

REMEMBERING SENATOR J.
WILLIAM FULBRIGHT

Mr. PELL. Mr. President, the United States lost a great and distinguished citizen today with the death of former Senator J. William Fulbright.

Senator Fulbright was a giant in the Senate. He became a person of international reknown and reputation during the period of his chairmanship of the Committee on Foreign Relations from 1959 until his defeat in 1974. I came to know him very well after I joined the Committee on Foreign Relations in 1969 and came to admire very much his careful and thorough approach to issues of tremendous national importance, most especially the war in Vietnam.

William Fulbright was born in Missouri and grew up in Fayetteville, AR. He attended public schools, graduated from the University of Arkansas in 1925, as a Rhodes Scholar from Oxford University England in 1928, and from the Law Department of George Washington University in 1934. In 1939 he became president of the University of Arkansas—the youngest in its history. He served one term in the House of Representatives from 1943–1945 and went on to election to the Senate in 1944. He was reelected in 1950, 1956, 1962, and 1968.

William Fulbright brought to his political career a great love and understanding of the responsibilities of an educator. His experience as a Rhodes Scholar taught him the value of international exchanges and led him to conceive of the Fulbright Scholars Program in the period immediately following World War II, which he described as “a modest program with an immodest aim.” Since the program’s establishment in 1946, more than 100,000 people from abroad have studied in the United States and more than 65,000 U.S. students and professors have studied overseas in what is undoubtedly the largest and most successful international exchange program in existence.

Earlier, as a freshman member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Senator Fulbright offered a resolution setting forth U.S. support for an international peacekeeping organization. This resolution, the first to be passed by the U.S. Congress since the League of Nations debacle following World War I, set the stage for establishment of the United Nations in 1945.

He was a maverick during much of his time in the Senate and was known for taking positions he believed in regardless of their level of popularity. For instance, in 1954, he cast the single Senate vote against funding Senator Joseph R. McCarthy’s investigative subcommittee.

Senator Fulbright’s period of greatest prominence was that of the Vietnam war. He introduced the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which gave President Johnson virtually free rein in the early stages of the Vietnam war. Only two Senators opposed the resolution and

Senator Fulbright later made it clear he wished it had been three, including himself. “Not that it would have made the slightest difference in the course of affairs, but I’d feel better about myself.”

Senator Fulbright was one of the earliest critics of the war. Under his stewardship the Committee on Foreign Relations conducted extensive investigations of involvement in Vietnam, held numerous hearings and was the fountainhead of legislative initiatives beginning in 1969 to restrict United States activities in Vietnam. In 1973, a Fulbright-Aiken amendment stopped direct involvement of United States combat forces in Vietnam.

Through the committee’s intensive work on the war, Senator Fulbright tried steadfastly to educate his colleagues, the Senate, the Congress, and the public as to the tremendous folly of the Vietnam involvement.

I can well remember watching Senator Fulbright facing down hostile witnesses while chairing hearings of great thoroughness and steadily and calmly posing questions until the truth of various problems was there for all to behold.

His widow, Harriett, recalled that the Senator deeply believed “that in order to ensure prosperity for all members of a free country, those who live in a democracy must be educated.” In fact, education ran through the heart of whatever he said and did. His speeches he wrote himself on yellow pads in pencil, full of lines through any fuzzy phrase. He worked them over until he was satisfied that every sentence was not only perfectly understandable but devoid of hyperbole. They were meant to clarify and persuade; in other words to educate—to educate audiences around the world as well as constituents.

One of the finest writers in the history of the Washington Post, the late Henry Mitchell, wrote a profile of William Fulbright in 1984. He pointed out that, despite Senator Fulbright’s concerns over the arrogance of power:

He does not say a nation can forget self-respect in the world or allow its citizens to be run over roughshod by others.

“But dignity has nothing to do with domination, nor is self-respect the same thing as arrogance. A nation can take pride in its accomplishments without taking on a missionary role in the world. . . .

“Which is the greater legacy any generation of leaders can bequeath, a temporary primacy consisting of the ability to push other people around, or a well-run society of cities without violence of slums, of productive farms and of education and opportunity for all citizens?”

To ask it is to answer it.

Mr. President, the Vietnam war made the Nation very much aware of the efforts of William Fulbright and of the Committee on Foreign Relations. To many in official Washington, he was anathema. But to others who saw Vietnam as a quagmire he was simply a hero. A leader who gave legitimacy, respectability and honor to opposition to

the war and what it was doing to the United States. At the time there were many who were quite disdainful of William Fulbright and who disliked him intensely. I remember well how he would sometimes conclude that his sponsorship of a measure would cost votes rather than gain them. This was a price that he felt he had to pay.

In 1993 Senator Fulbright’s fellow Arkansan, President Clinton, awarded the Medal of Freedom to the Senator. President Clinton said at that time “Senator Fulbright has long been known as a patriot and a realist. He has never been one to waste time and energy cursing the darkness; he is far too busy seeking and finding lamps to be lit.”

William Fulbright has been gone from this body for over 20 years. The controversy surrounding him as certainly abated and many more have come to appreciate the intelligence and care he brought to his assessment of public issues. His reputation has grown over the past two decades rather than dwindled. And his term as chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations is now regarded as a halcyon period for the committee and the Senate.

There were many challenges to be faced in the period of his chairmanship and he did not shirk from taking those challenges on and doing his best to meet them. His central interest was never personal aggrandizement but rather the discovery of the best way for the Nation to proceed. He is gone now but his legacy is powerful and he will live on as Fulbright Scholars are trained and educated and return to their countries and to the United States better able to play meaningful and productive roles.

Our deepest sympathy goes to his widow, Harriett and his family.

MEASURE TO BE HELD AT THE
DESK

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, if the Senator will yield, I would be so grateful.

I need under the rules to ask unanimous consent concerning holding of a bill until tomorrow.

Let me do it this way. I am advised we have to check with both sides. I think it would be agreeable to both sides, Mr. President. I send to the desk a bill, and I ask that it be appropriately referred tomorrow, and I send a statement herewith to that bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the bill will be received today and referred today.

Mr. HELMS. If the Chair will withhold, I have three unanimous-consents. One is required to be made orally. Let me do that.

I further ask unanimous consent that this bill be held at the desk until the close of Senate business tomorrow, February 10, so that Senators wishing to do so may become original cosponsors.