

# AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL

## TWENTY-EIGHTH DELEGATION TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

29 October-11 November 2012



### DELEGATION

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Former State Member for Everton, Queensland

**Ms Lizzie Blandthorn** (Australian Labor Party)  
Senior Vice President, Victorian Branch of the Australian Labor Party

**Senator Sarah Hanson-Young** (Australian Greens)  
Senator for South Australia

**Ms Helen Moreland** (Liberal Party of Australia)  
Senior Advisor to the Hon Tony Abbott MP, Leader of the Opposition, Federal Member for Warringah

**Mr Andrew Cox** (Liberal Party of Australia)  
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**Ms Emma Watts** (The Nationals)  
Senior Vice-Chairman, New South Wales, The Nationals

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

We were the 28th Australian delegation to travel to the United States of America under the auspices of the Australian Political Exchange Council. It was a well-organised, productive and informative visit that coincided with one of the most hard-fought US Presidential campaigns ever.

All the delegates returned with a much deeper appreciation and understanding of the society and governance of the USA, its history, the issues that the USA currently faces, the latest political campaigning techniques, and the importance of the Australia-USA relationship and how we might strengthen it.

The program commenced with a day-long briefing in Canberra, which provided extremely useful background information prior to the delegation's departure.

The delegation's arrival in Washington DC was slightly delayed by the tragic events of Hurricane Sandy, which devastated parts of the east coast of the USA.

The delegation ultimately spent three days in Washington DC and received a number of presentations from experts and American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL) Alumni on various aspects of political campaigning and the political system in the US.

The following four days were spent in the Tampa region of Florida, observing the Presidential campaign firsthand. The final four days were spent in Oklahoma, where the delegation gained an understanding of the American "heartland".

Key themes and observations:

1. Scale: the amount of money raised and spent on campaigns, the volume of advertisements, the number of volunteers and the level of participation by the public go far beyond what we see in Australia.
2. SuperPACs: this election saw their emergence, largely unregulated Political Action Committees that can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money to support a position or candidate. It is expected that their continued growth will have a major bearing on elections in the future.
3. Voluntary voting: this has a major influence on campaigning. Campaigns are focused on getting out their base vote, and issues which appeal to each party's base are emphasised, pushing debate to extremes.
4. No independent electoral commission: this means questions are commonly raised over electoral boundaries, and the conduct of elections.
5. Little or no "message discipline" on candidates: different candidates from the same party could take different positions on an issue.
6. "Ground game" of both parties (ie data collection and grassroots operations which aim to motivate voters), these are far more sophisticated than what we see in Australia.
7. Issues-based campaigning is used far more to motivate voters, especially young voters. This emphasis recognises voters may be more motivated by a party's position on an individual issue than an overarching philosophy.

## **Acknowledgements**

The delegation would like to thank the staff of the Australian Political Exchange Council, in particular Belinda Henderson, for their exceptional level of assistance in preparing delegation members before and during the exchange.

The delegation would also like to thank members of the ACYPL for their organisation of a wonderful and informative program. In particular, the delegation would like to thank Mr Quentin Lide,

Dr Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan and Senator Clark Jolley for their extraordinary efforts in making our exchange a memorable experience.

## **CANBERRA**

**Monday, 29 October 2012**

### **Meeting with US Ambassador to Australia, His Excellency Jeffrey Bleich**

The Ambassador provided an excellent overview of the current political climate in the US, and key issues in the Presidential campaign.

Key points:

- We should look closely at the ground game of both campaigns and their use of micro-targeting to identify likely supporters.
- Voluntary voting means that parties emphasise getting out the vote (GOTV). This also results in each side having to motivate their base, which can mean debate is highly partisan.
- Australia's compulsory voting system reduces the role of big money in campaigns and issue-based campaigning.

### **Briefing from Dr John Hart, Australian National University**

Dr Hart provided a very thorough briefing on the US political system. This proved to be a valuable exercise as the Australian delegation was far better prepared for the exchange, in terms of knowledge of the US political system, than delegations from other countries.

## **WASHINGTON DC**

**Wednesday, 31 October 2012**

The delegation's arrival in Washington D.C. was delayed due to Hurricane Sandy, which closed airports on the east coast of the US.

### **Role of Political Party Committees in US Elections**

The delegation was split into three groups to meet with senior representatives of the Democratic and Republican Parties.

### **Mr Rob Jesmer: Executive Director, National Republican Senatorial Committee (RSC)**

Key points:

- Fundraising is a priority: RSC has raised \$110m from PACs and individuals in the last two years.
- The impact of PACs has been massive. Official political committees are not allowed to work with the PACs.
- The Romney campaign's advantage is that running for re-election in this environment is very hard for President Obama. People's expectations haven't been met.
- The polling in all the battleground states is within the margin of error. Mr Jesmer had never been involved in an election where polling has been more different between pollsters.
- The campaign grid used to be "horizontal". You picked which column people fitted into and then campaigned to them through the appropriate tool. Now it's vertical. You have to communicate with them through a range of tools.

### **Mr Robby Mook: Executive Director, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC)**

Key points:

- The DCCC works with about 100 House campaigns, focusing on about 50 of the most competitive.
- The DCCC's role is to recruit candidates, and then assist them to raise funds, analyse voting data, identify likely supporters, build volunteer support, undertake communications and research, and program advertisements.
- One notable difference with Australia was the lack of "message discipline" among candidates. The DCCC will assist a candidate to develop a policy position that most assists that candidate's electoral prospects. That may be a very different position to another Democrat candidate running in a neighbouring seat, depending on the attitudes of voters in that seat.
- Polling is becoming more ubiquitous and yet more unreliable, especially phone polling given the decreasing number of people with landline phones at home. To overcome these issues, the DCCC brings together a variety of opinion data, from published and unpublished polls and from voter ID data obtained by campaigns, and then averages out that information to arrive at a probable polling position.
- Trends that are emerging that will influence future elections:
  - SuperPACs are likely to have an increasing influence, and are likely to assist Republicans more than Democrats given their traditionally stronger links with the business community.
  - The internet is likely to be even more important, with more internet polling and advertising. Internet cookies allow parties to collect data on the websites voters interact with and the products they buy. This will assist with placing advertisements and targeting voters.

### **Mr Rod Snyder: President, Young Democrats of America (YDA)**

Key points:

- YDA was established in 1932 and while it is the 'youth arm' of the Democratic Party of America, it has been a separate entity for the past 10 years.
- The role of YDA is to help young people have a voice within the Democratic Party and in politics more generally. This became more important when Barack Obama began campaigning for the Presidency and has gradually become even more important since that time.
- YDA offers young people the opportunity to become involved in politics through assisting with election campaigns, mainly in the ground game of getting people out to vote through phone calls and door-knocking.
- YDA's main work in issues advocacy in recent years has included voter identification, marriage equality, education funding/student loans, 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' and access to health care.
- A key difference between American political youth movements and their Australian counterparts is the media attention they receive. The heads of these organisations have high media profiles and are often called upon to provide commentary.

### **Reception hosted by Mr Patrick Murphy, 3 Click Solutions**

This reception provided a great forum for the delegates to network with members of delegations from a variety of countries. Unfortunately, Mr Murphy was unable to attend due to Hurricane Sandy disrupting his travel arrangements, but delegation members met other senior staff from his firm, and gained an insight into the role of lobbyists in US politics.

**Thursday, 1 November 2012**

**The Big Ideas: Campaign Messaging and Media (GMMB)**

This session was presented by Ms Annie Burns and Mr AJ Lenar, from GMMB, a leading Washington DC advertising and media consultancy. GMMB managed the 2012 Obama campaign's advertising program.

Key points:

- The key messages for the Obama campaign's advertisements were:
  - the US was in a terrible position when the President first came to power in 2008;
  - things had improved due to his efforts;
  - he had a plan for the future; and
  - voters had to choose between the President's plan and Governor Romney (who they characterised as extreme and out of touch).
- Advertising expenditure continues to grow. In 2008 it was around \$300 million. In 2012, it is expected to be up to \$450 million.
- The challenge for the Romney campaign's advertisements was that President Obama remained popular, so they couldn't attack him personally. They played on a sense of disappointment with the President compared to the high hopes held for him in 2008.
- SuperPACs had spent large amounts on advertising. Though they are prevented legally from liaising with Presidential campaigns, they tend to watch the Presidential advertisements and either try to complement them or concentrate on attacking their less-preferred candidate.
- There is an increasing use of social media for advertising. Advertisements there tend to be edgier and they are often promoted via a small amount of television advertising (ie which then directs people to a website).

**Money Matters: The Ever-growing Importance of Political Fundraising**

This session was presented by Ms Ami Copeland, Mr Jeff Young and Mr Tim Mynett (New Partners), Ms Deborah Tenenbaum (Protect Your Care) and Mr Teddy Johnston (Priorities USA). It underlined the central importance of fundraising in the US political system. Both sides (across Presidential, House, Senate, PACs and other campaigns) have raised about \$1.9 billion in 2012 alone.

President Obama pioneered low dollar fundraising from the grassroots. It includes raising money online, via mail, through telemarketing and texting, product marketing (making campaign supporters buy shirts and buttons) and house parties.

However, higher dollar fundraising still generates the most funds for campaigns. It includes ticketed concerts with associated celebrities, and ticketed dinners and other events ranging up to tens of thousands of dollars per head. Higher dollar events such as rallies and concerts are often used to create "lists" which are used to generate low dollar donations.

More recently US politics has seen the emergence of issue-based campaigns, with the associated need to fundraise. The Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case means that anybody can give any amount to a PAC and donations do not need to be disclosed.

**Welcome from Mr Adam Meier, US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs**

Mr Meier welcomed delegates from all countries and explained how the ACYPL program fitted into the US Department of State's external engagement.

Other programs designed to foster international cooperation that are administered by the Department of State include Fulbright Scholarships, the International Visitor Leadership Program and Study Abroad. Mr Meier encouraged delegates to consider participating in these programs, and to stay in touch with ACYPL through its alumni program and its website.

### **The Rules of the Road: Campaign Finance Regulations and Enforcement**

The delegation was addressed by Mr Trevor Potter, a lawyer at Caplin + Drysdale and Founder, President and General Counsel of the Campaign Legal Center.

In recent times, he says, the rise of SuperPACs have changed the face of elections. Following a Supreme Court decision in 2010, a SuperPAC can now raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, associations, unions and individuals, and spend unlimited sums of money, to overtly advocate for or against political candidates.

He considers that the Supreme Court got it wrong, because it basically said a corporation has the same level of rights as an individual which he says is a ludicrous notion.

He argues the Court said it was vitally important that all spending and donations be publicly disclosed. This failed miserably because the court underestimated the loophole of the not-for-profits being created via the SuperPACs.

### **Talking Heads: Political Commentators and Pundits in American Politics**

The delegation was addressed by Ms Maria Cardona, Partner, Dewey Square and CNN Commentator and Mr Lenny McAllister, Contributing Writer, Politic365.com, "Get Right with Lenny McAllister" Radio Host, and CNN Commentator. Maria, a Democrat, and Lenny, a Republican, have a strong friendship and mutual respect built up over many years.

They believe the current state of "punditry", particularly on cable news, is at a low point. They are attempting to raise the political discourse through their appearances on CNN, by respecting each other's opinions, not yelling over the top of one another and using facts to back up their considered opinions. As Lenny said, they want to "let the ideas win."

Despite their approach and, to a lesser extent, the approach of CNN, they are regularly beaten in cable television ratings by Fox News and MSNBC. Fox News in particular, they argue, reinforces what some people want to hear which means their base viewing audience is extremely loyal.

### **Reception hosted by Microsoft Corporation**

All ACYPL delegations attended this reception, which again provided an informal opportunity to network with delegates from other countries, representatives of the Australian Embassy, representatives of the business community, ACYPL alumni and lobbyists.

## **Friday, 2 November 2012**

### **Ground Game: Grassroots Organising, Youth Engagement and Get-Out-the-Vote Efforts**

This session was presented by Ms Amber Goodwin, Network Initiatives Director, mobilze.org and Ms Rachel S. Kelley, PAC Manager, International Council of Shopping Centers.

According to Ms Kelley and Ms Goodwin, the Democrats' campaign in 2008 was the perfect campaign because it engaged more new voters than ever, particularly younger voters. Part of this success was through *Obama for America* directly employing youth directors in each state.

In recent years, the Republican Party has had to develop the capacity to organise grassroots activities, which it has not been traditionally good at, in response to the overwhelming success the Democrats have achieved in this area.

Despite significant steps to encourage young people to engage in politics by voting, the ability for young people to represent the electorate is drastically diminishing because of the enormous sums of money required to run for office.

To counter this, a PAC has been established to try to increase the number of young women under the age of 40 to run for office or congress.

### **By the Numbers: Political Polling and Micro-targeting**

This session was presented by Mr Jim Burton, Partner, Public Opinion Strategies and Ms Anna Greenberg, Senior Vice President, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner.

We were given an overview of the history of opinion polling, going back to the campaigns of President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s.

Some of the developments in recent years included:

- the costs of polling have decreased dramatically,
- the reliability of polling based on calls to home phones is decreasing, as fewer people have or use home phones, and
- a consequent increase in polling based on calls to mobile phones, face-to-face interviews and internet research.

Overall it seemed that techniques do not vary greatly between Democrat or Republican campaigns, and the polling process outlined did not differ significantly from what would be expected in Australia.

### **Elections 2012: US Government Overview and Current American Political Landscape**

This session was presented by Mr Jay Footlik, President, Global Policy Initiatives and Mr Rick Smotkin, Vice President, Comcast-NBC Universal.

Some of their observations included:

- The electoral college system has its proponents and its critics. While it means that people across the country have less opportunity to elect their President as a collective, the process forces Presidents to pay attention to smaller states.
- In years where there is a Presidential election, on average, 60 per cent of Americans vote, but in non-Presidential years, less than 50 per cent of Americans might vote.
- One of the challenges faced by President Obama, and incumbents generally, in seeking re-election, is the need to govern and campaign simultaneously.

## **FLORIDA**

### **Saturday, 3 November 2012**

#### **Visit to the Obama Campaign Staging Post in Largo**

The delegation was hosted by Mr Rich Piper, President of the Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club. This campaign staging post was run out of his home, which was not unusual for the Obama campaign. Here the delegation met with a range of campaign volunteers and observed their preparation for doorknocking, distribution of doorknocking kits and data entry.

Some of the Democrat volunteers explained the challenges posed by changes to voting laws in their county, which they feared would depress the Democrat vote on polling day. To counter these challenges, the Democrats had made a concerted effort to encourage their supporters to vote early or vote by mail.

By this point in the campaign, efforts are focused only on GOTV of confirmed Democrat supporters, rather than unaligned/uncommitted voters. This is one result of the voluntary voting system employed in the US; campaigns can find out who has, and has not, voted (without knowing who they voted for), so by this point, they are focusing their efforts on precincts with a relatively low voter turnout.

#### **Visit to the Largo Obama For America HQ**

These premises were used as a distribution point for materials and personnel throughout the region. By this stage of the campaign, the office was fairly quiet, with volunteers being moved to staging posts and telephone banking rooms.

#### **St. Petersburg Get Out the Vote Rally for Democratic Candidates**

While the rally itself had a disappointing turnout (possibly due to attendees being involved in campaigning), the delegation had an opportunity to meet several Democratic candidates for State and National House of Representatives and Senate seats, and municipal offices.

#### **Visit to the Early Voting Location, Supervisor of Elections Office, Pinellas County**

The delegation inspected one of the early voting locations in St Petersburg and was taken aback by the lengthy queues that voters faced. People had waited over an hour to vote, but this compared favourably to voters in other cities, who had to wait up to four hours to vote.

Different views were given as to the lengthy queues, with Democrat supporters usually alleging they were the result of deliberate efforts by Republicans (who determined voting times and locations) to discourage Democrats from voting and Republican supporters usually pointing out the availability of mail voting and other options for those who wanted to avoid queues.

While there, the delegation met the Mayor of St Petersburg, Mr Bill Foster. He gave the delegation an overview of the history of the town and current issues facing it.

#### **Dinner hosted by Ms Malvina Gasco, Government Relations, The Boeing Company**

The delegation attended a dinner hosted by representatives of The Boeing Company and received a description of latest developments in the aerospace and defence industries.

The relative merits of an Obama or Romney Presidency for these industries was provided.

#### **Visit to the Obama Florida Campaign HQ, Tampa**

The day concluded with a visit to the Florida Campaign HQ in Tampa. The delegation observed a phone bank in operation and could see the lengths the Obama campaign was going to, to hold on in Florida.

The delegation spoke with numerous campaign volunteers who, though exhausted, were pushing on in the last couple of days in the hope of victory.

## **Sunday, 4 November, 2012**

### **Visit Early Voting Location, Supervisor of Elections Office, Pinellas County**

The delegation returned to the early voting location to inspect the polling booth itself. We talked to polling officials about their experiences of the voting queues and the election in general.

### **Lunch hosted by the Honorable Leslie Waters Vice Mayor of Seminole**

In addition to Mayor Waters, the delegation met with Senator Jeff Brandes, a young Republican State Senator, and former State House member.

Senator Brandes provided an overview of the critical importance of fundraising to being a viable candidate; and the use of a range of consultants to improve a candidate's chances of victory. There was also discussion of electoral redistricting (redrawing electoral boundaries) and the influence of the Tea Party wing of the Republican Party.

Senator Brandes commented on some of the features of campaigning at a State level. Democrats now struggle to raise money locally, as they are in the minority in the State House and Senate. This means it is becoming more difficult to get Democrats to run and term limits for the State legislature cede power to lobbyists and political staff, as they have the corporate knowledge that comes with longevity of service.

### **Visit to the Romney/Ryan Florida Headquarters, Tampa**

The delegation met with senior Florida staff from the Romney/Ryan campaign, who outlined the strategy that had been employed in an effort to win Florida.

The staff were feeling confident about Governor Romney's chances in Florida. Since the Presidential debates, every poll had Governor Romney leading, and momentum was clearly on his side.

The delegation was told that President Obama's campaign had damaged Governor Romney by spending large amounts of money early on advertising in battleground states about Romney's business career.

The key messages for the Romney/Ryan campaign included:

- America cannot afford another four years like the last four;
- The change we were promised by President Obama has not happened;
- What has President Obama told you in the last nine months that makes you feel the next four years will be any better; and
- As a former Governor of a strong Democrat state, Governor Romney has shown he can work across party lines to deliver.

By this point, all campaign messaging is set and the focus now is on GOTV.

### **Visit to the Romney Clearwater Field HQ Location**

This office was the leading Florida campaign office for the Romney/Ryan campaign, measured by doorknocking completed. Volunteers from this office had knocked on over 115,000 doors over the course of the campaign, significantly more than in 2008. There had been a trend away from phone canvassing and back to doorknocking, largely because of the decrease in people using landlines at home.

The office was well set up in terms of technology, with sophisticated systems for capturing voter identification data, including the provision of iPhone apps that volunteers could use to record and transmit the data they collected.

### **Visit to the Romney St. Petersburg Field HQ**

The delegation also visited this smaller campaign office for the Romney/Ryan campaign. We again observed the coordination of canvassing activities and the storage and transmission of voting data. A number of delegates returned to this office on election day, to participate in GOTV activities for the Romney/Ryan campaign.

### **Monday, 5 November 2012**

#### **US Constitutional Law Class, University of South Florida**

The delegation met with the Constitutional Law class of its host in Florida, Dr Judithanne Scourfield-McLauchlan.

An interesting discussion ensued about the similarities and differences between the Australian and American political systems.

Some of the key differences outlined were:

- In Australia there is more capacity for smaller parties to have an impact. This is mainly due to the use of preferential voting and proportional representation.
- Australia, as a parliamentary democracy, does not have separate elections for the Prime Minister. The Party which can form a majority in the House of Representatives forms Government and the Leader of that Party becomes Prime Minister.
- Australia has compulsory voting, with little debate about whether people should have to vote. Australian elections are therefore more focused on changing people's vote (especially those in the political centre), rather than getting supporters of either side to actually turn up and vote.
- Our grassroots organisation is nowhere near as sophisticated, as we don't need to have a GOTV style campaign.
- The biggest issue in Australia is probably the role of the Government itself. Abortion and euthanasia are not issues that come up in Australia. They are rarely mainstream topics for major parties.

#### **Michelle Obama Rally, Orlando**

The delegation had an opportunity to attend a GOTV rally led by the First Lady, Michelle Obama. This was an incredible experience for all delegates, enabling us to experience some of the "razzamatazz" of an American campaign. Other speakers at the rally included singer Mr Ricky Martin, Senator for Florida Bill Nelson and the Mayor of Orlando.

### **Tuesday, 6 November 2012 (Polling Day)**

Having spent two days being a bi-partisan delegation inspecting the grassroots campaigns of both the Republicans and Democrats across the crucial I4 corridor in Florida, on the day of the election we were afforded the opportunity to divide along political lines.

Campaigning on the day of the election in Australia, for both candidate and campaigners alike, is really limited to having a major presence at polling booths. Voters are obliged to turn up and mostly they do. However, in America, the contest is still going out on the ground, both in the community and in the homes of voters, right up until the polls close on the day of the election. The focus is on GOTV— ensuring that those people registered as either Republican or Democrat actually turn up at a polling booth and cast a vote for their party. Being a Tuesday, the biggest issue we confronted was that most people were not at home.

### **Campaign activities – Republicans**

Three members of the delegation participated in GOTV activities at a Romney/Ryan field office. The group observed an organised and well-tuned machine.

Delegates were given brief training on how to use the Republican phone banking system before having the opportunity to undertake GOTV phone calls. The Republican's phone system was technologically sophisticated, but relatively simple and required little training to use. Once familiar with the system it was possible to make a significant number of calls in a short period of time. While many people were weary of the number of phone calls they had received, the positive message of encouraging people to vote was less difficult to deliver than similar phone campaigns in Australia which focuses on selling a candidate or party.

The group was also given the opportunity to undertake GOTV doorknocking which is considered to be more effective in some cases because of the reduction in personal landlines. The Republican system of distributing "turf" and identifying the houses to target was advanced and efficient. However the group was reminded that even with sophisticated tools, human error can reduce effectiveness of these tools when it became apparent that we were doubling up on the efforts of another team of door-knockers who were already in the area.

### **Campaign activities – Democrats**

Three delegates visited a local Obama campaign office and were issued with doorknocking maps. The map included only those addresses of known Democrat voters who had not yet attended a polling booth. The Obama campaign was able to identify these prospective voters, because the electoral officials provide them with a nightly list to this effect.

The fact that known Democrats were doorknocked produced a big difference to doorknocking in Australia; our conversations with people were focused only on getting them to vote, rather than to persuade them as to why they should support President Obama.

### **Election night party – University of Southern Florida, Tampa Campus**

The delegation attended a "tailgate party" at the University campus. Delegates were able to mix with students and observe the results come in, which was a fantastic experience.

## **OKLAHOMA**

### **Wednesday, 7 November, 2012**

#### **Visit to the Oklahoma City National Memorial**

The delegation's visit to the memorial for the Oklahoma City bombing was a poignant experience for all concerned. It was explained to the delegation that the bombing was a turning point for the city, in that it caused residents to reconsider the city's identity and values. It was suggested that the community bonding and renewal that followed the bombing led to a rebirth of the city, and in particular the city centre.

#### **Dinner hosted by ACYPL Alumni**

The delegation was hosted to a dinner by Mr James McSpadden, a lobbyist for various agricultural, film and other corporations, and a number of ACYPL alumni including the Hon Joe Dorman, Member, Oklahoma House of Representatives, State Senator David Holt, and the delegation's host in Oklahoma, State Senator Clark Jolley.

The dinner provided an informal opportunity for the delegation to learn about Oklahoma State politics, some of the internal differences within the State Democrat and Republican parties, and pressing statewide policy issues such as agricultural and water policy.

## **Thursday, 8 November 2012**

### **Breakfast with Mr Pat McFerron, CMA Strategies**

Mr McFerron is one of the top Republican pollsters in Oklahoma. His main role is to develop effective messaging strategies and winning political strategy.

Mr McFerron provided a comprehensive analysis of the voting patterns of Oklahoma. He emphasised that while Oklahoma is a very conservative state, the conservative fringe is moving much further to the right. He also explained that the political split, on many occasions, is not based on political parties, but geography, ie the rural and urban divide.

He highlighted that there are three main distinct political groups in Oklahoma: Registered Republicans (42 per cent), Pro-Obama Democrats/Independents (33 per cent), and Anti-Obama Democrats/Independents (25 per cent).

Some of the other key facts include that 30 per cent of Oklahomans attend a church worship service more than once a week.

### **Tour of State Capitol Building with the Hon Robert Henry**

The Hon Robert Henry is the President of Oklahoma City University, and a former Member of the State House and former Attorney-General of Oklahoma.

Mr Henry is also an avid champion of the arts and was heavily involved in the redevelopment of the Oklahoma State Capitol Building. He kindly provided the Australian delegation with a tour of the building which highlighted the cultural and political history of Oklahoma. The artwork throughout the building has been collected or commissioned to ensure that it is a comprehensive record of Oklahoma's history.

Of particular interest was the Oklahoma State Capitol building dome. The building was built in 1919 but the planned dome was not completed until 2004 – controversially with the names of corporate and family sponsors prominently displayed inside the dome. The building is also the first American state capitol to be topped by an American Indian figure. "The Guardian" is a seventeen-and-one-half-foot-tall bronze sculpture of an American Indian carrying a shield and a spear.

### **Mr Randy Dowell, Chief of Staff, State Senate**

Mr Dowell provided the delegation with a concise explanation of how the Oklahoma State Budget process works. He explained that, according to the US Constitution, every US State is forced to only appropriate what they have.

Every state, across the board, has debt in form of bonds. Oklahoma is 43rd in the US for indebtedness which some argue is not a positive result. Some bond agencies believe Oklahoma does not have enough debt and that they should be investing into more infrastructure and other state building projects.

Oklahoma is only one of five states in the US where the State Legislature is empowered to write the budget. This would normally be a function of the Governor of the State. In Oklahoma, the Governor's constitutional role with the budget is to sign or veto, but nothing else.

### **Ms Denise Northrup and Ms Katie Altshuler, Office of the Governor**

Ms Northrup explained to the delegation that the power of the Governor in Oklahoma is limited because the legislature has the power to pass laws, the budget etc. She believes that political ideology has changed significantly in recent years and that conservatives are getting more conservative in Oklahoma.

Ms Altshuler believes the rural/urban divide is greater in Oklahoma than the Republican/Democrat divide. Access to water is a massive issue in Oklahoma, particularly with the Native American tribes. The Chickasaw Nation is suing the Government because they believe they have a cultural right to the water of Oklahoma. The negotiations with the Government and the tribe have been ongoing for over a year. It's expected the lawsuit could take 20 years or more.

At the end of this meeting, the delegation had a very brief meeting with Governor Mary Fallin, where pressing issues facing her State were discussed.

### **Hon Todd Lamb, Lieutenant Governor, State of Oklahoma**

Lt Governor Lamb advised the delegation that his role provides enormous latitude, allowing the incumbent to pick issues which interest him/her and champion those issues. For example, Lt Governor Lamb is the Chair of the tourism body in Oklahoma, the Vice Chair of the Aerospace Authority and sits on the School Land Commission. He also represents the Governor at many events and becomes the Acting Governor when the Governor is interstate or incapacitated. The Lt Governor also prides himself on being a strong advocate for small business.

The main issues impacting Oklahoma according to Lt Governor Lamb are workers' compensation reform, tax policy, workforce development and water issues.

The Lt Governor worked for the former Governor of Oklahoma, Governor Keating. Governor Keating became the face of the recovery following the Oklahoma City bombings in 1995. Lt Governor Lamb knew people who lost their lives in the bombing and he is still emotional about the events.

### **Ms Gwendolyn Caldwell, Senior Vice President for Government Affairs, Oklahoma Chamber of Commerce**

Ms Caldwell outlined the role of the Chamber and emphasised that her primary focus is to lobby the State Government to achieve pro-business legislation.

The Chamber wants to attract business to Oklahoma through a pro-business Government. The Chamber has developed a strategic and aggressive approach to lobbying candidates to vote for pro-business legislation. This is through direct mail material, robocalls, television and radio advertisements and political donations. They have also implemented a legislative watch website to monitor what each legislator is doing, how they vote and what actions they are taking to be pro-business.

Repeat offenders, who consistently vote for "anti-business legislation" are placed on an anti-business list. One legislator changed his vote to be removed from the list. They have also introduced the Oklahoma Civil Justice Council, to hold the elected members of the judiciary to account. The main purpose of this is to protect businesses from too much liability.

As lobbyists, the Chamber must follow certain guidelines, particularly anti-corruption. For example, they cannot 'pay to play', meaning they cannot promise funds to get a bill through.

The delegation attended a dinner hosted by the Chamber, where discussion on these issues continued.

## **Friday, 9 November, 2012**

### **Briefing on Renewal and Urban Planning by Mr Russell Claus, Planning Director, Oklahoma City**

Mr Claus is an expat Australian and warmly greeted the delegation with Vegemite and Tim Tams. Mr Claus gave a history of the development of Oklahoma City, as far back as Indian settlement and the first white settlement. He noted the beautiful Art Deco architecture of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After years of economic stagnation, Oklahoma City had enjoyed a revival, with a big urban renewal program. Most funding has come from local government.

Post war, Oklahoma City developed through suburban sprawl. Massive freeways were built because there was a view that you had to move people out of town as fast as possible. This created a ghost town of down town.

Mr Claus attributed the revival of Oklahoma City to two events: the Oklahoma bombing, and the loss of a contract for a Boeing factory, largely due to its lack of community infrastructure. Both events forced the city and its population to examine its identity.

This led to MAPS, a scheme where Oklahoma City residents voted to tax themselves to fund community infrastructure projects, such as the Bricktown Baseball Park, the construction of a canal through Bricktown, the Spirit of Oklahoma Trolleys, the Cox Convention Centre, a redevelopment of the Civic Centre, and the Ford Centre, which was redeveloped and is now home to the NBA team the Oklahoma Thunder

### **Oklahoma River Renewal, Chesapeake Boathouse**

The "River Renewal" is one of the MAPS projects that was explained by Mr Claus. It is a joint initiative of the government and Devon Energy where the river has had public investment and the facility has had private investment. There was a collective decision to have a world class water facility to send a message to the world water sports community. The facility became an Olympic training facility and has the Olympic Rings attached to it.

It is also a community facility. People are getting on the water in ways that they would never have expected - rowing, white water rafting and dragon boating. There are 55 corporate rowing teams and three universities have scholarship programs on the river.

### **Lunch hosted by Ms Karel Brewster**

Ms Brewster is a lobbyist, primarily for agricultural firms, and provided the delegation with an overview of issues confronted by that sector, including access to water.

### **Tour of the Devon Energy oil rig in Calumet**

Oil and gas have become major industries in Oklahoma, providing an alternative source of revenue and employment to traditional industries such as agriculture.

Similar tensions arise in Australia, between resource extraction and environmental protection, and between resource extraction and agriculture. Significant efforts have been made to manage these tensions.

### **Rodney and Carol Cowan**

Rodney and Carol Cowan run a mixed enterprise (cattle, wheat, soybeans and alfalfa) over three properties at Watonga, Oklahoma. Their main property has been in Rodney's family for four generations and they raised four of their own children on the property (two of their children are now involved in their farming business).

The Cowans run a very impressive and well-organised farming operation with a wide range of machinery - from large-scale state-of-the-art cropping equipment, to a large truck to transport their own produce.

Carol Cowan was named the inaugural 'America's Farm Mom of the Year' in 2010 (a competition run by Monsanto). The role involves travelling extensively to promote the passion, dedication and commitment that mothers show in their important multi-faceted role on farms.

### **Visit to the Whirlwind Winery, Watonga**

Whirlwind Winery specialises in dry, Old-World style red wines, but also offers a variety of different wines styles including "Honey-Apple" and local favourite "Wild Sand Plum".

The owners are trying to build up a consistent client base and have semi-regular visits from tourists from other states. They are only a small operation so far and hope to expand their production in 2013.

### **Oklahoma City Thunder Basketball Game**

The delegation attended a basketball game played by leading NBA team the Oklahoma Thunder. The Thunder had been attracted to Oklahoma through a concerted effort by local business people and State politicians.

The creation of a new team, and the construction of their playing arena, were other examples of the revitalisation of Oklahoma City.

## **Saturday, November 10 2012**

### **Meeting with Mr Bill Anoatubby, Governor of the Chickasaw Nation**

The Chickasaw people were originally in North Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama and Kentucky but were driven down to Oklahoma in the 1830s, to share land with the Choctaws in Oklahoma onto land reserved for Indians during the 'Trail of Tears'. Since then, despite overcoming tremendous obstacles, the Chickasaws have developed into one of the five most financially successful Native American tribes.

The Chickasaw Nation, as a government, overlaps with the Government of Oklahoma. They have their own executive government, a judicial department (with police officers), and Supreme and lower Courts.

The Chickasaws own more than 50 businesses within and outside of Chickasaw boundaries (casinos can only be established on Indian land in Oklahoma). The growth in their financial capacity has been dramatic. Over the past decade, the number of people employed by the Chickasaw Nation has increased from 500 to 6,500 employees, and financial performance has grown by 72 per cent in the past five years. Their business interests are diverse, including hotels/motels, health care, bionics, biotechnology, real estate, banking, manufacturing, horse racing and gaming, utilities, energy and software.

The Chickasaw Nation's 65,000 people share in the multi-billion dollar revenues through access to a range of services, particularly in the areas of health (which accounted for 13.56 per cent of Chickasaw revenues in 2011 – or \$164.5 million), education (3.30 per cent of Chickasaw revenue or \$40.0 million in 2011) and housing (2.16 per cent or \$26.3 million in 2011), as well as a concerted effort to ensure they can access employment in Chickasaw Nation-owned businesses. Entrepreneurship is also highly valued by the Chickasaws, they run targeted camps to assist young Chickasaws develop their own businesses.

Also impressive is the Chickasaw's cultural centre which features a comprehensive exhibition outlining their history, a large amphitheatre, replication of a Chickasaw village, commercial-sized cinema, gift shops and a cafeteria.

#### **Attend "Life.Church.tv" Church Service**

Given the central role that religion plays in the life of many Oklahomans, the delegation attended a church service of one of the largest evangelical churches in the world.

#### **Sunday, November 11 2012**

The delegation visited two of the big museums in Oklahoma City: the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, and the Oklahoma City Museum of Art.

Both were very impressive and these visits again demonstrated the very high quality museum facilities in Oklahoma City.