Sen. J. William Fulbright had a vision to promote mutual understanding among peoples and countries and introduced legislation in 1946 that instituted the Fulbright Programs.

I was fortunate to participate in a Fulbright International Education Administrators (IEA) Seminar in South Korea in June 2017, sponsored by the U.S. government and in part funded by the South Korean government. During the two-week seminar, eight of us, from different colleges and universities across the U.S., were immersed in local culture and traditions. Our Fulbright group was treated like honored guests as we visited 12 universities around South Korea, learning the unique features of each school, touring the campuses and being treated to delicious Korean meals.

Members of the Fulbright staff acted as guides, taking us on excursions to such places as Gyeongbokgung Palace, Insadong, a shopping area for traditional Korean crafts and gifts, the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the U.S. Embassy in Seoul. We also participated in the first Fulbright workshop held in South Korea – New Frontiers in U.S. Student Mobility to Korea. We saw palaces, temples, museums, traditional dance presentations, visited a paper-making business, Busan’s fish markets, and more. Some of the group spent considerable free time in Karaoke rooms and Korean spas!

Any anxiety I felt before the trip, regarding the conflict between North and South Korea, was minimized as I learned that the people of South Korea and the expatriates who live there go about their business each day; since North Korea has made threats and aggressions for over 60 years, ever since the Korean War and the signing of an armistice in 1953.

One of the most profound experiences for me was the opportunity to try on a traditional hanbok while visiting Silla University. When my father served in the U.S. Army in South Korea at the end of the Korean War, he brought home a small child’s hanbok that I remember wearing for special occasions, so it was heartwarming to not only be among the kind and generous Korean people that my father was honored to help during the war, but to wear one of the traditional dresses.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in the Fulbright IEA Seminar in South Korea. I gained important insights into the Korean culture that are a critical part of understanding the people, their lives and country. I also gained an appreciation of and recognize my stewardship to promote goodwill and friendship.