they?” Are they sufficient and complete, who enforces them, and if not in compliance and spirit of them who ushers guilty parties to somewhere else? As Professor John Ellis offers in his book about “one party campuses,” this kind of thing is a threat to our campus freedom of speech in America much less TAMU. We look forward to what you find and recommend.

Freedom of Expression: We believe that we, as elder Texas Aggie former students, well understand this precious right guaranteed by the US Constitution (despite having been lectured about such). We embrace that and are thankful for it as-long-as we can be civil, accountable and responsible with some sort of sense of consequence for what we say. In the past two months, we have sadly witnessed some embarrassing “conflicts in agenda” with supporting cohorts who were offended. Most of us never thought we’d see Ags vs Ags confrontations. The embarrassing optics of this is not us for sure (at least who we say we are)! And the editorialization about such episodes from those in charge has been meager. We suppose, therefore, that this is why a Commission was appointed, but the timing may be way late to need.

If we believe “We are the Aggies” as one, and thus our athletic teams are in competitions supported by the rest of us as the 12th Man, then the notion that political expressions at games about social justice is the wrong venue. And during protest activities, threatening and vulgar language, certainly going unpunished by the administration, coaches and mentors of those involved is inconsistent and not acceptable. We look forward to your findings about this also.

It would be useful for the Commission to address the question before proceeding too far with your work: “To whom does TAMU belong?” We have our version of the answer and will share it if you want. What you find and report should be well connected to the answer. Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Tom Reid. '61
President*

As a follow-up and feedback to our members, we had our SRG Board’s zoom meeting with Commissioner Dr. Jimmy Williams '83 and some of his members the 12th of October as scheduled. They were kind to meet with us and we had a frank and constructive exchange in an hour-long session (longer than originally allocated which was appreciated by us). Joining in was Committee Chairwoman Tiana Sanford '04 and Committee Co-Chairwoman Dr. Mary Ann Covey '92, and others. In our group, joining the SRG President, Tom Reid '61, was Joe Ashy '62, Jay Blume '63 and Dr. John Adams '73.

Many topics were covered during the session. We asked them for their Commission definitions for “diversity” and “systemic racism” – the reason being that their commissioned tasks by President Young compel them to report on both. And, unless both definitions not only exist but are clear and unambiguous, then it would be impossible to make judgements about the findings in a report void of them. The crux of the answer was there can be many interpretations of both the terms’ definitions, but one can google both and find them.

As you may recall, the first announcement by President Young on commissions was to basically form and ordain two commissions: One on “diversity, inclusion and equity” and the other on “representations” (meaning monuments and statues with first priority on the LSR statue). When the ongoing Commission on “Diversity, Inclusion and Equity” was actually appointed, “representations” was not included in the title for some unexplained reason. So, we asked about this to confirm that monuments were being addressed and would be included its report findings - and specifically on the LSR statue. The answer was yes. The commissioner also told us that all four Committees of the Commission (with different titles inferring different focus areas) had received guidance to address and report on the LSR statue. We find this to be strange. As we concluded the dialogue, it was noted by the Commissioner that if sizable cohorts [of the student body] were found to be “uncomfortable” about any particular issues and areas, that they would be “brought forward” in the report.

Another point was important from both parties’ perspectives - that the modus operandi of the SRG Board was and still is to make and establish relationships with pertinent student groups and their advisors, so not to “dictate” but to suggest and say at times when appropriate “have you thought of,” as mentors! This was made difficult during the summer because of the pandemic. But we are not abandoning this process for sure. Examples of this are key members of: VP of Student Affairs, Dr. Danny Pugh and his key staff; Eric Mendoza, the Student Body President; the Speaker of the Senate Zach McCue; The Traditions Council Chair; Corps Commander Tanner Cedrone; fish Camp Director Ryan Brown; Commandant BG Joe Ramirez; the Fraternity-Sorority Joint Council, and others. Our objective is to be constructively helpful as elder Aggies in perpetuating what makes Teas A&M University special while being inclusive with the huge, diverse Texas Aggie Family – “We are the Aggies, the Aggies are we!”

Suffice it to say, both parties agreed on one thing for sure – That TAMU is a great institution that has been set apart from other institutions by a record of service before self, the answering of the call to duty in all sectors, core values which guide us, valued and rich traditions and “A spirit that can ne’r be told!” And over the past 144 years, change has been inevitable and constant. Our SRG founder, Lester Potter, charged us to preserve that part as we navigate the challenging trek from the traditional to modernity. With the huge changes in the size and diversity of our student body over those years, we all want to preserve what “got us here. Fightin’ Texas Aggies can!

You can reach us at SRG president@aggienetwork.com

Reminder: Anyone (Ags and non Ags, SRG Ags and all other Ags too) can “opt in” by going to <https://www.aggienetwork.com/theassociation/sulrossgroup.aspx> and simply putting in your name and email address, and then clicking on “submit.” You will then automatically receive all the SRG Bulletins.