

## **Overseas Americans Week 2009 - Experiences of first-time delegate Lori Hakulinen**

Sunday afternoon, on my way to the orientation meeting who do I run into? ACA stalwarts Andy Sundberg (Geneva), Roberta Enschede (Netherlands) and Roger Conklin (Florida), of course! At the Cosmos Club I finally meet Claire Smith from Germany, Beth Tudan and Berengere Parmly from Washington DC. Off to a strategy session: reminder for participating groups to speak with a single voice, to strongly encourage members of Congress to join the Americans Abroad Caucus, to request new a GAO report on the effects of taxation of overseas Americans on trade, and to get commitment to vote on bills that we are all backing.

**Day One** – got up at 6.30am – out the door (late) at 7.30. Navigated Washington DC metro system – busier than weekends! Am already perspiring because I am one hour late – good thing breakfast runs until 9! - found the Longworth Building – made it through security and bag check - was directed to the basement (cafeteria) by a nice guard. Found the OAW group. Got my schedule for the day – observing and note taking for Tom Rose (AARO) of the Medicare/Social Security (SS) group. Off to the first meeting at 10am with a legal aide to Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA). Next meeting is at 11am with Toni Miles of Sen. Max Baucus’s office (D-MT). She is a professor, teaches geriatrics at University of Kentucky. Absolutely agreed with our position, and encouraged us to follow up because in her words “many people are hurting right now”. She strongly suggests finding a Senator from a border state of Mexico to champion the cause. Now we’re getting somewhere! Missed the next meeting (George Vinovich, R-OH) due to this meeting taking a full hour.

Afternoon – starts with a 12 noon meeting with Harrison Lewis, Legislative Assistant (LA) for Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL) – very funny guy who advised us to not use the words “Senior” and “Executive” in the same sentence at this moment (during the AIG exec bonus scandal week). Met at 14.30 with LA from Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL) office, after which I was scheduled to be at the National Secretaries of State meeting downtown – at 15.30. Could **not** get there in time – so I tagged along to strategy meeting with Kim Reed, the attorney who headed Pres. Obama’s outreach to overseas Americans during his campaign. What a polished professional she is! Totally calm when 15 extra people showed up! She is a Washington DC insider – you feel like you’re “in the know” just being in her office. She let us in on events which were in the process of happening, and gave us tips on who to contact.

Most meetings were scheduled for ½ hour, but started late and took longer. Was hard to keep to schedule. Note to self – exchange business cards at each meeting, no matter who they are.

Back to the hotel – eat a burger on the way, sort through notes, fill in the blanks, print next day’s schedule, try to get to sleep...

**Day Two** – get up at 6am. Better. Get to breakfast on time. Am the fourth person to arrive. Logistics are easier – don’t have so many small details to navigate. Meeting today with Joel Nagar, Ways & Means Committee staffer who specializes in Medicare & SS, accompanied by Tom Rose and Paul Crist, President of a non-governmental organization established to seek Medicare for American retirees in Mexico. Nagar, who is Mexican/American himself, really understand the issues and is very helpful. Paul will follow up with him, making his Medicare reform proposal. Walking down the hall a staffer from Sen. Sherrod Brown’s (D-OH) office started talking to me. Got him to come to the OAW cocktail Wednesday evening.

Ran out of business cards today – definitely need to bring at least 50.

Evening – went to presentation at the Cosmos Club (a palace really) by Paula Lucas, founder of Domestic Violence Crisis Hotline. Was very impressed with her – went to dinner at local Greek restaurant with an all women group.

**Day Three** – Met with staffer at Sen. Kristen Gillibrand’s (D-NY) office IN THE HALL. Ms. Gillibrand was in the hall too – between meetings. They are on the busy side since replacing Senator Clinton. Took the metro out to the Pentagon – met with an official administering the Tricare program. Got to get to know Paul Crist a bit – runs a hotel in Mexico, and is single-handedly trying to get a demo project off the ground for introducing paid Medicare to American retirees in Mexico.

Back to Washington DC and on to one more meeting with an official at AARP. Very helpful – got the name of someone who is working on organizing a task force for the same thing Paul is working on. Feel like “we’re” getting somewhere. There is hope!

Just cross the street I saw the National Association of Realtors sign – and was struck by the money and power associated with Washington lobbyists.

Cocktail – staffer from Sherrod Brown’s office who I met in the hallway shows up – with their banking expert! Rep. Mike Honda is chatting with Andy Sundberg – took picture while Rep. Carolyn Maloney walked up and shook Andy’s hand. Had a nice chat with Don and Mary Adair (who is alarmingly funny and charming) and Barbara Stern of AARO. Went around the room taking some pictures – lovely start to the evening.

Heading to OAW organizing dinner with Peter Goldfarb, Jackie Bugnion, Andy Sundberg and others – was raining – looked up at the Capitol Building glowing at night and took a picture. Two minutes later it started to pour – luckily a taxi passed by.

At dinner did a round robin – I was last in line – did not speak, but found myself offering to help organize OAW next year! (What?!? Am I nuts???)

**Day Four** – everyone is tired. Frustration starting to show – not getting hoped-for responses.

**Day Five** – Exhausted but satisfied – checked out of hotel at noon, happy to be on the way home.

*(Lori Hakulinen is a member of ACA’s Executive Committee)*