

An Unabashed Report of the Congressional Delegation Weldon (or Codel-Weldon) to Budapest, Hungary

by

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Abstract

From December 7th - 9th, we were invited by Congressman Curt Weldon to join his Congressional Delegation in Budapest, after their week long stay in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The following is our personal report.

Preamble

On the evening of December 7th, following a week long visit to Moscow and St. Petersburg (for details, see the article by Trudy Rubin in the Inquirer <http://www.phillynews.com/inquirer/98/Dec/11/opinion/RUBIN11.htm>), five of the nine members of the United States Congressional Delegation led by the Honorable Curt Weldon (Codel-Weldon) came to Budapest, the historic and picturesque capitol of Hungary by the Danube. Congressman Weldon is the Chairman of the House National Science Committee Subcommittee on Military Research and Development, a Senior member of the House Science Committee, and a recently elected member of the House Select Committee on Intelligence.

The members who came are

Congressman Curt Weldon (R-PA), Chairman of the delegation
Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY)
Congressman Jack Metcalf (R-WA)
Congressman Mark Sanford (R-SC) (represented by Mrs. Sanford)
Congressman Mark Souder (R-IN)

As customary, this codel is accompanied by a number of Congressional Staffers, in this case Doug Ritter, Chief-of-Staff and Erin Coyle, Legislative Aide to Congressman Weldon, and a number of Staffers on the Committee of the Codel, Stephen Ansley and Brian Green, both from the House National Security Committee. In addition, there is also a Russian Language expert as well as a military doctor with the Codel.

Besides "normal" activities of the Codel, such as discussions with senior government officials in the ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, this visit has the exceptional academic flavor. The Technical University of Budapest, one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the world, inducted Congressman Curt Weldon as an honorary member of the Faculty Senate, the highest honor bestowed on a "non-engineer" individual. An additional goal of the visit was to reinvigorate the scientific and technological cooperation between the US and the Central European countries of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

With global deep concern over the economic and political turmoil in Russia, with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland soon to be members of NATO, it is particularly timely for members of the United States House of Representatives to visit one of the pivotal countries in Central Europe.

We would certainly be remiss in our duty if we do not give a mountain of credit for this entire visit to Professor Tibor Bercei, an eminent professor of electrical engineering and a world renowned expert in microwave telecommunications. It was his tenacity in building a strong intellectual bridge between the United States and Hungary that inspired the visit of the Codel! We also need to acknowledge the energetic and gracious support of Dr. Akos Deretkoi, Rector Magnificus (the official title of the President of the University), and Dr. Laszlo Pap, Dean of the Technical University of Budapest. A very special thanks is due to Mary Bercei who took the Codel on a sightseeing tour. Her profound knowledge of history, her deep love for Budapest, her energy and charm made this event unforgettable. The two of us are also grateful for the magnificent dinner we had in the House of Bercei in the company of their beautiful grandchildren.

II. Visit with OMFB (Orszagos Muszaki Fejlesztési Bizottsag, or The National Committee for Technological Development)

In 1990, inspired by President Bush, a Science and Technology cooperative program between the United States and Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland was conceived and implemented. A large number of scientists and engineers in the ensuing years have intellectually and technologically benefited from this program. As of 1998, the program has successfully been concluded.

The possibility of a new program was the subject of discussion between Congressman Weldon and the Hungarian Ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Geza Jeszenszky. This breakfast meeting in the Congressional dining hall on November 11th was attended by the science and technology attaché of Hungary, Andras Roboz, and Ivan Dubovicky of and Miroslaw Sawicki of the Czech and Polish Embassies, and by the two of us.

In order to further this discussion, we went to OMFB on Monday morning (before the arrival of the Codel) to brief Andras Siegler, Vice President of OMFB, and his senior staff members, which included Dora Groo, the existing program manager from the Hungarian side of the bi-lateral program. In addition, Charlotte Roe, Environment, Science and Technology Attaché, a member of the US team in this program, was also present. In fact, for the next 36 hours, we saw a great deal of Dora and Charlotte, both proved to be enormously helpful in the discussions for the Codel and their Hungarian counterparts.

The discussion went very well indeed, with a great deal of ideas exchanged. In particular, we presented to the Hungarian side a more comprehensive description of Congressman Weldon's ideas, his global vision, and his interest in Russia, technology and global stability.

We were also invited for a formal lunch meeting at the foreign ministry, where high level Hungarian officials confirmed their desire to continue the Science and Technology cooperation and their willingness to commit matching funds.

III. Reception at the Ambassador Residence in honor of Codel-Weldon

Virtually no sooner did the Codel arrived in Budapest at 5 pm on the 7th of December, Codel Weldon was whisked to the magnificent residence of His Excellency Peter Tufo, United States Ambassador to Hungary. The reception/dinner, hosted by Ambassador Peter Tufo, was attended by at least 50 guests. The invitees included the leaders of the US business community in Hungary (e.g. the CEOs of GE/Tungstram, Coka-Cola, General Motors, Motorola, etc.), members of the Codel, and a select few of the Hungarian science and art scene.

After a sumptuous meal, Ambassador Tufo gave a short and succinct description of the excitement of his position in this new era for Hungary. In particular, he remarked that Hungary is the first country in Central Europe which has successfully held three national democratic elections in the past decade, and the tradition is obviously here to stay. After Tufo, Congressman Weldon gave a short summary about the Codel's trip to Russia, emphasizing the role Central European countries, such as Hungary, can play in the new political and economic landscape.

To us at least, the most interesting comment came from Congressman Hinchey, the "only Democratic member of the Codel left in the trip", as he said in his opening remarks. He then said how appreciative he is being invited to join this Codel, and how much he learned about Congressman Weldon. Perhaps the best praise he has for Congressman Weldon is summarized in the following statement:

"....it pains me (as a Democrat) to say how impressed I am with Congressman Weldon, but when the truth stares you in the face, you should just accept it!"

IV. Meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Just before Congressman Weldon's lecture at the University, we (Weldon, Herczfeld, Feng, Charlotte Roe and Erin Coyle) were invited to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to continue the dialogue which was established the previous day when Herczfeld and Feng began at OMFB. The host of this meeting was Dr. Janos Gorog, Ambassador and Deputy State Secretary at MOFA. Joining him, among others, were Dr. Norbert Kroo, deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Education (and an outstanding laser physicist who was, in his previous professional life, the

president of the European Physical Society) and Professor Gabor Naray-Szabo, Deputy General-Secretary of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Besides reiterating his interest in establishing strong economic, intellectual and technology ties with Hungary, Congressman Weldon was eloquent in his praise of the famous Hungarian patriot, Lajos Kossuth, who is the only non-US citizen to have a statue in the United States Congress and who on February 16th, 1852, 13 years before Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address, told the Ohio State Legislature that

"All for the People and All by the People; Nothing About the People Without the People - That is Democracy!"

Congressman Weldon told the Hungarian colleagues that "United States had to learn from a great Hungarian the meaning of democracy", a lesson in history which "the people of the United States should not and must not forget!"

V. Ceremony and Reception at the Technical University of Budapest

In the afternoon of the eight of December, 1998, the Technical University of Budapest, one of the oldest and more prestigious universities in the world, inducted Congressman Weldon into its Senate as an Honorary member. This tribute is reserved only for distinguished individuals that the University wishes to recognize. The solemn ceremony, attended by many of the most distinguished members of the academic communities of Hungary, and unexpectedly by Ambassador Peter Tufo, and several of his staff members, began by the procession of the Deans Council. As required by centuries old tradition, members of the Council wore the traditional cap and gown, and chanted the historic Latin song: "gaudiamus igitur juvenes dum sumus...". Then Rector Magnificus, as the chief academic officer of the University, Dr. Akos Deretkoi, opened the special meeting of the University Senate. This was followed by the Dean of the Engineering, Professor Laszlo Pap who introduced the following resolution:

Proposition presented to the Special Assembly of the Technical University of Budapest Senate

In accordance with the rules and regulations of the established constitutional procedures of the Technical University of Budapest, I propose with respect and great pleasure to the Senate to confer on the Honorable Curt Weldon, Congressman from the State of Pennsylvania, USA the Honorary Membership of this body and induct him into our ranks.

Congressman Curt Weldon was born in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania on the 22nd of July, 1947, and currently resides in Aston, Pennsylvania. He earned a degree specializing in Russian Studies. Presently he represents the 7th district of Pennsylvania in the US Congress. Formerly he was a school teacher and subsequently the Mayor of Marcus Hook. Congressman Weldon has a clear vision of the role of science and technology in the future which focuses on three areas: strengthening the research enterprise, invigorating the medical schools and the health delivery systems, and instituting a global information infrastructure in support of these.

Congressman Weldon is a ranking member of the US House Science Committee and the Subcommittee Chair on Military Research and Development of the US House National Security Committee. He is an eloquent and influential spokesman for science and technology, particularly for informatics, which he believes will be the driving force of economic progression in the next century.

Congressman Weldon initiated a novel program tying Hospitals – Universities - Business enterprises - and Schools, entitled HUBS, to form a smart information network. He is deeply committed in expanding HUBS into Central Europe, and he envisions the new Informatics Center at the Technical University of Budapest as a cornerstone of this extension. Congressman Weldon is aware of the successful co-operation between Professor Tibor Bercei of Technical University of Budapest and Professor Peter Herczfeld of Drexel University in Philadelphia, in microwave photonics. He wants to see US-Hungarian scientific and technical research collaboration to flourish and to expand into new areas of mutual interest.

The Honorable Congressman Curt Weldon and his Excellency, Geza Jeszenszky, the Hungarian Ambassador to the United States of America met in Washington, and they extensively discussed the possibility of opening up new avenues for scientific co-operation between our countries. This new co-operation will emphasize a broad range of technical subjects in support of enriching the lives of the Hungarian and American people. It is anticipated that the Technical University of Budapest will play a critical leadership role in this exciting undertaking.

Congressman Weldon, a former teacher himself, is keenly aware of the importance of high quality education. Therefore, in addition to government supported programs, Congressman Weldon also wants to promote and foster private industry participation in educational and research activities at the Technical University of Budapest. It is my great pleasure to request the distinguished members of the University Senate to support this proposition.

Dr. Laszlo Pap
Dean

The rector then informed the Assembly that the Senate has voted unanimously to accept Congressman Weldon as an Honorary Member, and requested Congressman Weldon to deliver the Istvan Szechenyi Lecture.

The lecture lasted about half an hour. In those half an hour, Congressman outlined the following:

1. Hungarians are an integral part of the United States scientific, technological, artistic and economic landscape. He specifically acknowledged the significant contribution of Leo Szilard, Eugene Wigner, John von Neuman, Edward Teller, Theodor von Karman, Andrew Grove and many others to national security and economic well being of the US. He also mentioned Hungarian artists, like Bartok and Philadelphia's own Eugene Ormandy, who enriched the American arts scene. He thanked Hungarians for these 'gifts'.

2. Hungarian's science and technology are globally recognized, and the Technical University of Budapest, one of the oldest and most acclaimed engineering universities in the world, in particular has contributed several Nobel Laureates and other outstanding individuals to the scientific and engineering communities.

3. Hungarians, by being the recipient of both the Eastern and Western cultures, could be the bridge for these two dominant forces in the 21st century;

4. Information will be the economic driving force in the 21st century. In response to this challenge, he has initiated in the Four State region (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania) an information technology effort called HUBS (hospitals, universities, businesses and schools). He urges the future NATO members, Poland, Czech Republic and of course Hungary to form a similar information coalition. He promised to be a "cheer leader" for this effort!

5. He pledged to be a strong supporter and advocate for Hungary in the United States Congress in the new century.

The entire ceremony was conducted with great dignity and respect to Academic Traditions and to Congressman Weldon. It was a moving, dignified and very touching affair.

VI. The Csarda

No visit to Hungary would be complete without a visit to the csarda, or the Village Inn. Tuesday evening we took a half an hour ride to the village of Tok. The evening turned out to be more romantic than planned due to an unexpected power failure in the region. We had a candle light dinner of authentic gulyas (i.e. goulash), a Hungarian 'woodplatter', strudel and lots of palinka (a special and very potent Hungarian liquor), and wine to keep us warm. A Gypsy orchestra and a group of colorful folk dancers provided a enchanting background. It was fun to see relaxed Congressmen 'performing' gypsy dances.. blindfolded!

VII. Epilogue

Although the visit is short, the synergy between the Hungarian academic and political communities and Codel Weldon was strong. Perhaps the best way to describe it is to use the last few sentences of Congressman Weldon's Szechenyi Lecture:

"...I know that Grof (Count) Istvan Szechenyi, for which this lecture is named after, had been a profound influence to Hungary. His father, Grof Ferencz Szechenyi, was also a very enlightened nobleman. He was the founder of numerous Hungarian Institutions, notably the National Library. He sent his son to England to get a modern education. There the young Szechenyi saw the advance of the industrial revolution, international trade and commerce, the value of good education and the

importance of science and the arts. On his return to Hungary, often using his own money, young Szechenyi started to build a modern infrastructure for the country, including roads, waterways and dams. He started the first Hungarian Steamboat Company to provide for transportation on Europe's greatest river, the Danube.

On one occasion, Istvan Szechenyi received a message at his home in Pest that his father, Ferencz Szechenyi, was gravely ill in Vienna. Since the winter was particularly harsh and the Danube was frozen, he could not cross the river for several days. By the time he got to Vienna his father passed away. With great sorrow and determination, he went to London, hired the best engineer (Adam Clark) and the first permanent bridge connecting Buda and Pest was built. The Szechenyi bridge, or chain bridge as Hungarians like to call it, is still the most beautiful bridge in Budapest.

I like to urge the 21st century Istvan Szechenyi's, many of whom I am sure are sitting in the audience, to build the electronic "chain bridge" in the new millennium, so that people in the world, through this new communication bridge, can live in peace and prosperity".