

TXCPA'S NEW DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS/SPECIAL COUNSEL KENNETH BESSERMAN, J.D., LL.M.

In March, Kenneth Besserman, J.D., LL.M., joined TXCPA's staff as the director, government affairs/special counsel. His office is located in Austin, and he has over 25 years of legal experience in state government and private practice.

As general counsel to the Texas Restaurant Association, Besserman handled legal and regulatory matters affecting the association and restaurant industry, as well as government relations and lobbying efforts for TRA at the state capitol. He previously served as assistant general counsel with the Comptroller of Public Accounts and general counsel and chief of staff for Texas State Senator Rodney Ellis.

He graduated from the University of Houston Law Center and earned his LL.M. degree from the London School of Economics. In this issue of *Today's CPA*, we're excited to introduce you to Besserman, and share some details on his background, career and new responsibilities at TXCPA.

What is your background? You grew up in Austin?

I grew up in Austin and went to grade school and high school in Austin. I was born in Winnipeg, Canada, where my father was doing his pediatric surgery residency. After Canada, we moved to New York and New Jersey, finally settling in Austin in 1972. Austin was then a small sleepy college town. After high school, I went to college at Tulane University in New



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Orleans, then law school in Houston. I worked as a young attorney in Houston for a few years before making my way back to Austin.

Why do you think that work in governmental affairs is so vitally important for TXCPA and the accounting profession?

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Like many other regulated and licensed professions, the accounting profession has seen an uptick in legislation impacting the practice, the licensing credentials and who can practice. It is important to protect the profession from this type of legislation. Government affairs is the tool that the Society can use to best defeat this type of legislation but also a place to lobby for industry needs and to seek legislation that protects the profession. Having good relationships at the state capitol and in elected officials' districts are important in educating legislators on the importance of the profession to the state of Texas and the Texas economy.

You joined the TXCPA staff during an exceptionally busy time as news was breaking of the coronavirus. Describe some highlights of TXCPA's efforts in the advocacy area as our state and federal governments, the IRS, our members and the public responded to this unprecedented outbreak.

Yes, they have been very strange and interesting first several weeks on the job. Since it has been mostly virtual (Zoom, emails, chats), I have not had a chance to meet with everyone in person. That will come in time. My first week on the job, I was focused on the number of local and county shelter-in-place and stay-at-home



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orders and emergency declarations to make sure that accounting and the profession were deemed an "essential service." Without a statewide order, we were on our toes monitoring the orders and working with local officials to include the protective language.

TXCPA's long history and great advocacy work have enabled the Society to maintain close contact with state and local elected officials to make sure that our voices are heard; compliments to years of great advocacy.

What work is on your desk today?

On a daily basis, I'm getting up to speed on the legislative and government affairs issues that are facing the profession. I've been on numerous conference calls and webcasts to learn the issues. I'm also reaching out to my new colleagues to

learn what they do, how the Society operates and to learn more about the government relations team.

What influenced you to pursue a career in governmental affairs?

I grew up in a family that was very interested in politics. I always had an interest in public affairs and policy issues. After law school, I gravitated back to Austin and found a job at the state capitol working on a Senate staff that was highly energetic and involved in many areas of public policy from criminal justice reform to the state budget to regulatory matters. I've always had a good ability to work with elected officials and in each of my jobs in Austin (state Senate, Texas Comptroller's office, Texas Restaurant Association), I've worked closely with members of the Legislature to craft policies that benefit the office for which I was working.

Tell us about your family.

I've been married to my wife Anna-Karin for over 20 years. Anna-Karin is from Sweden and we met in London when we were both studying there. We get back to Sweden every summer for a few weeks. Our daughter, Rebekah, is 15 years old and a freshman in high school. I'm currently teaching her to drive, which is a little easier the last few weeks with the roads much emptier as a result of the shelter-in-place order in Austin.

What is your favorite book and why?

I read a lot of spy and espionage books – both fiction and nonfiction. One of my favorite books is *Harlot's Ghost* by Norman Mailer. It's a very comprehensive fictional take on the establishment of the CIA and many of the personalities and scandals that plagued the agency in its early years.