

## Congress-Bundestag/Bundesrat Staff Exchange Program

### Berlin, Amerika Haus

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The Congress - Bundestag Staff Exchange Program (CBSX) was inaugurated in 1983. It was part of the commemoration of the 300th anniversary of German settlements in the United States. Now, twenty years later, it is still going strong.

This exchange provides a valuable opportunity for staffers in the legislative branches of two of the world's leading democracies to get an inside look at the organization and operation of our respective governments. Understanding the role of the legislature within the larger framework of the federal government and, of the forces in both the public and private sector that influence the legislative process, is important. And it's something that you can't necessarily pick up from books, or the news, or even from just hearing about it from other people.

Over the past twenty years, there has been a lot of sharing of information, of cooperation, of mutual assistance. And there have been real results [and examples of "persoenliche Einsatz" *[individual courage and commitment]* - beyond that one occasion when Frau Schuchardt rescued a group of congressional participants from a stalled elevator just in time for them to witness President Rau's inaugural ceremony.

*[This refers to an incident that occurred in 199?. A group of congressional staffers participating in an exchange to Germany, on their way to attend President Rau's inaugural ceremony, were stuck in an elevator. Frau Schuchardt - who will probably attend -heard calls and knocking from the elevator and "rescued" them just in time to attend the Rau event.]*

Seriously, I know, from my years in the Senate, that the real accomplishments in Congress are thanks to the efforts of the staffers behind the scenes.

This program recognizes the important role you all play in government.

When the Congress-Bundestag/Bundesrat program was instituted, it wasn't purely commemorative.

Twenty years ago, both on our side and the German side, there was a feeling that there were some deficiencies in the political, cultural and social relations between the US and Germany. Hildegard Hamm-Brucher, then State Secretary in the German Foreign Office -- who incidentally was one of the first exchange students to visit the US in the early postwar years -- said:

"The German-American relationship as a whole is now faced with new problems and strains, and there are an increasing number of conflicting interests, whether supposed or actual, between Americans and Europeans involving aspects of foreign policy and economics. While it was possible on the basis of mutual trust to deal with and overcome differences of opinion and conflicting interests in the German-American relationship of the first postwar generation, the willingness to understand, or even the ability

to communicate, on the part of the "successor generation" on both sides increasingly appears to be waning, or indeed lacking entirely."

People like Hildegard Hamm-Brucher and the U.S. Ambassador in those days, Arthur Burns, wanted to do something about that waning interest and failing communication. Both were personally involved and committed to this new exchange program.

Now, there are once again new problems and strains in the transatlantic relationship, in large part because of the enormous new challenges that now face us – the war on terrorism and a host of separate and related global issues.

That does not mean that a shared commitment is not there. It is. It does mean, however, that we all have to work hard at keeping the channels of communication and dialogue open.

Last week, President Bush reaffirmed that commitment in his address at the Bundestag.

That is one of the defining characteristics of President Bush's administration. He believes in defining clearly and publicly the principles of his Administration.

Perceptions of American unilateralism are, in my opinion, unjustified. Only when all sides clearly define their positions on both specific and general issues, can we then figure out how to solve problems and arrive through dialogue at a consensus.

That drives President Bush's efforts, it is what the Secretary State spends a lot of his time doing, and it is our main goal here at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin.

And programs like the Congress-Bundestag/Bundesrat exchange are an important part of that dialogue process.

I salute you therefore for your commitment and thank you for your attention.