

Excerpts from "Impressions from the 31st Annual Congress-Bundestag Seminar"

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IMPRESSIONS FROM THE *31st Annual Congress-Bundestag Seminar*



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2014

*About The
Congressional Study
Group on Germany
and the Annual
Congress-Bundestag
Seminar*



The Congressional Study Group on Germany is an independent, non-advocacy legislative exchange conducted by the U.S. Association of Former Members of Congress (FMC), a congressionally-chartered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. With more than 100 current Members of Congress on its roster, The Study Group facilitates frank and candid dialogue on all issues that affect the strategic U.S.-German relationship through regular roundtables on Capitol Hill and study tours and seminars for Members of Congress and senior congressional staff abroad.

The Annual Congress-Bundestag Seminar is the highlight of Study Group programming each year. Sessions range from bilateral “closed-door” meetings, broader roundtables including invited senior representatives and officials from academia, industry, the media, and the federal government, and public fora held at local universities. The Seminar alternates each year between the United States and Germany.

Regardless of the format or location, the goal remains the same: to provide a platform for substantive, issue-specific conversation that leads to long-lasting personal relationships, which support the transatlantic alliance.

The Study Group would like to thank the German Marshall Fund of the United States for its institutional support of our programming since its inception in 1983, as well as the organizations that comprise our Business Advisory Council (BAC).

Special thanks are also due to the Atlantik-Brücke Foundation and Heinrich Böll Foundation for their sponsorship of the 31st Annual Congress-Bundestag Seminar. For a full list of our partners, please visit www.usafmc.org/partners.

*About The U.S.
Association of Former
Members of Congress*



Though our programs chiefly focus on current Members of Congress, The Congressional Study Group on Germany is administered by the U.S. Association of Former Members of Congress (FMC). Initially founded in 1970 as an alumni association and chartered by Congress ten years later, FMC has grown over the decades to provide a variety of educational and legislative exchange programs that share the goal of promoting public service and strengthening representative democracy both at home and abroad. As a non-partisan organization that does not engage in advocacy, FMC is an ideal umbrella group for such vital work.

Message from our Leadership

In the past year, crisis erupted in Ukraine, war broke out between Israel and Hamas, and ISIS has emerged as a threat to the civilized world, all while the United States and the European Union negotiate a landmark trade and investment agreement. Despite the reports about the extent of U.S. global surveillance and data collection activities, which have tested the U.S.-German relationship, the case for a strong partnership between our two countries remains as compelling as ever.

At the core of the bilateral relationship – what sustains it through such rough periods and helps it heal – are the personal ties between lawmakers and opinion leaders from both sides of the Atlantic. The Congressional Study Group on Germany and its counterpart in the German Bundestag, the German-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship Group, have facilitated these bonds for over three decades, and we are honored to serve as their respective leadership.

In the pages that follow are highlights from the 31st Annual Congress-Bundestag Seminar – the pinnacle of our mutual dialogue each year – which occurred in September 2014 in Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley and Berks and Dauphin Counties.



Congressman Charles W. Dent
Co-Chair, The Congressional
Study Group on Germany



The Hon. Peer Steinbrück MdB
Chairman, German-U.S.
Parliamentary Friendship Group



Study Group Co-Chair Congressman Charles W. Dent (right) guides his German counterpart MdB. Peer Steinbrück (left) and Congressmen Rob Bishop (center) around Bethlehem's historic district.

Introduction

In a fresh chapter to their long tradition of yearly transatlantic visits, legislators from the U.S. and Germany gathered for the 31st Annual Congress-Bundestag Seminar in September 2014. Led by their Chairmen, MdB. Peer Steinbrück (SPD-Mettmann) and Congressman Charles W. Dent (R-PA), members of the Bundestag's German-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship Group and The Congressional Study Group on Germany representing all parties in both legislatures met in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley and Washington D.C. Former Members of the U.S. Congress and German Bundestag also participated in the Seminar, as did a Member of the European Parliament in his capacity as a representative of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

and observed German-American economic ties in places ranging from a Pennsylvania Dutch country meat store to a cutting-edge medical device company. In Washington, D.C., legislators met with their counterparts on Capitol Hill and senior administration officials, adding to lively exchanges with policy makers and pollsters, think tank leaders and academics.

Dominating the discussions – and occasionally interrupting them, when U.S. Congressmen left to vote on military action in the Middle East – were foreign policy and security challenges, both in that region and in eastern Europe. Talks also focused on trade relations and intelligence gathering across the Atlantic.

“For the lawmakers, the 2014 Seminar was an opportunity to jointly reflect on a dramatically changed international landscape.”

For the lawmakers, the 2014 Seminar was an opportunity to jointly reflect on a dramatically changed international landscape. Since their gathering the previous year, the crisis in Ukraine had erupted. The group that calls itself Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, emerged in the Middle East. The extent of National Security Agency surveillance, both in Europe and the U.S., surfaced, sparking outrage in Germany. In addition, the strategic implications of America's new energy resources became more apparent. The Euro crisis, which had dominated the transatlantic debate for years, faded in urgency by contrast.

The Seminar kicked off in Pennsylvania, Rep. Dent's home state, where the visiting delegation of seven current Bundestag members and one member of the European Parliament witnessed the revitalization of some of America's most blighted industrial sites and cities. The visitors also explored the current U.S. energy revolution and hydraulic fracturing,

Both in Pennsylvania and D.C., members of the delegation led town hall meetings with college students. At the events, held at Muhlenberg College in Allentown and Georgetown University in Washington, participants agreed that current security challenges strengthened the case for close cooperation in foreign and security policy, while economic competition, especially from China, increased the need for a trade agreement that Rep. Dent called “an economic NATO.”

The Seminar benefited from the careful planning, gracious hospitality and good cheer of this year's host, Rep. Dent. The Study Group is also grateful to Atlantik-Brücke and the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, who were sponsoring partners of the 31st Annual Seminar, and thanks The German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Study Group's Business Advisory Council, for their year-round support of program activities.

Mrs. Verna Dietrich (right), owner of Dietrich's Meats, demonstrates the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect in conversation with MdB. Tobias Linder (left).

