

“The Last Three Feet: A Fulbright Experience”

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Ambassador Hall, Minister Gehrler, Rector Winckler, honored guests, friends and associates of the Fulbright program in Austria. Let me also especially acknowledge Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, a fellow member of the Fulbright club, a colleague and co-conspirator – in good causes - during his days in New York, and, indeed, a man whose devotion to the cause of peace and stability would have earned highest marks from my old boss and friend, Senator Fulbright.

Today is an extraordinary day. I'm sure that Senator Fulbright would look down on this celebration with a great deal of pride, with the keen interest that typified his engagement with the world, and with a real sense of accomplishment. As for myself, my reaction is one of awe, wonder, and a great deal of pride. As some of you may know, Fulbright and all that Fulbright represents has been a substantial part of my life, and not just as a former Fulbright Scholar. I worked for Senator Fulbright during those tumultuous days of Vietnam and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. I also have a Fulbright son and brother. So the link is an enduring one, and it is gratifying to be able to turn my attention, in the twilight of my career, to the Fulbright programs and what I call the “Fulbright Legacy” in my constitutional responsibilities to the Fulbright-Hays legislation.

I think it is fair to say that Senator Fulbright achieved what few people do: the translation of his dreams into a substantial legacy. His is a legacy that any of us would be proud to leave behind, yet how few have had the drive, the constancy, and the vision to do so. The Senator's vision, which we celebrate today, was exceptionally clear, penetrating, and far sighted.

On September 27, 1945, the freshman Senator from Arkansas rose in the Senate and to a nearly empty chamber asked unanimous consent to use credit for reparations and foreign loan repayments to fund an academic exchange program. The legislation slipped almost unnoticed through the Congress. The official purpose of the Fulbright legislation was and remains to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the peoples of other countries. Bill Fulbright understood that neither the wealthy, nor the elite, nor the learned carry the hopes for increasing international peace alone, but rather the people of all nations. He believed that only by spreading wide the possibility of international understanding did his program stand any chance of making a dent in century-old mountains of prejudice and mistrust.

As he later said of the programs that bear his name, "It is a modest program with an immodest aim -- the achievement in international affairs of a regime more civilized, rational and humane. I believed in that possibility when I began; I still do."

Senator Fulbright hoped that the exchange programs would be a pure distillation of education's greatest qualities -- the constant challenge to redefine one's presumptions, the jarring experience that makes sudden change and strange sounds familiar, and the brilliant openings to new sights, sounds, smells and reactions. He felt passionately that good institutions alone were insufficient if a country was not composed of virtuous, educated people. The good Senator believed that one must give proper attention to what he called "the opinions of mankind," and that giving such attention was a major motivation for organizing the exchange programs.

Not that those early exchange programs were without critics. Senator Kenneth McKellar of Tennessee said, after the bill's passage, "Senator, that's a very dangerous piece of legislation. You're going to take our young boys and girls over there and expose them to those foreign isms." Well, I have to admit that such profound and lofty ideas as those in evidence on the Senate floor were not the staple of conversation aboard the USS Independence in September of 1953, when the first class of Fulbrighters, which included a very young, very naive and very inexperienced graduate of Pomona College, first set sail for Germany.

I think we were what Senator Fulbright wanted for that program. Quite literally, none of us had ever been out of the country. None of us had

any idea what Europe was or about its people. We arrived in a country that was devastated by the war, bereft of hope, and sometimes of possibilities. In response, we learned, we saw, and we were changed. We were changed fundamentally. It is hard to measure, even to fully recall, the impact this first Fulbright experience had on my own life. But it moved my heart and changed my life. My Munich of 1953 and 1954 was a city where I was inspired and moved by Romano Guardini and his sermons at the Paulus Kirche, by the intellectual passion of Ortega y Gasset, just a few years before his death, and the extraordinary presence and emotional impact of Emil Nolde – and above all – by warmth and reality, of tens of young Germans from Dresden to Dortmund. One such young German – who is now a baron of German industry – was my beistander at my marriage in Munich in December of 1953.

Indeed the life that I have now led for the last 40 years came out of, in a very real way, those two years in Germany.

I would say the same has been true for my son, John. At Yale, when John was applying for the Fulbright, his mentor said to him, "You must apply for France." And he asked, "Why?" His mentor answered, "Well, you have the best chance there." To his credit, John resisted. "But I've lived in France. I speak French. I know the country. I've been there for four years. I want to go to India. I want to go to India because it is a new place. It is a place where I can learn something, or I can do something." These are the kinds of attitudes and experiences that the Fulbright programs have fostered. And I was fortunate to live it myself, which is why I am so pleased to now have this opportunity to be the shepherd of the Fulbright programs.

As one of the early Fulbright scholars wrote in a book entitled The Fulbright Experience, "The ultimate worth of the Fulbright approach is to remove the sense of the exotic, the strange, the alien, to make events and peoples in faraway places as real and meaningful as events and peoples who are our neighbors, our associates and acquaintances. Nothing -- nothing is so profoundly mistaken as to think that they are different from us."

In that context, some of us might remember the words of a cartoon character of the 1960s, an opossum by the name of Pogo, who said – really of the Vietnam War, "We have met the enemy, and they is us." In terms of Fulbrights, many of whom adorn this room, we might modify the Pogo dictum by saying "We have met the *others*, and they is us."

Permit me in the time that remains to illuminate further what the Fulbright experience has meant to this proud member of the Fulbright Class of 1953, by speaking of my own experience with the character and personality of the great senator himself. I trust that in citing this personal “Fulbright experience” I will not be accused of conjuring up yet another dusty “icon for all seasons”. I intend just the opposite. As I stand here, what I am most aware of is the Senator’s lively personality and presence still moving among the winds of ideas and emotions among us.

To begin with, Senator Fulbright was an extraordinary listener. He was one of the most gifted listeners I have ever met. This sometimes created real problems for the people to whom he was listening, precisely because he did actually listen. I observed this from time to time in congressional hearings since unlike many senators Fulbright listened. In so doing, he gained not just useful knowledge but also seized the weaknesses of the argument being made.

He was also remarkable one-on-one. This is where he really found the opportunity for interchange. If you were conversing with Bill Fulbright, you were held accountable for what you said. He had little patience for what Thomas Mann called "the blue-eyed and the commonplace." You had to be prepared. He listened. And woe to those who were not prepared

He also had remarkable standards of excellence. His intellectual instincts were first rate. He consistently knew how to go to the heart and logic of what you were trying to say or do. I learned this first-hand. The first time I came to Capitol Hill, I was on the Fulbright staff. Later I served as Chief of Staff to Senator Church and Senator Javits. But I came fresh to the Fulbright staff. I wanted to be part of what was, I believed, the only respectable and credible form of dissent in the United States to the Vietnam War.

In those days, would-be staff members were required to appear before the Personnel Committee. The Personnel Committee of the Foreign Relations Committee consisted of Senators Fulbright and Hickenlooper. Now if any of you know something about the highly conservative and gruff Senator Hickenlooper, you know that for anyone – including me, fresh from Princeton as a proud young professor – this was a daunting prospect. How could I possibly say anything that would satisfy these two? But that wasn't

the problem. When Senator Fulbright turned to me, and he pulled his glasses down and asked pointedly, "Dr. Bader, I see that the title of your doctoral dissertation is 'A Communist Failure: Austria 1945-1955.'" Then he leaned over, and he said, "What makes you so sure it was a failure?" The end of this story is that when that book was finally published, it was called Austria between East and West, 1945-1955.

Another standard we associate with Senator Fulbright is the standard of courage. For those of us who lived through those times, the quality remains both memorable and poignant. Consider this extraordinary time when Bill Fulbright took the full consequences of his criticism of American's involvement in the Vietnam War. It was a time when the American dissenters were shunned and battered. His friend Lyndon Johnson, who once referred to Fulbright as "my secretary of State", turned on him with all the fury of an Old Testament God. Abuse found its way to the staff level in ways that are remembered with awe and anger. On one occasion Lyndon Johnson cut Fulbright funding as an act of retribution. It was a difficult time, but it was also stimulating to stand in the company of a man as courageous as Senator Fulbright, who held to such uncompromising standards.

As I close, I want to read to you from something. One of the major financial donors to the Fulbright Legacy is a man by the name of Diethelm Hoener, a German. He wrote to the university, explaining why he had made such a major donation. He wrote first about what Germany was like in 1945: how poor they were and how there was very little to eat and how they were moved in boxcars across a shattered desolate Germany. That child of a broken, dispirited and starved Germany has become one of the great venture capitalists of our time.

In his letter he remarks, "My first memories of Senator Fulbright are from that period of time. At school no one had anything to eat until American assistance came to our town. How well I remember the amazing sight of a big kettle standing in the middle of the schoolyard. I asked the teacher, 'Who pays for that?' His answer was, 'Thanks to Senator Fulbright from America.'

"As my schoolmates and I played in the ruins of bombed-out buildings, I began to ask the question, 'Who is this America? Who is this country that sacrificed its children to destroy one of the worst dictators and

criminals in history?' I knew from my geography lessons where the United States was located on a map, but little more than that.

"As time went on, I became more and more fascinated by Senator Fulbright, this American who helped the morally and physically destroyed nation of Germany at a time when no one, and rightly so, had respect for a country that had caused the death of more than 50 million people.

"When I learned of the Fulbright Scholarship Program, created to promote mutual understanding among nations, my admiration only intensified for this man; his vision, his generosity and his will. Here is a man who fervently believed in the first principles of democracy, that every human being has inalienable rights, among them life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Senator Fulbright extended these rights down to America's citizens and applied them to all citizens of the world.

I find the humanitarian legacy left by Senator Fulbright very much alive in America of the 1990s. My gift to the university then is only a modest gesture that hopefully repays a bit of the enormous debt of gratitude that I, as a German, feel toward Senator Fulbright and all that he contributed to the world in his lifetime. This is what Senator Fulbright did all around the world. It is one of his great gifts and his legacies."

It is because of such sentiments and our memories of the Senator and the Fulbright Program, that we are gathered here today. The success, strength, and durability of this program is to be celebrated as we are doing today. And the world should also take note – that the Fulbright Educational Exchange Program was on January 5, nominated by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan for the Nobel Peace Prize. In his letter to the Nobel Committee, the Senator cited Seymour Martin Lipset's dictum: "He who knows only one country knows no country." I will add to that powerful thought, Edward R. Murrow's admonition that "In a journey of 10, 000 miles only the last three feet matter."

I thank the Fulbright Program and the Senator for giving me a lifetime of studying, seeing, tasting, touching, and feeling "the last three feet."