

Pauline Hanson's 'neo-Austrian' economic brain

One Nation hires an 'anarcho-capitalist' advisor

One Nation's new economic advisor has been billed as "one of the world's leading economists". Darren Nelson worked on Donald Trump's presidential campaign and with radical free-market think-tanks in America, including one associated with the notorious Panamanian law firm, Mossack Fonseca. These groups' 'neo-Austrian' or 'anarcho-capitalist' ideas are far from One Nation policies such as opposition to free trade, taxing multinationals, industry subsidies and plans for a "people's bank".

Report

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Summary

This paper, the second in a series devoted to analysis of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party and its policies, looks at Senator Hanson's economic advisers.

It highlights the One Nation party's recent recruitment of Darren Brady Nelson, an economic and regulatory analyst with a self-declared “neo-Austrian” outlook.

Senator Hanson’s chief of staff James Ashby has billed Nelson as “one of the world’s leading economists”.

While Nelson’s credentials and experience fall somewhat short of that description, his “anarcho-capitalist” economic philosophy and association with a range of radical free market and libertarian think tanks in the United States reveals much about One Nation's links to American far-right groups. Nelson may be a harbinger of a shift towards more radical free-market thinking within One Nation, a move at odds with the party’s often protectionist outlook that includes strong opposition to free trade agreements, and preparedness for governments to directly subsidise manufacturing industry. Nelson’s radical free market perspective certainly fits uneasily with One Nation’s declared policy of increasing government regulation of financial markets, including working to “bring back a people’s bank”.

Of particular interest is Nelson's connection with the Centre for Freedom and Prosperity, a little known but energetic Washington-based lobby that advocates for offshore tax havens and has been associated with the notorious Panamanian law firm and tax avoidance facilitator, Mossack Fonseca.

This appears somewhat inconsistent with One Nation’s desire to make foreign companies pay more tax in Australia.

Table of Contents

Summary.....	1
Pauline Hanson’s advisers	3
Introducing Darren Brady Nelson.....	6
Neo-Austrian economics and anarcho-capitalism	8
Engagement with radical free market and far-right think tanks.....	12
One Nation’s “neo-Austrian” economist.....	20

Pauline Hanson's advisers

The question of who advises leaders is often an important story in politics. The appointment and roles of advisers can be a critical influence on the strategy, tactics, policies and ideological direction of political leaders. Two decades ago some of Pauline Hanson's staff and advisers attracted significant media attention. From 1996 to 1998 journalists and political commentators focussed heavily on the roles and influence of the likes of John Pasquarelli, David Oldfield and David Ettridge.¹

In more recent times much attention has been directed at James Ashby, Senator Hanson's current chief of staff, who has been variously described as "controlling" and "obsessive" as well as "very likeable, very professional".² A *Weekend Australian Magazine* feature on Ashby has the provocative title "a wrecking ball or a political mastermind?" Ashby has been described as "the gatekeeper to Hanson".³

This paper focuses on a different subject that has so far not attracted media attention, that of who Pauline Hanson's principal economic advisers are and what their economic and political thinking is.

This is important as the One Nation party leader apparently plans to resurrect her 1998 "Easytax" 2 per cent flat tax proposal⁴ and she and her colleagues deal with a wide range of complex economic, financial, taxation and social security matters before the Australian Senate.

¹ Pasquarelli and Ettridge subsequently published books on their experience: John Pasquarelli, *The Pauline Hanson Story: By the Man Who Knows*, Frenchs Forest, New Holland Books, 1998 and David Ettridge, *Consider Your Verdict*, New Holland Publishers, Frenchs Forest, 2004. Oldfield went on to serve the sole One Nation representative in the New South Wales Legislative Council from 1999 to 2007.

² "One Nation's James Ashby places himself in the background behind Pauline Hanson", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/one-nations-james-ashby-places-himself-in-the-background-behind-pauline-hanson-20170119-gtui9s.html>.

³ "Wrecking ball or mastermind", *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 4-5 February 2017, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/enter-stage-right-james-ashby-still-ruffles-feathers/news-story/bd79cb7e9589f1b7f809eade8c2e0057>.

⁴ See "Pauline Hanson outlines One Nation's blue print for Australia", *The Australian*, 5 February 2017, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/pauline-hanson-outlines-one-nations-blueprint-for-australia/news-story/4697844183eb01c4aa903c005722f6ce>, and Pauline Hanson's blueprint for Australia under One Nation", *Courier Mail*, 4 February 2017, <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/hansons-blueprint-for-australia-under-one-nation/news-story/84b647417dec44e42ff580a22f622b4c>.

Currently the most prominent One Nation spokesperson on economic matters is Senator Hanson's Queensland colleague Malcolm Roberts.

Senator Roberts has, as One Nation's website puts it, “a background in engineering, mining, business leadership and has a keen interest in economics” as well as a “passionate” interest in climate change data.⁵ Roberts has an engineering degree (earth science geology) from the University of Queensland, 1976. He also spent 21 months studying for a Masters of Business Administration at the University of Chicago between 1988 and 1990.⁶

A former coal mine manager, Senator Roberts has been closely associated with the climate change denying Galileo Movement. The Galileo Movement stridently opposes what it calls “a price on carbon dioxide”, but more broadly declares its aims to “protect freedom – personal choice and national sovereignty” and “protect people's emotional health by ending Government and activists' constant destructive bombardment of fear and guilt on our kids and communities.”⁷

Much of Roberts political activity has been focussed on disputing climate change science and attacking the United Nations, especially the sustainable development Agenda 21 as an international conspiracy against Australia national sovereignty; as well as what he sees as the malign influence of a “tight-knit cabal” of “some of the major banking families in the world.”⁸

On 16 September 2016 Senator Hanson's chief of staff James Ashby announced that One Nation had hired a former economic adviser to then US Republican presidential candidate, Donald Trump. Ashby told a One Nation community forum in Rockhampton,

⁵ Pauline Hanson's One Nation profile on Senator Malcolm Roberts:
<http://www.onenation.com.au/team/malcolmroberts>.

⁶ Malcolm Roberts – Personal declaration of interests, October 2010 (updated June 2016),
http://www.conscious.com.au/__documents/additional%20material/Personal%20declaration%20of%20interests.pdf. Roberts' MBA studies followed his retrenchment from an underground mine manager's job at Coal and Allied and discussions with a potential new employer, Arco Coal Australia. The Federal Court subsequently rejected his effort to claim the \$29,212 cost of the degree from his tax as “work-related self-education. The Federal Court found that Roberts' expenses were “moneys which were spent to obtain a new employment, albeit one in a better position and on higher wages. Being the cost to an employee of obtaining his employment, they do not form an outgoing incurred in the course of earning the wages payable in the employment.” “Roberts sought tax deduct uni degree”, *SBS*, 18 November 2016, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2016/11/18/roberts-sought-tax-deduct-uni-degree>.

⁷ The Galileo Movement lists Malcolm Roberts as a “project leader”. See The Galileo Movement, “Who we are”, http://www.galileomovement.com.au/who_we_are.php.

⁸ “Climate change sceptics unwarmed by scientist's reassessment of cold facts”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 July 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/climate-change-sceptics-unwarmed-by-scientists-reassessment-of-cold-facts-20120730-23agk.html> and Clive Hamilton, “One Nation, Climate Denial and those Jewish Bankers”, <https://theconversation.com/one-nation-climate-denial-and-those-jewish-bankers-62176>.

Queensland, that “... on the economic side of things, tomorrow there’ll be a front-page announcement, from what I understand. ... We have just taken him from the Trump camp, so he’s come on board with us. So that’s pretty exciting and we need to build credibility on the economics front.” Ashby declined to name the newly recruited adviser but described him as “one of the world’s leading economists”. Senator Roberts, tweeted that he was “very excited” by the news.⁹ However no announcement was made the following day and it would be another four months before the identity of One Nation’s new economic adviser would be publicly identified.

⁹ “Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party hires former adviser to Donald Trump”, *Guardian*, 17 September 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/sep/17/pauline-hansons-one-nation-party-hires-former-adviser-to-donald-trump>.

Introducing Darren Brady Nelson

In January 2017, in the course of controversy over how Senator Hanson had been “invited” to attend to inauguration of United States President Donald Trump, it was revealed that One Nation's new economic adviser was Darren Brady Nelson who had taken a position in Senator Roberts' office.¹⁰ Curiously the media paid no attention to who Nelson is and what experience, expertise and outlook he brings to One Nation.

Darren Nelson is a dual US-Australian citizen with, his curriculum vitae highlights, a United Kingdom ancestry visa. He was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but has spent the most of his adult life in Australia, mainly in Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane.¹¹ Nelson has a Bachelor of Economics from the Australian National University, majoring in economic history, and a Master of Commerce degree from the University of New South Wales, majoring in business law.¹²

In his publicly available curriculum vitae, Nelson describes himself as “a professional economist and project manager” with two decades experience working for or with business, government regulators, government policy makers as well as “those outfits trying to influence them.”¹³

Between 1994 and 2001 Nelson worked for the Northern Territory Treasury as a economics statistics researcher; as a pricing regulatory economist with the Queensland Competition Authority; as a competition policy economist with the New South Wales Treasury; and briefly as a senior economics consultant with the international accounting firm Arthur Andersen before its demise as a consequence of the Enron scandal. Since June 2001 Nelson has worked as a contractor or consultant for a wide range of organisations including the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, various Australian state government agencies, a number of water, transport, energy and telecommunications providers as well as professional services company KPMG, consultants Sapere Research Group and sEconomics. He has also worked for brief periods for overseas clients including for the Water Industry Commission for Scotland and Wisconsin Manufacturing and Commerce – Wisconsin's

¹⁰ “One Nation leader Pauline Hanson invited to Donald Trump's presidential inauguration”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 January 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/one-nation-leader-pauline-hanson-invited-to-donald-trumps-presidential-inauguration-20170115-gts12a.html>.

¹¹ Darren B Nelson, LinkedIn profile, <https://au.linkedin.com/in/darren-b-nelson-712b0712>.

¹² “Darren Brady Nelson – Australian-American economist”, Curriculum Vitae, <http://www.slideshare.net/DarrenBNelson/nelson-db-cv-econetc-20160727>.

¹³ “Darren Brady Nelson – Australian-American economist”, Curriculum Vitae, <http://www.slideshare.net/DarrenBNelson/nelson-db-cv-econetc-20160727>.

principal business lobby group. Although Nelson's experience is diverse, much of it has been short-term in nature.¹⁴

Nelson's curriculum vitae does not identify any university or academic engagement after completion of his Master of Commerce degree and he does not appear to have a record of publication in any peer reviewed economic journals. He does, however, have a strong interest in economic and political theory from a sharply libertarian perspective.

Described as a “neoAustrian economist, regulatory analyst and communicator”, one account of Nelson's background and outlook, probably self-written and certainly enjoying his endorsement, reads as follows:

Darren has a very wide knowledge base of economics and related matters like law, history and ethics, particularly as it pertains to business and consumer valuation, pricing and production, and government interference with these ... Darren first started down the path, in the late 1980s, of understanding, appreciating and promoting (the politics of) liberty when he took a strong interest in the Reagan and Thatcher administrations (the latter person he was fortunate enough to meet in London in January 2010, and get an autograph from on his Union Jack wallet). The next milestone on this path, in the early 1990s, was his formal studies of (the microeconomics of) liberty, including history of economic thought, especially that of Adam Smith and Milton Friedman. The next milestone, in the mid 1990s to late 2000s, was his work in and around government in terms of competition reforms and regulation implementation, particularly that of so-called ‘natural monopoly’ price regulation. The most recent milestone over the past several years or so was his rediscovery of the American liberty culture and the Austrian School of economics (microeconomics, macroeconomics, history, law and ethics), especially the thinking of Ludwig von Mises and Murray Rothbard.¹⁵

According to this profile, Nelson “tries to leverage his deep skills and experience from the English speaking world in mainstream economics along with that of the Austrian School ... in order to creatively and empathetically lead the winning of the 'hearts' as well as the 'minds' of individuals who are lovers of, friends of, open to and/or even sceptical/ignorant of liberty.” He has a strong focus on what is described as “the negative (unintended and foreseeable) consequences for liberty from overbearing and growing government regulation.”¹⁶

¹⁴ “Darren Brady Nelson – Australian-American economist”, Curriculum Vitae, <http://www.slideshare.net/DarrenBNelson/nelson-db-cv-econetc-20160727>.

¹⁵ Heartland Institute profile: D Brady Nelson: <https://www.heartland.org/about-us/who-we-are/d-brady-nelson>.

¹⁶ Heartland Institute profile: D Brady Nelson: <https://www.heartland.org/about-us/who-we-are/d-brady-nelson>.

Neo-Austrian economics and anarcho-capitalism

Once described in *Forbes* magazine as “the greatest thinker you've never read”, Darren Nelson’s intellectual hero Ludwig von Mises was a leader of the mid-20th century “Austrian School” of economists who wrote extensively in defence of classic liberalism and free market economics.¹⁷

Although relatively obscure for the general public, Mises' writings have long been a touchstone for doctrinaire advocates of free market economics. Founder and director of the Adam Smith Institute Eamonn Butler describes Mises as “one of the most significant economists and political scientists of the twentieth century”. Mises most notable work, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*, presented the case for laissez-faire capitalism based on praxeology, the investigation of purposeful human action, and argued that free market economics is both more efficient and morally superior to government-regulated or planned systems. Indeed Mises argued that unhampered free markets were the only workable economic system and any government intervention in the workings of the market economy was invariably destructive.¹⁸

In Butler's view, Mises' “sweeping rejection of tariffs and subsidies, wage and price controls, restrictions over the free movement of goods and people, and state intrusion in the personal sphere ... set the standard for free market radicalism, laissez-faire politics, and thoroughgoing liberalism.”¹⁹ According to Mises, the operation of the market was nothing less than the foundation of civilisation and that if political leaders failed to understand and embrace free market economics they would inevitably “stamp out society and the human race.”²⁰

Mises, who migrated to the United States in 1940 and died in 1973, strongly influenced libertarian economic and political thinking, including that of his student, economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek, author of the famous defence of classic liberalism, *The Road to Serfdom*. “Neo-Austrian” economists and political thinkers reflect Mises' and Hayek's broad conviction that free-market capitalism offers “the best guarantee of personal freedom and economic and social well-being”, including a strong belief that the free market cannot be taken for granted and that constant advocacy and

¹⁷ “The Greatest Thinker You've Never Read”, *Forbes*, 29 September 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/artcarden/2012/09/29/the-greatest-thinker-youve-never-read-ludwig-von-mises/#747fd9f93346>.

¹⁸ Eamonn Butler, *Ludwig von Mises – A Primer*, CIS Occasional Paper No 120, Centre for Independent Studies, St Leonards, 2010, pp. 17-18.

¹⁹ Eamonn Butler, *Ludwig von Mises – A Primer*, CIS Occasional Paper No 120, Centre for Independent Studies, St Leonards, 2010, pp. 17-18.

²⁰ Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1949, p. 881.

explanation are required. As one introduction to neo-Austrian economic thinking puts it: "If... the free market based upon the private ownership of property is a necessary condition for the continuance of a society in which genuine personal freedom under the rule of law may be taken for granted, then it is obviously desirable that people should be offered a convincing explanation of why this is so. Ignorance of the capitalist market ethos ... is, unfortunately, nearly as common among its supporters as among its opponents."²¹

This emphasis on advocacy, and indeed political action to defend the free market, was strongly evident in the work of Nelson's other intellectual hero. Murray Rothbard was an American economist and intellectual follower of Mises, who, until his death in 1995, played a central role in the development of modern American libertarian thinking as the founder and leading theoretician of "anarcho-capitalism", a political philosophy that advocates the elimination of the state in favour of individual sovereignty, private property and free markets in what its proponents describe as a "voluntary society". Rothbard famously described government as "the organisation of robbery systematised and writ large". Rothbard similarly characterised taxation as "theft, purely and simply even though it is theft on a grand and colossal scale which no acknowledged criminals could hope to match. It is a compulsory seizure of the property of the State's inhabitants, or subjects."²²

"Anarcho-capitalism" has provided some, though not the only, inspiration for the "sovereign citizens" movement of tax protesters who take the position that they are answerable only to their interpretation of the common law and are not subject to any government laws or proceedings (a movement that Senator Roberts has demonstrated some sympathy for, though he has claimed "I'm not a sovereign man.")²³

To promote his economic and political ideas, Rothbard joined prominent libertarian author and editor, self-professed "anarcho-capitalist" Llewellyn H "Lew" Rockwell and bullion dealer Burton Blumer to establish the Ludwig von Mises Institute in Auburn, Alabama in 1982. On its website the Mises Institute sets out its purpose as advocacy for "a free-market capitalist economy and a private-property order that rejects taxation, monetary debasement, and a coercive state monopoly of protective services."²⁴ In the view of the Southern Poverty Law Centre, a leading legal advocacy

²¹ Alexander H Shand, *The Capitalist Alternative: An Introduction to Neo-Austrian Economics*, Harvester Press, United Kingdom, 1984, p. 220, <http://www.univpgri-palembang.ac.id/perpus-fkip/Perpustakaan/Austrian%20School/Kapitalisme%20Alternatif.pdf>.

²² Murray N Rothbard profile, <https://mises.org/profile/murray-n-rothbard>. See also <https://mises.org/library/murray-n-rothbard-legacy-liberty>.

²³ "One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts wrote bizarre 'sovereign citizen' letter to Julia Gillard", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 August 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/one-nation-senatorelect-malcolm-roberts-wrote-bizarre-sovereign-citizen-letter-to-julia-gillard-20160804-gqlesa.html> and "One Nation's Malcolm Roberts denies being 'sovereign citizen' and urges change to race law", *Guardian*, 7 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/07/one-nations-malcolm-roberts-denies-being-sovereign-citizen-and-urges-change-to-race-law>.

²⁴ "What is the Mises Institute", <https://mises.org/about-mises/what-is-the-mises-institute>.

organisation specialising in civil rights law and investigation of far-right white supremacist groups in the United States, the Mises Institute promotes “a type of Darwinian view of society in which elites are seen as natural and any intervention by the government on behalf of social justice is destructive. The Institute seems nostalgic for the days when, 'because of selective mating, marriage, and the laws of civil and genetic inheritance, positions of natural authority [were] likely to be passed on within a few noble families.'”²⁵

Aside from promoting neo-Austrian economics and anarcho-capitalist doctrine, Rothbard engaged in revisionist history supportive of the American Confederacy and downplaying the significance of slavery, and was accused of sympathy with the Klu Klux Klan.²⁶ Rothbard was not shy of advocating support for former-Klansman and white nationalist politician David Duke, saying “It is fascinating that there was nothing in Duke's current program or campaign that could not also be embraced by paleoconservatives or paleo-libertarians; lower taxes, dismantling the bureaucracy, slashing the welfare system, attacking affirmative action and racial set-asides, calling for equal rights for all Americans, including whites: what's wrong with any of that?”²⁷ The Mises Institute has published revisionist histories of the origins of the American civil war, prompting the Southern Poverty Law Centre to describe the Institute as “neo-confederate”.²⁸

In March 2015 the Mises Institute published an article by Darren Nelson that, drawing on the writings of both Mises and Rothbard, argued vociferously against government regulation: “Perhaps due to it not being as readily quantifiable as government taxation, debt, welfare, and money creation; regulation has too often been superficially dealt with,” Nelson wrote. “In many ways, the largely 'hidden tax' of regulation is a bigger threat to liberty, economy, and morality than other weapons of forceful government intervention.”²⁹

In Nelson's view, government regulation is not just an immediate financial burden on business and individuals, but a broad imposition on the free market and society more broadly:

[T]his is just the proverbial tip of the regulatory-burden iceberg. The tangible burdens above are a quite manageable list of the more immediate impacts such as extra money spent by business to comply and government to enforce

²⁵ “Into the mainstream”, Southern Poverty Law Centre, *Intelligence Report*, 14 August 2003, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/mainstream?page=0%2C1#11>.

²⁶ “Exposing the Racist History of Libertarianism and Murray Rothbard”, *Business Insider*, 4 October 2011, <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/exposing-the-racist-history-of-libertarianism-and-murray-rothbard-2011-10>.

²⁷ “Murray Rothbard, Lew Rockwell and Scientific Racism”, *Holocaust Controversies*, 6 July 2010, <http://holocaustcontroversies.blogspot.com.au/2010/07/murray-rothbard-lew-rockwell-and.html>.

²⁸ “Neoconfederates attempt to whitewash Southern history”, Southern Poverty Law Centre *Intelligence Report*, 15 August 2003, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/neo-confederates-attempt-whitewash-southern-history>.

²⁹ D Brady Nelson, “Government Regulation: Another Hidden Tax”, *Mises Daily Articles*, 16 March 2015, <https://mises.org/library/government-regulation-another-hidden-tax>.

regulation. However, the intangible burdens are an almost infinite list of the less immediate impacts, such as lower performance throughout the economy in terms of entrepreneurship, innovation, growth, customer service, and jobs. The intangible burdens do not readily lend themselves to quantification like the tangible burdens do, and thus it is harder to understand the magnitude and even the exact nature of the almost infinite potential problems caused-and-effected. This is made harder due to the fact that value is always subjective (and ordinal) to each individual at any one point in time and, thus, there are no objective (or cardinal) opportunity costs and benefits of regulations as a whole that can simply be observed, calculated, and compared using cost benefit analysis.

Nelson's solution was, unsurprisingly, radical deregulation — “as much as possible, as fast as possible”. This he acknowledged as a difficult task requiring concerted political activism: “It will not be easy to slow, stop, and reverse the century-plus growth of the regulatory state in the US and around the world. The crucial job of pursuing deregulation cannot just be left to politicians from the *top down*. It will need to come more from as many voters and seceders as possible from the *bottom up* and every direction in between.”³⁰

Nelson's reference to “seceders” appears to be a reference to “sovereign citizens” or other people refusing to pay tax or accept government regulation or laws – effectively seceding from the authority of the state – however he does not elaborate this point.

³⁰ D Brady Nelson, “Government Regulation: Another Hidden Tax”, *Mises Daily Articles*, 16 March 2015, <https://mises.org/library/government-regulation-another-hidden-tax>.

Engagement with radical free market and far-right think tanks

Darren Nelson's March 2015 article for the Mises Institute on government regulation was by no means his only contribution to “neo-Austrian” and radical libertarian discourse. He has been associated with a number of prominent radical free market think tanks that have provided ideas, policies and advocacy for the “alt-right” of American politics

Since April 2010 Nelson has done “part-time paid freelance and unpaid volunteer writing and other work” for a number of radical free market organisations in the United States. This was mainly done from Australia, but included 10 months in 2010 in the United States (Chicago and Milwaukee), and eight months in 2013-14 and another four months in 2015-16 in Washington DC, and again in Washington DC in late 2016.³¹

Nelson's curriculum vitae describes him as an “associated senior fellow” with the Frontiers of Freedom and the Center for Freedom and Prosperity, and lists work with the Heartland Institute as a part-time “journalist and regulatory policy writer” from April 2010 to March 2016. He has written numerous news articles on subjects that included “budget, climate, education, energy, environment, mining, money, President Reagan, regulation, tax, etc, etc, etc.”³²

Nelson has contributed to the conservative *Townhall* website.³³ Nelson is also the “part-time Chief Economist” for LibertyWorks in Australia, a new Australian libertarian think tank.³⁴

³¹ Darren B Nelson, LinkedIn profile, <https://au.linkedin.com/in/darren-b-nelson-712b0712>. and “Darren Brady Nelson – Australian-American economist”, Curriculum Vitae, <http://www.slideshare.net/DarrenBNelson/nelson-db-cv-econetc-20160727>.

³² Darren B Nelson, LinkedIn profile, <https://au.linkedin.com/in/darren-b-nelson-712b0712>. and “Darren Brady Nelson – Australian-American economist”, Curriculum Vitae, <http://www.slideshare.net/DarrenBNelson/nelson-db-cv-econetc-20160727>.

³³ See for example D Brady Nelson, “Obamacare's Muse: The UK's NHS”, *Townhall*, 29 May 2015, <http://townhall.com/columnists/dbradynelson/2015/05/29/obamacares-muse-the-uks-nhs-n2005024>.

³⁴ Darren B Nelson, LinkedIn profile, <https://au.linkedin.com/in/darren-b-nelson-712b0712>. and “Darren Brady Nelson – Australian-American economist”, Curriculum Vitae, <http://www.slideshare.net/DarrenBNelson/nelson-db-cv-econetc-20160727>.

Frontiers of Freedom

Founded in 1996 by Republican ex-Senator Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming, Frontiers of Freedom (FF) describes its mission as “to promote the principles of individual freedom, peace through strength, limited government, free enterprise, free markets, and traditional American values as found in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.”³⁵

Located in Fairfax, Virginia, FF has received extensive financial support from US conservative and free market political foundations as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars from Exxon Corporation to support anti-climate change policy work and advocacy.³⁶

Aside from disputing climate change science, current FF priorities include targeting the US Environmental Protection Agency, winding back government food and safety regulation, defending oil and gas industry interests, defending the tobacco industry, lifting environmental regulation on transport and automotive manufacturing, attacking Obamacare and encouraging other countries to walk away from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC). (The United States is not a participant in the ICC.)³⁷

Heartland Institute

The Heartland Institute is another American right-wing think tank founded by financier and libertarian political activist David Padden and current chief executive Joseph Bast in 1984. The Institute is located in Arlington Heights, Illinois, and focusses on issues including reducing government spending and taxation, healthcare, tobacco policy, climate change and defending the free market from government regulation. The Institute's declared mission is to “promote free-market solutions to social and economic problems. Those solutions include parental choice in education, market-based approaches to environmental protection, privatisation of public services, and deregulation in areas where property rights and markets do a better job than government bureaucracies.”³⁸

In the 1990s, the Heartland Institute worked closely with tobacco company Philip Morris to dispute or deny the health risks of second-hand smoke and to lobby against public smoking bans.³⁹ In the following decade the Heartland Institute “emerged as a leading force in climate change denial”; rejecting the international scientific consensus on global warming and opposing policies that would reduce carbon emissions as

³⁵ Frontiers of Freedom: Mission: <https://www.ff.org/about/>.

³⁶ “Frontiers of Freedom”, http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Frontiers_of_Freedom and Fact Sheet: Frontiers of Freedom, ExxonSecrets.org, <http://www.exxonsecrets.org/html/orgfactsheet.php?id=35>.

³⁷ Frontiers of Freedom: Freedom Centers: <https://www.ff.org/freedom-centers/>.

³⁸ The Heartland Institute: About us: <https://www.heartland.org/about-us/index.html>.

³⁹ Erik Conway and Naomi Oreskes, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, Bloomsbury Press, London, 2010, pp. 233-234, 247-248.

damaging to the economy.⁴⁰ Heartland chief executive Bast says the global scientific consensus is alarmist and economically disastrous, especially given that, he claimed in 2014, “the data don’t show any warming for the last 17 years.”⁴¹

The Institute summarises its views on climate change and energy in three documents titled “There is No ‘Scientific Consensus’ on Global Warming”, “The Global Warming Crisis is Over” and “Five Elements of a Pro-Energy, Pro-Environment, Pro-Jobs Plan”.⁴²

Darren Nelson has been a regular contributor to the Heartland Institute writing mainly on climate change and energy.⁴³ Nelson's articles place him firmly in the climate change denial camp. In June 2015, for example, he uncritically reported the views of Austrian-born, American physicist and climate change sceptic Siegfried Fred Singer that “Warming is not serious. We can stand warming. Ice ages are serious ... They wiped out the Neanderthals.”⁴⁴ Other articles reflect Nelson's interest in deregulation, for example highlighting opinion polling that suggested a growing number of Americans believed government “interference” in their lives had grown too large.⁴⁵ However most of Nelson's published writing for the Heartland Institute appears to be quick news rather than substantive research or analysis.⁴⁶ He is still listed as a contributor on the Institute's website.⁴⁷

Center for Freedom and Prosperity

Located in Alexandria, Virginia, in the United States, the Center for Freedom and Prosperity (CF&P) advocates for territorial taxation systems and offshore tax havens. Currently headed by former economic analyst with the Republican National Committee Andrew F. Quinlan, CF&P lobbies for jurisdictional tax competition, financial privacy and fiscal sovereignty. According to CF&P's website “protecting Fiscal Sovereignty is essential to preserving international liberty and prosperity. The right of each nation to set its own fiscal policy is essential to preserving tax competition, serving as the last line of defence against the efforts of politicians who seek to replace tax competition with a tax cartel, or an ‘OPEC for politicians.’ Just as the real OPEC extracts more money

⁴⁰ James Hoggan, Richard Littlemore, *Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming*, Greystone Books, 2009, pp 79, 85-87..

⁴¹ “In Las Vegas, Climate Change Deniers Regroup, Vow to Keep Doubt Alive”, *Bloomberg*, 15 July 2014, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-07-10/in-las-vegas-climate-change-deniers-regroup-vow-to-keep-doubt-alive>.

⁴² See <https://www.heartland.org/Center-Climate-Environment/index.html>.

⁴³ See <https://www.heartland.org/search?search=darren%20nelson&page=0>.

⁴⁴ D Brady Nelson, “Global warming policies reflect false assumptions, panelists say”, 14 July 2015, <https://www.heartland.org/news-opinion/news/global-warming-policies-reflect-false-assumptions-panelists-say>.

⁴⁵ D Brady Nelson, “National poll finds increasing skepticism towards government regulation”, 30 September 2014, <https://www.heartland.org/news-opinion/news/national-poll-finds-increasing-skepticism-towards-government-regulation>.

⁴⁶ See <https://www.heartland.org/search?search=darren%20nelson&page=0>.

⁴⁷ Heartland Institute profile: D Brady Nelson: <https://www.heartland.org/about-us/who-we-are/d-brady-nelson>.

from energy consumers, a tax cartel would grab more money from taxpayers.”⁴⁸ CF&P considers financial confidentiality achieved through off-shore tax havens to be “fundamentally a question of freedom ... financial privacy is a necessary and critical component of protecting basic human rights.”⁴⁹

CF&P is an energetic defender of tax havens which the Center insists have no role in tax evasion or money laundering but rather “*promote economic growth, sound fiscal policy, and individual liberty.*”⁵⁰ CF&P's declared enemy is the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) – “a bunch of crazy European socialists”, in the words of the center's founder, the radical free market economist and senior fellow with the libertarian Cato Institute, Daniel J Mitchell.⁵¹

Some insight into CF&P's lobbying operations has been provided in the course of media reporting on the massive “Panama Papers” leak to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) of off-shore tax haven records of the controversial Panamanian law firm and off-shore tax haven facilitator Mossack Fonseca. In April 2013, the ICIJ and the *Washington Post* reported on CF&P's lobbying in response to efforts by United States Senator Carl Levin to pursue investigations into off-shore tax havens and tax minimisation by US corporations:

Senator Carl M. Levin (Democrat-Michigan) has been holding hearings and conducting investigations into the offshore world for nearly three decades. In 2010, Congress passed the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act requiring that U.S. taxpayers report foreign assets to the government and foreign institutions alert the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] when Americans open accounts.

In February, Levin introduced legislation that would permit the Treasury Department to penalize offshore financial institutions that “significantly” impede U.S. tax enforcement and put an end to accounting practices that enable corporations to evade billions in taxes.

'We can't afford to lose tens of billions of dollars a year to tax-avoidance schemes,' Levin said. 'And many of these schemes involve the shift of U.S. corporate tax revenues earned here in the U.S. to offshore tax havens.'

The efforts by Levin and other lawmakers have been opposed by powerful lobbying interests, including the banking and accounting industries and a little-known nonprofit group called the Center for Freedom and Prosperity. CF&P was founded by Daniel J. Mitchell, a former Senate Finance Committee staffer who

⁴⁸ Center for Freedom and Prosperity, Fiscal Sovereignty, <http://freedomandprosperity.org/core-principles/fiscal-sovereignty/>.

⁴⁹ Center for Freedom and Prosperity: Financial Privacy <http://freedomandprosperity.org/core-principles/financial-privacy/>.

⁵⁰ Tax Havens: Myth versus fact”, Center for Freedom and Prosperity, <http://freedomandprosperity.org/issues/tax-havens/>.

⁵¹ “Mossack Fonseca: Inside the firm that helps the super rich hide their money”, *Guardian*, 8 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/apr/08/mossack-fonseca-law-firm-hide-money-panama-papers>.

works as a tax expert for the Cato Institute, and Andrew Quinlan, who was a senior economic analyst for the Republican National Committee before helping start the center.

In filings with the IRS, the center says it has 'met with more than 175 Capitol Hill offices on benefits of tax competition.' The center argues that unfettered access to offshore havens leads to lower taxes and more prosperity.

According to records reviewed by The Post and ICIJ, the organization's fundraising pleas have been circulated to offshore entities that make millions by providing anonymity for wealthy clients, many of them U.S. Citizens.

In May 2007, one director of a Hong Kong company that creates offshore trusts sent a CF&P solicitation to contacts in the Cook Islands, pointing out that CF&P was trying to raise \$250,000 for a lobbying campaign to 'stop the bleeding, build allies and go on the offensive' against efforts in Washington to regulate the industry.

'I personally think the efforts of CF&P should be supported by the Cook Islands given the impact [that] passage of current bills being considered in the USA Congress would have on the jurisdiction and industry,' the director said.

Attached to the e-mail was the proposal from CF&P to 'work with Congress and the White House' and explain the 'legitimate role that low-tax countries play in protecting financial privacy.'

Quinlan, the president of CF&P, declined to disclose his donors or say how much of the \$200,000 his organization raises each year comes from the offshore world.

'I don't think it matters what percentage of the money comes from which donor,' Quinlan said. 'There are huge offices on K Street that lobby on behalf of interests that are outside the United States. We're just trying to be as effective as we can be.'⁵²

As part of its reporting on the Panama Papers leak, the *Guardian* also revealed that in 2012, CF&P offered Mossack Fonseca an exclusive briefing on "what CF&P is doing in Washington" and "the current legislative climate on offshore tax and information exchange schemes". CF&P's approach followed a OECD report that featured a blacklist of 35 tax havens and threatened measures against jurisdictions that failed to improve

⁵² "Offshore Tax Havens Became Traps for Investors", *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists*, 7 April 2013, <https://www.icij.org/offshore/piercing-secrecy-offshore-tax-havens>. K Street is a major Washington DC thoroughfare know as the home for numerous think tanks, lobbyists and advocacy groups.

banking transparency and action against money laundering. Mossack was appreciative and moved to “coordinate a discussion group with our attorneys”.⁵³

The CF&P's current top project what it calls a “Coalition for Tax Competition” which is “fighting to preserve jurisdictional tax competition, fiscal sovereignty, and financial privacy from erosion by international bureaucrats.” CF&P is currently lobbying the US Congress to defund the United States financial contribution to the OECD which favours “the interests of finance ministers and tax collectors from European welfare states whatever the cost to the global economy ... [and] the massive BEPS [base erosion and profit shifting] tax grab widely understood to be aimed at US-headquartered multinationals.”⁵⁴

Darren Nelson's contributions to CF&P's work, past and present, are unclear, but he still lists himself as a “associated senior fellow” with the group.

In a 2015 article posted on the CF&P website, Nelson advocated radical free market policies as the best means to address the United States economic malaise: “The economic moral of the Reagan story versus that of Clinton-Bush Jr-Obama, is that bad economic policies of one’s predecessor must be quickly addressed with good ones (i.e. pro free market). There will be more *pain* for some at first (the pain being much shorter, the more markets are liberated), for much greater and sustained *gain* for most thereafter.”⁵⁵

LibertyWorks

Nelson's involvement with the small Queensland based libertarian think tank, LibertyWorks began in October 2015 with his role described as “chief economist and deputy start-up manager”.⁵⁶

Headed by Brisbane businessman and Liberal Democratic Party Queensland state president Andrew Cooper, LibertyWorks appears to be an effort to advance radical free market ideas in Australia. LibertyWorks describes itself as “an Australian based not-for-profit organisation that advocates for a drastic reduction in government control over people’s economic and personal lives.” According to LibertyWorks free markets unrestrained by government regulation are “a more successful economic system and a more moral one too ... Government heavy economies produce poor economic results

⁵³ “Mossack Fonseca: Inside the firm that helps the super rich hide their money”, *Guardian*, 8 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/apr/08/mossack-fonseca-law-firm-hide-money-panama-papers>.

⁵⁴ Centre for Freedom and Prosperity media release, 9 January 2017, <http://freedomandprosperity.org/2017/news/press-releases/cfp-letter-calls-on-congress-to-include-oecd-with-un-defunding-effort/>.

⁵⁵ D Brady Nelson, “The Personal Burden Formula: The New Misery Index”, *Townhall Finance*, 17 April 2015, <http://finance.townhall.com/columnists/dbradynelson/2015/04/17/the-personal-burden-formula-the-new-misery-index-n1986208> and <http://freedomandprosperity.org/2015/news/prosperity-updates/prosperity-update-may-1-2015/>.

⁵⁶ “Darren Brady Nelson – Australian-American economist”, Curriculum Vitae, <http://www.slideshare.net/DarrenBNelson/nelson-db-cv-econetc-20160727>.

and are morally inferior to free markets because they rely on coercion to function.”⁵⁷ LibertyWorks website highlights opposition to renewable energy targets, calls for repeal of section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, and libertarian argument in favour of the legalisation of cannabis use.⁵⁸

LibertyWorks President Cooper says he “began to question the influence of the state on personal and economic freedom during his university years after a friend encouraged him to read Milton Friedman’s 'Free to Choose'. Later he discovered Ayn Rand’s 'Atlas Shrugged' which he considers to be one of the most profound books he has read. [He] credits Rand’s writing to his understanding that big government is not only ineffective and counter-productive but manifestly unethical.”⁵⁹

Darren Nelson is currently listed as a member of the LibertyWorks advisory board with an entry that describes him as an “Austrian economist” and adviser to Senator Roberts.⁶⁰ Other members of the advisory board are the President of the Australian Libertarian Society and Deputy Director of the Australian Taxpayers Alliance, Dr John Humphreys; Director of Regulation Economics (and a former Director of Deregulation at the Institute of Public Affairs) Dr Alan Moran; and Anthony Cappello, director of Connor Court Publishing, Australia’s “go-to conservative publisher.”⁶¹

Donald Trump campaign

It is unclear from the public record what role Darren Nelson may have played directly or indirectly in President Donald Trump's election campaign organisation. He was described by James Ashby as an economic adviser to Trump and in “the Trump camp”, but there are no details on Nelson's current curriculum vitae or from other recent sources such his profile as the LibertyWorks website. Nelson himself, however, was forthcoming when asked about his involvement in the Trump campaign, describing a modest and short-term role as an economic analyst within a large team based at the Trump campaign headquarters in Trump Tower in New York. His own campaign work largely focussed on analysis of economic statistics relating to the state of American cities and urban areas. He is highly critical of city administration by Democrat Party machines, describing the Democrats stewardship of many American cities as “eight decades of neglect and failure.” Asked about how he had come to work on the Trump

⁵⁷ LibertyWorks Principles: <http://libertyworks.org.au/vision-mission/>. LibertyWorks was registered in Queensland as a not-for-profit association in October 2015: Extract from Australian Securities and Investment Commission database extract: LibertyWorks Inc, Registration No. IA55317.

⁵⁸ See <http://libertyworks.org.au/opinion/>.

⁵⁹ LibertyWorks, Operations Team: Andrew Cooper, <http://libertyworks.org.au/people/andrew-cooper/>.

⁶⁰ LibertyWorks, Advisory Board, Darren Nelson, <http://libertyworks.org.au/people/darren-nelson/>.

⁶¹ Liberty Works, Advisory Board, <http://libertyworks.org.au/advisory-board/>; and “How Connor Court became the go-to conservative publisher”, *The Saturday Paper*, 23 August 2014, <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2014/08/23/how-connor-court-became-the-go-conservative-publisher/1408716000>.

campaign, Nelson referred to “a contact at the Cato Institute”. CF&F founder Daniel Mitchell is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. ⁶²

It is also apparent that Nelson's engagement with the Republican Party and more particularly Tea Party activists extends back some years. He spoke at a Tea Party rally in Appleton, Wisconsin in 2010.⁶³

In January 2017 New South Wales One Nation Senator Brian Burston claimed that Nelson had obtained tickets to President Donald Trump's inauguration from Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger (representing Illinois's 16th congressional district). Pauline Hanson said she could not attend owing to campaigning commitments and sent Senator Burston in her place.⁶⁴

Kinzinger appeared a somewhat unlikely point of contact for One Nation with the Trump camp. His relatively mainstream conservative views had resulted in him being targeted by the conservative, free-market Go for Growth super-PAC (political action committee) as a “RINO” - a “Republican in Name Only”⁶⁵. Moreover in August 2016, Kinzinger announced publicly that he would not support Republican presidential nominee Trump, saying “I'm an American before I'm a Republican. I'm a Republican because I believe that Republicanism is the best way to defend the United States of America... [Trump] throws all of these Republican principles on their head.” In any case it was quickly revealed that One Nation's inauguration tickets were obtained from Kinzinger's office by the Australian Embassy in Washington after repeated representations from Senator Roberts who visited Washington and held meetings with the incoming Trump administration's Environmental Protection Agency transition team and other “alt-right” contacts including *Breitbart News* in December 2016. Robert's contacts were apparently insufficient to secure tickets to the inauguration, but with Kinzinger the Australian Embassy was successful in finding a congressman with tickets to spare.⁶⁶

⁶² Telephone conversation with Darren Nelson, 17 February 2017.

⁶³ D Brady Nelson, “Obamacare's Muse: The UK's NHS”, *Townhall*, 29 May 2015, <http://townhall.com/columnists/dbradynelson/2015/05/29/obamacares-muse-the-uks-nhs-n2005024>.

⁶⁴ “One Nation leader Pauline Hanson invited to Donald Trump's presidential inauguration”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 January 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/one-nation-leader-pauline-hanson-invited-to-donald-trumps-presidential-inauguration-20170115-gts12a.html>.

⁶⁵ “Club for Growth targeting 9 'RINO' Republicans for primary challenges”, *The Hill*, 27 February 2013, <http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/house-races/285193-club-for-growth-targeting-rino-republicans>.

⁶⁶ “One Nation lies about Trump invite, gets caught out, cries 'fake news'”, *Crikey*, 9 January 2017, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2017/01/19/one-nation-lied-trump-invite/>; “One Nation senator Malcolm Roberts to meet Trump advisers”, *The Australian*, 6 December 2016, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-affairs/one-nation-senator-malcolm-roberts-to-meet-trump-advisers/news-story/14d23224511c303f7ec08a74c7240991>, and “One Nation senator joins new world order of climate change denial”, *Guardian*, 15 December 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/planet-oz/2016/dec/15/one-nation-senator-joins-new-world-order-of-climate-change-denial>.

One Nation's "neo-Austrian" economist

James Ashby's description of Darren Nelson as "one of the world's leading economists" involved an element of exaggeration. In fairness to Nelson it should be said that he appears to have made no such claim.

It remains to be seen what influence Nelson may have on One Nation's economic policies and whether he will help them "build credibility on the economics front". His recruitment was certainly greeted with enthusiasm by Ashby and Roberts, but in many respects Nelson's libertarian approach may be more in tune with Senator David Leyonhjelm's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) than Pauline Hanson's more populist economic approach that includes strong opposition to free trade agreements, and preparedness for governments to directly subsidise manufacturing industry. Senator Leyonhjelm's aggressive free market liberalism has led him to ask "Is Pauline Hanson a Communist?"⁶⁷ Nelson's recruitment to One Nation, with his "neo-Austrian" outlook and engagement with the LDP connected LibertyWorks may represent a radical free market breach in One Nation's protectionist front.

Nelson's perspective certainly fits uneasily with One Nation's declared policy of increasing government regulation of financial markets, including working to "bring back a people's bank"⁶⁸.

Together with LibertyWorks Nelson may prove to be significant as an advocate for radical free-market thinking within One Nation. Nelson's recruitment to Senator Roberts' staff may signal an emerging divide between One Nation's protectionist and radical free-market tendencies, or else a shift in the party's orientation towards the latter.

Equally if not more significant than Nelson's specific economic views are his broad connections with American right-wing think tanks.

A previous Australia Institute research paper has highlighted One Nation's dependence on American "alt-right" thinking in its policies on Islam and Muslims.⁶⁹ This pattern

⁶⁷ Senator David Leyonhjelm: "Is Pauline Hanson a Communist?" <https://davidleyonhjelm.com.au/is-pauline-hanson-a-communist/>.

⁶⁸ Pauline Hanson's One Nation: Economics and tax policy; <http://www.onenation.com.au/policies/economics/economics-5>.

may continue in relation to economic policy, with Nelson's connections with the Frontiers of Freedom and the Centre for Freedom and Prosperity being potentially important.

In this regard it should be noted that Senator Hanson has long argued that foreign companies should pay a “fair share” of tax – by which she means a larger share – on profits made in Australia. This nationalist position was a prominent aspect of her economic policy platform during her parliamentary service in 1996-98 and continues to feature in One Nation's economic platform with the party calling for some \$100 million in tax to be clawed back from multinational corporations.⁷⁰ There would appear to be some inconsistency between this objective and One Nation's engagement of an “associated senior fellow” with the Center for Freedom and Prosperity, the most prominent lobbyist group in the United States arguing the case for off-shore tax havens.

One Nation does have a track record for getting its policies from overseas. Darren Nelson may well be a harbinger of further American “alt-right” influence on One Nation's thinking.

⁶⁹ Philip Dorling, *The American Far-Right Origins of Pauline Hanson's views on Islam*, Australia Institute Research Paper, January 2017, <http://www.tai.org.au/content/american-far-right-origins-pauline-hanson%E2%80%99s-views-islam>.

⁷⁰ Pauline Hanson's One Nation: Economic and Tax Policy, <http://www.onenation.com.au/policies/economics/economics-3>. In 1998 One Nation's taxation policy included the following: “All overseas companies operating in Australia will be required to publish their balance sheets in full detail. The giant multinational companies can show low profits by disguising a lot of their profit as fees, royalties and charges which are tax free at present. [One Nation's] new tax system will provide incentive for Australian companies using offshore tax shelters to cease these activities and start working within our domestic environment.” See <http://www.gwb.com.au/onenation/press/tax.html>.