

**The Australia-US Relationship and the  
President's Partnership Agenda  
- Jeffrey L. Bleich**

**9 December 2009**

**Transcript**

Grattan Institute presented a breakfast seminar on 9 December 2009 with the new US Ambassador, Jeffrey L Bleich in his first public appearance in Melbourne. He discussed the Australia-US relationship, and President Obama's plans to strengthen it into the future.

**Speaker: Ambassador Jeff Bleich (A)**

**Moderator: John Daley, CEO, Grattan Institute (J)**

**Audience participants: Carol Schwartz (C), John Allen (JA), Chris Butler (CB), Winsome McCaughey (W), Nick Rowan (N), Paul Quinn (P), Daniel Mullerworth (D)**

**Location: Allen Arthur Robinson, Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia**

J: Good morning ladies and gentlemen. If I can distract you from your excellent breakfast, can I welcome you all this morning? I'd like to start by showing my respect and acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which this event is taking place and show our respects to the Elders past and present.

Thank you all very much for coming, and welcome to this Grattan Institute Seminar. I'd like to begin first by acknowledging our host, Allens Arthur Robinson and particularly Paul Quinn. It was very generous of them to offer to host this event which I'm sure promises to be a very interesting one about what is effectively one of Australia's most important relationships.

We have the opportunity today to hear from Ambassador Jeffrey L Bleich, the new US Ambassador to Australia. Even if he were not the Ambassador, I would hope that we would have the same interests. Ambassador Bleich has had an extraordinarily distinguished career as a lawyer. He clerked for Chief Justice Rehnquist which for those of us who have been in the legal profession immediately puts him on a different plane. He has been president of the Bar Association of California which when you think about it is the largest state in America which presumably means it's a lot of lawyers. He has had a distinguished career as a lawyer in litigation areas, both in commercial litigation and in a series of international arenas. And more recently he's held a number of positions under the Obama Administration, most recently as Special Counsel to the President.

So given that, he comes to us with an extraordinary range of experiences understanding that crucial institution of law and how it matters and what it does for the United States. But then on top of that, of course, he is now the Ambassador for the United States. To use that well worn but nevertheless very true phrase, the United States is a great and special friend to Australia and it has been a defining relationship for Australia over the last 100 years. And I'm sure it will continue to be a defining relationship for many, many years to come.

So we are very grateful for you coming today. We're looking very much forward to hearing what you have to say about developments both in the United States and internationally, and what they might mean for the United States and Australian relationships. And thank you for your time today and may I ask you all to welcome the Ambassador of the United States, Ambassador Jeffrey Bleich.

A: Thanks.

(Audience applause)

A: Thanks again. Well good morning and thank you for getting up so early for this. I want to thank John for that wonderful introduction. Well, and I should thank my mum for writing it, 'cause it was very nice.

(Audience laughter)

A: I want to thank Allen Arthur Robinson for this fantastic venue and beautiful view of Melbourne which is one of my favourite cities. And, yeah, as John mentioned I was the President of the Bar Association in California which is the largest integrated Bar I think in, certainly in the United States, and possibly in the world, which lets you know just how many people are unhappy with lawyers, when you're the President of that organisation. In fact, we regulate lawyers and what you discover is that in every case, you know, there's a winner and a loser in litigation. So at least one person hates the other side's lawyer. And sometimes they hate their own lawyer too. So it ends up being a big job. And finally I want to thank Grattan Institute. This is a terrific organisation and congratulations on your first year anniversary. It is startling what you've accomplished in just one year. And this is precisely the sort of body that we should all be trying to develop more of around the world. Our country just as much as yours has important issues getting bogged down in partisan debate and looking for people who are trying to find real solutions and make decisions based on facts rather than simply ideology or opinion. It's critical to our progress and your progress. So thank you for all the work that you're doing.

Now one question that I keep getting since I arrived in Melbourne is, you know, have you ever been to Melbourne before? And I have. In fact Melbourne is the reason that I decided that I wanted to take this position in Australia. My first trip here was about four years ago and I was taking depositions in a legal matter. And normally if you spend, you know, your entire day doing two depositions a day, in a city, you don't have a longing to return after that experience. But I did. Actually I love Melbourne. I love the river, I love the theatres, I love the sights and the restaurants and the shopping and I think I like the wine region a little too much. I went out to ... I got some wine at Yering Station and Tarrawarra and Green Point and missed the whole of Heathcote region, which my wife complained about. You know, like, you were there and you didn't try that one? But I brought a whole bunch back and I'm looking forward to coming back down here in about a month with my family for the Australian Open. We're going to bring our credit card too and looking forward to seeing you all then.

One other thing that keeps coming up here in Melbourne, and then I'll get into the serious part of the program, is that the Sunday Herald Sun was kind enough to write a article introducing me to Melbourne. Or allowing me to introduce myself to Melbourne, and I mentioned that I was excited to take my kids to see their first live AFL game. And actually I stayed up late last night watching Geelong and Collingwood. So I won't get into that game, I just want to let you know I did, I watched it. And people wondered why I'm interested in football. I played football when I was in the United States but I played American football, which is sort of the two worst aspects of American culture, 'cause it's intense violence interrupted by committee meetings.

(Audience laughter)

What I love about Aussie Rules is that you leave out the committee meetings, so ... and yeah I wanted to learn more about it before I got here so I went to the championships which were being played on a huge screen TV in a ballroom in San Francisco. I hadn't even nominated for Ambassador at that point. I go into this room. And it was great. Tons of people and they were serving James Boag beers and meat pies and I'm, you know, eating meat pies, throwing back some beers and for about an hour, you know, we're watching videos and my son turned to the guy next to me and said so when does the game start? Eleven. Like in four hours from now?

(Laughter)

Yeah. Well what are you going to do until then? He's like you're doing it mate.

(Laughter)

There you go. So needless to say I stayed and watched the game. I have no idea what the rules were. I just ... it never occurred to me. Now let me talk a little bit about the US-Australia relationship. It is, as John said, one of the strongest relationships in the world, between two nations. So I'd like to talk about that partnership and how it fits into President Obama's call for a re-engagement in the world by the United States and particularly in the Asia Pacific region. And

of course as new Ambassador I want to let you know how both the President and I see this relationship and offer our thoughts on the broader agenda.

I went back and looked and for the last 50 years I think every single initial address by a US Ambassador about the Australia-United States relationship that started with the ANZUS Treaty. And this one's going to be just a little bit different because I want to talk about something else that binds us all together, and that is Facebook. Yeah. 'Cause the day my nomination was announced, you know, I was working in the White House and it was a typical day for a White House lawyer. You don't have access to your personal email in the White House. They make it as difficult as possible for you to have a life. That's so you don't get distracted. So I worked until one or two in the morning and got home and then I checked my email and had a couple of hundred personal emails that I hadn't gotten to and I ... oh, you know, I'll go to bed and get to them in the morning. So I got up bright and early, pull up my emails and I've got over 2,000 messages. And I thought (sighs) you know, I got a virus and just what I need. And in fact it wasn't a virus, it was Facebook friend requests from Australia. I had 2,000 new friends in Australia.

(Laughter)

And there was a nice couple in Perth, they wanted to have tea with me and there was a guy from Sydney who wanted me to barrack for the Swans and then a whole bunch of emails came in afterwards, you know, talking what an idiot he was and you know, don't barrack for the Swans, you know. And some Melbourne team, or at least, you know, Geelong. And then a whole bunch of things about words that you just can't say that are okay in the United States that you can't say them in Australia which I would share now but we're being taped, so I won't ... (chuckles). And the reason that I mention all this is because there's a quarter truth to these emails, which is that it tells the deeper story of the US-Australia relationship. There is no question that the battle for World War II and the ANZUS Treaty that followed is the cornerstone of the modern relationship between the United States and Australia. But it's those thousands of intangible human connections that are the brick and the mortar that we've built upon a cornerstone. We are more than just two countries joined by a common policy interest, or goal. Over decades and decades we've built trust and understanding and friendship. And it's that friendship and the other friendship that John mentioned that brought me here. As John mentioned, I am old friends with President Obama. We were together on election night at Grant Park and, when he won the Presidency, and then I flew from Chicago to DC with them the next day to begin the transition. And then I ended up working in the White House as Special Counsel to the President for the past eight months which incidentally used to be very impressive to my kids that, you know, Dad was in the White House until, you know, last week when they discovered pretty much anyone can get into a White House State Dinner.

(Laughter)

But I came to Australia and I was deeply honoured when the President asked me to serve, because I can't think of a greater way to affect the vision of this President for broader engagement than through the extraordinary partnership that we have with you. The President's agenda has been about partnership and engagement in the world: his international agenda. His world view was shaped by having lived abroad in Indonesia and having lived in the Pacific in Hawaii, and seeing how America is viewed from the rest of the world. And what he learned was that we're all much safer where we have more friends and fewer enemies. And so our leadership in this region grew from his perspective not purely from power and force. After World War II the United States demonstrated that it had the military power to lead, but it was the acts of engagement, it was the Marshall Plan and the Berlin Airlift and the ANZUS Treaty that made it a leader.

So since taking office, President Obama has been dedicated to restoring that form of great American leadership. And the mandate that he's given to me, and to his other Ambassadors, is to renew our engagement in the world through mutual interests, but also through mutual respect. And that's why service as the Ambassador here in Australia is so attractive, because there is no relationship in the world that better exemplifies that great ideal of partnership. And there is no partnership in the world that has a greater chance of extending engagement through

the Asia Pacific region. And I don't have to remind people in this room of it, but having now travelled around the country, I've already been to Perth and up in Barrow Island and over in Sydney and Canberra and here, just in a couple of weeks. And everywhere I've gone the level of cooperation and interdependency between our nations is staggering. Whether it's military cooperation or space exploration, combating climate change, increasing cultural exchanges, from fighting in Afghanistan to fighting wildfires in California and down here in Melbourne, to forming free trade zones around the world, the United States is committed to Australia, and Australia has been committed to the United States. In short, and I've said this before, and I think I've annoyed some other countries, but the United States has no better friend in the world than Australia.

The important thing about this is this sort of kinship isn't an accident. It's not a freak of nature. Our bilateral relationship was built by very far sighted people over many decades who established bipartisan support in both countries, because it was built on a few enduring principles: security, prosperity and most important, shared values. And it's also been as deep and as strong as it has been because we haven't neglected it. We've focused on long term goals and we've acted in good faith to overcome the short term differences that always pop up, and our own self-interests that sometimes get in the way. And in doing this, we've managed to take this vast ocean that separates us and turn it into a great zone of peace that binds us together.

It's particularly important that we have this relationship now because there is no more important region in the world geopolitically than the Asia Pacific. Your Prime Minister has talked recently about how Australia's Western by history but Asian by geography. Our President has said that the great Westernised United States is actually a Pacific nation and that he's our first Pacific president. There's a reason why they're focusing on our Pacific connection and it's because when you've got 40% of the world's population in 54% of the world's GDP here, Asia holds the key to all of our futures. And thus our nations, and the world as a whole, depend quite a bit on the commitment of our nations to reach across the Pacific, extend prosperity throughout this region and to bring our leadership into the rest of the Asia Pacific. So I'm going to talk about four pillars on which we are working on these types of issues together.

Now the first pillar of our partnership, and where it stands today, is built on strength. I won't go into all the different areas because this is a very sophisticated room, so let me just focus on the one that you're probably most interested in which is Afghanistan. Today as we speak, we've got troops fighting side by side in Afghanistan and it's a truly unified Australian and US force in [Orūzgān](#) province and Kandahar. Right now Australia's the United States' largest non-NATO troop contributor with 1,550 troops. And the civilian support that you've also provided has been invaluable. I think numbers don't really tell the story, as said the other day, as Roy Jones Jnr discovered the other night, you know, Australians tend to punch above their weight. So we are grateful for the civilian support as well, and that has been the major recent development in this effort, which is the United States in determining its new needs in the region, has focused on increased troops in certain areas, but from the Australians what it's principally relying upon is the contribution of additional civilian resources to help with the real work that's being done in that region, in [Orūzgān](#) province, it's principally focused on mentoring, teaching, teaching the basic tools to the Afghan people that will permit them to lead their own nation. And also to focus on eliminating corruption at government levels which has so far interfered with the formation of a stable government society.

This is very hard work. I think it's easy to underestimate how difficult this is. It's done person-to-person, one-on-one, in very remote and lonely outposts where you're trying to train individuals how to have a functioning society. And our sons and daughters are doing this out there because they, and the children of our allies, and I think the people in this room, recognise that we can't allow that country to fall back into the hands of Al Qaeda.

So while I have you all here I want to take this opportunity to thank you. I want to thank the Prime Minister obviously for his support but also all of you and the brave Australian military and civilians who are out there serving in Afghanistan. We mourn for the 11 soldiers that you've lost. And we pray for them and we pray for those who are out in the field, just the way that we do for our own children. So thank you.

But the strength which we always tend to focus on in our relationship is not the end in itself. It's just a means to an end. And part of the reason why we need to be strong and secure is in order to promote prosperity in this region economically. And one of the most recent major steps that we've had has been the Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the United States where we have had a tremendous success, was put into effect four years ago. Since then US exports to Australia have increased 56%. Australian exports to the United States have increased 46%. It's a total win-win. The relationship between us is about as robust as you could get. We invest in Australia, we buy Australian, we hire Australian. So what do I mean by that? We are the number one investor in Australia, 350 billion dollars in US funds, in Australia. We are the third largest trade partner with Australia. We're behind China and Japan but we're working on it. And try harder. We're like what is it, Avis? And our companies large and small employ over 325,000 Australians and are adding to Australian prosperity in that manner. We've got large projects coming online like the Gorgon project up in Barrow Island which will bring in, you know, thousands and thousands of new jobs and billions of new dollars to the region. We invest in Australia because we believe in Australia.

The big challenge that we have economically now is to extend that prosperity. Together, our bilateral relationship is strong for the two countries but we could be so much stronger if we could leverage that into broader trade partnerships and so both the President and the Prime Minister recently announced that we are going to commit to the trans-Pacific partnership which will bind eight nations from across the Pacific, South American countries with Asian countries in one large set of bilateral relationships and if we do that right, we will have a strong economic force that can rival larger nations with very strong economies.

The third pillar concerns the environment and I know there's been a very robust debate here in Australia about energy use and the environment. Like Australia, the United States, and every nation in the world, is feeling the effects of an unsustainable energy policy. The nations of this world have built their economies on fuel supplies that are exhaustible, they will be exhausted, and that are fouling our seas and our skies in the process. The greatest of our many challenges together, and I think the ones that our grandchildren will judge us by is developing sustainable and clean energy futures. That's going to give them a dependable source of energy. It will give them an advantage over countries that lag behind in that effort. And it will slow and reverse global climate change. The threat of climate change is real and the United States is committed to meeting our responsibilities to develop a new safe energy future. And we thank Australia which has been a real leader in the run up to the Copenhagen Conference that just began two days ago.

As we've seen here, this is a hard issue and a lot of people have a big stake in it. And it's not going to be easy, and there is going to be a very difficult and robust debate, just as you've had here, but we're going to see it in capitals all around the world. Australia, by placing this at the top of your global agenda, by making it a priority issue, you've done us all a great service because it's forcing the debate and now more than ever our scientists, our engineers and our political leaders need to go beyond immediate self-interest and go beyond ideology and look at the facts and start charting a new course to find ways to increase efficiency standards, to create clean energy technologies and to cut our greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally, the fourth pillar that I want to talk about is saving the planet in another way. And that's from our worst instincts and our worst people who are seeking access to nuclear weapons. Australia's been a real leader in nuclear non-proliferation efforts and we have agreed to cooperate, including sharing very sensitive information to secure vulnerable nuclear material to help other nations strengthen their own capacity to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and to bring international outlaws to justice. We've stood together on some of the toughest non-proliferation issues facing us today including Iran and North Korea, and because of the fundamental trust that we have between our two countries, we can have the type of frank and honest discussion about how to stop this threat, that is the only way to stop the threat. It's all about intelligence sharing and thoughtful approaches to these problems.

All these things are going to take work. And that's precisely what the President asked me to do and what he expects of me. You know, like many of the other Presidents' ambassadors, I'm in



the middle of my career. I've got a young family and this is not an honorific job for me, it's not some capstone for my career. It's a role-up-your-sleeves kind of job. So I'm very energised to be a personal representative of the President on these four great issues, in this great country, in this great region, at this very, very important time. I'm not going to take any of it for granted. You're going to be seeing a lot of me, I plan to be a very active Ambassador who personifies the partnership that I just described.

So let me finish up and then I'll open up for questions. On behalf of the President and the people of the United States, let me thank you. You know, too often this world is marred by these large regions of conflict and that's what's on the news every night. Our nations offer this beacon of hope, that for 60 years what we've shown is that two great nations can learn from each other, they can trust one another, they can help one another, and they can create a region of peace that stretches 10,000 miles around the globe. And we've done this regardless of the times, regardless of who is in power in our country and regardless to which challenges we face. So I'm very grateful to Grattan Institute for inviting me here. I'm grateful to my new friend John, I'm grateful to my new friend Prime Minister Rudd, to my old friend President Obama, to my thousands of new Facebook friends from Australia on both sides of the Pacific who are committed to this. And so I want to thank you for the great gift of your friendship, for the wonderful breakfast and now let's play stump the Ambassador.

(Audience laughter, applause)

J: As the Ambassador indicated, he's very generously offered to take our questions. So if I can ask anyone who has a question if you could raise your hand and if I could just ask as you introduce your question if you just introduce yourself and where you're from, please. So, I can throw it to the floor please.

A: Oh, come on, I didn't cover everything. Yes, Carol?

C: Carol Schwartz. I'm actually a member of Grattan Institute. Ambassador, I had the pleasure of having breakfast with you a little bit earlier and you were talking about Iran. I wonder whether in this forum you can expand on what your insights are into what's happening in Iran and what role [unclear]?

A: Well, obviously it's a very sensitive area. The US has been clear that Iran's nuclear program is unacceptable and we've been joined by other leading powers in the world in a relatively unprecedented statement of unanimity among the major powers. The Iranians have initially responded to evidence that we obtained that they had in fact developed a system for creating high grade uranium that could be used for weapons as opposed to for energy, lawful energy uses. By saying that they would open up their systems and demonstrate their compliance, there is some scepticism obviously and I think the entire international community is on a wait and see approach. But we have made clear that a nuclear Iran is unacceptable and that we will take appropriate measures to ensure that that doesn't occur, and I think the world community has come together on this. I think it's also a tribute to the quality of the information exchange and cooperation among leading powers that we're at that point. There is ... and I think that's about as far as I can talk.

J: Thank you.

C: Thank you.

JA: Ambassador my name is John Allen and I'm an independent consultant. If I could start on a personal note, my son was in Chicago, he was in Millennium Park the night that President Obama made his speech, or his inauguration speech. Talking to him after that, it gave me the thought that we had another situation in the world like John Kennedy's election, like Nelson Mandela's release, that here was a real kind of Messianic figure. And 11 days after he was inaugurated he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize which if ever there was an indication of... in hope that was it. It is therefore with some dismay that I, and others who I talk with, have heard about how he's kind of tripping up on some of the stuff that we don't really hear about in Australia, such as health policy etc. Could you just give us a perspective that the 11 day

nomination was really the thing we should focus on and not worry about what else is happening the other 364 days of the year?

A: (Chuckles) Okay, well let me do two things. One is the last thing is that the President would want to be is a Messianic figure. And in fact I remember, yeah, we've been friends for a while and at one point he just started getting all this media attention and adulation and people were ... you know, artists were making renderings of him, writing songs about him. And I said to his wife, the First Lady, Michelle, I'm like you know Barack's becoming a rock star. And she's like oh, do not call him that, you know, that's the last thing that any of us want. And if you look at rock stars lives, they're not very good. So he is very grounded, he's not buying into any of that and he doesn't allow the polls or adulation or criticism to change his judgement. He has stayed very focused on the four things that he said he was going to do in his first year. There were ... and the lobbying from both sides, you know, don't do too much, don't do too little, you know, do my issue, don't do their issue. It's intense. And he said there are four things we need to do to get America back on track. First we've got to fix the economic crisis, you know, we're on the verge of a great depression unless we do things right and get a stimulus package through and start spending money properly. Second thing we need to do is make sure we're secure by drawing our forces back from Iraq, refocusing on Afghanistan. Third is got to get our health care policy right, we're wasting a lot of money and putting ourselves at a competitive disadvantage around the world, needlessly, this is a self-inflicted wound that we've got to stop and we've had 40 years of not dealing with it. Fourth, we've got to get energy policy right, both because of the threat of global climate change and all the other issues that people talk about, but more importantly, because it is the principal way in which we can re-establish an economic advantage over the rest of the world. If we are ahead of the game on clean tech, then we can have cheap, sustainable energy sources going forward and we will be able to avoid the external costs that come with polluting technologies. So we have that opportunity and we need to do it now. And we can't wait.

He's focused on those four things. Where are we? The economic stimulus package has worked, our economy has come back from ... you know, our stock market was down at around 6400, now we're back over 10,000 again. Jobs are starting to come back, we're seeing signs of life in our economy and there is new confidence in the markets. We've got a huge debt and we still have unemployment, but we've walked back from the precipice. We've drawn down our troops in Iraq, we've re-focused on Afghanistan, we have a clear plan there, we've got 43 countries that are on board with this, with this plan. I think he's been a very effective Commander-In-Chief on that issue. Healthcare? We've got a Bill through the House, we've got it to the Committees of the Senate, we are going to get a Healthcare Bill and it'll be signed I believe by February. And on energy, we've got a Bill through the House, we've got the Waxman-Markey Bill. We're going to have a tough debate in the Senate and I don't think it'll be much different than the debate we've had here, although, you know, your processes are different.

(Audience laughter)

A: And I'll leave it at that. And we will have a ... but I believe we're going to have a significant energy Bill through. And if you look at that as what he planned to do and what he's done, I'll match that up against any President in their first year.

J: Thank you.

CB: Ambassador, it's Chris Butler from Ernst & Young. One of our Prime Minister's pet projects is creating an Asia-Pacific community, which he has invested a lot of personal time in.

A: Yes.

CB: It has been received with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Could you just perhaps comment on how the US looks at that proposal in particular?

A: Yeah. I'd be glad to. In fact I was in Sydney for the first meeting of the APC forum and ... first I'll tell you my impression of the enthusiasm for it and then I'll give you the US perspective. I think the enthusiasm for it has increased in that it's a demonstration of the sort of



powerful case that the Prime Minister has made and that others have made, that notwithstanding the fact that there are already many, many Asian regional institutions: there's APEC, there's ASEAN there's ASEAN plus the ASEAN dialogue partners, there's the ASEAN Regional Forum, there is EAS. So there are plenty of forums already. There are none that are comprehensive. You don't have the United States in the EAS, you don't have India in APEC, you've got these big gaps in terms of constituency and in terms of mandate for each of these institutions and so how do you rationalise it? By trying to get people together, dealing on interrelated issues and having all the major voices at the table. I think that's what he has suggested and it's either going to have to come through some sort of consolidation or through some very effective coordination among these bodies. But at least let's see if it can be improved. He made a good case for it and I think there is a real will to try and accomplish that. And that's pretty much where the United States is, we applaud the effort, we think it would be great if we could improve upon the current regional architecture. And, but it's going to take some work and it's going to take some time to see how much buy in we really have and how much people are just saying if I nod long enough maybe it'll go away. But we're committed to try and make it work.

W: Ambassador, I'm Winsome McCaughey and I'm working at the University of Melbourne at the present time.

A: Hi.

W: You spoke about being a working Ambassador. One of the best kept secrets I think of Melbourne in particular is the absolutely stunning research capabilities we have in this city and in this State. We're wonderful at innovation and research especially in the areas of energy and life sciences etc.. One of the things that we're not so strong in is translating these into applications into the global sphere and taking them to market as well. Under your watch as Ambassador here, is this one of the areas that you'd like to be working at helping and encouraging USA based global research companies to engage with our wonderful scientists.

A: Yeah. Well, well that ... first, I think Grattan Institute is one of the great opportunities to do that, to sort of connect great academic research with people who are ... can apply it in a real world. But a big part of my job, what the President said to me, and you get this very long letter that describes all the things that you're supposed to focus on as Ambassador. And I read it, you know.

(Audience laughter)

A: But you also get a relatively more concise briefing and what he said was if you listen and you're a good partner, you'll be a great Ambassador. And I think that's right. My job out here is to listen and to learn from the innovation that you're developing here in Melbourne, and then to partner it up with people who can make a difference with it. So whether they're US businesses or other, you know, multi national regional efforts. But that's my job.

J: Thank you. There's a question over here.

N: Thank you Ambassador. My name is Nick Rowan and I am a consultant. I'm interested in... you didn't mention world population growth and the imbalance between population, natural resources and prosperity. And its probably a difficult subject round the world... you see various people talking about it. But is the US has a focus in this area and where do you see the world debate and the US position because it becomes embroiled in all the other issues we've talked about. Do you have any comments to make? Thank you.

A: Well, I think the United States is obviously very concerned about resources for the population generally. You know, we don't look at this as an issue of population control, we look at it as resource allocation and we've got some serious resource allocation problems in the world right now. Water scarcity is a tremendous problem, food scarcity, tremendous problem. Energy, as I talked about, a tremendous issue. And we're trying to look at these things globally. Our concept of the world has been as interrelated as it is, is relatively recent in human history. But now we understand that if we have climate change affecting just one region of the world, or

some terrible natural disaster affecting one region of the world, that wipes out food supplies and for other nations, it creates refugee issues and asylum issues for other countries. It creates a whole ripple effect of challenges and so trying to be smart about planning for resource shortage and to try and overcome existing shortages is a key part of maintaining, you know, our own sovereign integrity, let alone being a good global citizen. But there's a great deal of self-interest in trying to make sure that we get these allocations right. And one of the reasons why we keep hammering on energy policy is because as we have more and more countries developing, and you look at the development in China, the development in India, we can't afford to have huge carbon footprints for every country that wants to have the same level of ... same quality of life as we have in many of the Westernised countries. You can just see what it will do both in terms of environmental damage but also in terms of quickly exhausting exhaustible supplies. We'll just have to come up with another system. Same thing with water conservation, you know, we're looking at how you make desal work better technologically, because right now 97% of the world's water is unusable, it's salt water. We've got 3% fresh water and 2% of that ... or ... and then two-thirds of that is the ice caps. So really, there's one percent of the world's water is fresh water that's accessible. As our population grows and that water supply doesn't grow, we got a problem.

P: Paul Quinn from Allens Arthur Robinson. I wonder if you'd like to comment on what the US expectations might be for Copenhagen.

A: Yeah, well, I think our expectation is that there will be progress in Copenhagen. And what I mean by progress is that you will have the nations of the world, particularly major powers that have the most at stake, committing to a ... to certain principles and to committing to coming back and working up the multilateral treaty. I don't think that it was ever realistic to expect that something this complex, involving this many interests, was going to be reduced to writing in one meeting. But the fact that this is drawing the attention of the entire world right now, when five years ago you could not get this on the international global agenda, demonstrates a tremendous shift in commitment in the world. And so I think that's tremendous progress and that's our goal.

D: Thank you Ambassador, Daniel Mullerworth, Grattan Institute. You've touched on energy policy a couple of times....

A: Too many times.

D: I wondered if I could ask another question about it.

A: Sure.

D: I was wondering if you could comment on the US's view of nuclear energy around the world and, in particular, options for Australia given our ownership of a large proportion of the world's uranium deposits.

A: Yeah. Well I can't really speak to Australia's judgements about the use of nuclear energy or how it will distribute its own resources that can be used to make nuclear fuel. On the other hand, the United States, we have nuclear power plants. Many of those are ageing. And the question is, are we going to be able to replace those with a different form of energy technology, or are we going to continue with nuclear technology to replace those that are going to be taken offline. So that debate is coming up in the United States. I don't think a firm, you know, across the board conclusion has been reached, but I do think that absent opportunities to come up with new technologies, that there will be some new nuclear facilities that will likely be online in the United States. And as the President has said, he has no ... during the campaign he said he doesn't object to nuclear energy per se, the question is can you store the waste in a safe manner? Can you operate them safely and can you store the waste in a safe manner? There have been improvements in that technology since Three Mile Island and Chernobyl and some of the other disasters that caused people to really rethink their nuclear energy policies. But this is an issue that we haven't ... where there isn't an American policy across the board yet.

J: Unfortunately I think, given the time, we might have to finish off with questions there. I was hoping I could call on Carol Schwartz, one of the members of Grattan Institute, to provide us a very brief vote of thanks.

A: Well thanks. If you wanted to end with a funny question, you know, about my kids, you know, kangaroos, that kind of thing.

C: Leave it to me.

A: Okay, good.

C: Thank you very much Ambassador.

A: Thank you.

C: And John said at the beginning of your presentation that the US is a very close and special friend to Australia. And I think that your appointment as US Ambassador to our country actually indicates the respect and significance with which the US holds Australia. Thank you for your warm anecdotes and your candid insights, and I'm sure we are all looking forward to signing you on as a friend on Facebook. And please accept this. I'm not sure it's Tarrawarra wine.

A: Oh. Excellent.

C: [Unclear]. Thank you very much.

A: Oh, this is wonderful.

C: Please join me in thanking the Ambassador.

(Audience applause)

A: Thank you very much.

(Audience applause continues)

J: If I can just conclude by thanking our hosts again, Allens Arthur Robinson for their hospitality. It's greatly appreciated. Thank you all for coming and I would ask you all to wander out into the warm Melbourne sunshine, and thank you for your attendance today. Thank you.

(Audience applause)

End of recording.