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CORRESPONDENTS

Of Junkets & the USIA

CPYRGHT

In his endless hearings on Viet Nam, Senator J. William Fulbright has expressed so many worries about U.S. policy—ranging from the rational to the ridiculous—that it seemed inconceivable he could find any new ones. But last week Fulbright uncorked yet another: the U.S. Information Agency may be winning sympathy for the U.S. among foreign newsmen.

To attack that sin, which is precisely the one that the agency is supposed to commit, Fulbright called USIA Chief Leonard Marks before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The subject was junkets—with which Senators are familiar—specifically USIA payment for the transportation of 30 to 35 Asian and European newsmen to Viet Nam. Fretted Fulbright: "Doesn't this point to a possible conflict of interest that might compromise the objectivity newspapers owe their readers?"

Patiently, Marks testified that no U.S. newsmen were involved; that the USIA had paid the bills because the correspondents' papers could not otherwise have afforded to send a man; and that the foreign newsmen were under no obligation to write anything other than what they saw and felt. Pressing on, Fulbright & Co. pointed out that some U.S. newspapers have refused Pentagon offers of Viet Nam junkets. Wasn't this evidence of their judgment that such junkets are corrupting?

More likely it was evidence that those U.S. papers were able to pay their own Viet Nam transportation costs, replied Marks. In any case, he repeated, the USIA has nothing to do with inviting U.S. newsmen to visit Viet Nam. It operates only abroad—where it is presumably trying as hard as possible to open foreign minds to U.S. problems and policies.