



From left, Scott Klippel, Jackie Rixen, Barbara Horan and Carolyn and Richard Pena visited Egypt as part of the People to People Citizen Ambassador Programs.

ON AMBASSADOR PROGRAM TRIP TO EGYPT, EQUAL PARTS LEARNING AND TEACHING

From Richard Pena of Austin.

Most Americans will never have the privilege of experiencing the influence our country has upon people and leaders around the world. Never before did I realize the profound importance of the United States as a global player until I traveled to Egypt. I arrived in Cairo on Nov. 3, the day before our Election Day.

This was my 11th travel experience as a leader with People to People Citizen Ambassador Programs (www.peopletopeople.com), escorting groups of legal professionals to discover new cultures and to learn and explore legal systems in other countries. This time, I led a group of 25 to Egypt to learn about Egyptian law, meet with Egyptian state officials and experience the rich history of a civilization 5,000 years old.

In Cairo, our group discovered ancient Egyptian artifacts at the Egyptian Museum and gazed in awe at the ancient pyramids. We traveled to Alexandria, where we visited the Alexandria National Museum and stood at the footsteps of the catacombs of Kom El Shugafa, the largest Roman burial site and the tallest ancient monument in Alexandria. And yet, throughout this discovery, we couldn't help but feel that we weren't so much the ones exploring as the ones being explored.

For the Egyptian people, we represented America. They were hungry to speak with us at length about the outcome of the U.S. election and were full of hope about what the coming presidency might mean for their nation and the world.

Our group met with political officials from the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, the Egyptian Parliament and the Egyptian People Assembly. While we spoke about ancient Egypt (an law and women's rights, the topic of the U.S. election continually was raised. The Egyptian people were fascinated with the turns in our political process; the promise of more open communication and new policies and excited about the potential that the election of the first African American president might mean in terms of overall perception for the rest of the world.

Regardless of political beliefs or personal opinions, everyone from my group left Egypt with a deeper understanding of how closely the world pays attention to what takes place in the U.S. and the impact we can all make when we sit down one-on-one and exchange ideas with people in other countries.

Pena's law practice is headquartered in Austin, with branches in Chicago and McAllen. He is president of the American Bar Foundation, and past president of the Travis County Bar Association and the State Bar of Texas. This year, he is traveling to India and Israel.