



AUSTRALIAN
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LEADERSHIP DIALOGUE TRIBUTE TO BOB HAWKE—the people’s Prime Minister

Bob Hawke, the Australian people’s Prime Minister, had the natural instincts of statesmanship.

An important conversation in the Oval Office between Prime Minister Bob Hawke and President George HW Bush led to the President’s visit to Australia in 1992. Prime Minister Hawke’s invitation was supported and the Presidential visit subsequently facilitated by US Ambassador to Australia, Hon Mel Sembler AO. It was on Sydney Harbor New Year’s Day 1992 that New South Wales Premier Nick Greiner hosted the President, First Lady and members of the official US delegation. This was the context in which conversation with the President led to the creation of the Australian American Leadership Dialogue.

As our friends in the United States regularly point out, the Leadership Dialogue uniquely owes its sustainability to President George HW Bush lending the weight of his Presidential imprimatur in support of our creation. The President was very clear in expressing his respect for Bob Hawke personally, and in his capacity as long serving Australian Prime Minister through the Reagan Presidency and his own.

In discussing planning of the Leadership Dialogue, I sought Bob Hawke’s counsel regarding the values and principles which should underwrite our private diplomatic strategy of multi-tiered bilateral engagement. Bipartisanship, civility, open mindedness, celebrating the diversity of the Australian people as national asset, enhancing democracy and the rule of law, adopting an aspirational view of Australia’s future and treating every citizen as first class—these were all addressed and immediately agreed.

Importantly he advised we should stand for the sovereignty of Australia, treating leaders of other nations as peers, whether they represent great and powerful nations, or smaller countries than ourselves. While giving tangible expression to the importance of shared values, Mr Hawke was crystal clear that sustainable bilateral partnerships must derive mutual benefits and be in respective national interests, reflecting precisely what President George HW Bush had said.

Over the ensuing years of the Leadership Dialogue, we remained in contact and January 1 of this year, we wrote to Bob Hawke following the passing of President George HW Bush and reminding ourselves of the seminal role his relationship with the President played in enabling our creation. The letter is attached below.

As a citizen of Australia, I share the sense of Bob Hawke being the people’s Prime Minister. With his gifted and razor sharp mind, I am also one of so many who have benefited enormously from his leadership example of standing strong for his beliefs, his abiding faith in and love for the Australian people, and his aspirations for the role Australia must play in advancing human kind.

Phil Scanlan
FOUNDER

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