

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Assignment Prompt Sheet

The Marshall Plan of 1948

Overview

Act Titles: The Marshall Plan; Foreign Assistance Act of 1948; Economic Cooperation Act of 1948

Congress: 80th Congress (1948-1949)

Session/Sessions: 2

Statute No: 62 Stat. 137-59

Public Law No: 80 PL 472

Eid: 800472

Gid: 241-006

Bill: S 2202

Sponsor: Sen. [Arthur Vandenberg \(R-MI\)](#)

House Committees: Foreign Relations

Senate Committees: Foreign Affairs

Companion Bill: None

Related Bills: HR 4840; S 2331; S 2393

House Rules: Hres 505

Past Bills: None

Introduced Date- Law Date: February 23-April 3, 1948

House Floor Days: 7

Senate Floor Days: 12

Roll Call Votes: 12 (9 in the Senate; 3 in the House)

Issues: foreign policy; economics; appropriations; foreign aid

Procedures: open rule; obstruction; failed yeas; amendments; conference

Last Updated: 2/27/24



(Above) Former Secretary of State George C. Marshall. As the spokesperson for the plan that would eventually bear his name, Marshall was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953.

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Legislative History Comments

The Marshall Plan established the Economic Cooperation Administration and “authorized \$5.3 billion for the year of economic assistance to sixteen European countries (Stathis 2014, 280).” Upon signing the bill, President Harry S. Truman (D-MO) asserted that “this measure is America’s answer to the challenge facing the free world.”¹ Named for Secretary of State George Marshall, the plan was the product of many different individuals, with Truman perhaps the most prominent among them (see e.g. [Washington Post 2022](#)). Clinton and Lapinski rate the measure as the second most impactful law passed by the 80th Congress.²

The Marshall Plan represented an “effort to prevent the economic deterioration of Europe, expansion of communism, and stagnation of world trade, the Plan sought to stimulate European production, promote adoption of policies leading to stable economies, and take measures to increase trade among European countries and between Europe and the rest of the world ([CRS 1997](#), 1).” To that end, it is frequently viewed as a “great success” today (see e.g. [Lukacs 1997](#)). However, others have argued the plan represented a logical extension of American economic imperialism (see e.g. [Slate 2024](#) on this point).

The measure was passed in response to a request by Truman (D-MO) for \$6.8 billion to help Europe recover from World War II (see e.g. [CQ Almanac 1948](#); [CQ Almanac 1947](#)). And it was frequently pitched by advocates like Marshall as a way to stave off communist influence by the Soviet Union. It was criticized at the time by some who argued it did not go far enough. Others felt the price tag was far too high. Responding to Senate critics of its price, Marshall argued that the United States needed to “either undertake to meet the requirements of the problem or don't undertake it at all ([CQ Almanac 1948](#)).”

Passage of the plan is fairly straight-forward. It took place during the 80th Congress, the first one controlled by Republicans in nearly 20 years (and one famously dubbed the “do-nothing” Congress by Truman.) As a result, much of the debate in both chambers is dominated by splits within the Republican Party. There is a lot of floor amending, but pick two or three that interest you and focus on those. Otherwise, follow the above CQ Almanac articles or e-mail me with process questions.

¹ See Hinton, Harold. 1948. “Aid Bill is Signed by Truman as Reply to Foes of Liberty.” *The New York Times*, April 4.

² The measure rated just behind the Taft-Hartley Labor Act (80 PL 101).

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

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. Open

#2. 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.

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? [CRS \(1997\)](#) is worth a look on this question.

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

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 second session index for S 2202 is available below.

S. 2202—To promote the general welfare, national interest, and foreign policy of the United States through necessary economic and financial assistance to foreign countries which undertake to cooperate with each other in the establishment and maintenance of economic conditions essential to a peaceful and prosperous world.

Mr. Vandenberg and Mr. Connally; Committee on Foreign Relations, 1487.—Reported back (S. Rept. ----), 1724.—Debated 1915, 1961, 1965, 1969, 1981, 2019, 2024, 2041, 2106, 2123, 2187, 2297, 2366, 2379, 2385, 2448, 2470, 2516, 2531, 2617, 2636, 2711, 2713, 2723.—Passed Senate, 2793.—Referred to House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2892.—Reported with amendments (H. Rept. 1585), 3265.—Made special order (H. Res. 505), 3311.—Debated 3322, 3415, 3516, 3618, 3705, 3809.—Amended and passed House, 3875.—House insists upon its amendments and asks for a conference, 3875.—Conferees appointed, 3875.—Senate agrees to House amendment to text of bill, with an amendment; disagrees to the House amendment to the title; insists upon its amendment and asks for a conference, 3894.—Conferees appointed, 3894.—House disagrees to Senate amend-

S. 2202—Continued

ment to House amendment to the text of the bill and agrees to the conference requested by the Senate, 3972.—Conferees appointed, 3972.—Conference report (No. 1655) submitted in House and agreed to, 4053.—Conference report submitted in Senate and agreed to, 4027.—Examined and signed, 4041, 4115.—Presented to the President, 4080.—Approved [Public, No. 472], 4080.

#1. Senate Consideration of S 2202 (March 1-5; 8-13, 1948)

S 2202 was sponsored by Sen. Arthur Vandenberg (R-MI), the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The measure was reported out of committee by a unanimous vote on February 26, 1948 (CQ Almanac 1948).

On March 1, 1948, Sen. Kenneth Wherry (R-NE), moved the Senate consider S 2202, the European Recovery program. His motion was agreed to by voice vote.

In support of the plan, Vandenberg, a former prominent isolationist, asserted: “This legislation, Mr. President, seeks peace and stability for free men in a free world (Congressional Record, 80th Congress, March 1, 1948, 1915).”

Senators debated amendments and the merits of the bill in the days that followed. One of the more notable floor amendments offered was a proposal by Sen. Robert Taft (R-OH) that sought to reduce the cost of the plan by 25%.³ The amendment [was defeated 31-56](#).

The Senate would have to delay consideration of S 2202 in response to “stalling tactics” on the part of opponents led by Sen. George Malone (R-NV). The issue was further complicated by the fact that Wherry, the acting Senate Majority Leader and Vandenberg, the bill manager and chairman of the originating committee were on opposing sides of the debate.⁴

³ See “Senate Defeats Taft Europe Relief Slash,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 13, 1948.

⁴ See Belair, Felix. 1948. “ERP Critics Force Senate Vote Delay beyond Next Week.” *New York Times*, March 6. Wherry became acting leader after a nervous breakdown led to a three-month hospital stay [for Sen. Wallace White \(R-ME\)](#).

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

The Senate eventually passed S 2202 on March 13 by a [vote of 69-17](#).

#2. House Consideration of S 2202 (March 23-25; 29-31, 1948)

On March 23, 1948, Rep. Herter called up Hres 505, which sought to provide for consideration of S 2202 under an open rule. Debate over the rule largely focused on the merits of the bill.

Rep. E.E. Cox (D-GA), who supported the measure, criticized it for not putting “enough emphasis upon military assistance rather than upon economic aid” because “[d]ollars alone will not stop Russia (*Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, March 23, 1948, 3313).”

Rep. Vito Marcantonio (ALP-NY) criticized it for undermining the United Nations and providing “for unilateral action.” He dubbed it a “war measure (*Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, March 23, 1948, 3315).”

In response, Rep. Howard “Judge” Smith (D-VA) “complimented” Marcantonio but added that he “hope[d] some time in his public career he may speak as eloquently for the American form of government and for the American people as he speaks for communism on this floor (*Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, March 23, 1948, 3320).”

Hres 505 was eventually [adopted 316-21](#).

The House considered and dispensed with a large number of floor amendments throughout the next few days.⁵ The bill would pass S 2202 after a lengthy debate [by a 329-74 vote](#) on March 31, 1948.

#1. Senate Consideration of the Conference Report on S 2202 (April 2, 1948)

The Senate adopted the conference report on S 2202 by voice vote.

#2. House Consideration of the Conference Report on S 2202 (April 2, 1948)

The House eventually adopted the [conference report 318-75](#).

⁵ Pick a couple of the more interesting floor amendments. CQ suggests an amendment to include Spain was adopted, though a roll call request by Marcantonio on it was defeated.

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Member Spotlight

Choose one of the following for your member spotlight:

#1. Sen. Arthur Vandenberg (R-MI); Sen. Kenneth Wherry (R-NE); Sen. Robert Taft (R-OH); Sen. Wallace White (R-ME); Sen. George Malone (R-NV); Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. (R-MA); Sen. Walter George (D-GA)

#2. Rep. E.E. Cox (D-GA); Rep. Christian Herter (R-MA)⁶; Rep. Vito Marcantonio (ALP-NY); Rep. Howard “Judge” Smith (D-VA); Rep. Emanuel Celler (D-NY); Rep. Everett Dirksen (R-IL); Rep. Sam Rayburn (D-TX); Rep. Adolph Sabath (D-IL)

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?

⁶ Herter would go on to serve as Governor of Massachusetts and Secretary of State under President Dwight D. Eisenhower (R-KS).

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

Suggested Sources

Scholarly Articles

Steil, Benn. *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

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.

Steil, Benn. "Russia's Clash with the West is about Geography, not Ideology." *Foreign Policy* 12 (2018).

Bianchi, Nicola, and Michela Giorcelli. "Reconstruction Aid, Public Infrastructure, and Economic Development: The Case of the Marshall Plan in Italy." *The Journal of Economic History* 83.2 (2023): 501-537.

DeLong, J. Bradford, and Barry Eichengreen. "The Marshall Plan: History's most successful structural adjustment program." (1991).

Kunz, Diane B. "The Marshall Plan reconsidered: a complex of motives." *Foreign Affairs* 76.3 (1997): 162-170.

Burk, Kathleen. "The Marshall Plan: Filling in Some of the Blanks." *Contemporary European History* 10.2 (2001): 267-294.

Eichengreen, Barry, and Marc Uzan. "The Marshall Plan: economic effects and implications for Eastern Europe and the former USSR." *Economic Policy* 7.14 (1992): 13-75.

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.

Amuzegar, Jahangir. "Point Four: performance and prospect." *Political Science Quarterly* 73.4 (1958): 530-546.

Frank, Charles R., and Mary Baird. "Foreign aid: its speckled past and future prospects." *International Organization* 29.1 (1975): 133-167.

Pedaliu, Effie GH. "The Marshall Plan speech at 70—and the lessons it can provide for today's challenges." *LSE European Politics and Policy (EUROPP) Blog* (2017).

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

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.

Fossedal, Gregory A. *Our finest hour: Will Clayton, the Marshall Plan, and the triumph of democracy*. Hoover Press, 2021.

Hayes, S. P. (1953). An Appraisal of Point Four. *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, 25(3), 31-46.

Arkes, Hadley. *Bureaucracy, the Marshall Plan, and the national interest*. Vol. 1251. Princeton University Press, 2015.

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.

Newspaper Pieces

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/books/review/benn-steil-marshall-plan.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/1947/09/26/archives/truman-on-marshall-plan.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/06/07/business/the-lessons-of-the-marshall-plan.html>
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43264189>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2022/10/08/marshall-plan-russia-ukraine/>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/marshall/marshall.htm>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1997/05/25/a-look-at-the-legacy-of-the-marshall-plan/47b5b44c-e1eb-4c68-bd46-5a29c5c76c73/>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/05/the-marshall-plan-turns-70-this-week-here-are-4-reasons-this-was-so-important/>
- https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/why-the-marshall-plan-spooked-the-soviets-and-sparked-the-cold-war/2018/02/23/fdeae418-0a85-11e8-8890-372e2047c935_story.html
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1997/06/08/why-the-marshall-plan-worked/cb2ed573-25e1-40d2-90aa-1acdb0ff6400/>
- <https://www.vox.com/2019/6/4/18650850/elizabeth-warren-economic-patriotism-green-marshall-plan>
- <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/21430852/keynes-stimulus-economy-covid-the-great-rebuild>
- <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/16/761329044/the-marshall-plan-is-having-a-moment>
- <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14149843>
- <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2012/10/romney-foreign-policy-speech-how-can-he-praise-the-marshall-plan-while-attacking-the-stimulus.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/11/opinion/george-marshall-s-world-and-ours.html>
- <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2024/01/israel-ukraine-george-kennan-cold-war-diplomacy-trap.html>
- <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/07/failed-marshall-plan/564905/>
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24911804>

THE CONGRESS PROJECT

- <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/26/foreign-aid-is-about-u-s-interests-marshall-plan/>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1987/03/12/the-day-harry-truman-remade-the-world/dd786d92-da55-475c-ae9f-fc0229b745e3/>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/05/05/are-there-any-humanitarian-superpowers-covid-19-fight/>
- <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/what-every-american-should-know-about-u-s-foreign-aid/>
- <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-global-aid-true-false-20170501-htmlstory.html>