
THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Assignment Prompt Sheet

Foreign Assistance Act of 1961

Overview

Act Titles: Foreign Assistance Act of 1961

Congress: 87th Congress (1961-1962)

Session/Sessions: 1

Statute No: 75 Stat. 424-465

Public Law No: 87 PL 195

Eid: 870195

Gid: 242-003

Bill: S 1983

Sponsor: Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-AR)

House Committees: Foreign Relations

Senate Committees: Foreign Relations

Companion Bill: HR 8400

Related Bills: HR 7372

House Rules: Hres 414

Past Bills: None

Introduced Date- Law Date:

House Floor Days: 6

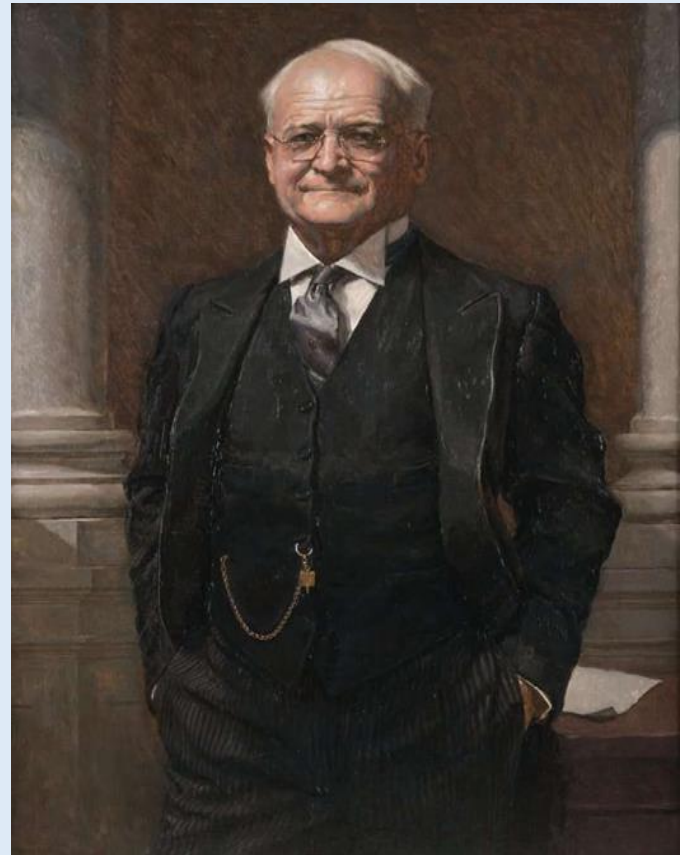
Senate Floor Days: 11

Roll Call Votes: 25 (23 in the Senate on HR 5748; 2 in the House)

Issues: foreign policy; economics; appropriations; foreign aid; separation of powers

Procedures: open rule; amendments; conference

Last Updated: 6/14/24



(Above) Sen. Harry Flood Byrd, Sr. (D-VA), the long-time leader of the “Conservative Coalition” in Congress and opponent of the New Deal. He would be the leading opponent of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

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Legislative History Comments

As [CRS \(2023\)](#) notes: “In its broadest sense, U.S. foreign assistance, or foreign aid, is defined under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.” The measure “made several major innovations, requested by the President, in the foreign-aid program. It replaced the existing Mutual Security Act with a new basic law and the new title “Foreign Assistance Act.” It authorized future separation of military and economic aid budgets. It gave the President power to abolish the existing Development Loan Fund and International Cooperation Administration and establish a single new economic aid unit, the Agency for International Development ([CQ Almanac 1961](#)).”

The measure was passed in response to growing concerns, in part stemming from a number of academic studies, regarding the diffuse and contradictory foreign assistance programs the U.S. had been operating. Moreover, in the decades following the Marshall Plan, public opinion towards foreign aid had become highly negative. In response, President John F. Kennedy (D-MA) made overhauling foreign assistance a priority in his new administration. The enacted bill was sponsored by Kennedy’s first choice for Secretary of State, Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-AR). When Fulbright proved to be too controversial, Kennedy selected Dean Rusk, who advocated for the President’s program during committee hearings (Halberstam 1972).

Congressional debates over the program largely focused on executive power and concerns regarding “back-door appropriating”. Specifically, Kennedy wanted the executive to have authority to borrow funds independent of the regular legislative spending programs for five years. While the Senate approved the request, narrowly defeating an amendment by Sen. Harry Flood Byrd (D-VA) that required yearly congressional appropriations by [a 39 to 56 margin](#), the House rejected the President’s position. The House position would prevail in conference. Kennedy still signed the measure into law, declaring it signaled the beginning of a “decade of development ([Kennedy 1961](#)).”¹

This shouldn’t be too tough from a process standpoint, but it’s a fairly controversial measure for its era. The biggest challenge here is covering the floor amending process. I think with this measure, focusing on the Byrd amendment in the Senate and the Saunt amendment in the House would make the most sense. You are certainly welcome to pick out another amendment or two to cover as well, but don’t kill yourselves here. There are nearly 100 floor amendments and 25 roll call votes on this measure across 17 days of floor discussion across the two chambers. Once you’ve settled on a few floor amendments, this should be pretty easy. It passes the Senate [66-24 on August 18, 1961](#). Democrats split 51-14 in favor, Republicans backed it by a narrower margin of 24-12. Considered under an open rule in the House, its [adopted 287-140](#) also on August 18th. There are a number of interesting members for legislative history purposes, and I included Secretary of State Dean Rusk as an option as he had a lengthy affiliation with UGA.

Consult CQ Almanac (1961) for process questions or e-mail me directly! This should be an interesting measure.

¹ See also “President Signs Foreign Aid Bill.” *New York Times*, September 5, 1961.

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Assignments

For the sections below, you're going to want to answer the questions and write-up the process sections that correspond to your assigned number. Here they are:

#1. Gonzalez-Perez

#2. Wylie

#3. Open

Background Questions

1. Discuss the broader political context this bill was considered in. Who controlled the House? The Senate? By how many? Who was President? Was this part of the President's agenda? What other pieces of legislation were being considered/passed in this Congress?

The Stathis (2014) piece might worth a citation here.

What motivated consideration of this legislation in this specific Congress? Was it in response to a specific event? Or was this a slower build over time? What happened in previous congresses regarding this? Had Congress considered comparable legislation?

2. What does this act actually do? Who was pushing for it? Was it significantly altered during consideration? What were the problems it was trying to rectify?

What did existing federal policy look like in this specific issue area? Why did reformers feel it needed to be changed?

3. What is a reauthorization? Do programs really need to be reauthorized? Why or why not? How often had this been reauthorized in the past? Were these controversial? Bipartisan? Had the bill been substantially altered since its initial passage? In what way?

Here are few pieces on authorizations that might be useful: [Saturno \(2020\)](#); [Vinik \(2016\)](#); [Kosar \(2019\)](#).

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Process Sections

Please write-up the sections that correspond to your number. Feel free to incorporate any notes I might have dumped in the margins. The index for HR 5748 is available below.

#1. Senate Consideration of S 1983 (August 4; 8-11; 14-18, 1961)

S 1983 was introduced by Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-AR) on May 26, 1961 and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

On August 4, 1961, Sen. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT) moved the Senate proceed to consider S 1983. This was agreed to by voice vote.

In support of the measure, Sen. Leverett Saltonstall (R-MA) asserted it was a “careful and serious proposal which can achieve the dual objective of proper congressional control and an effectively long-term development aid program (Congressional Record, 87th Congress, August 4, 1961, 14694).”

A substantial point of debate during consideration of S 1983 in the Senate related to the President’s ability to finance foreign aid by borrowing from the Treasury department. Sen. Harry Flood Byrd (I-VA) offered an amendment that “authorized the same amount of appropriations (as the President requested) for the same length of time” but “required the President to apply each year to the House and Senate appropriations committees.”²

After several days of debate, Byrd’s amendment was [defeated 39-56](#).

The Senate considered and dispensed with a number of other floor amendments. Ultimately, the chamber [passed S 1893 66-24 on August 18, 1961](#). Democrats split 51-14 in favor, Republicans backed it by a narrower margin of 24-12.

CQ Almanac (1961) notes that the final Senate bill was largely supportive of President Kennedy’s original proposal.

#2. House Consideration of HR 8400 & S 1983 (August 14-18, 1961)

HR 8400 was introduced by Rep. Thomas Morgan (D-PA) on July 31, 1961. It was referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs (which Morgan chaired) shortly afterwards.

The Foreign Affairs Committee reported the measure by a 27 to 4 vote on August 1, 1961.³

Prior to considering HR 8400 on the floor, Rep. Ray Madden (D-IN) reported Hres 414 to the House floor on August 14, 1961. Hres 414 sought to provide for consideration of HR 8400 under an open rule. While the previous question motion and the rule itself were adopted by voice vote, there was some critical discussion over the bill itself. Rep. Clarence Brown (R-OH), for example,

² Kenworthy, E.W. 1961. “President Wins Key Senate Test of Long-Term Aid.” *New York Times*, August 12.

³ Albright, Robert C. 1961. “Foreign Aid Bill Passes Committee.” *Washington Post*, August 2.

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asserted the “bill carries more authority and more spending than any bill, which has ever come before us in connection with foreign aid matters (Congressional Record, 87th Congress, August 14, 1961, 15736).”

A key moment during House consideration occurred on August 16th, when Rep. D.S. Saund (D-CA) offered a floor amendment that sought to delete the President’s authority to borrow for five years.⁴ Saund’s amendment replaced that language with a one year authorization. The amendment was adopted via an unrecorded teller vote by a 197 to 185 margin and prompted President Kennedy to appeal “directly to House members to reverse” the vote.⁵

The House passed HR 8400 by [a 287-140 margin](#) on August 18, 1961.

#3. Senate Consideration of the Conference Report on S 1983 (August 31, 1961)

The Senate adopted the conference report on S 1983 [on a 69-24 vote](#) on August 31, 1961.

#3. House Consideration of the Conference Report on S 1983 (August 31, 1961)

The House adopted the conference report on S 1983 [on a 260-132 vote](#) on August 31, 1961.

Member Spotlight

Choose one of the following for your member spotlight:

#1. Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-AR); Sen. Leverett Saltonstall (R-MA); Sen. Everett Dirksen (R-IL); Sen. Styles Bridges (R-NH); Sen. Harry Flood Byrd, Sr. (D-VA); Sen. Prescott Bush (R-CT); Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D-MN)

#2. Secretary of State Dean Rusk (D-GA); Rep. Thomas Morgan (D-PA); Rep. Ray Madden (R-IN); Rep. Clarence Brown (R-OH); Rep. D.S. Saund (D-CA); Rep. Dante Fascell (D-FL); Rep. Paul Rogers (D-FL)

#3. Sen. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT); Rep. H.R. Gross (R-IA); Sen. Ralph Yarborough (D-TX); Sen. Allen Ellender (D-LA); Rep. Wayne Hays (D-OH); Rep. Marguerite Stitt Church (R-IL); Speaker Sam Rayburn (D-TX)

⁴ Saund had the distinction of being the first Sikh, Indian American and Asian American ever elected to Congress.

⁵ Albright, Robert C. 1961. “Democrats Act to Save Foreign Aid.” *Washington Post*, August 18.

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Aftermath Questions

1. How was this act viewed upon passage? What did the newspapers say? How did the final measure differ from the one reformers were pushing?

How has this law evolved over time? Has it been featured in any major Supreme Court cases? Significantly altered by subsequent legislation?

How has this act been viewed by scholars? Did it achieve its stated goals? Do scholars highlight any major limitations? Are there aspects of the bill that are viewed more favorably than others? Discuss the relevance of this act as it pertains to contemporary policy.

2. How relevant is this law currently? Are there additional issues related to it that reformers have been pushing to change?

How have the politics of foreign aid changed since this bill was enacted? Has the U.S. continued similar policies? Do they differ between developing and developed nations? What does the scholarly debate over the effectiveness of foreign aid look like? Do they find it worthwhile?

3. How relevant is this issue currently? What about this act specifically? Are there additional issues related to it that reformers have been pushing to change?

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Suggested Sources

Scholarly Articles

Clinton, Joshua D., and John S. Lapinski. "Measuring legislative accomplishment, 1877–1994." *American Journal of Political Science* 50.1 (2006): 232-249.

Stathis, Stephen W. 2014. *Landmark Legislation, 1774-2012: Major U.S. Acts and Treaties, 2nd Edition*. Washington: CQ Press.

Rennack, Dianne E., and Susan G. Chesser. *Foreign assistance act of 1961: Authorizations and corresponding appropriations*. Vol. 40089. Congressional Research Service, 2011.
https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20110729_R40089_a16c241a668d33d6be484ebded8164ece38431a.pdf

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Oas, Rebecca. "What is the Real Purpose of the Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act?." *Center for Family and Human Rights* 15 (2019).

O'Leary, M., 2017. *The politics of American foreign aid*. Routledge.

Cleveland, Harlan. "The convalescence of foreign aid." *The American Economic Review* 49.2 (1959): 216-231.

Milner, Helen V., and Dustin H. Tingley. "The political economy of US foreign aid: American legislators and the domestic politics of aid." *Economics & Politics* 22.2 (2010): 200-232.

Meernik, James, Eric L. Krueger, and Steven C. Poe. "Testing models of US foreign policy: Foreign aid during and after the Cold War." *The journal of Politics* 60.1 (1998): 63-85.

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Newspaper Pieces

- <https://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/foreign-aid>
- <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/23854173/foreign-aid-cash-benchmarking-evidence-usaid>
- <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/23875344/dean-karlan-usaid-foreign-aid>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/11/28/opinion/foreign-aid-better-but-threatened.html>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/07/05/u-s-has-spotty-record-on-law-requiring-it-to-cut-aid-after-coups/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/01/26/archives/a-humphrey-legacy-bill-to-streamline-foreign-aid-main-goals-listed.html>
- <https://www.npr.org/2008/08/07/93375859/candidates-share-interest-in-boosting-foreign-aid>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/12/world/the-law-that-spells-out-sanctions.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/01/26/world/us-secretly-gave-aid-to-iraq-early-in-its-war-against-iran.html>
- <https://www.vox.com/2023/4/25/23692700/usaid-foreign-aid-joaquin-castro-young-kim>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/07/magazine/immigration-el-salvador.html>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/05/09/outlook-on-overhauling-foreign-aid-little-chance/c12dda16-8057-420b-bdd7-7be291252112/>
- <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/24108729/us-foreign-aid-sara-jacobs-congress-local-usaid>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/07/03/law-says-the-u-s-is-required-to-cut-aid-after-coups-will-it/>
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- <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/united-states-foreign-aid-history-trump/>