

Multi Nation Program



Dr. Gong Weibin | Beijing, CHINA

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Dr. Gong Weibin is a highly influential public administration specialist who is responsible for training mid and senior-level public officials throughout China, and for conducting research in social and cultural policy and management. Prior to his current position, he served as Vice Mayor in the Haimen municipal government and as Deputy Director General in the Chinese Academy of Governance's Department of Political Science. While on fellowship, he looked at social policy development and social services administration in the U.S., social security and pension programs, and health and human service programs. His most significant take-away is the lack of a unified national policy, and the extent to which social policies vary by state.

Dr. Gong launched his fellowship in Washington, DC, where he was hosted for dinner at the home of USA Fellow Michael Williamson, a deputy director with the District of Columbia Retirement Board who provided both a warm fellowship welcome and an extensive overview of the social security and pension systems in the U.S. Dr. Gong's meetings throughout the country, including at CalPERS (California Public Employees' Retirement System) and CalSTERS (California State Teachers' Retirement System) deepened his understanding of public pension programs. Substantive meetings hosted by the U.S. Social Security Administration and at Prudential Insurance, in addition to numerous meeting with NGOs and think tanks, as well as academics such as Dr. Alicia Munnell, director of the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, all contributed significantly to his knowledge base in this area.

Getting out into the field provided a vital perspective for Dr. Gong on community needs and solutions. He visited Habitat for Humanity building sites and the Larkin Street Youth Center in San Francisco; Project Renewal mobile health services for homeless men and women in New York City; and in Boston he saw the formerly blighted area where Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiatives' innovative programs have turned the neighborhood around. In Chicago, he rolled up his sleeves and spent an afternoon volunteering with the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Dr. Gong was especially intrigued by the concept of 'block captains,' and enjoyed a neighborhood ride-around provided by the director of Operation Brightside in St. Louis. He marveled that their 7 staff members have recruited and trained 100 area commanders and 2,000 block captains, all volunteers providing safety patrols and working to clean and beautify their neighborhoods.

A highlight of Dr. Gong's fellowship was his visit to USA Fellow Robert Blair in Kendrick, Idaho. Dr. Gong reported that "Robert took me to visit regional officials, business people, towns, wood mills, Native American reservations, grain elevators, barns, museums, and other places of interest. We watched a children's baseball game and experienced his machinery harrowing the field. Robert can drive and repair all kinds of agriculture machines, and also apply GPS and IT in controlling machines and analyzing food markets. What a modern and intellectual farmer with traditional sincerity and hospitality towards people!"

To broaden his understanding of health care services and financing, Dr. Gong visited the St. Louis Children's Hospital and met with various city health departments. He discussed public housing programs during visits to the California Department of Housing and Community Development and the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, and learned about services for people with disabilities at Access Living in Chicago. His examinations of U.S. policy-making in these areas revealed that "checks and balances are the nature of politics, and are the most important characteristic of the political structure, although it is not so complete. In reality, large companies often have a strong impact on policy making, including social policy. Government is always under criticism for being too large and spending too much public revenue. However, in comparison to other countries, the American federal government's power is very limited."

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