

LGBTQ+ Victory Institute – International LGBTQ+ Conference 2024 Washington DC

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In December 2024, I joined hundreds of LGBTQ+ elected leaders, officials and advocates from around the world for the 40th Annual LGBTQ+ Leaders Conference in Washington DC. The three-day conference included workshops, plenary sessions, panel discussions and multiple networking opportunities. Many of the attendees were elected representatives from the US state legislatures, which offered a useful learning opportunity to find out more regarding how they operate, in particularly in terms of individual member legislation and the interaction between the many different levels of democracy in the USA.

The conference took place at the JW Marriott Hotel and the first day included something specifically for elected representatives. We heard from a range of speakers, including Senator Tammy Baldwin as well as Representatives from State Legislatures and others. There was also useful, practical sessions focussed on creating networks and increasing LGBTQ representation and political presence.



Some key takeaways from the conference included:

- Learning more about the role of the State legislatures in the USA and the potential opportunities there could be for the Senedd to build relationships with them.
- Building an understanding of the form and value of LGBTQ+ networks/caucuses/groups for representatives within a particular legislature. This is something I am now exploring ahead of the seventh Senedd.
- The exchange of information and ideas on common challenges, ranging from :
 - increasing LGBTQ+ representation
 - the attacks on the trans community
 - what AI means for democracy and influencing policy/practices
 - lessons for LGBTQ+ representatives for taking forward campaigns/issues/policy proposals and much more.

Attendance at the conference was beneficial both in terms of an exchange of ideas that could contribute to plenary, committees and other aspects of work in the Senedd (I have already raised it in OAQs), but also more more broadly in respect of LGBTQ+ parliamentary networks and so forth. It also provided a platform to promote our parliament as one that both aspires to be (and prides itself as) modern, Inclusive and progressive.

A presence from Wales was very much welcome at the conference and delegates were keen to learn more about our devolved democracy, both form and function as well as our commitment to inclusivity and LGBTQ+ equality. I hope that I will be able to welcome international guests met at the conference to the Senedd at some point. I also took the opportunity to talk about Wales' LGBTQ+ Action Plan and the Senedd's own LGBTQ+ network. In addition, taking into account the current international context, attendance was a firm demonstration of solidarity and support for the LGBTQ+ elected community in USA and other countries around the world where rights and representation is under serious threat.

In addition...

I was keen to maximise the relatively brief time I was in Washington DC and organised additional meetings with both the House of Congress Ethics Committee and at the Airbus Experience Centre.

House of Congress Ethics Committee

I met with senior staff and counsel from the House of Congress Ethics Committee in my capacity as Chair of the Senedd Standards of Conduct Committee. The meeting took place in their offices on Capitol Hill and was an opportunity to share with them the range of reform work our committee is doing around Individual Member Accountability. They were particularly interested in the committee's ground breaking work around deliberate deception and more generally to learn more about the Senedd itself. The meeting also served as a chance to learn more about how their standards process worked in practice. One of the findings of particular interest and that I have fed back to the committee, is that when a member is sanctioned there they are required to be in attendance.



Airbus Government Relations Team, Washington DC

Airbus UK co-ordinated a meeting with their Government relations team based in



central Washington DC (they have a HQ just outside of the capital itself) and a final assembly line in Mobile Alabama which employs over 2000. The meeting was of note from both a committee perspective as a member of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee and constituency wise too as Airbus are a large employer in my area.

The meeting took place post the Presidential Election and prior to President Trump taking up office again but the spectre of tariffs was already

on the table and we discussed what the new administration may mean for the company. The aviation sector is not currently subject to any tariffs globally. I was also able to advise on some of the work of ETRA and more broadly introduce them to our Senedd. I also extended an invitation to visit us should they next be in the UK.