

Remarks

(As Prepared for Delivery)

**Vice Chair Susan Ness
J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board**

**Reception Celebrating the 60th Anniversary
of the German-American Fulbright Program**

**Federal Foreign Office
Berlin, Germany**

Monday, March 19, 2012

Minister Pieper, Mr. Delawie, Dr. Schütte, Dr. Hoffmann, and Fulbrighters – past, present and future – Guten Abend.

I bring greetings from the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. We presently are **nine** private citizens who are appointed by the President of the United States to set policy for the Fulbright Program, approve all grantees, and promote Fulbright worldwide.

This evening we commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of one of the world's exemplary Fulbright Commissions.

Willy Brandt observed that there are three pillars of diplomacy: **politics, trade** and **culture**. The **German-American Fulbright Commission** is like the titanium core of that cultural pillar: immensely strong, but flexible and responsive. **You** understand that the global challenges we face today are vastly different from those during the Cold War, from those after the fall of the Berlin Wall, or those after 9/11, or even those after the recent global recession.

Your Commission has served as a model in responding effectively and creatively to this changing world. You also have shown great leadership in attracting private sector support -- so essential in these difficult economic times. We are indeed grateful for that dedication and investment in the future.

So, congratulations to you, Dr. Hoffmann, and your outstanding team, for nurturing the spirit and purpose of the Fulbright program, all while enabling it to evolve to meet today's challenges and opportunities.

II

Over the past few months, I have had the honor of meeting hundreds of Fulbrighters from countries spanning the globe. Their stories differ, but they share the same refrain: Fulbright has changed my life.

While I did not have a Fulbright, I did spend the 1968-69 academic year studying in Geneva, Switzerland. The lessons learned, the friendships forged, and the events to which I bore witness have profoundly changed **my** life.

During that year, I had the opportunity to visit Berlin. It was 43 years ago –the height of the Cold War – and it was the week between Christmas and New Year. On the western side of this divided city, people were bustling about, frequenting cafes, and enjoying the lights and sounds of the holiday season as they frenetically prepared to usher in the New Year. But on the other side of the Wall – built just seven years earlier - - it was a starkly different picture. A thick pile of snow blanketed the ground. A lone boy was dragging a sled, and there was no one else in sight. It was eerily quiet.

That contrasting image deepened my resolve to work for freedom and human rights, for peace and understanding. To tear down the walls that divide people. To celebrate, not condemn differences. And to build cultural bridges that span the political divide.

That is the essence of Fulbright.

Since 1952, from the post-war period through reunification to now, the Fulbright program has been central to German-American diplomacy and to the powerful friendship and cultural connection between our two countries.

What was the inspiration for this vital program?

During the 1920's, William Fulbright was encouraged to apply for a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford, where he spent three of the most formative years of his life. He was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1944. Deeply troubled by the human devastation of World War II, he concluded that if the future leaders of countries could spend enough time abroad to appreciate a different way of interacting, they might be willing to settle disputes through dialogue, not conflict. Thus in 1946 the idea of an international education exchange program was born.

But how to pay for it? (Isn't that a timeless question!) His eyes lit up when he saw on his desk a bill to sell for credits all the surplus military goods scattered around the world. The bill left his desk with an innocent sentence tacked on – "these credits shall be used only for international education exchange." Two years later, the first boatloads of Fulbright students crossed the ocean.

III

In its 60-year history, the German-American Fulbright program has sponsored more than 40,000 students and scholars. That's almost 15% of all Fulbright alumni worldwide.

Among them are the opera singer **Renee Fleming**, the novelist **Jonathan Franzen** and the philosopher **Werner Krieglstein**. They in turn are part of an incredible global network of more than **310,000** Fulbright alumni from the United States and **155** other countries, which includes such notables as: the president of Chile, **Sebastian Pinera**, the Nobel-Prize winning economist from Bangladesh, **Muhammad Yunus**, and the American poet and author **Maya Angelou**.

The Fulbright relationship isn't simply bilateral. It's a partnership of shared efforts to promote human rights everywhere; to combat poverty, to find solutions to global climate change and to ensure that we live in a more secure world -- one ruled not by fear or threats, but by peace and freedom.

To meet such challenges, we're working with the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to launch our first ever *regional* Fulbright program -- NEXUS -- the Fulbright Regional Network for Applied Research. We are creating a platform for scholars from across the Western Hemisphere to engage in collaborative thinking, problem-solving and multi-disciplinary research in one of three inter-related topics: technology and innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable energy.

And our Board is also striving to make the Fulbright opportunity more accessible globally, particularly to people from underserved communities, and to people interested cross-cultural immersion in such communities. Your Commission has embraced that concept in a significant way.

IV

As has been noted, each member of the Fulbright family continues to contribute to a better world long after the grant has ended. It is the **lifetime** of these contributions that make Fulbright such a valuable program. To inspire others, the Fulbright Board is making everyone aware of the good deeds of our alumni -- individually and collectively.

Alumni and grantees, we encourage you to speak out about your experience -- and how it changed *your* life. Now more than ever, it is essential to do so. And now more than ever it is easy to share those thoughts and ideas -- we are on Twitter. Please follow us **@Fulbrightboard**.

V

Senator Fulbright once remarked, "...We must seek through education to develop **empathy**, that rare and wonderful ability to perceive the world as **others** see it."

For over 60 years, the German-American Fulbright Commission has taken these words to heart, enshrining them in every scholar and student it supports, from its first class to the class of 2012.

It is my great privilege to be here with you tonight. And on behalf of my colleagues on the Board, and all the Fulbright alumni worldwide, I wish you a very happy anniversary and a bright future ahead.