



THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Perennial Crisis*

PERENNIAL CRISIS

H. ALEXANDER SMITH

SENATOR H. ALEXANDER SMITH (Republican, New Jersey) was co-sponsor of the Smith-Mundt Act and sponsor of the act, passed in 1949, authorizing the use of payments on World War I debts by Finland for educational activities, including exchange of students between the two countries.

The challenge

■ “As long as we believe that knowledge is better than ignorance, that the truth makes men free, exchange of persons programs should survive and grow.” That sentence, taken from the report of the Committee on Educational Interchange Policy on “The Goals of Student Exchange,” eloquently presents the challenge to those of us who do believe that knowledge and truth are the sound foundations on which to build enduring peace and a free and prosperous world.

Educational exchange plays an important, but by no means

exclusive, role in the spreading of knowledge and truth. However, the almost ideal partnership through which we in the United States have combined private and public contributions to international educational exchange is a guiding example to be followed in attacking all aspects of international ignorance, prejudice, and misunderstanding.

■ There is no justification for complacency or inattention merely because a program has reached a high level of success. We must constantly review our goals, as did the Committee on Educational Interchange Policy, and, of equal importance, continuously inspect the foundation and framework on which we have built.

As readers of this *Bulletin* are well aware, private exchange programs long antedate the Government's activity in this field, and still bear the major share of the burden. However, the Governmental role is a significant one and in recent years has become nearly indispensable. The legislative foundation on which the Government's participation is built consists essentially of two laws: Public Law 584 of the 79th Congress, and Public Law 402 of the 80th Congress. The former is popularly known as the Fulbright Act, and the latter as the Smith-Mundt Act.

As a co-sponsor of the Smith-Mundt Act, I am particularly gratified with the outstanding success of the exchange program. My participation was inspired by the experience that I had personally with the activities of the Belgium American Educational Foundation, established by former President Hoover after World War I. This was an outgrowth of the old CRB — Commission for the Relief of Belgium — which saved Belgium during the first World War. The Belgian American Exchange program has been in continuous operation for a period of over thirty-five years. It counts among its "alumni" the leading Belgians in public life today. To it can be attributed directly the abiding friendship today between Belgium and the United States. It has been a model operation for many other private exchange programs.

■ The Fulbright Act inspired by my colleague, Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas, originally enabled the use, for educational

*An ideal
partnership*

*Governmental
rule
indispensable*

exchange purposes, of some of the foreign currencies available to the United States as a result of the disposal abroad of surplus property. As such it was a temporary program, but free from the necessity of annual appropriations. The Smith-Mundt Act provided a framework for a permanent program of much broader scope (in addition to the educational exchange features, this act is also the basis for the activities of the United States Information Agency), but required appropriated funds. Happily the Fulbright Program now has available foreign currencies acquired by the United States through other means, and presumably will carry on indefinitely. Less happily, the program must now "purchase" these funds from the United States Treasury, thus becoming dependent upon appropriated funds.

It is in this context that we legislators who annually find ourselves "on the firing line" in the battle for appropriations, are forced to examine the foundation and framework on which we have built the Government's participation in educational exchange. For some years now I have had the growing feeling that, while the framework of the administration and programming can always be improved, the immediate problem is a crack in the foundation itself.

■ Over the past few years a definite pattern has emerged in the process of getting appropriations for the Government's participation in international educational exchange; the President requests funds for a minimal, but adequate, program; the House of Representatives slashes this figure nearly in half; the Senate restores the full amount, and the final figure is a compromise between the two. The result is, of course, a clearly insufficient appropriation.

In passing it should be mentioned that our successes in securing Senate approval of the full budget request have not been easy. The votes, when pressed in committee and on the floor, have been close. Unfortunately, in the House they have gone the other way, and deep cuts have been sustained.

Why? The program is an inspiring one, quick to catch the imagination of intelligent men, and never more important than today. The Congress is a responsible institution of Government,

*Appropriated
funds*

The House

and responsive to the desires of the articulate voter — traditionally the House even more so than the Senate.

■ The answer would seem obvious. Public understanding and public acceptance are the *sine qua non* for any long-range Governmental program requiring annual appropriations. In the case of the exchange program we would seem to rely too heavily on an annual flood of testimonials at “appropriations time,” instead of building up a genuine and thorough year-round understanding of the program.

We have become too parochial, too ingrown. Happily we have had great success in securing wholehearted acceptance at the local level for the exchangees themselves. We must translate this acceptance — which has widely become enthusiasm — into a grassroots understanding of the program itself, and the role of the Government in it. When that has been accomplished, the appropriations should readily be forthcoming.

*Acceptance at
local level*

It is particularly appropriate that we renew our private efforts at this time, for the Geneva Conference, on the initiative of President Eisenhower, directed the Foreign Ministers to study measures to bring about freer contacts and exchanges to the mutual advantage of the countries and peoples concerned. This is one item on the agenda of the October meeting of the Foreign Ministers. We can do no less than give overwhelming support at home to this international interest at the highest levels of Government in promoting that which we believe in so deeply.

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