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Former TX State Bar President Leads Delegation to United Arab Emirates

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A delegation of US legal professionals, led by former Austin Bar and Texas State Bar President Richard Pena, visited the United Arab Emirates to meet and exchange knowledge with professional counterparts, academics, and government officials.

Also among the Legal Structures and Rule of Law Delegation were Kenneth Owens, administrative law judge with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission; and Wallace B. Jefferson, former chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court.

The delegation toured Dubai and Abu Dhabi after they arrived in February 2023 and returned to the States in March.



The delegation at the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. FRONT ROW (L-R): Carolyn Malley Pena, Terezinha McGlynn, Judge Jaclanel McFarland, Richard Pena. BACK ROW (L-R): Daniel McGlynn, Natasha Daniela de Lima McGlynn, Steve Kahn, Lenna Brown Owens, Kenneth Owens, Peter Kelley, Susan Barrett-Kelley, Judge Charles Bernstein. NOT PICTURED: Wallace B. Jefferson, Renee Knake Jefferson.

“The UAE was a fascinating destination that turned out to be a wonderful adventure and learning experience,” said Pena in a blog post. “From a cultural perspective we experienced the dynamic architecture, modern city scape, and the clean environment. Our delegation was fortunate in getting to interact with our professional counterparts for substantive matters and we were able to gain an understanding of the UAE legal system, which for them works.”

The delegation was sponsored by the Citizen Ambassador Program, which provides exchanges between high-level professions for more than 35 years. Citizen Ambassadors is a program of Cultural Visas, a U.S. nonprofit based in Washington, D.C.

While in the UAE, the delegation sought to understand how Islamic principles impact social laws and how cultural variances among the individual emirates are addressed in the laws and execution of the legal system.

The delegation met with representatives of the UAE’s Ministry of Justice to develop a foundational understanding of the UAE constitution and legal processes. They also met with UAE academics to learn how the rule of law has evolved in the UAE.

They also observed the C3 court system in practice.

“C3 is publicized as the future of litigation processing,” Pena said. “It is a project in which the three levels of litigation are merged into one court, and the time limit for litigation is reduced to 30 days from the current 305 days. We were told this system works, but there were also mixed reviews. This unique project is characterized by the ability to reduce the time for handling case, issue a ruling, simplifying litigation procedure and reducing litigation expenses. Whether this system will catch on in other countries is an open question. Also, the authoritarian aspect of the country limits dissent and political protest, but things do get done quickly.”

Pena further praised UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan as a visionary leading the UAE into the modern world.

Austin Bar members interested in future legal delegations abroad can contact Richard Pena at richard@rpenalaw.com.

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