I want to make a few brief remarks about Senator Fulbright and Austria, the Fulbright Program, Austrian Studies, and the German Studies Association which includes Austrian Studies in its German-speaking studies agenda. I am not going to talk about the Austrian-American Fulbright program in detail, but I do want to refer you to a new brochure on the program, which is available here, and to encourage you to consult our redesigned website at www.fulbright.at. Please note the Austrian-American Educational Commission’s use of the moniker Fulbright Austria that concisely captures who we are and what we do so.

I am going to limit myself to five brief observations.

The first refers to J. William Fulbright’s biography. Fulbright was born 1905 and raised in Fayetteville, in northwestern Arkansas, where he attended the University of Arkansas. He came from a well-to-do family, was a good athlete and a good student, and he applied for and received a Rhodes Scholarship to attend Oxford University from 1925 to 1928. This was a profound and a transformative experience for Fulbright which informed his ideas concerning the establishment of an academic exchange program after World War II.

It is a little known fact that Fulbright spent six months in Vienna after he left Oxford: much of the time at Café Louvre – a hangout for English and American journalists as well as journalists writing for British and American papers, including a Hungarian, Mike Fodor, who took Fulbright under his wing, mentored him on Central European politics, and took him along on a tour of the Balkans. According to Randal Woods, author of the definitive biography of Fulbright, Fulbright’s experiences with Vienna and with Fodor “constituted an education in itself” and were “his introduction the real world of international politics.”

The point I want to make here is that the formative institutions for Fulbright were the classrooms of Oxford and the coffeehouses of Vienna. Austria also played a role in his thinking about international education, too.

Second: The Fulbright Program was based on a simple but absolutely ingenious idea. The amendment of a piece of legislation that had nothing to do with educational or cultural exchange: the Surplus Property Act of 1944. Fulbright proposed that part of the windfall funding that the US government was accruing from the sale of wartime surpluses stockpiled overseas be earmarked to fund the exchange program that came to bear his name. Harry Truman signed the Fulbright Act into law on August 1, 1946.

The Fulbright Act was not even two pages long, but it sketched out the architecture of the program in four brief points. It called for the conclusion of “executive agreements” between the United States and participating partner governments. These agreements established binational commissions capable of receiving funds, making policies, selecting grantees, and disbursing grants, and these
grants were designated for students and scholars participating in bilateral exchanges. Finally, it created a 10-person Board of Foreign Scholarships – consisting of leading academics and university executives – that was to be appointed by the President of the United States to figure out all of the organizational details of how to do this.

The idea and the architecture of the Fulbright Program also was informed by the fact that Fulbright was in liberal internationalist. He believed in partnerships and shared sovereignty.

Third: When the initial funding from the sales of war surplus materials ran out after 15 years, it became necessary to provide for regular funding for the Fulbright program from the federal budget, and this was secured by the Fulbright-Hays Act, which John F. Kennedy signed into law in June 1961. It reaffirmed the importance of binational commissions and broadened the reach of the program by establishing over twenty new ones, and it gave partner governments and other organizations an opportunity to contribute to the program – either in terms of governmental co-funding or private donations.

Partner country cash and in-kind support for the program went from zero in 1961 to over $100 million dollars to an annual US appropriation for the program around $236 million today. So it is roughly about 1:2. However, it is important to recognize that many of those countries with binational Fulbright commissions, like Austria, have come to contribute more to the program than the US government. The average partner government contribution among those 23 countries in Europe with Fulbright commissions is $2 for every $1 US dollar. I want to take this opportunity to once again acknowledge the Republic of Austria’s commitment to and generous support for the Fulbright Program.

However, the Austrian Fulbright Commission and Austrian-American Fulbright Program is also supported by many partner organizations: one prominent example is the fact that Austria has the seventh-largest program for US Fulbright Scholars in the world. With 23 annual awards, it ranks behind India, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Japan and ex aequo with Canada. This is because it has collaborative and cofounding agreements with so many Austrian universities, museums, and research centers but also because it works closely with American organizations, such as the Botstiber Foundation and the Hall Foundation. It also has an annual collaborative award for an Austrian Fulbrighter at the University of Minnesota.

This brings me to my fourth point: understanding why the Center for Austrian Studies is at the University of Minnesota and how this is related to what best can be called the “Fulbright ripple effect”: the relationship between Fulbright grants and long-term impacts.

In 1976 the Republic of Austria decided to endow an institution in the United States with a million dollars to establish a Center for Austrian Studies as a bicentennial gift to the United States. How did the Center for Austrian Studies end up at the University of Minnesota? Some observers have conjectured that former Minnesotan Senator Walter Mondale, who was then serving as Jimmy Carter’s vice president, convinced the legendary Austrian Federal Chancellor Bruno Kreisky that the Minnesota Democrat Farmer-Labor Party was the closest thing you could get to Austrian Social Democracy and still be in the United States. However, that theory is speculative.

The University of Minnesota came up with the best proposal for hosting the center based in no small part on the background and expertise of a professor of history, who had a lot of additional experience in international education: William E. Wright. Bill Wright had been a Fulbright student in Austria in 1954-55, and a scholar in the early 1960s. His successor as director, David Good, was a Fulbright student in Vienna in 1969-70, and David’s successor, Gary Cohen, had a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research grant that brought him to Prague and Vienna in the early 1980s. Howard Louthan, the newly appointed director of the Center for Austrian Studies, also taught in the US
Teaching Assistantship Program (which the Fulbright Commission manages for the Austrian Ministry of Education) in 1987-88.

I always go out of my way to point out that Gerry Kleinfeld, the legendary founder of the German Studies Association in 1976 who served its executive director for 30 years, was a 1959-60 alumnus of the Austrian Fulbright Program, not the German Fulbright Program, so in some respects the GSA can be seen an outcome of the Austrian Fulbright Program, too.

Joe Patrouch, recently appointed Director of the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies at the University of Alberta, was a Fulbright Student in the late 80s and a scholar in the late 90s. Günter Bischof, Director of the CenterAustria at the University of New Orleans, and coeditor of 24 volumes of Contemporary Austrian Studies, was not a Fulbrighter….. He is an alum of another legendary program, and as a teenager from Vorarlberg had his first exposure the United States was an AFS student.

This brings me to my fifth and concluding point. You will find Fulbrighters and alumni of the Austrian US Teaching Assistantship program everywhere where Austrian Studies are institutionalized – and the same thing applies to German studies or other national area studies. For example, the editor and book review editor of the Austrian History Yearbook, Pieter Judson and Maureen Healy; Hillary Herzog, co-editor of Journal of Austrian Studies; or Kathleen Giustino, Heather Morrison, John Swanson, Joe Patrouch, who have served or are serving as editors on H-Net’s HABSBURG platform. By the way, Christine Moser, Director Austrian Cultural Forum in New York City, was a Fulbrighter at Smith College, and Hannelore Veit from the ORF’s Washington office, who is here tonight, was one at Notre Dame.

Fulbright Austria did a short online survey of the members of the German Studies Association and the Austrian Studies Association this summer, and we managed to identify 58 GSA members and 37 ASA members who were alums of our programs – mostly in departments of history or German – at institutions large and small all over the United States. One can extrapolate on these numbers a bit. Here were have the authors of hundreds of dissertations and books; thousands of articles; and teachers of tens of thousands of students, who are actively and professionally mediating the interface between Austrian and American cultures by teaching and doing research on things Austrian. And as everybody in the profession knows, Austrian Studies is a tough way to make a living, too!

Finally, Fulbright Austria is commemorating its 65th anniversary activities with a new website and a new design, and we want to reach out to our alumni to ask them to help document what they have done because this will help us show what this program does so well. Our new website has a subdomain called “Fulbright Forever” that has been specifically designed to facilitate longitudinal tracking and a story-telling project. Why is this important?

The representatives of the taxpayers of the Republic of Austria in the Austrian parliament and the United States of America in Congress, who we would like to thank for their generous support, need to be reminded that the Fulbright Program is a great investment in cultural diplomacy: one of the most credible soft power tools that the US has because it is an academic exchange program and as such is committed to the principles of the freedom of expression and the freedom of inquiry.

The Fulbright Program transforms lives and institutions, makes us better citizens, is cost-effective, and has long term impacts in so many different ways. We need to advocate for the program more effectively to sustain it in the future, and you can help us do this, too.

It is great to see so many Fulbright alumni here! Thank you for coming tonight!