

**AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL  
DELEGATION REPORT**

**Australia to the United States  
2 April to 15 April 2005**

**DELEGATION**

**Mr Daniel Andrews MP**

Member for Mulgrave and Parliamentary Secretary for Health in the Parliament of Victoria. Delegation Leader.

**Mr Brad Emery**

Media Adviser to the Hon Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Workforce Participation in the Australian Government.

**Mr Andrew Hall**

Federal Director of the National Party of Australia.

**Mr Julian Leeser**

Ministerial Adviser to the Hon Philip Ruddock MP, Attorney-General in the Australian Government.

**Ms Kirsten Livermore MP**

Member for Capricornia and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education in the Parliament of Australia.

**Mr Tim Neve**

Research Officer to Mr Tony Smith MP, Member for Casey in the Parliament of Australia.

**Mr Linus Power**

National Organiser for the Australian Labor Party.

**Mr Simon Troeth**

Chief of Staff to Senator the Hon Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs in the Australian Government.

**Ms Pandora Livanos**

Executive Officer, Australian Political Exchange Council.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The delegation travelled to the United States between April 2 and April 15 as part of the annual Australia - United States political exchange program. The study tour saw the delegation visit Washington DC, Maine and Colorado. The two-week program was informative and enjoyable with delegates benefiting greatly from detailed briefings and opportunities to share information and ideas with United States public officials, policy makers and political professionals.

The delegation wishes to acknowledge and thank the following people and organizations.

The American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL) - especially study tour organizer Mr Quentin Lide whose hard work, unflappable nature and good humour were greatly valued by all delegates.

State Representative Dr Lisa Marraché of Waterville, Maine who very generously hosted the delegation while visiting Maine.

The El Pomar Foundation in Colorado especially fellows Mr Evan deSieyes, Mr John McClendon, Ms Kate Faricy and Mr Nathaniel Washington who coordinated an informative program for delegates in Colorado.

Finally, the delegation wishes to acknowledge and thank Ms Pandora Livanes, Executive Officer, Australian Political Exchange Council for her professionalism and hard work. She is an asset to APEC and delegations representing the Council overseas.

## **THE UNITED STATES-AUSTRALIA RELATIONSHIP**

Among the first items on the delegation's official program were a series of meetings at the United States Department of State. These meetings were a great beginning to the study tour and helped to emphasise the nature of the United States-Australia relationship.

Discussions with senior staff at the Australia Desk, and others with responsibility for South East Asia and the Asia Pacific region more broadly, covered a number of important issues.

It was immediately clear to the delegation that the strategic relationship with Australia is highly valued by American officials and policy makers. The delegation was able to discuss features of the bi-lateral relationship and learn more about a number of different initiatives.

## **STRATEGIC COOPERATION**

Strong cooperation to tackle common threats - war on terror, trans-national crime and the promotion of democratic values throughout our region - is central to the bi-lateral relationship. This cooperation is characterised by regular dialogue like the annual AUSMIN meetings, strong partnerships between the Australian and the United States Governments and security agencies and a number of joint ventures - the most notable of which is Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The strategic partnership also extends to more practical matters such as intelligence and information gathering and sharing and military hardware - for example the replacement of the FA18 fighter jet and so on.

The dialogue is however not confined to strategic or defence matters. The delegation was briefed on a number of other programs including joint efforts to protect the environment - for example coral bleaching, the 2004 Free Trade Agreement and its impact on economic cooperation and the common approach to financial and other aid in our region.

The delegation was briefed on the United States Millennium Corporation and the structured focus of the United States Government on the link between domestic policies, institutions and practices and foreign aid. The approach of the Corporation complements our own Ausaid program and again illustrates the breadth of the relationship.

The series of meetings at the State Department was a highlight of the Washington DC program. All delegates were able to explore the diverse nature of the bi-lateral relationship and discuss its implications for Australia, the United States and our region. The delegation was particularly grateful to Dr Howard Krawitz and Mr John Crowley who were very generous with their time.

The strength of the bi-lateral relationship and its diversity was reinforced by time spent at the Australian Embassy in Washington DC. Ambassador Michael Thawley briefed the delegation on issues relating to the FTA and its implementation as well as possibilities for further trade reform such as increased access in key agricultural markets and a Visa waiver for Australians entering the United States for short stays relating to business.

Ambassador Thawley emphasised the importance of the FTA and these implementation issues and noted that Australia needed to continue to build on commodities based trade and also enhance our competitive advantage in providing specialist services. For instance Ambassador Thawley cited the more than 12,000 students from the United States currently attending universities in Australia as an important area for expansion.

## **UNITED STATES POLITICAL SYSTEM**

The delegation was fortunate to meet with a number of representatives from the organisational wing of the Republican Party, the policy development wing of the Democratic Party, as well as politicians and political staff from all three levels of government.

These meetings enabled the delegation to explore similarities and differences in electoral systems, campaign techniques, the broader American political system and its institutions and the public policy challenges faced by Local, State and Federal Governments.

Of particular note was the highly partisan mood in Washington DC. During the study tour, debate was raging about proposed changes to Social Security and procedural reform to the operation of the United States Senate, especially in regard to the confirmation of Presidential appointments. A number of the groups the delegation met with discussed the domestic political landscape at length. These discussions were of great interest to the delegation and helped to improve the delegation's understanding of the differences between the United States legislature and executive branch of government and Australia's parliamentary system.

## **CAMPAIGN FINANCE**

The delegation received several briefings that touched upon the complex and often confusing regulation of political donations and campaign finance. The system often seems open to abuse by the expenditure of 'soft money' and the operations of supposedly independent third parties.

The delegation was interested to learn of one approach to campaign finance reform – the operation of the Maine Ethics Commission and the *Clean Elections Act 1996*.

Since the passage of the *Clean Elections Act in 1996*, candidates for Local, State and Federal office have been able to receive limited public funding in return for pledging to refuse all other campaign contributions from individuals or businesses. For example, \$16,000 is provided for a State House election, \$44,000 for a State Senate election and so on.

A number of contests have been run under this limited public funding model. It would be fair to say that in these contests, the incentive to reject 'private campaign finance' is the fact that more assistance is on offer through the public grant. This can be the product of the competitiveness of the race or the strategic value of the office being sought or defended.

The aim of this form of campaign finance regulation is to see a community shift towards supporting 'clean election' candidates and thus forcing candidates to turn away from private campaign finance. While this form of limited public funding has had some success in Maine, it is important to note that in 2004 neither the Governor, two Congressmen nor the re-elected United States Senator were 'clean election' candidates.

The issue of campaign finance remains a complex and difficult one. A State like Maine and the United States Congress has each tried to limit and regulate expenditure on elections with limited success. Campaign finance regulation and the all pervading culture of lobbying together with the high prevalence (by Australian standards) of political donations by both corporations and individual citizens, is both a hallmark of American democracy and one of its greatest challenges.

The delegation was interested to learn more about these issues and draw parallels with our own system of public funding and campaign finance disclosure.

## **CAMPAIGN TECHNIQUES**

The delegation had an opportunity to meet with Mr Jonathan Poe of the Republican National Congressional Committee who has responsibility for coordinating the re-election of GOP House members.

The delegation received valuable insights into the often negative nature of American political campaigning. The meeting provided an overview of enrolment (registration) and voter turnout techniques, media production facilities and services, elector data collection and database management and so on.

Delegates were pleased to note that the standard of printed and other campaign material in the United States was similar to that in Australia.

It is fair to say that while United States campaign techniques are of great interest to Australian political professionals, they generally have little application in the Australian context primarily as a result of compulsory voting. Nevertheless, much can be learned especially in the application of technology. In the American context (election for Congressional office), political campaigning is approached as a mainstream marketing-exercise with all the professionalism normally associated with a corporate advertising and branding campaign. The same approach is increasingly evident in Australian electoral contests.

## **OFFICE OF UNITED STATES SENATOR KEN SALAZAR**

The delegation was pleased to spend some time with senior Washington Staff of United States Senator Ken Salazar. The delegation was briefed on the mechanics of representing a State like Colorado with 150 radio stations, 100 newspapers and 15 television stations.

Senator Salazar's staff briefed the delegation on the operation of the Washington DC office and the seven offices spread across Colorado. The Senator is supported by approximately 50 staff dealing with his Committee assignments, policy and legislative work as well as attending to the needs of constituents. The combined offices of Senator Salazar receive around 6,000 telephone calls, emails and letters per week.

## **POLICY CHALLENGES**

Throughout the study tour the delegation was briefed on a number of local and national policy challenges. While the approaches taken by different administrations varied from State to State, the delegation was struck by the universal or global nature of the public policy challenges facing our hosts. The examples below are as relevant in the Australian context as they are in the United States. The delegation enjoyed detailed briefings on these and many other policy issues. These briefings were a valuable opportunity to share information and ideas on addressing common problems.

### **Sustainable Healthcare**

For example, the delegation was extensively briefed by senior staff at the Maine General Hospital on the challenges faced in providing adequate healthcare. These included the ageing population, duplication and demarcation between levels of government and the changing nature of the burden of disease. That is, the shift away from curing / treating 'infectious diseases' and the move towards managing multiple chronic and complex conditions for long periods of time.

## **Sustainable Water Resources**

While in Colorado, Mayor of Colorado Springs, the Hon Lionel Rivera, briefed the delegation on strategies to deal with a chronic water shortage. Colorado Springs has introduced a public awareness campaign to better educate the community on the value of water resources, introduced water restrictions and also begun work on a 43-mile pipeline at a cost of \$1 billion due for completion by 2010. These measures will enable the population of Colorado Springs to grow from 400,000 to more than 900,000 over the next 40 years.

## **Alternative Energy**

The Colorado leg of our study tour saw the delegation visit the National Renewable Energy Laboratories to be briefed on a range of technology based solutions to the world's energy needs. The delegation was briefed on advances in renewable energy technology, in particular solar technology, fuel cell development and changes in design and construction standards.

## **Economic Development**

While in Waterville, Maine the delegation received a comprehensive briefing on the growth of the biotechnology sector and associated opportunities for economic development. The growth in this sector is a response to the decline of traditional industries like forestry and manufacturing. Both local and State administrations seemed engaged in developing these and other industries and promoting them as part of a sustainable future with jobs and the economic growth needed to keep townships like Waterville strong.

## **Education and Training**

In Maine and Colorado the delegation met with a number of young people (college students and recent graduates), educational and civic leaders all of whom were focused on promoting and pursuing educational opportunities and academic learning.

The challenges facing civic leaders, including local school boards, as they seek to provide a quality secondary education, include constraints on public funding, economic restructuring and changing demographics.

The commitment of individuals to their chosen area of tertiary study was most impressive given the high cost of college fees and for many the added expense of living outside the family home and for some their home State.

The complexities of higher education in the United States were canvassed with the President of Colorado College. The competition between high school students to successfully apply for their chosen course and between the colleges seeking to enrol those students represents a major point of difference when compared to higher education in Australia.

Nevertheless, the clear link between a flexible and well resourced education and training system and opportunities for economic development and employment growth exists in a United States and Australian context.

## **PHILANTHROPY**

The delegation found a consistent difference exists between the United States and Australia in the philanthropic attitude each country holds. It was particularly evident when discussing political campaigns and in discussions with corporate representatives.

At all levels of Government, political campaigns are heavily driven by the amount of money a candidate can raise. With the voluntary voting system in the United States, a large amount of money needs to be spent on 'getting out the vote'. This is a financial burden which has never been part of the Australian electoral system.

Fundraising campaigns are generally well planned and surprisingly seem to focus on small amounts donated by a large number of people. Political parties and candidates appeal to a social conscience which exists in the United States – a culture of people contributing towards the democratic process through the donation of money.

Aside from political donations, many of the social projects visited by the delegation rely heavily on philanthropic support and often very little State-sponsored support. For example, the delegation visited the United States Olympic team headquarters while in Denver, Colorado and met with senior coaching and administrative staff. The United States Olympic team is funded through a combination of private donations or philanthropic grants and corporate sponsorship. This is in stark contrast to the Australian experience.

From the large and well-funded El Pomar Foundation in Colorado, which was originally established with a substantial bequest, right down to local hospital boards, there is a clear and strong bias towards the community giving in the United States.

## **CONCLUSION**

The great benefit of the 22nd delegation to the United States was the new perspectives it gave delegates.

In a concerted sense, the delegation experienced the way a country with many similarities, but a vastly different political culture, confronts some of the same issues that face Australia – education, healthcare, water resources and regional development. In a less tangible sense, it was enlightening to hear American perceptions of the United States-Australia relationship. It is clear that the relationship remains important and strong.

The delegation was also provided with a valuable opportunity to get to know people involved in Australian politics, from another political party, in a way that the general political process does not facilitate.

In the 24 years since the Australian Political Exchange Council was established, there have been 22 delegations that have travelled to the United States. The frequency of these visits says something of the enduring relationship between the two countries and that this particular exchange is taken very seriously by delegates and the organisations which nominate them.

The diversity of experiences gained by the delegation – visiting both urban and regional areas in the United States – coupled with the combination of different people we encountered, can only make a positive contribution to the public diplomacy of both countries.

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