

# AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL

## 35th AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

20 July to 2 August 2024



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**Contents**

Executive Summary..... 3

Delegation Report..... 4

Friday 19 July 2024 - Sydney..... 4

    Briefing Day..... 4

Sunday 21 July 2024 - Washington, D.C..... 4

    National Museum of African American History and Culture..... 4

Monday 22 July 2024..... 5

    US Department of State..... 5

    General Motors..... 5

    American Lung Association..... 5

    Australian Ambassador to the US, the Honorable Dr Kevin Rudd AO..... 5

Tuesday 23 July 2024..... 6

    American Council of Young Political Leaders..... 6

    US Treasury Department..... 6

    Politico..... 6

    United States Capitol..... 7

    Boeing..... 7

    GlobalWIN and Oracle..... 7

Wednesday 24 July 2024..... 7

    The Honorable John Curtis, Member, US House of Representatives..... 7

    Australian Embassy..... 8

    Capital One..... 8

Thursday 25 July 2024..... 8

    Antelope Island State Park..... 8

    Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute..... 9

    Governor’s Office of Economic Opportunity and World Trade Center Utah..... 10

Friday 26 July 2024..... 10

    Rio Tinto Kennecott Copper Mine..... 10

    Utah State Capitol - meeting with elected officials..... 10

    Utah Olympic Park, Park City..... 11

Saturday 27 July 2024..... 11

    Downtown Farmers Market..... 11

    Snowbird Ski Resort..... 12

Sunday 28 July 2024..... 12

    The Honorable Stanley Chang, Senator, Hawai’i State Senate..... 12

Monday 29 July 2024..... 12

    Hawai’i Institute of Marine Biology, Coconut Island / Moku-o-loe..... 12

    Loi Planting and Cultural Lesson, Papahana Kualo..... 12

Tuesday 30 July 2024..... 13

    United States Indo Pacific Command..... 13

    Honolulu Department of Transportation Services and “Skyline” Autonomous Rail System..... 13

    USS Missouri..... 14

    Pearl Harbor National Memorial Visitor Centre and USS Arizona..... 14

Wednesday 31 July 2024..... 14

    Iolani Palace..... 14

    Hawai’i Government Employees Association (HGEA)..... 14

    Hawai’i State Capitol - meeting with elected officials..... 15

Conclusion..... 16

## Executive Summary

The 35th Australian Political Exchange Council (Council) Delegation to the United States of America (US) comprised representatives from the Australian Labor Party, the Liberal Party of Australia, and the Australian Greens. The Delegation was accompanied by Mr. Connor Costello from Council's Secretariat, with assistance from Mr. Charles Ogden from the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL).

It is understood to be the first all-female delegation undertaken by the Council.

The US is a vital ally and friend of Australia. It is a relationship reinforced by shared democratic values, cultural similarities and common endeavors, including defence and security cooperation, climate, critical minerals and clean energy, and trade and investment.

The Council's 35th Delegation to the US occurred at a historic time in the bilateral relationship. The two nations have further solidified defence and security cooperation through the AUKUS trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US. The US is also Australia's largest economic partner, conducting US\$77 billion in two-way trade, underpinned by the Australian-United States Free Trade Agreement (AUSFTA), and with an investment relationship valued at US\$1.6 trillion<sup>1</sup>.

With economic and strategic ties between the two countries vibrant and strong, it provided a solid foundation for positive and open discussions during the two-week delegation. Delegates met with a broad range of representatives including diplomats, congressmen, state parliamentarians, local government councillors, business leaders, bureaucrats, academics, multinationals, not-for-profit organisations and other leaders of civil society. Delegates also visited key political, academic and cultural sites. The three districts and states visited by the Delegation - Washington, D.C, Utah and Hawai'i - provided a fascinating insight into the political, social and economic diversity of the US. It also highlighted the common challenges faced by each jurisdiction - and indeed Australia - from housing and water to energy, climate change and cost of living. The comprehensive program of meetings provided for wide-ranging dialogue, allowing delegates to garner different points of view on the aforementioned policy challenges, as well as discuss other topics relevant to the bilateral relationship.

The timing of the delegation also fell at a critical juncture in US politics with the upcoming Presidential Election. This was a regular topic of discussion within meetings, and delegates greatly appreciated the candor and the insights provided by representatives and organisations they met with.

The Delegation returned from the US with a greater understanding of one of Australia's closest allies and the ties that bind the partnership. Importantly, additional people-to-people links have been developed between ACYPL and Council alumni and that will continue well into the future.

Delegates are pleased to provide details of the exchange in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> [Trade and investment | Australia in the USA \(embassy.gov.au\)](https://embassy.gov.au)

## **Delegation Report**

### **Friday 19th July - Sydney**

#### **Briefing Day**

The delegation met in Sydney to attend a pre-departure briefing day. Following an introduction from Mr. Connor Costello, Visitor Coordinator, Australian Political Exchange Council (the Council), the delegation met with academic, departmental and consular officials.

The first briefing was from Professor Brendon O'Connor on United States (US) history and politics. This excellent overview of the history of US migration, foreign policy ideology, the separation of powers of the executive (President, Congress, Judiciary), and the electoral college system provided important background information useful for the discussions delegates would go on to have during the exchange. It was an opportunity to ask questions of the Professor regarding the current political situation in the US. Specifically, the growing unity of the Republican Party following the assassination attempt on President Donald Trump and the increasing pressure on President Joe Biden to step down as the then Democratic Party's presumptive Presidential nominee.

Acting Assistant Secretary of the US, United Kingdom and Canada Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ms. Erny Wah, provided a briefing on Australia-US Bilateral and Economic Relations.

US Consulate Coordinator Neal Vermillion and Public Engagement Manager Georgia Brown briefed the delegation on US Embassy engagement, which was particularly useful given delegates would be meeting with the Australian Ambassador to the US, the Hon. Dr Kevin Rudd AC.

### **Saturday, 20 July 2024 - Washington D.C**

The Delegation arrived in Washington D.C late on the Saturday evening and was greeted by Mr. Charles Ogden, Program Manager, American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL), who would accompany the Delegation during the exchange.

### **Sunday, 21 July 2024 - Washington D.C**

#### **National Museum of African American History and Culture**

The first morning in Washington. D.C began with a River Cruise of the Potomac, which provided delegates with a useful overview of the various landmarks, monuments and memorials of the US capital.

In the afternoon, delegates visited the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture - the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture. The Museum was established by an Act of Congress in 2003 and opened to the public on 24 September 2016. It followed decades of campaigning by private citizens and organisations, determined to showcase the contributions of African Americans.

The museum extensively portrays the history and stories of African Americans through slavery and the Civil Rights Movement; their influence in creative works, art, music, sport and activism; and the impact of key figures such as Martin Luther King Jr, Oprah Winfrey and President Barack Obama. The Museum's collections were emotive, informative and inspiring. The experience provided delegates with an important grounding, as they embarked on their exchange, into how African Americans have contributed to the American values of resilience, optimism, and spirituality.

## **Monday, 22 July 2024 - Washington, D.C**

### **US Department of State**

During a meeting with key officials from the US Department of State, including Mr. Jack Bisase, Mr. Jeffrey Kline, Mr. Jiwon Lee, and Ms. Nalinee Cain, delegates discussed the significance of the strong relationship between the US and Australia. The conversation emphasised the strategic importance of this partnership in promoting stability and cooperation within the Indo-Pacific region. Additionally, the discussions highlighted the critical role of both nations in fostering positive relationships with Pacific nations, particularly in areas of public diplomacy, cultural exchange, and regional security. The meeting highlighted the shared commitment to maintaining and strengthening these vital international relationships.

### **General Motors**

Delegates met with Ms. Ashley Lerner from General Motors (GM), an ACYPL alumni, to discuss operations, community engagement strategies, and political involvement. The discussion provided valuable insights into GM's corporate strategies and their approach to influencing policy and supporting political campaigns.

One of the key learnings from the meeting was GM's use of Super Political Action Committees (Super PACs) to support political campaigns. The company has strategically leveraged Super PACs to advocate for policies that align with its business interests, particularly in areas such as automotive regulations, trade policies, and environmental standards. GM's involvement in political campaigns through these channels highlights its commitment to shaping a favourable legislative environment that supports its long-term goals.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to learn about GM's operational strategies. The company has been focusing on innovation and sustainability, with significant investments in electric vehicle (EV) technologies. GM's operations are geared towards maintaining their position as a leader in the automotive industry, with a strong emphasis on adapting to market changes and technological advancements. It was an opportunity to discuss the various challenges with EVs in Australia.

The meeting with GM was highly informative, offering valuable insights into both its operational strategies and political engagement through Super PACs. The information gathered will be beneficial in understanding how large corporations like GM navigate the complex intersection of business operations, technological innovation, and political advocacy.

### **American Lung Association**

The American Lung Association (ALA) is a health organisation that advocates to improve lung health and prevent lung disease through education, advocacy and research. As a non-profit, it targets key issues of concern such as bushfires (wildfires), risks to health through climate change and tobacco and nicotine products. In the meeting, the ALA and the delegation spoke about the risks of bushfires and ways of managing smoke inhalation. The ALA also discussed how it positions itself in the climate debate, seeking to align with health organisations rather than environmental ones to help advance its agenda. The ALA and the delegation also discussed the inequalities of emissions, with more severe impacts often felt in lower socio-economic regions.

## **Australian Ambassador to the US, the Honorable Dr Kevin Rudd AO**

In the afternoon, delegates were invited to the Australian Ambassador's Residence, White Oaks, to meet with Australia's Ambassador to the US, the Honorable Dr Kevin Rudd AO. As well as discussing his role as Ambassador, and Australia's bilateral relationship with the US, delegates took the opportunity to ask the Ambassador questions regarding the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, where he had just returned from. As a renowned Sinologist, delegates also enjoyed discussing with the Ambassador Australia's bilateral relationship with China and the drivers of China's policy decision-making. Delegates greatly appreciated the time the Ambassador took to meet with them and for the significant presence of key Embassy staff.

## **Tuesday, 23 July 2024 - Washington, D.C**

### **American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL)**

Delegates were invited to meet with Ms. Libby Rosenbaum, Chief Executive Officer at the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL), for a briefing and introduction to the program. ACYPL was founded in 1966 by staffers on Capitol Hill who wanted young Americans to have the opportunity to learn about other political systems such as in Western Europe and the USSR. The members were motivated by the fact that internationally, there seemed to be an appreciation for, and understanding of, the American political system for non-Americans, whereas Americans had limited understanding or knowledge of political systems outside of their own.

Since its inception, the ACYPL has conducted exchange programs with 129 different countries and territories, with more than 8900 alumni worldwide, including notable alumni such as the Former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Chris Hipkins.

Delegates also enjoyed a candid discussion with Ms. Rosenbaum regarding her views on the upcoming Presidential Election.

### **US Treasury Department**

Delegates met with representatives from the US Treasury Department, including Mr. Scott Arceneaux - Deputy Assistant Secretary of Public Engagement, Mr. Nick Tabor - Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Financial Markets and Ms. Bella Tonkonogy - Senior Advisor, Climate Hub.

The briefing provided an overview of the state of the US economy, with a particular focus on inflation and the geopolitical environment and their impacts.

Inflation in the US has been an issue for consumers. Prices for goods peaked in 2022, and consumers have not adjusted to inflated costs. Employment is strong across the nation, and wages have typically kept pace with inflation. The Treasury predicts that interest rates will decrease this year. A notable distinction in the US (as is the case in the United Kingdom), is that mortgage holders have fixed rate loans for the lifetime of the loan.

The Treasury officials and delegates also discussed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), originally named the Build Back Better Act, which is primarily focused on energy policy. This Act has raised \$1 billion in revenue and in practice has aided climate action through incentivisation, with 22-25 new or enhanced tax credits. Credits have been provided for fuel, sustainable aviation fuel, vehicles for consumers and home energy efficiency. The IRA provided legislators an opportunity to combine and create energy and climate policy. It has also set forth clear incentives in supply chains, extraction and clean energy supply chains.

## **Politico**

Following their meeting at the Treasury Department, the delegation met with Politico's White House Reporter, Mr. Daniel Lippman who briefed delegates on the US political landscape, in particular the upcoming Presidential Election, and his views on the potential Democratic Vice President nominee.

The delegates were also shown around Politico's office in Virginia where delegates met a Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist, Mr. Matt Wuerker, who showed them his recent artworks which provided an interesting and amusing insight into the current political landscape.

## **United States Capitol**

Following the meeting at Politico, delegates went on a tour of the US Capitol. Of particular interest to delegates were the bronze and marble statues situated throughout the Capitol building. On July 2, 1864 the National Statuary Hall Act passed which enshrined in law that *"The States ... provide and furnish statues, in marble or bronze, not exceeding two in number for each state, of deceased persons, who have been citizens thereof, and illustrious for their historic renown or for distinguished civic or military service as each State may deem worthy of this national commemoration"*. As the US grew, so did the number of statues required, outgrowing the Statuary Hall in size and structure, with the chamber unable to support the weight of further statues. In 1933, Congress passed a resolution allowing statues to be relocated to designated areas and corridors of the Capitol.

## **Boeing**

Delegates met with representatives from the Boeing Company who provided a briefing about their work in space, commercial aviation and defence industries. Boeing Space is the world's largest manufacturer of satellites, and as an example, currently has a NASA contract to build a rocket to send to Mars. Commercially, Boeing airplanes represent half of the world's fleet, with more than 13,000 in service. Boeing also changed its business model to include one of its now major businesses - servicing its own fleets rather than outsourcing the work. Australia boasts one of Boeing's largest footprints outside of the US, with most of its workforce residing in Melbourne, Victoria. Delegates also received a briefing regarding Boeing's Defence work, including the Australian-designed and built Ghost Bat (MQ-28) or Loyal Wingman which is, in short, an uncrewed system that flies alongside crewed fighter jets.

Further, delegates learnt about Boeing's latest innovation - Air Taxi by "Wisk" - an all-electric, self-flying light aircraft, which will be the world's first autonomous air taxi. It is of great value to the company, as currently, the world is not producing enough pilots. Boeing has been flight testing Wisk in New Zealand since 2018 and is engaging with Queensland local governments with the aim to provide green transport options into the future, including for the 2032 Brisbane Olympic Games.

## **GlobalWIN and Oracle**

Delegates were co-hosted for dinner that evening by members of GlobalWIN, a bipartisan organisation for women passionate about innovation, along with American software company, Oracle. Having the opportunity to speak candidly with women who have worked within the Democratic and Republican movements, including on "the Hill", and who now work in the tech and innovation sector, was a highlight of the exchange for delegates.

## **Wednesday, 24 July 2024 - Washington, D.C**

### **Honorable John Curtis, Member, US House of Representatives**

Delegates traveled to Capitol Hill to meet with the Honorable John Curtis, Member, US House of Representatives and his legislative staff. Congressman Curtis represents the state of Utah, where the State is grappling with how to transition to the use of clean energy in what was once “Carbon Country”. There is an emphasis in Utah to use fossil fuels and renewable in the right way - with an interest in moving to the use of nuclear energy.

As a Republican, Congressman Curtis offered his insights as to the state of the Republican Party post the assassination attempt on former President Trump and in the wake of President Biden ending his candidacy in the upcoming Presidential Election and Kamala Harris’ impending nomination. He offered his view that amongst Republicans, even if they were not fans of Trump - they would be impressed by how he handled the assassination attempt - or in the more extreme, would now consider him “a hero”.

Congressman Curtis also outlined that in his view, there is a battle for the heart of the Republican Party, and that things are shifting within the Party. For a time, it was about Trump defining the Party, but now Republicans talk about “traditional Republicans” i.e. Reagan Republicans and how there should be a return to that ideology.

### **Australian Embassy**

Delegates enjoyed a brief visit to the new Australian Embassy, which was opened in August 2023. Key features of the new embassy include its copper facade (which evokes colours of the Australian desert) and Australian furniture and art, with a distinct focus on First Nations artists. More than 250 employees work at the embassy across a range of departments.

### **Capital One**

Delegates were hosted for lunch by Mr. Joe Vidulich, Director of Federal Government Affairs, Capital One, who is also an ACYPL Trustee and ACYPL Alumni. Also in attendance was Mr. Nick Sanders Director of Government Affairs, CNA Insurance and ACYPL Alumni; and Ms. Arlie Ziskend, ACYPL Director of External Relations and ACYPL Alumni. Mr. Vidulich’s former role on Republican Senator John McCain’s 2008 Presidential Campaign prompted discussion on the Republican Party’s shift from a traditional “GOP” platform to the MAGA movement, under Former President Trump, and what that shift means for traditional Republicans.

In the afternoon, the delegation departed Washington D.C for Salt Lake City, Utah.

## **Thursday, 25 July 2024 - Salt Lake City**

In the morning, delegates were greeted by Ms. Angie Welling, General Manager of Expansion Markets for Google Fiber and ACYPL Alumni, who had held a previous role as Director of Communications for former Utah Governor Gary Herbert. Ms. Welling would accompany the delegation for their time in Utah.

### **Antelope Island State Park**

Delegates took a 40-minute drive to Antelope Island State Park, one of Utah’s 46 state parks and the largest of 10 islands located within the Great Salt Lake. The park is home to approximately 800 free-ranging Bison. Park Manager Wendy Wilson, who lives on the Island, provided the delegation with a brief history of the State Park. In 1969 the State of Utah purchased the northern section of the Park and in 1980 finally acquired the entire island via “eminent domain” (compulsory acquisition).



Prior to being purchased, the land was heavily grazed and noxious grasses were introduced. For the past 25 years, custodians have been working to restore the natural environment, as well as work with the Northwest Shoshone Nation (a federally-recognised tribe) to share its connection to the land.

The delegation then heard from Mr. Ben Winslow, reporter with KSTU Fox 13. Mr. Winslow is part of the Great Salt Lake Collaborative, a coalition of 19 news, education and civic organisations that have come together to better inform and engage the public about the challenges faced by the Great Salt Lake and what can be done to make a difference. Despite being rival news organisations, the media outlets that form part of the Collaborative share stories, research and information (known as “solutions journalism”) in order to reach and inform a broader audience.

Mr. Winslow advised the delegation that:

- The Great Salt Lake’s water levels impact the area’s drinking water, snow and ski industry, air quality, economy and ecology.
- The lake is able to create its own weather patterns and drought cycles.
- When water levels drop and the lakebed is exposed, it blows toxic dust, containing arsenic, lead, cadmium and copper, into local communities.
- Politically, the health of the Lake is not yet a “game-changer”, however 80 per cent of people support action to better protect the lake.
- A recent controversial study suggested the lake had a five-year shelf life.
- In 2023, the Utah Legislature established the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner, following the lake dropping to historically low levels in 2021 and 2022 and prompting action to protect it.
- Whilst the lake has recently risen 6.5 feet, it is considered 3-feet below a healthy ecological range.
- The Utah Legislature earlier this year passed water conservation laws to allow water to be donated back to the lake without agricultural users or mining companies losing their water rights.
- However, a lack of data means it is difficult to ascertain where the saved water is going.

Mr. Wilson’s briefing prompted discussion regarding the similarities between the Great Salt Lake and Australia’s largest and most complex river system, the Murray-Darling Basin, which has also been impacted by drought, agriculture, irrigation, urban and industrial uses. Mr. Wilson summed up the discussion with a well-known western phrase: *“Whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting”*.

Before driving back to Salt Lake City, the delegation took a short scenic drive through the Park to spot a lone Bison grazing.

## **Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute**

Delegates met with Ms. Natalie Gochmour, the Director for the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, who is a leading economic expert with the University of Utah, for a briefing about the history, economy and people of Utah.

According to Ms. Gochmour, Utah’s strengths include:

- Its youthfulness, job growth and balanced economy with industry diversity.
- Its high birth rate and high migration rate - providing the state with an economic advantage.
- Being nation-leading in “social capital” (i.e. civic engagement).
- Its large middle class and equality of income (measured using the Gini coefficient)
- Its high levels of upward mobility (often studied in social science)
- Its highest percentage of married couples in the country, who often have large families (directly related to being a Mormon state).
- Boasting a high work ethic and labor force participation (i.e. engagement in workforce).
- Being economically prudent, for example the state prides itself on maintaining a high credit rating (AAA).

Utah has a population of 3.4 million, in comparison to a state like California which has a population of 30 million. An estimated two-thirds of Utah residents are Latter Day Saint (Mormon) members of record, and 50 per cent of these are considered active or “church-going”. This is likely the driver of the growing “Cottage Industry” in the state. Entrepreneurial women with large families who work from home have turned to social media influencing (for example “Ballerina Farm” on Instagram) and platforms like Etsy (homemade arts and crafts).

With Utah being a Mormon state, it prompted further discussion on other social and political issues. Despite being a highly religious State, Ms. Gochmour explained there is a non-discrimination statute for the LGBTIQ+ community, known as “the Utah Compromise”. This provides a comprehensive framework at the state level for addressing anti-LGBTIQ+ discrimination and preserving religious liberty. And despite being a highly-Republican state, within Utah there is a reticence towards former President Donald Trump’s MAGA-style politics.

Ms. Gochmour also gave delegates an insight into the feeling of jubilation within Salt Lake City following the announcement it will once-again host the Winter Olympic Games in 2034. Utah was the sole bidder for these Games and had previously hosted them in 2002, where it had been found to have brought an economic benefit to the host state.

### **Governor’s Office of Economic Opportunity and World Trade Center Utah**

Delegates participated in a discussion on economic opportunity and trade with representatives from the Governor’s Office of Economic Opportunity and the World Trade Center Utah. In attendance were Mr. Franz Kolb, Director of International Trade and Diplomacy from the Governor’s Office of Economic Opportunity and Executive Assistant, Ms. Deveney Reber; Mr. Jonath Freedman, President and CEO of the World Trade Center Utah; and Mr. Jared Anderson - Director of Global Business Services of the World Trade Center Utah.

According to Mr. Kolb, the philosophy within the Governor’s Office is that the best government is the smallest government. It is their view that the responsibility of the Government is to create an environment where businesses thrive to create jobs, and therefore are very pro-business. This is reflected in Utah’s economy where it boasts a \$400 million “rainy day” fund. Utah has internationalised its economy, and therefore many residents speak other languages. Utah is also known for its innovation and boasts some of the highest patent rates in the nation. Australia is Utah’s 11th largest export partner and shares targeted industries. For example, Australian-owned Rio Tinto owns Utah’s Kennecott mine.

The World Trade Centre Utah is a private non-profit organisation that focuses on promoting Utah’s trade to go international. For example, Utah has an \$8 billion industry of nutraceuticals (e.g. essential oils). Tourism is also a key part of the economy, both in winter (skiing) and summer (the natural landscape). Utah is very much an outdoor state and is the only state with five National Parks (known as “The Mighty 5”), as well as being home to 43 state parks.

In the evening, delegates enjoyed attending a Salt Lake Bees baseball game at Smith’s Ballpark. The Bees are a Minor League Baseball team that plays in the Pacific Coast League.

## **Friday, 26 July 2024 - Salt Lake City**

### **Rio Tinto Kennecott Copper Mine**

Delegates travelled by bus to the Rio Tinto Kennecott Copper Mine in the morning. The mine has been operating for more than a century (since 1906), is one of the largest open-pit mines in the world and has been a critical driver of economic growth for the region. As a major source of employment and a key contributor to local businesses, the mine has significantly bolstered the community's economic foundation. Its copper production is essential not only for global supply chains but also for supporting local industries. However, the mine has faced considerable challenges, including environmental concerns such as land degradation, water usage, and air quality issues. To address these, Kennecott has invested heavily in sustainable practices, such as land reclamation projects that restore mined land to its natural state, replanting native vegetation, and creating wildlife habitats. These efforts reflect a commitment to environmental stewardship, ensuring the mine continues to benefit the region while minimising its ecological footprint.

### **Utah State Capitol, meeting with elected officials**

Upon arriving at the Utah State Capitol, delegates met with the Honorable Angela Romero, Minority Leader, Utah House of Representatives. Ms. Romero is also Chair of the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators' Education Task Force and serves on the Latina Legislative Initiative Committee. Within the State Legislature, Ms. Romero champions issues including victim's rights, preventing sexual assault and domestic violence, and clean energy initiatives.

A focus of the discussions with Ms. Romero was the Republican's supermajority in the Utah's Congress and the impact this has on policy-decisions within the state. Given the supermajority, the state has passed an anti-DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Bill, which proposes to limit diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at state-funded institutions. It also has a "Book Ban" whereby if three public schools ban a book, it is then banned by all public libraries.

Following the meeting with Ms. Romero, the delegation met with Republican State Senators Mr. Wayne Harper, Mr. John Johnson and Ms. Heidi Balderree, who briefed the delegation on the makeup of the Utah Senate. In Utah, there are 29 Senators, with 23 of them being Republican and six of them Democrats. There are only seven women in the Utah Senate. A key topic of discussion in the meeting was the subject of abortion. In 2020, Utah's State Legislature enacted Senate Bill 174, or the Abortion Prohibition Amendment. Also known as a "Trigger Law", this Bill states that if Roe v. Wade was ever overturned, it would trigger a law designed to ban almost all abortions in the state. Following the 2022 overturning of Roe v. Wade, the trigger law was challenged by Planned Parenthood in a lawsuit against the state. The injunction was recently upheld by the Supreme Court, and, at present, abortions remain legal in Utah up to 18 weeks of pregnancy.

Another topic of discussion was the unity of the Republican Party behind former President Donald Trump. Senator Johnson offered his view that Mr. Trump's Presidency has seen an end to the "Country Club Republican" made up of elitist progressives, with the GOP now viewed more as a party for working-class Americans.

### **Utah Olympic Park, Park City**

Delegates then travelled approximately 45 minutes to Utah's Olympic Park, the site of the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, for a private tour. Delegates were able to view the luge and ski jumping platforms. As mentioned previously, only days prior Salt Lake City was officially confirmed as the 2034 Winter Olympic Games host, so there was a feeling of excitement at the park following this news.

This provided delegates the opportunity to ask questions regarding the standard of the current Olympic infrastructure and what work would need to be undertaken over the next decade to prepare for the 2034 games.

Following the tour, delegates experienced the “Flying-Ace All Stars Freestyle Show”, which showcased the talents of Olympian and National Team Skiers who performed acrobatic feats up to 60 feet in the air, before landing into an Olympic Freestyle Pool. The choreographed shows are held every weekend from mid-June through to the Labor Day Weekend in September.

In the evening, delegates were joined for dinner at a local Park City restaurant by Mr. Alex Hagn from the Park City Chamber of Commerce. Discussions centered around the changes in the visitor economy in winter compared to summer, and whether Park City will continue to host the Sundance Film Festival beyond 2026. A review is currently underway into the future location of the festival, with Park City on a shortlist which also includes Atlanta, Georgia; Boulder, Colorado; Cincinnati, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; and Santa Fe, New Mexico.

### **Saturday, 27 July 2024**

#### **Downtown Farmer’s Market**

Delegates spent the morning in the Downtown Farmer’s Market, which was established in 1992 by the Downtown Alliance to activate Pioneer Park - a 10-acre area of open green space. Since that time, the market has flourished with more than 200 food vendors and 100 art and craft vendors, with a vendor mix that represents more than 100 local farms and ranches. As well as farmers and producers selling fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, honey and flora, the market also includes vendors selling locally made sauces, beverages, baked goods, arts and crafts. According to organisers, the market has been the launch pad of several successful food brands, for example Rico Beans. It was first established in 1997 in the Downtown Markets by Mexican immigrant Jorge Fierro, whose products now sell in local supermarkets across Utah.

#### **Snowbird Ski Resort**

Following their visit to the Downtown Farmers Market, delegates traveled approximately 40 minutes to Snowbird Ski Resort. The resort plays a vital role in the local economy, drawing tourists year-round, especially during the ski season. During the warmer months, it has diversified its offerings with activities and events, such as wildflower festivals, hiking and family-friendly amusements such as coasters, slides, climbing walls and trampolines, ensuring a steady flow of visitors throughout the year. This adaptability has created a significant economic impact, supporting local businesses and providing consistent employment opportunities, making Snowbird a cornerstone of the region's economic stability.

Additionally, delegates learnt that Snowbird contributes heavily to the local water supply, and snowmelt is a protected drinking water source. For Snowbird, the two sides of the mountain each flow into different water catchments - both Salt Lake City and Salt Lake County. Snowbird has invested in ensuring that water quality is high and incorporates education for its visitors into this resource, particularly with the challenges facing the Great Salt Lake.

### **Sunday, 28 July 2024**

The delegation departed Salt Lake City for Honolulu.

#### **The Honorable Stanley Chang, Senator, Hawai’i State Senate**

That evening, the delegation attended a welcome Luau dinner, hosted by the Honorable Stanley Chang, Senator, Hawai’i State Senate, and ACYPL Alumni, who would accompany the delegation for its time in Honolulu.

## **Monday, 29 July 2024 - Honolulu**

### **Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology, Coconut Island / Moku-o-loe**

In the morning, the delegation travelled by boat to the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology on Moku-o-loe / Coconut Island. Here the delegation met with a range of researchers across the institute. The delegation heard about the ongoing work to study the impacts of the marine pacific heatwave. This heatwave poses a significant threat to Hawai'i's reefs and surrounding habitat. Similar to Australia, the reefs are at risk of permanent coral bleaching and ecological harm as a result of marine heatwaves. In particular, researchers spoke to the delegation about the marine pacific heatwave's effect on whale populations. Researchers found an 85 per cent decrease in calf production, with a 1000 per cent increase in calf mortality. The delegation met with the Coral Resilience Lab who are selectively breeding types of coral that are more resistant to warming. This project will feed into a broader project the institute is undertaking to construct and breed artificial coral reefs to help slow the erosion on the coastline.

### **Loi Planting and Cultural Lesson, Paphana Kuaola**

After travelling back to the mainland by boat, the delegation visited Papahana Kuaola, a non-profit for cultivating Hawaiian culture and history. Here, the focus is on restoring and reestablishing traditional practices for land management and cultivation. The delegation engaged in aloha 'aina principles and learnt about the traditional relationship to the natural environment. The delegation also learnt about the traditional ways of growing and cultivating kalo (taro) and helped to restore some of the fields by removing weeds and invasive species.

## **Tuesday, 30 July 2024 - Honolulu**

### **United States Indo-Pacific Command**

The delegation's visit to the United States Indo-Pacific Command (the Command) provided insights into its operational perspective and emphasised the critical importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The Command covers the largest and most complex US theatre. With 400,000 personnel, the Command covers a vast area that includes 38 countries (including the six largest militaries) and covers 52 per cent of the globe. The Command's structure and planning processes were discussed, highlighting a focus on investment, activities, and capabilities development. The US State Department plays a key role in informing policy and strategy, while the Department of Defense (DoD) is integral to these efforts.

The discussions with the delegation focused on the nature of security, and the recognition that security means different things to nations in the theatre. This can include domestic security and policing capability, access to secure and reliable communications and internet, women's peace and security, and recovery from natural disasters including access to equipment, food and water. DoD and the State Department work collaboratively to ensure there is consistency in the US relationship with Pacific nations.

The delegation heard that relationships are crucial in the region, and Australia has had a long and consistent commitment to its Pacific neighbours. Accordingly, Australia has a significant presence in the Command, including a large number of personnel on the island and more than anywhere in the world outside of Australia.

### **Honolulu Department of Transportation Services and "Skyline" Autonomous Rail System**

Delegates were briefed on local infrastructure policy and given a tour of Skyline Operations by Mr. Jon Nouchi, Deputy Director, Honolulu's Department of Transportation Services (DTS).

“Skyline” is a fully-automated electric rail system - the first of its kind in the US - which is being rolled out on behalf of the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation (HART) and DTS in a joint venture with Hitachi Rail. Skyline officially opened on 30 June 2023, with nine of the planned 19 stations currently in operation. The expected cost of the project is approximately US \$5.2 billion. However, reports suggest that delays and cost overruns will see this figure double to US \$10 billion or higher. A 0.5 per cent General Excise Tax and a 3 per cent City Transient Accommodations Tax, “Bed Tax”, have been introduced to help pay for the project.

It has taken 55 years from thought to completion for Skyline to be executed. The aim of the state-of-the-art system - once fully complete - is to eliminate an estimated 40,000 car trips per day from Honolulu’s congested streets and highways – equivalent to adding up to eight new freeway lanes.

According to Mr. Nouchi, there are more registered cars on the island than there are people, therefore DTS is pushing for Hawaiians to modeshift, providing an example that 24 minutes traveling by car will be able to be achieved in a six-minute rail ride on Skyline.

However, given the preference for private vehicle transport and metro bus services, along with concerns around the cost of the system and the value to Hawaiians, the shift to Skyline has been difficult. According to DTS, 3500 people ride the service per weekday, but DTS is hopeful this number will continue to increase as transport orientated housing developments are built. For example, a new housing area is being developed near the Pearl Harbor train station precinct to increase housing supply.

Skyline is also providing opportunities for local employment. A partnership between DTS and the local community college, where a Skyline station is also located, will mean that this industry will employ more than 280 people.

To complete the briefing, delegates were given a tour of Skyline’s operations centre, managed by Hitachi Rail, including the control room and maintenance facility.

## **USS Missouri**

In the afternoon, delegates were given a private tour of the USS Missouri, an Iowa-class battleship built in the 1940s that is now a Museum Ship. Most well-known as the location of the surrender of the Empire of Japan, officially ending World War II, the USS Missouri was a highly decorated battleship, serving in World War II, the Korean War and the Gulf War. Delegates were taken to the quarterdeck to view the site of Japan’s surrender and were able to lean over the side of the ship to see the small dent made by a Kamikaze pilot. The 19-year-old pilot, Setuso Ishino, who was shot down and died in the failed attack, was given a proper sea burial. Officers and crew are understood to have even fashioned an improvised Japanese flag to use during the burial.

## **Pearl Harbor National Memorial Visitor Centre and USS Arizona**

Following the tour of the USS Missouri, delegates took a boat to the USS Arizona Memorial, which is built above the shipwreck of the USS Arizona. The battleship sank on 7 December 1941 during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, killing more than 1170 officers and crewmen. Despite the windy conditions on the day, delegates were able to make out the silhouette of the battleship under the surface, while one of the turrets remains visible above the water. To this day, you can still see oil seepage from the ship’s hull. Delegates were invited to scatter rose petals over the shipwreck to pay their respects to the fallen, which was a moving experience and an opportunity for quiet reflection.

## **Wednesday, 31 July 2024 - Honolulu**

### **Iolani Palace**

In the morning the delegation visited Iolani Palace, the royal residence of the Hawaiian monarchy until the monarchy was overthrown in 1893. The delegation learnt about the history of the Hawaiian monarchy, including the imprisonment of Queen Lili'ukoalani. This included viewing the quilt made by the Queen during her imprisonment that articulates the political history and context surrounding the overthrow.

### **Hawai'i Government Employees Association (HGEA)**

Following the tour of Iolani Palace, the delegation walked to the Hawai'i Government Employees Association (HGEA). HGEA is the largest union in the state, representing 28,000 members and 19,000 retired workers from both white and blue-collar sectors. It covers employees across nine bargaining units, including state government, judiciary, the University of Hawai'i, public hospitals, and county staff. Over time, the association has become predominantly female, with approximately 67 per cent of its workforce being women, along with a growing number of younger members.

Mr. Randy Perreira, HGEA's Executive Director, who has held the position for around 16 years, discussed various roles within the union and highlighted that teachers are the second-largest group after public sector workers. The state has a high unionisation rate of 26 per cent, but areas like retail, banking, and small businesses show lower union presence. Industries with significant union representation include hotels/hospitality and construction.

Mr. Perreira noted there is a decline in candidates running for council or county positions. Work-from-home issues are frequently negotiated by the union, but employers often push for a return to the office. For nurses, the primary concerns are patient-to-staff ratios and the deregulation of nursing standards to address staffing levels. The association covers only public sector nurses and highlights that government sector employees are underpaid due to historical neglect. The union employs interest-based bargaining and notes that bus drivers are covered by Teamsters. Public sector compensation includes a 40 per cent contribution to healthcare.

### **Hawai'i State Capitol**

Upon arriving at the Hawai'i State Capitol, delegates were hosted for lunch by various ACYPL Alumni including the Honorable Donovan Dela Cruz, Hawai'i State Senator; the Honorable Tyler Dos Santos-Tam, Council Member, City of Honolulu; and the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism Deputy Director, Mr. Dane Wicker.

The discussion focussed on the challenges and opportunities within the agriculture industry in Hawai'i. Senator Dela Cruz emphasised the critical need for better education in the sector to ensure economic viability, particularly in overcoming the high costs of production and difficulties in scaling up operations. He highlighted significant investments that had been made in his district but noted the absence of an overarching economic strategy and the need for dedicated governance at a township level to drive outcomes.

The discussion also touched on the economic disadvantage of local production compared to imports, underlining the necessity of a "buy local" campaign that connects consumers with the stories of local farmers. Land and water access were also identified as key issues to long-term sustainability and growth, with a strong emphasis on the government purchasing land for 99-year leases to support local agriculture development.

Additionally, the top export industries were noted as real estate and cottage industries, with Amazon's recent opening creating 400 local jobs.

A crucial takeaway from the meeting was the recognition that while the agriculture industry faces significant challenges, including high production costs and difficulties in scaling, there is a pressing need for targeted education and strategic economic planning. The importance of connecting consumers with local farmers through storytelling emerged as a potential solution to bolster local production and support the agricultural sector. Additionally, the discussion highlighted the need for a more comprehensive and

After lunch, delegates met with State House Representative Ms. Lauren Matsumoto and State Senator Mr. Kurt Flavella. The meeting underscored the significant impact of economic challenges on local agriculture, and the need for strategic reforms, with Ms. Matsumoto revealing her family had lost its egg farm because of the rising costs of agriculture production, in particular the cost of bringing in feed from the US mainland. Housing shortages were discussed, with a focus on aligning zoning laws with current economic realities to better utilise available land and increase residential areas. Additionally, the conversation about migration trends and legislative measures like the "No Alien Bill" provided insights into how policy decisions can influence local housing markets and economic conditions.

Delegates then met with the Honourable Sylvia Luke, Lieutenant Governor of Hawai'i. Key points discussed in the meeting included the crucial role of Google's transpacific cable fibre installation in enhancing connectivity across the Pacific region. There was a focus on improving digital literacy, particularly for the older community - noting that County support will be essential for rolling out IT and internet literacy education. Environmental concerns were also discussed including rising sea levels and the contentious issue of landfills and waste incineration.

### **Thursday, 1 August 2024 - Friday, 2 August 2024**

The delegation departed Honolulu to return to Sydney, Australia, concluding the exchange.

### **Conclusion**

The timing of the exchange provided a unique opportunity to learn more about the US Democracy against the backdrop of an upcoming Presidential Election, as well as witness first-hand the country's growing alliance with our nation following the AUKUS agreement.

The exchange reinforced our nation's close friendship with the US, allowing delegates to forge links with key staff from departments and organisations, along with political and civic leaders.

Delegates wish to thank ACYPL Alumni Ms. Angie Welling and Senator Stanley Chang for their hospitality during the exchange, the Council and ACYPL for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and also wish to acknowledge the efforts of Mr. Connor Costello and Mr. Charles Ogden for the excellent coordination of the trip.