

Speech to the Launch of ‘Successful Public Policy: Lessons from Australia and New Zealand’

Thank you for your invitation to help launch ‘Successful Public Policy’ this evening. I’d like to congratulate the editors, authors and ANU Press for this insightful publication. As Professor Smith wrote in his foreword, while understanding policy failure is important, ‘it is also important in these times of diminishing trust to recognise why and how successful policy outcomes can be achieved.’ The edited collection chronicling Australasian policy success certainly achieves that goal.

As someone who has straddled both academia and government service, I’m bound to say that while my politics and leadership backgrounds have provided useful insights into my job in the Beehive, my psychology major has been the greater gift.

Being a Chief of Staff is largely about managing people and relationships in and across the government’s three parties. Successful public policy, ultimately, stems from the shared understanding and goals of people in-and-outside of formal political structures allied to accurate discernment about what is possible within the situational and political contexts in which they are bound.

That said, Richard Neustadt’s longstanding theory on presidential bargaining has been the most practical use for one of my roles as Chief

of Staff; as the Deputy Prime Minister's chief negotiator for the coalition and government's most complex political and policy dilemmas.

It is interesting for me as a participant—especially with the government's unique configuration of parties—to observe how we attempt to fashion successful policy outcomes. In my experience when meaningful consultation between respective parties starts at the beginning of the policy development stage the politics tends to flow more easily and better policy results. When consultation does not occur in this fashion then we have to work very hard to reach an equilibrium that satisfies the political and policy interests and ambitions of respective parties.

So, while the art of the possible is our lodestar an appreciation of Sun Tzu's art of war is, on occasion, also necessary.

I'd also like to highlight Professor Smith's commendation of this volume to all 'who have an interest in advising or implementing successful policy and who aspire to leadership roles in and around government.'

In responding to this let me tell you a story about something you won't know. One of the people who reached out to me immediately after our March 15 tragedy was Paul t'Hart. Paul and I share a warm relationship and he is an academic I have both affection and respect for. Paul was also hurting as three Dutch citizens had been murdered in

Utrecht in the immediate wake of March 15, with that killer motivated to revenge the Australian terrorist's actions in Christchurch.

Paul sent me a chapter on crisis management, one that helped inform our small group dynamic grappling with a unique form of crisis. Specifically, we were able to both understand and be conscious of the necessary point when we began moving from immediate crisis response to laying the foundation for medium and longer term policy responses.

Those responses focused on immediate firearm reform, accepting accountability through a Royal Commission, and a coalition commitment to use our particular moment in time to achieve wider policy unity around our then trickiest policy negotiations to mirror the nation-wide unity that so strongly manifested post-March 15.

Importantly, Paul also sent me the page proofs of a chapter from 'Successful Public Policy,' the one written by Phillip Alpers and Zareh Ghazarian on the Howard Government's response to the Port Arthur mass shooting in 1996.

Without disclosing any detail I can say that that chapter contributed to one crucial element of our intended firearms policy response that was lacking and that carried significant downside risk. After being presented with arguments derived from the Alpers-Ghazarian chapter our decision-making group ended up fashioning a better process and policy as a result.

Now, it's not often an academic book can be said to have made a direct impact on government decision makers BEFORE publication so the co-editors and authors should feel proud that, however unknowingly, you have already made a defining contribution to future public policy success.

To wrap up, the interaction between academia and political practitioners is a valuable one even if, on occasions, they are separated by a common language. 'Successful Public Policy' expertly bridges this gap and I wish all who contributed to it every success.

Thank you.

ENDS – 734 words