

Washington DC Trip Summary

There were 4 people in our delegation to Washington DC; Mitch Cummins, Paradise Computers, Russ Summerell, Flying Fish, Lloyd Davidson Macaw Mountain Bird Park, and Gary Chamer, Palmetto Bay Plantation. Many people helped in planning this trip – we could not have accomplished as much as we did without the help of Kelcy Warren for giving us access to his lobbyist, Daryl Owen, Daniel O'Connor of UCD, an umbrella organization of Honduran Civil Society, and especially Robyn Wapner of Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's staff. These people arranged meetings for us, as you'll read further on, they did a phenomenal job in getting us in front of people on hill. We went to Washington DC to promote 2 main issues – the separation of the Bay Islands from the travel advisory issued by the state department and the need to recognize the Honduran elections on November 29th.

We traveled to DC on Monday October 26. Our meetings began on Tuesday morning. We had meetings all day on Tuesday and Wednesday morning. On Wednesday afternoon we did the briefing to the House of Representatives. There was a press conference in conjunction with the briefing. There were several members of the press in attendance, NY Times, TeleSur, Al Jazeera, NotiMex, as well as a few others. I was interviewed on camera by Al Jazeera. Gary was interviewed by the NY Times. After that briefing we gave a briefing at the Heritage Foundation. That was attended by several organizations. After the briefings were over, we had a few more meetings before calling it a day. We were originally scheduled to leave on Thursday morning. We had 3 meetings that got moved to Thursday, so we extended our stay to make those meetings. One of the meetings on Thursday was with representatives from the State Department. It was well worth a bit of delay in leaving to make those meetings.

Here's the list of people that we met with:

1. Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC)
2. Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ)
3. Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK)
4. Senator John Barrasso (R-WY)
5. Congressman Ron Klein (D-FL)
6. Congressman Connie Mack (R-FL)
7. Congressman Albio Sires (D-NJ)
8. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA)
9. Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)
10. Congressman Michael McCaul (R-TX)
11. Congressman Jim Duncan (R-TN)
12. Congressman Peter Roskam (R-IL)
13. Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL)
14. Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL)
15. Congressman Brian Bilbray (R-CA)
16. Congressman Michael Turner (R-OH)

17. Congressman Brad Miller (R-NC)
18. Congressman Robert Wittman (R-VA)
19. Jason Steinbaum, staff for Elliot Engel (D-NJ)
20. John Mautz, staff for Howard Coble (R-NC)
21. Peter Quilter, staff for Howard Berman (D-CA)
22. Hassan Christian, staff for Kendrick Meek (D-FL)
23. Rachel Leman, Policy Director for David Dreier (R-CA)
24. David Wolfe, Deputy Director of the Office of Central American Affairs, State Department

We got virtually 100% support for separating the Bay Islands from the mainland for the travel advisory. In our meeting with the State Department, we demonstrated numerous examples where the State Department had separated areas within the country that had different levels of risk. They guaranteed that they would take this information back and review the travel advisory that was most recently issued for Honduras. I believe that the embassy in Tegucigalpa was meeting yesterday, Thursday November 5, to discuss the travel advisory. I hope that we see a change in the travel advisory in the coming days.

The recognition of the elections was a more partisan issue. All Republicans supported the recognition of the elections without any conditions. Most of the Democrats were close to that position, several expressed a desire to come and observe the elections. The staff of the two key democrats that we met with, Berman and Engel, were much more aligned with the Obama Administration's position. They both felt that there had to be some reparation made for the exiling of Zelaya to Costa Rica.

In the meeting with the State Department, which was midday on Thursday – literally a few hours before the agreement between Zelaya and Micheletti was signed – we heard that the State Department really didn't care what the agreement said, they just wanted an agreement signed by both parties. It was obvious from that discussion that the administration just wants the crisis over. They realize that they cannot force Honduras to accept Zelaya and they certainly don't want to be put in a position to possibly not recognize a legitimate election.

At the briefing at the House of Representatives, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) announced that he would be leading a Congressional Delegation to Honduras to observe the elections. He indicated that he had 12 – 15 commitments to come to Honduras.

There were also a couple of Hondurans that live in the DC area that came to the Heritage Foundation briefing to say "Thank You" to our team for what we've done. I have to tell you, that happens fairly often. It always brings a tear to my eye. I feel that what we've done is a small token of thanks for what the Hondurans have done. The real heroes in this story are the Honduran people and the interim government that has withstood tremendous international pressure.

This crisis has done more to unite the country like only the World Cup has been able to do in the past. Isn't it ironic that the last time Honduras went to the World Cup was the year that they approved the constitution that they have done so much to defend this year?

We have to encourage all of our Honduran friends, neighbors, and employees to vote on November 29. It's less important who they vote for, but Honduras needs to show the world that this election is a full representation of the people.

For non-Hondurans, it's important that we do all that we can to support these elections. It's easy to be an international observer. They need as many as possible. An NGO that has recently been established in the US is working to assist people that want to be observers. Please email video@paradise-computers.com to get information about being an observer. Take a few hours on Sunday November 29 to help ensure that Democracy rings clear across Honduras.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the many, many people that have worked to support Honduras for the past few months. The hundreds of letters, discussion group chat postings, articles, letters to the editor, meetings, and conversations have all helped. While there have been a few of us that have been more visible, it's really the work of the larger group that has made the difference.

THANK YOU!