

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Quick Chat with Tal Coley

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We caught up with AmericanHort's new Director of Government Affairs to see how his new gig was going.

GrowerTalks: What are your immediate thoughts after “surviving” your first industry event?

Tal Coley: What I love about this industry is they put their partisan hats in a drawer and they conduct meetings through the prisms of what is best for this industry and I think it's refreshing to see people come together like that.

GT: Your new job lobbying for AmericanHort is not a complete career change for you, it's just a different industry, correct?

TC: Yes, after I left the military in 2008, the new GI bill came out and I ended up using it [to help pay to get a Master's at] the University of Miami for International Administration. After that, I got in touch with Concerned Veterans for America and they were just starting, so I was there right at the beginning. Working for them was quite unique and there was a lot of advocacy work involved in that; I was the point of contact on the Hill for the organization. We did a lot of fly-ins as well, so I had institutional knowledge with that and it carried over very well to Impact Washington.

What I love about the horticulture industry and the folks that I've interacted with is a passion for what they do and it's genuine. And I see a lot of integrity; they're not choosing to let someone else run the show. They're involved.

GT: It didn't always used to be that way. Now, you have growers actively participating in campaigns and inviting their representatives to their operations and getting to know them. Within the last five to 10 years, growers' involvement has picked up the pace, which is why Craig [Regelbrugge] needs more help.

TC: I find it fascinating how much Craig does. Between flying across the country to do speaking engagements to having a presence here in D.C. with meetings on important policy discussions, the man never stops. And his passion is infectious. Even though these issues are tough and they're intricate, and

Craig has been working on them for years, I still feel that he has such a connection to these issues.

But you are right ... we are at a period now where people are getting more involved and our challenge is we do represent quite a diverse audience. Not everybody is on the same page with every issue, but we do our best to thread those together and come up with a unified message. And I think Impact Washington is the first step in that.

GT: What will be your focus moving forward?

TC: I'm going to transition, not only into planning more meetings, I'm going to be doing a lot of site visits and meeting with the influencers in the industry. I think my job is to listen right now and hear what people are concerned about, what keeps them up at night and how I can be a better voice for them and putting them in front of the right people.

GT: A lot of people wonder if it's worth flying in to D.C. to visit with their representatives. Does the face-to-face time really help move the needle?

TC: I think the face-to-face is an important aspect of this because you get a sense of the person and where they're coming from and hear a little bit about their background. That's why I think it's so important to get the contact information and get to know the staffers. They're going to listen to you a lot more as a constituent and a business owner than they are if just a lobbyist goes in there. There is an emphasis on [AmericanHort] members to continue those discussions. **GT**