

# TEXAS DELEGATION BIOS

## NOVEMBER 2015: CUBA



### **Texas Governor Greg Abbott** State of Texas

Elected to serve as the 48th Governor of the State of Texas, Greg Abbott has a strong record of conservative leadership as Texas' longest-serving Attorney General. A husband and father, Governor Abbott has spent his career fighting to preserve Texas values like faith, family and freedom for future generations.

As the state's chief law enforcement official, Governor Abbott made protecting Texas communities the focus of his tenure as Texas' longest-serving Attorney General. Shortly after taking office as Attorney General, Governor Abbott established a Cyber Crimes Unit to arrest criminals who use the Internet to prey upon children; a Fugitive Unit to arrest convicted sex offenders who violate their parole; and an expanded Medicaid Fraud Control Unit to crack down on elder abuse and waste of taxpayer dollars. During his time serving as Attorney General, he has collected more than \$31 billion in child support for Texas children. In 2014, his office was recognized as the nation's best child support program by the National Child Support Enforcement Association. As a candidate for governor, Governor Abbott cast a vision to build a better future for Texas, a vision focused on creating jobs and economic opportunity, improving education, building transportation infrastructure and securing Texas' border in the face of federal government inaction.

Prior to serving as the 50th Attorney General of Texas, Governor Greg Abbott served as a Justice on the Texas Supreme Court and as a State District Judge in Harris County. A native Texan, Governor Abbott was born in Wichita Falls and raised in Duncanville. After graduating from The University of Texas at Austin with a B.B.A. in Finance, he received his law degree from Vanderbilt University Law School. Shortly after graduating from law school, he was partially paralyzed by a falling tree while jogging. Governor Abbott and his wife, First Lady Cecilia Abbott, a former school teacher and principal, have been married for 34 years. They live in Austin with their daughter, Audrey.



### **First Lady Cecilia Abbott** State of Texas

Cecilia Abbott's story reminds us all that the American Dream is alive and well in Texas. The granddaughter of immigrants from Mexico, Cecilia was raised in San Antonio by parents who were both educators, and who instilled in Cecilia, her sister and two brothers a love of learning and helping others. Cecilia took their lessons to heart, and studied at the University of Texas at Austin before subsequently earning three degrees from the University of St. Thomas in Houston: a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, a Master's degree in Education and a Master's degree in Theology.

Cecilia then devoted her life to serving others. She has been a teacher, vice-principal, and principal at several Catholic schools across Texas. Most recently she served as the principal of the Cathedral School of Saint Mary in Austin from 1996 to 2001. Cecilia then went on to another noble calling working in senior health care services, where she served as the managing director of community relations from 2004 to 2013 for a health care company specializing in senior adult health care facilities and services.

But Cecilia hasn't only devoted her professional life to helping others; she's done the same thing in her personal life. She currently serves on the board of several educational organizations – the University of St. Thomas Board of Directors, the Huston-Tillotson University Board of Directors, and the Saint Gabriel's Catholic School Board of Trustees. Cecilia is also active in numerous philanthropic groups - she is a member of the Alzheimer's Association Capital of Texas Chapter, Women's Symphony League of Austin, the Austin Chapter of the National Charity League, and the Dell Children's Women's Trust. Cecilia is a former member of the State Board of Educator Certification, where she served from 2001 to 2008, and also served on advisory boards for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children Texas Regional Office, the Holy Trinity Seminary, the Austin Diocesan School, Ballet Austin, and the Principals' Center at Harvard Graduate School of Education. Cecilia believes strongly in giving back to our communities.

But most importantly, Cecilia is a proud mother to her daughter, Audrey, and a devoted wife to her husband of 34 years, the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott. With her husband's election as Governor, Cecilia made history by becoming the first Hispanic First Lady of Texas. The Abbott Family lives in Austin with their two dogs, Oreo and Pancake.

# Office of Texas Governor Greg Abbott



**Daniel Hodge**  
**Chief of Staff | Office of the Governor**

Governor Greg Abbott appointed Daniel Hodge as Chief of Staff at the Governor's Office on January 20, 2015. Prior to his appointment as Chief of Staff, Hodge served as First Assistant Attorney General at the Texas Attorney General's Office, where he was responsible for overseeing day-to-day operations at the more than 4,000-employee agency. A graduate of Davidson College and the University of Texas Law School, Hodge is a native Texan who grew up in Fort Worth but has lived in Austin since he first went to work for Governor Abbott in 2001.



**Robert Allen**  
**Deputy Chief of Staff | Office of the Governor**

Governor Greg Abbott appointed Robert Allen as Deputy Chief of Staff at the Governor's Office on January 20, 2015. Prior to his appointment, Robert Allen served as Deputy Chief of Staff at the Office of the Attorney General, where he assisted with the administration of the more than 4,000-employee agency. He has served Governor Abbott since 2003. A native Texan, Allen earned a bachelor's degree from The University of Texas at Austin.



**John Reed Clay**  
**Senior Advisor to the Governor | Office of the Governor**

Governor Greg Abbott appointed Reed Clay as Senior Advisor to the Governor on January 20, 2015. Before being appointed, he served as Senior Counsel to the Attorney General, having previously served as Texas' Assistant Solicitor General. Prior to his service to the State of Texas, Clay was a litigator for the U.S. Department of Justice. A native Texan, Clay is a graduate of Wake Forest University and the Duke University School of Law.



**Bryan Daniel**  
**Economic Development & Tourism Division Executive Director | Office of the Governor**

Bryan Daniel was appointed to lead the Governor's Office of Economic Development and Tourism (EDT) in January 2015. The Governor's Office of Economic Development and Tourism promotes the State of Texas as a leading global business climate and premier travel destination. As Executive Director, Daniel provides leadership to the Commission for Women, Office of Aerospace, Aviation, and Defense, Texas Military Preparedness Commission, Texas Small Business Advocacy, Texas Workforce Investment Council, Texas Music Office, and the Texas Film Commission.

Daniel joined Governor Abbott's administration after serving as the Senior Administrator for Trade and Business Development at the Texas Department of Agriculture. He previously served as Vice President for Business Development at Agricultural Workers Mutual Auto Insurance Company and as the Texas State Director of Rural Development.

Daniel holds both a master's degree and bachelor's degree from Texas Tech, where he was also Coordinator of Student and Alumni Programs.



**Drew DeBerry**  
**Policy Director | Office of the Governor**

Governor Greg Abbott appointed Drew DeBerry as Policy Director when he took office in January 2015. DeBerry manages a team of policy advisors who serve as primary liaisons with each executive branch state agency and support the Governor's policy initiatives and legislative decisions.

Prior to joining Governor Abbott, DeBerry was Deputy Commissioner of the Texas Department of Agriculture, where he served in this agency executive role since 2007. This followed serving as the White House Liaison and Deputy Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of Agriculture from 2001 until 2006.

A graduate of Texas Tech University, Drew and his wife, Gayle, have three children and live in Dripping Springs, Texas.



**Matt Hirsch**  
**Director of Communications | Office of the Governor**

Matt Hirsch currently serves as Advisor and Communications Director for Texas Governor Greg Abbott. He has served in various communications roles for Presidential, U.S. Senate, and Gubernatorial candidates. Hirsch is a graduate of the George Washington University in Washington, DC.



**Lauren Bean Clay**  
**Senior Advisor to the Governor for the Office of the First Lady | Office of the Governor**

Lauren Bean Clay currently serves as Senior Advisor to the Governor for the Office of the First Lady. Previously, she served as the Deputy Communications Director at the Office of the Attorney General, a position she assumed in 2010 after serving as Communications Director to U.S. Representative Michael Burgess, MD, and Deputy Press Secretary for U.S. Senator John Cornyn. A native Texan, Clay is a graduate of The University of Texas at Austin.



**Chelsea Holden**  
**Senior Advisor to the First Lady | Office of the Governor**

Chelsea Holden currently serves as Senior Advisor to the First Lady and works on a variety of issues for the Governor, including education, economic development, and government affairs. Previously, she worked as the director of marketing at Harden Healthcare. Holden also worked as a staff assistant at The White House and the Department of Defense. She is a graduate of Southern Methodist University with a degree in corporate communications and public affairs.



**Matt Sniadecki**  
**Senior Advance Representative | Office of the Governor**

Matt Sniadecki serves as Senior Advance Aide for Texas Governor Greg Abbott. As advance aide, Sniadecki works with the Governor's protective detail as well as various outside organizations to plan logistics for the Governor's travel and meetings. Prior to working for Governor Abbott, Sniadecki worked for the Lieutenant Governor of Texas. He completed his undergrad from the University of Texas at Austin in 2011.



**Cody Kloster**  
**Communications Aide | Office of the Governor**

Cody Kloster is a photographer and communications aide for the Texas Governor and is tasked with highlighting successful programs and initiatives within Texas. Before joining Governor Abbott's professional staff, Kloster dedicated part of his career to working in organic agriculture on a farm that sustained food for several local restaurants. Since that time, Kloster has devoted time to the reforestation efforts happening across the United States.



**Garrett Nerren**  
**Executive Aide to the Governor | Office of the Governor**

Garrett Nerren serves as Governor Abbott's Executive Aide. He graduated from Texas A&M in May of 2014, receiving a B.A. in Political Science. Garrett was heavily involved across the campus of Texas A&M, specifically in Greek Life and Student Government, making a run for Student Body President his junior year. He currently serves on the Texas A&M Greek Former Student Board and is a member at Austin Stone.





## **Tracye McDaniel**

**President and CEO | Texas Economic Development Corporation, Inc.**

Tracye McDaniel is the President and CEO of Texas Economic Development Corporation, Inc., an independently funded and operated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, whose mission is dedicated to economic development, business recruitment, and job creation in the State of Texas. Texas Economic Development Corporation operates the TexasOne™ Program which coordinates efforts with the Office of the Governor for strategic marketing and lead generation activities.

Formerly with Choose New Jersey, Inc., McDaniel led global promotion, lead generation and project management for economic growth and job creation in the Garden State and is part of the state's award-winning economic development organization: The New Jersey Partnership for Action (PFA). Under the leadership of Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno, the Partnership serves as the starting point for all initiatives, policies and efforts related to growing New Jersey's economy and creating quality, sustainable jobs.

Ms. McDaniel has more than 30 years of state and regional level experience as a widely recognized strategist in all facets of economic development, including public relations, tourism and international business development. She has led successful economic development organizations in Texas. In 2007, Ms. McDaniel served as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Greater Houston Partnership (GHP), Houston, TX, regarded as a top global location for business.

She holds leadership positions in numerous professional and industry organizations and sits on the Board of Directors of the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), the world's top organization for economic development professionals. She was also named by NJBIZ among New Jersey's 2014 Best 50 Women in Business, as well as the 100 Most Powerful People in New Jersey Business. McDaniel was appointed by Governor Chris Christie to both the Council on Innovation and the New Jersey Military installation Growth and Development Task Force during her time in New Jersey.

A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, Ms. McDaniel is also a Ford Foundation Regional Sustainable Development (RSD) Fellow, a program of American Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE).



## **Michael Chrobak**

**Executive Vice President, Lead Generation | Texas Economic Development Corporation, Inc.**

Michael Chrobak is Executive Vice President, Lead Generation, of the Texas Economic Development Corporation. He is responsible for spearheading research-based lead generation and strategic partnership activities for TexasOne, including business attraction and expansion of jobs, investment and industry development for the state.

Previously, Chrobak served as the Chief Economic Development Officer at Choose New Jersey, Inc., a privately funded organization that encourages and nurtures economic growth throughout the state of New Jersey, including a focus on making New Jersey's most distressed cities engines for growth and opportunity.

During his four-year tenure at Choose New Jersey, Chrobak identified more than 19,800 new business contacts, established a business pipeline of more than 600 new project leads, qualified 227 new business projects considering doing business in New Jersey and secured 66 business project commitments to New Jersey that included the potential for 12,818 jobs and \$1.39 billion private investment for New Jersey.

Previously, Chrobak served as the Chief Financial Officer for the Economic Development & Tourism Division within the Office of Governor Rick Perry. He also served as the Director of the Texas Economic Development Bank, where he created and developed the financial due diligence practices for economic development programs in the state of Texas.

Chrobak served in prior leadership positions as Senior Director of Dell Ventures, a strategic business development initiative for Dell Computers, as Director of Corporate Development, computer products and Internet services for Compaq Computer, and as Manager, Product Development and International Business Development, education and calculator products for Texas Instruments.

Chrobak holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from New Jersey Institute of Technology, a Master of Business Administration from Texas Tech University and a Master of Arts in Economics from Southern Methodist University. He was recently recognized as one of the Top 50 Economic Developers in North America by Consultant Connect.



**Jack Webb**  
**Senior International Business Advisor | AWSCI LLC**

Jack M. Webb has been a businessman, lawyer, geologist, mediator, lobbyist, farmer, diplomat, and soldier. He presently is the Senior International Business Advisor for AWSCI, LLC.

He has undertaken thirty-four federal court appointments as Trustee in complex business reorganization cases, Couch Mortgage Company, and twelve state court appointments as Special Deputy Receiver for Texas insurance companies, Employers Casualty Company, Chairman of the Board and General Counsel of Republic Capital, Senior Vice President of First City Texas, Vice President, Secretary and Assistant General Counsel of Gulf Resources & Chemical Corporation and as legal counsel for Panhandle Eastern Corporation and Standard Oil Company of California.

He received a Doctor of Jurisprudence from Tulane University and Bachelor of Science in Geology from Centenary College of Louisiana prior to service as a Captain in the U.S. Army tank corps. In 1999, he attended the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.



**Samuel Webb**  
**CEO/General Counsel | AWSCI LLC**

As the CEO and General Counsel of AWSCI, LLC Mr. Webb has created a company from its origin. Founding the company in 2005 with his wife Ann, they have grown from a one-room home spa business to a multi-million dollar acquisition of their skin care line in 2011. The company continues to expand under his guidance and is now a leader in medical esthetics, licensing education (including esthetics license, eyelash extension license and laser hair removal license), and skin care products. Training people from all levels of ability, the Webb's give people the skills and ability to start a trade in the beauty industry.

Prior to going full time with his own business, Mr. Webb worked for the Texas General Land Office primarily as Deputy Commissioner of Coastal Resources including a gubernatorial appointment as the Texas representative on the Coastal States Organization. His other roles included work with the Energy Management, Government Relations and Veterans Land Board divisions.

Mr. Webb has also worked as a management consultant in the timber industry and as an attorney in the oil and gas, litigation and corporate law areas. He has a wide range of personal interest and has traveled extensively including 30 foreign countries. His BA degree is from TCU in Political Science with a minor in Russian Language Studies.



**Saba Abashawl**  
**Chief External Affairs Officer | Houston Airport System, City of Houston**

As Chief External Affairs Officer for the Houston Airport System, Saba Abashawl oversees Global Industry & Government Relations, Corporate Communications and various stakeholder initiatives at all three airports. She manages a variety of efforts that collectively provide vital support network for new and expanded air service in Houston that help fuel economic growth for the entire Gulf region.

As lead liaison to Federal Departments (Homeland Security, State, & Commerce) on facilitation issues, Saba has brought together multiple governmental, public and private agencies in exploring new and unique approaches for maximizing efficiency, establishing IAH as a model U.S. Port of Entry and leading the nation in new enrollment for the Global Entry program.

Saba also serves as the Executive Officer for the Mayor of Houston in foreign affairs and business development initiatives, aiding many Houston businesses with significant contacts and joint venture opportunities. The arrival of new airlines, along with the expansion of air service options from existing carriers, impacts economic growth and leads to a greater level of connectivity experienced by millions of Houstonians.



**Mario C. Diaz**  
**Director of Aviation | Houston Airport System**

Mario C. Diaz is the Director of the City of Houston Department of Aviation. He is responsible for the executive leadership of the Houston Airport System and its three aviation facilities — George Bush Intercontinental Airport, William P. Hobby Airport and Ellington Airport— and its more than 1,300 employees. Since his arrival in Houston in 2010, Diaz has led efforts to establish Bush Intercontinental as the region's long-haul, full service international airport; convert Hobby to a regional international airport of the Americas; and develop Ellington as the nations' 10th licensed spaceport. Prior to 2010, Diaz was the deputy general manager for Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. His 17-year career with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey began in 1981 and included an 18-month stint as the assistant director of the redevelopment program at John F. Kennedy Airport. He also worked at Newark Liberty International Airport and Teterboro Airport.



**Ernest Bezdek**  
**Director Trade Development | Port of Beaumont**

Mr. Ernest Bezdek has a professional career spanning 35 years in the international shipping and port industry primarily in Houston/Beaumont, Texas. His shipping career includes the U.S. company Lykes Lines, the Danish shipping company Nordana and the French company Delmas/Bollere Group as Vice President in charge of their North American sales effort.

Ernest currently serves as the Director of Trade Development for the Port of Beaumont and is responsible for their international sales efforts as well as real estate expansion and development activities.

He has served in the following volunteer trade capacities during his career in the international shipping industry: President - West Gulf Intermodal Transportation Association, President / Board Member - Transportation Club of Houston, Houston Chapter President - National Defense Transportation Association, Texas Regional President – National Defense Transportation Association, Director / Vice President - Propeller Club of Southeast Texas, and Director / Treasurer – Texas Cuba Trade Alliance.



**Judy Hawley**  
**Port Commissioner | Port of Corpus Christi Authority**

Judy Hawley served 8 years in the Texas House of Representatives. She was the Executive Director of the San Patricio Economic Development Corporation prior to joining a small technology company as the Texas business development lead.

Hawley's recent community affiliations include serving as chair of the Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corporation, chair of the Texas State Aquarium Board and co-chair of the Chamber Infrastructure Committee. Hawley chairs the State I-69 Corridor Advisory Board and serves on numerous other statewide transportation boards including the Texas Transportation Institute Advisory Committee, the Alliance for I-69 and the Border Trade Advisory Committee. She has been a Commissioner for the Port of Corpus Christi Authority for 10 years.



**Charles Zahn**  
**Vice Chair | Port of Corpus Christi Authority**

Zahn holds a Bachelor of Arts from Texas A&M University and a Doctor of Jurisprudence from Baylor University. He is Partner in the Law Offices of Charles W. Zahn, Jr. He is a long-time resident of Port Aransas, Texas, where his community involvement and organizational affiliations include Port Aransas Parks and Recreation Board, Port Aransas Charter Commission, Port Aransas Rotary Club, Friends of the Ellis Library, Keep Port Aransas Beautiful, Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association, Aransas County ISD Education Foundation, Coastal Conservation Association, to name a few. Although a resident of Port Aransas, he also serves on the Nueces County Board of Park Commissioners.

Because of his commitment to his community, he has received numerous awards with the Boy Scouts of America, has also been named 2005 Citizen of the Year by the City of Port Aransas and is a recipient of the Jerry McDonald Award for Service to Youth.





**Roger Guenther**  
**Executive Director | Port of Houston Authority**

Roger Guenther was named the Executive Director of the Port of Houston Authority in 2014. He previously served as Deputy Executive Director of Operations and was responsible for all container and breakbulk cargo operations, management of capital development projects, facility and asset maintenance, and real estate interests. Guenther currently serves on TxDOT's Freight Advisory Council and Port Authority Advisory Committee, and is a member of the Board of Visitors of Texas A&M University at Galveston and Texas A&M Transportation Institute Advisory Council. He holds a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Texas A&M University and an MBA in International Trade and Finance from the University of St. Thomas. Guenther resides in Pearland with his wife Fabiana and two children, and he is actively involved with youth programs at his church and is a dedicated supporter of Texas A&M athletics.



**Janiece M. Longoria**  
**Chairman | Port of Houston Authority**

Janiece Longoria has served as Port of Houston Authority Chairman since she was unanimously appointed January 8, 2013. Longoria is a University of Texas honors graduate and received her J.D. from the University of Texas School of Law. She is on the board of CenterPoint Energy, Inc. and Superior Energy Services, Inc. and is the former Vice Chairman of the University of Texas System's Board of Regents. She serves on the board of directors of the University of Texas Law School Foundation, the Greater Houston Partnership and the Texas Medical Center, and the UT MD Anderson Cancer Center Board of Visitors. Longoria has received numerous honors, including the University of Texas Distinguished Alumnus Award, the Sandra Day O'Connor Award for Board Excellence, the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Female Executive of the Year Award, and has been inducted into the Greater Houston Women's Chamber of Commerce Hall of Fame.



**Cynthia Thomas**  
**President | TriDimension Strategies, LLC**

Founded in 1986, TriDimension Strategies, LLC specializing in public sector consulting and Cuba trade. Ms. Thomas holds an M.A. in Public Affairs and a B.S., Summa Cum Laude, in Governmental Research, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Since 2004, Ms. Thomas has been responsible for over \$85 million in U.S. sales to Cuba. She has made 38 business trips to Cuba.

Ms. Thomas is the founding president of the Texas-Cuba Trade Alliance. She has served on the executive committee of the North Dallas Chamber of Commerce and as a board member for the Volunteer Center of Dallas.

She has over 30-years of government relations experience in federal, state and local government issues, including four years as a policy analyst and a research director in the Minnesota Senate.



**Dee Vaughan**  
**Chief Operating Officer | Vaughan Farms, Inc.**

Dee Vaughan resides and farms in Moore County, Texas, where he produces corn, cotton, sorghum, and wheat, and is a contract grower of sorghum seed.

Vaughan serves as a director of the Corn Producers Association of Texas, the Texas Corn Producers Board, and Plains Cotton Growers, Inc. He is the current chairman and past president of the Southwest Council of Agribusiness. He served on the National Corn Growers Association board and as president of that organization in 2004. Through his service on these boards

Vaughan has significant interaction with producers of many commodities across the United States and specifically Texas. Vaughan has worked extensively on policy and regulatory issues pertaining to agriculture, energy, transportation, and trade. He served as a corn industry representative to the Doha round of WTO negotiations, to the WTO headquarters in Geneva, and traveled on numerous trade missions to the European Union and Russia. In his role as president of the National Corn Growers Association he had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Cuban government in Washington, DC and in Guadalajara, Mexico to discuss expanding food trade between the United States and Cuba. He continues to work on regulatory and policy issues as the Issues Committee chairman of the Texas Corn Producers Board.