



THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP ACADEMY 2014 LEADERSHIP FORUM
FEBRUARY 5-7, 2014, RICHMOND, BC**

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Program Highlight #6

Interview with Keynote Speaker, Emeritus Mayor Peter Woods

Keynote Address: Wednesday, February 5th, 1:45-3:00 pm



1) Is this your first visit to our province? What have you heard about BC and what do you think are the similarities with the Australian experience?

I visited Vancouver a few years ago for a UN meeting. I find the city similar to Sydney area and the foundations to be similar to Australia and New Zealand. I have a great respect for Canada and Canadians and find I am generally on the same communications wave-length. Our roots are similar.

2) Based on your extensive experience and travel, what are a couple of the lessons you want to talk about?

I want to talk about people-to-people relationships and not the country political relationships that are often contrived and not sincere. Local Government relationships can be a far truer expression of real people than the political and diplomatic double talk of many National Governments and some of the duplicity that emanates from the UN. Inter-cultural sensitivities need promoting and nurturing and my extensive travels and experiences convince me that people have more in common than they have in differences.

3) What is an Emeritus Mayor? This is new to us in Canada.

The Local Government Association in New South Wales decided that it needed to give recognition to long-standing Mayors who had served their communities. It recognised that Ministers who retired from Parliament retained the title "Hon.", Military retained their title eg Major General (Ret.) etc., etc., etc. The Association decided to confer such a title on former Mayors who had served for at least three years and were formally nominated as worthy of such recognition. The decision of the Annual Conference was noted and a Certificate was presented.

4) What can you tell us about your role as United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific Ambassador?

I had been the President of IULA ASPAC and when I retired as a Local Government politician I was appointed as Secretary General of UCLG ASPAC. When I retired from this position the Executive Bureau had noted the work I had been doing of a sensitive nature in the region between Taipei and Beijing, India and Pakistan, North and South Korea etc. and asked if I could remain and make myself available as required by the Presidency and/or the Secretary General to assist on matters as required. I was delighted to oblige. The role of Ambassador enables me a point of entry to assist in the people-to-people relationships and to be seen to be officially linked to UCLG ASPAC but still retaining a degree of flexibility so necessary for this type of work.

5) Given the challenges facing humanity on a global basis, such as climate change, sea level rise, poverty and lack of security, what can local governments do to prepare for a brighter future?

The world's wealth needs to be more equitably spread if we are to overcome poverty and stifle the perceived need for aggressive action to be taken to overcome discrimination. Greed is at the centre of this, as is the increase in the negative results of climate change. All people need to reflect upon the human action and inaction that leads to negative consequences. Local Governments need to raise the consciousness of their communities by drawing upon the examples which are often obvious to local people but chosen to be not obvious by some myopic politicians and entrepreneurs with a pecuniary interest which overshadows any semblance of social responsibility.

Citizens, having become more aware of the impacts in their own communities need to be encouraged to link-in internationally and consolidate such reinforcement.

6) Australia has examples of the two main models of metropolitan governance - a large number of smaller municipalities with regional or state supervision of area-wide functions (e.g., Sydney, Melbourne) and one large city with larger suburban municipalities (Brisbane). What are the advantages and disadvantages of the two models?

There are too many Local Governments across Australia, particularly in the highly urbanised State Capitals. On a personal note I am a believer in doing-away with State Governments and having a strong and re-defined Federal Government with far stronger Regionally structured Local Governments with far greater powers and resources. (When I was State President of Local Government for 12 years I urged our policy to see the end of State Governments.) State Governments are a wasteful duplication and an antiquated legacy of the original Crown Colonies established by the British and a fore-runner to the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. This is probably wishful thinking on my part as there is too much self-interest and parochialism to see this enacted.

Brisbane has one Local Government for the city, full-time Councillors and big functions, including several carried out by State Government in other States.

While smaller units can provide for a more involved citizenry such a model lacks necessary resources and much is wasted on duplication. It also allows for the intrusion of State politicians and bureaucrats in the legitimate powers and authority of Local Governments. Pending getting rid of State Governments, bigger Local Governments through amalgamations seems ideal. If the bigger structure changes then looking at Brisbane becomes most relevant.

7) How does Australia retain such a high level of citizen engagement in local politics?

Federally Australia has compulsory voting. Statewise there is also compulsory voting. Local Government has always taken the political position that if it is compulsory for Federal and State

elections it should be compulsory for Local Government elections too. The turn-out is about the same for all elections (up to 90+%).

Some central bureaucrats would like it to be optional and postal for Local Government. We have opposed this. We see this as weakening Local Government's standing. I think we would be down to what you have in British Columbia too if we didn't demand being treated the same as the other spheres of government.

The principle of compulsory voting is based on the Athenian democracy of Ancient Greece. There they ruled being part of a city state brought the people rights but also responsibilities. To play a full part people had an obligation to be fully involved and not just sit back and criticise. If they didn't participate they were banished from the city.

In Australia it is compulsory to attend the polling booth and have their name registered. They can then vote, destroy their ballot paper or write profanities on their paper!! Interestingly having made the effort to attend (and avoid a fine) most votes are formal.

8) Can you tell us a little about your leadership experience and work with local government elected leaders in North and South Korea? What have you learned from being on the ground there versus listening to media reports?

I have visited South Korea about 12 times and North Korea 6 times. I have travelled the country (there is one Korea) from the very North to the very south, East and West. The people share many values. They are one people and speak the same language and are only separated by political actions. There is a huge desire by the overwhelming number of people in both parts for a peaceful reunification of their country. I have spent a lot of time conveying views across the border and messages on how the reconciliation can translate into reunification. There are many very senior politicians and business leaders who do not back the US in Korea. Most of the ordinary people of South Korea and virtually all the young people I have met do not back the US. When you have talked to such people it makes a mockery of the propaganda that is pedalled by the US to demonise North Korea and its people. The economic sanctions put in place by the US are an outrage and clearly constitute crimes against humanity. But why should I be surprised? Without a reason to occupy Korea and Japan the US would have no justification to have a forward military deployment to assist in its containment policy of China. That is what it is about. The Armistice in 1953 was supposed to be translated into a Peace Treaty within 3 months. The US refused to honour this agreement. I say no more. I will continue to work with all Koreans and their Local Governments despite the US.

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More About Emeritus Mayor Peter Woods

Peter Woods has been a teacher, an academic, a senior administrator and an industrial advocate in state and federal courts in addition to his 26 years of local government service as Mayor and Councillor of Concord, Australia (since an amalgamation now known as the City of Canada Bay). He has extensive political and board experience in both the public and private sectors, nationally and internationally, and is currently serving as Ambassador for the United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific (UCLG-ASPAC). Among many other distinguished positions and directorships, Mr. Woods has been President of the Australian Local Government Association, a member of the Council of Australian Governments chaired by the Prime Minister of Australia, and a member of numerous Ministerial Councils and State and Federal Boards of Enquiry. He is a Justice of the Peace, holds a Bachelor of Arts, Master of Letters, Teachers Certificates, and a Certificate in Commercial Mediation. He received the Order of Australia Medal in 1995, the Outstanding Service Medal in 2002 and was conferred the title "Emeritus Mayor" for long and distinguished service. He has been recognized for his work with Aboriginal people, and has extensive experience in Asia-Pacific and around the world through his service with UCLG-ASPAC, the International Union of Local Authorities, the

Commonwealth Local Government Forum, the United Nations, etc. His list of achievements goes on and his experiences are many and varied. Mr. Woods is sure to entertain, educate and inspire – you don't want to miss this opportunity to hear him speak!