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Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program
Chancellory
Berlin, May 23, 2003
Ambassador Coats

Chancellor Schroeder, thank you for your hospitality.

I would also like to thank you, and the members and representatives of the Bundestag, and all the people here today who have made it possible for these 160 young Americans to spend a year in Germany.

You have given them a chance of a lifetime.

As Ambassador I see the benefits of international education and exchanges every day.

Dr. Kissinger, it's a pleasure to have you here today. I'm sure you can back me on that point.

Many of our diplomats both here at the Embassy and at the consulates around the country have studied at German universities. Their studies, research, and knowledge are of tremendous help in the day-in, day-out diplomatic world.

And, every day I encounter German business people, government officials, journalists who have participated in an exchange program or studied in the United States.

People-to-people diplomacy, created through international education and exchanges, provides 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, a word to the American Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program class of 2003. Like those who have gone before you – the 15,000 Germans and Americans who have participated in the CBYX program since 1983, the 30,000 Germans and Americans who have been part of the Fulbright Program, and all the participants in the many transatlantic postwar exchange programs -- you have an important role to play.

The late Senator J. William Fulbright once described the goals of the program named after him like this. He said that exchanges could "bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason, and a little more compassion into world affairs."

These programs – the Fulbright, the CBYX – are as important as they were 50, 20 years ago. They provide opportunities to exchange ideas and opinions. Because it is important to learn that there are people behind ideas and opinions, and that there are people behind stereotypes and misperceptions.

This year has been a chance of a lifetime for you all but I am sure it has been difficult as well. You will have learned a lot about who you are -- as individuals and as Americans. These days, the task of diplomacy belongs not only to governments, but to individuals as well. Each of you has been an ambassador in the communities where you have lived.

You will also have learned a lot about Germany – much more than, as one recent exchange student reported, that people here "eat bigger lunches and smaller dinners, walk more and drive less, and eat pizza with a knife and fork."

The lessons you have learned may be hard to put into words but the CBYX does indeed come to life through its grantees. Through immersion into local host communities, through discussions and activities, and through leadership, Senator Fulbright's vision -- that "educational exchange can turn nations into people" -- is indeed being realized.

Chancellor Schroeder, thank you again for the continued support of the German government for this important program and making this possible.