



**Berlin Day
U.S. Participants of the Congress-Bundestag Youth
Exchange Program
June 18, 2004
Deutscher Bundestag im Reichstagsgebäude**

As prepared for delivery.

Bundestag President Thierse,

Members of the Bundestag,

Representatives of the Bundestag Administration and exchange organizations,

Dear Students,

On behalf of the American Embassy, I would like to thank you for this invitation to meet with the American participants in the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program here at the Reichstag. As I look around the room, I see happy, satisfied faces. For me, that's a sign that this exchange year has been a rewarding and valuable experience for this year's group of participants. This meeting at the German Parliament is a fitting conclusion to an important year for the Class of 2004.

The Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program is a special program. Initiated and established in 1983 by members of the Congress and the Bundestag, it has been successful because of the initiative and commitment of so many people -- the sponsorship of the individual members, the administrative support of government offices on both sides of the Atlantic and the cooperation of exchange organizations. The ongoing success of this program is a demonstration of the strength and depth of the German-American partnership and a true symbol of German-American friendship.

President Thierse, Members of the Bundestag, representatives of the Bundestag Administration and exchange organizations, and to all those who have been part of this ongoing effort, please accept our sincere thanks for your commitment to the goals of the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program.

I would also like to thank this year's American participants, the U.S. alumni of the Class of 2004.

You are approaching the end of an intense and highly productive experience. Spending a year in a foreign country is one of the most valuable experiences a person can have. I'm sure it hasn't always been easy. During the last 10 months, I bet each one of you has had some difficult moments -- and I'm sure the same is true of your German counterparts who have been living in the U.S. As much as you have learned about this country and its culture, I suspect you have also learned a lot about yourself. You can deal with challenges. You can go into radically new situations and succeed. That twin benefit -- a rich understanding of a foreign country and a surge of self-knowledge and self-confidence -- cannot be acquired any other way. Not by all the book learning in the world, not by a thousand short trips. What you've gained from this year will stay with you for the rest of your life. From here on in, it will be a touchstone for you, a continuing source of strength and imagination that will illuminate and enrich your other endeavors.

By taking part in the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program, you've also shown that you care about the world outside our U.S. borders. You are active and engaged. These are terrific qualities. It's not up to me to tell you exactly how and where to focus your energy and initiative. Figuring that out for yourself will be a central -- and very exciting -- part of your own personal development. But I do want you to know how much my colleagues and I admire and support your willingness to go out and get involved. It makes you very special -- as links between the U.S. and Germany.

There is a law, Metcalfe's Law, which states that the value of a network increases exponentially as more people connect. You are part of a larger network. Just imagine. Over the past 20 years, some 5,000 young Germans and Americans have participated in this program. If each one of you met and talked with just 100 people in the course of your stay abroad, that means that this important program to foster German-American friendship has touched the lives of over half a million people.

This is people-to-people diplomacy and you have all been ambassadors in the communities where you have lived. Through immersion into local host communities, through discussions and activities, and through leadership, the vision that Senator Fulbright had over 50 years ago about how "educational exchange can turn nations into people" -- is being realized. Those relationships you have established provide the basis for the kind of strategic partnerships that have served us well in the past and that will serve us well in the years ahead.

And so, as you move forward with your life and return home, I am convinced that that your Congress-Bundestag year in Germany will stay with you. And if you have a strong opinion about the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program and the opportunities it has given you and, if you feel CBYX is a valuable program that's worth every penny we spend on it, then I urge you to share those views with your representatives in Congress.

Who knows, perhaps some of you will one day find yourselves as members of Congress, able to support the program and host German guests yourself.

Enjoy the day in Berlin and the rest of your stay in Germany and have a safe trip back.
