

The International Program – Cambodia



June 6, 2006

Guests: Meeting with Cambodian Judicial Officials

Judicial Watch met with a delegation of Cambodian judicial officials at the request of the Delphi International Program of World Learning, which was administering a three-week project on behalf of the U.S. Department of State, entitled "The US Judicial System." A representative from Judicial Watch was asked to discuss its role as a watchdog organization and the impact it has had on the American judicial system.

Judicial Watch's director of litigation, Paul Orfanedes, and associate attorney, Jim Peterson, welcomed the distinguished international guests.

The first half of the discussion focused on the tools used creatively by Judicial Watch, such as federal and state sunshine laws and, in particular, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), to promote the fundamental principles of good government: transparency, integrity, and accountability. A general overview was provided of the types of issues in which Judicial Watch has most recently become involved, which range from energy policy to illegal immigration.

The educational aspect of Judicial Watch's mission and the role of the media in this endeavor were highlighted during the second half of the meeting. The delegates were informed that the public, both nationally and internationally, is educated about Judicial Watch's investigative pursuits through radio and TV interviews, most frequently with JW President and spokesman, Tom Fitton. And Judicial Watch's Internet site is the primary repository of documents obtained in response to FOIA

requests, as well as press releases, court documents, and articles from the major media outlets on major developments in our cases.

The lawsuit JW brought against the Department of Defense for refusing to release camera recordings of American Airlines Flight 77 crashing into the Pentagon on September 11 was given as a prime example of the public education component of Judicial Watch's mission. The [video footage](#) released to Judicial Watch was immediately made available to interested news media outlets and posted on Judicial Watch's Internet site for public viewing. The enormous impact such information has on the American public when made available by a non-governmental organization was also discussed. The posting of the released 9/11 photos helped put to rest conspiracy theories fomenting under the Department of Defense's shroud of secrecy.

Throughout the investigative process, from the filing of a FOIA request to the receipt of the requested documents, the public is made aware of potential government misconduct that may have gone unnoticed but for Judicial Watch's oversight and the subsequent exposure provided by various media outlets. [The Cheney Energy Task Force](#) was given in example because of the amount of media coverage it received worldwide. Most importantly, as a result of the lawsuit brought by Judicial Watch, the American people were made aware that special interest groups, who had a substantial financial interest in energy policy formulation, had participated in secret energy task force meetings.

Mr. Orfanedes, who argued Judicial Watch's case against the Cheney Energy Task Force Group before the Supreme Court of the United States, informed these visitors that the American people are wary of government corruption. When government officials appear to be conducting business behind closed doors, their wariness is heightened. He affirmed the importance the media played in bringing the Cheney Energy Task Force to account. This case was a major victory for the American people in bringing to light and possibly preventing potentially corrupt activities by government officials. It forced them to account for their actions before courts of law.

The Cambodian officials are presently engaged in a very serious discussion about how much information government agencies should be required to make public.

There is concern that complete openness may actually violate certain rules, such as confidentiality in criminal matters.

Mr. Orfanedes informed the delegates that there are acceptable guidelines and provisions made for matters requiring confidentiality, particularly in criminal matters and matters concerning national security. These boundaries are fairly well defined and tend toward the protection, not suppression, of citizen's rights. Sunshine laws are designed to hold public servants accountable to the people—and they serve to restore faith in the American judicial system by reconfirming America's fundamental belief that no one is above the law.

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