

Remarks of
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Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board

FULBRIGHT U.S. STUDENT RESEARCHERS TO SOUTH CENTRAL ASIA
PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION
Thursday, June 13, 2013
Washington, DC

Good afternoon, Fulbrighters! On behalf of the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, I want to congratulate each of you on your selection as a Fulbright U.S. Student Researcher. What a fascinating region of the world you soon will be calling your home!

I have had the honor of serving as Vice Chair of the Fulbright Board for two years now, and the best part is the opportunity to meet Fulbrighters.

The Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board is comprised of 12 private citizens who are appointed by the President of the United States to oversee and set policy for the Fulbright Program -- and to approve all grants.

Among my colleagues on the Board are a university president, a college professor who happens to be blind, a former U.S. Ambassador, a former chief of staff to the First Lady of the United States, a former U.S. marine who founded a school for orphans in Kenya, and a poet who teaches creative writing. The poet is our chairman.

Board members give final approval for *all* U.S. *and* foreign Fulbright grantees. With more than 155 countries participating in the Fulbright program, and more than 8,000 U.S. and foreign Fulbright grants

awarded each year, you can imagine that our Board members spend a lot of time on applications.

Our Board approved *your* application – and so I know firsthand what an incredible group of emerging leaders we have in this room!!

The fact that you are here today, following a rigorous, merit-based selection process, is a tribute to your scholarship and your leadership. I predict that your Fulbright Award will open doors for you, not just in academia but in your personal development, and in ways that you can't even imagine today. Simply put – it will change your life.

You are going to a region with an extraordinarily rich history and cultural heritage. Each country will offer you a stimulating and dynamic experience. You are one of 77 students who will soon be on your way to Bangladesh, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, or Uzbekistan.

You are pursuing subjects ranging from public health to economic development, from science to social entrepreneurship, from educational policy to micro insurance and farming. Each of you is tackling a unique and important topic in today's complex and challenging world.

The perspective that you bring to your research undoubtedly will evolve -- thanks to the people you will meet and the experiences you will have while on your grant.

And the friendships you will form in your host communities and institutions — and with other Fulbrighters — will last a lifetime.

You are joining a very distinguished group of Fulbright alumni – both American scholars who have gone to South or Central Asia and visiting

scholars from this region who have come to the U.S – and who have gone on to be awarded Nobel or Pulitzer prizes. No pressure here!!

Among the Nobel Prize winners: Henry Kissinger, went to India in 1962-3, Leonid Hurwicz, was a Fulbright Scholar in India in 1965-66, and Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh, was a Fulbright Student at the University of Colorado, Boulder and at Vanderbilt University in 1965-66.

Also, Journalist Eric Freedman, a Fulbright Scholar to Uzbekistan in 2001, won a 1994 Pulitzer Prize in Journalism. Historian David Brion Davis was a Fulbright Scholar to India in 1967, and France in 1980 and later won a 1980 Pulitzer Prize in History.

When your grant comes to a close, your Fulbright experience will continue on. You will be joining a family of more than 300,000 Fulbright alumni since the program began more than 65 years ago. Fulbright alumni have become world leaders on every continent -- 18 have served as heads of state, and one became Secretary General of the United Nations. Many serve in governing bodies in their home countries, have written books and performed on the international stage, and 43 were Nobel laureates.

You will find that there is a special bond between Fulbrighters – even those you have never met. They will open doors for you. You just need to reach out to them – as well as to those who follow in your footsteps.

You were chosen – not just for your academic prowess or for your compelling research topic. We had many applicants who were fully competitive on these grounds. But you were also chosen for your ability to be a citizen ambassador – to fully immerse yourself in the culture and life of your host country; to better understand their views -- and through your presence, enable your hosts to better understand the

United States – not as it is portrayed fictionally in our media, but by getting to know you as a person.

Quick story: Tuesday, I had lunch with a group of foreign Fulbrighters who were finishing their science and technology grants in the United States. One was doing his PhD at Cal Tech. I noted that *The Big Bang Theory* is set at Cal Tech. He groaned, and said that he knew that. I can assure you—upon his return to India he will make sure that his family and friends know that *The Big Bang Theory* is just a spoof!

But all kidding aside, I cannot overstate the importance of getting to know your host community and them getting to know you as a person, and not a caricature.

Your American Fulbright colleagues are great, and it may be tempting to spend much of your social time with them (where there are more than one of you!). Don't!! Instead, make an effort to become integrated into the social life of your host community. It won't be easy, especially if you don't speak the local dialect. But try. It will significantly enhance your Fulbright experience.

Senator Fulbright's "immodest aim" for what he called a "modest program." Is to "bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason, and a little more compassion into world affairs and thereby to increase the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship." He believed that "International education and exchange... can turn nations into peoples."

So, following the war in 1946, Senator Fulbright persuaded his colleagues to pass a law establishing what we now know as the Fulbright program. But funding it was a problem, because his Senate colleagues had again turned inward.

Then across his desk came a bill authorizing the sale of surplus US military goods, which were spread around the world. He tacked on a single sentence to the bill – that the proceeds could be used ONLY for international educational exchanges! Brilliant!!!!

This story is highly relevant today. We are in tough fiscal times. Every government program must prove its worth, and global educational exchanges are a long term investment in our future.

So I have a simple assignment for you as you embark on this adventure: During your grant -- and afterward, share stories from your Fulbright experience with others. Make sure your hometown media outlets know of your Fulbright experience. Blog, Tweet, post videos, use Facebook. And when you return home, reach out to prospective Fulbright applicants.

By sharing your stories and your experience, you will help to preserve the visibility and vitality of the Fulbright program for future generations of students.

And after you return home, continue to collaborate with other Fulbrighters here and abroad in your field of research. Organize projects with them to help solve the world's most pressing problems.

And while you are on the Fulbright grant – have the time of your life!!

Thank you.