

**Statement of James H. Billington
Chairman of the Board of Trustees
Open World Leadership Center
Before the
Subcommittee on Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
March 1, 2006**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on the Open World Leadership Center's budget request for fiscal year 2007. The Center, whose board of trustees I chair, conducts the only foreign-visitor program in the U.S. legislative branch and sponsors the largest U.S.-Russia inbound exchange. All of us at Open World are very grateful for our home and support in the legislative branch and for congressional participation in our programs and on our governing board. The Consolidated Appropriations Act passed in December 2004 made the chair of this subcommittee ex officio a member of Open World's board, and my fellow trustees and I are pleased and honored to have you join us, Mr. Chairman. We look forward to working with you as we make important decisions on the future of Open World.

During an important year of assessment and change, the Board and staff began to review all aspects of the program in order to produce in FY 2006 a comprehensive strategic plan for the future. This review is being led by Board member James Collins, who played a key role in launching the program when he was Ambassador to Russia.

Geraldine Otremba completed her outstanding leadership of the able and dedicated staff of the Center in September 2005. Aletta Waterhouse, who had also done great work with the program from its beginning, served very well as Interim Executive Director. The Board will name a new Executive Director in Early Spring of 2006.

The Center's budget request of \$14.4 million (Appendix A) for fiscal year 2007 reflects an increase of \$0.54 million (4.0 percent) over fiscal year 2006 funding. This funding will enable the Center to continue its proven mission of hosting young leaders from Russia; expand its important program for Ukraine; and conduct smaller programs for such other countries as the Board of Trustees will approve in consultation with the Appropriations Committees. The budget increase over fiscal year 2006 is due to increases of salaries and benefits (11% of increase), airfares and impact of changing exchange rates (60% of increase), and domestic transportation, per diem and other programmatic costs (29%).

In 2005, Open World welcomed its 10,000th participant in its sixth year of operation. We began calendar year 2005 by organizing a major post-Orange Revolution exchange to six U.S. states for Ukrainian judges, election experts, NGO managers, and journalists. We ended the year with a local-government study tour in Maine for a delegation from the Solovetsky Islands, home to one of the Soviet Union's first prison camps and one of Russia's greatest monasteries.

Open World brought 1,552 Russians and Ukrainians to the United States in calendar 2005 to work with their American counterparts while

experiencing our democracy and civil society. The Chief Justice of the Russian Supreme Court had planning sessions at the U.S. Supreme Court on U.S.-Russian judicial cooperation; two teams of Russian child-trauma experts helping Beslan victims consulted with Pennsylvania social agencies on their mental and social support services, and a delegation of Ukrainian journalists shared their experiences during the Orange Revolution at a forum in Cincinnati.

Open World's plans for calendar year 2006 include programs on accountable governance for officials from municipalities created under Russia's recent law on local self-governance; expanding our two-year-old exchange for Ukrainian leaders; and providing programs on elections to both Russian and Ukrainian leaders. We will also continue our rule of law program, which has benefited so much from the involvement of U.S. Supreme Court justices and many other prominent members of the American judiciary, including Chief U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Sidney B. Brooks of Denver, Colorado, and U.S. District Judge Michael M. Mihm of Peoria, Illinois. As I discuss below, this calendar year the Center's board—in consultation with the members of the Appropriations Committees—must also make important decisions about whether and where Open World should expand in Eurasia.

Program Leadership

Senator Ted Stevens (AK) serves as honorary chairman of the Open World Leadership Center's board. The congressionally appointed members are Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (TN), Senator Carl Levin (MI), and

Representative Robert E. “Bud” Cramer (AL). The second congressionally appointed seat reserved for a member of the House of Representatives is currently vacant. Public Law 108-447, as amended by Public Law 109-13, added to the Board the chair of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives or designee and the chair of the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate. Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia James F. Collins, Walter Scott, Jr., Chairman of Level 3 Communications, former Representative Amo Houghton, and former U.S. Ambassador to Spain George Argyros are the current citizen members. I sit on the Board in my capacity as Librarian of Congress, and I currently serve as chairman. The Board of Trustees met on December 5, 2005, and reviewed the budget request and program plans presented below.

Program Objectives:

Open World program enhances professional relationships and understanding between political and civic leaders of participating countries and the United States. It is designed to enable emerging young leaders from the selected countries to:

- build mutual understanding with their U.S. counterparts and share approaches to common challenges;

- observe U.S. government, business, volunteer, and community leaders carrying out their daily responsibilities;
- experience how the separation of powers, checks and balances, freedom of the press, and other key elements of America's democratic system make the government more accountable and transparent;
- develop an understanding of the U.S. free enterprise system;
- learn how U.S. citizens organize and take initiative to address social and civic needs;
- participate in American family and community activities; and
- establish lasting professional and personal ties with their U.S. hosts and counterparts.

Open World provides the highest-caliber program for the U.S. visit so that Open World participants return to their countries with a meaningful understanding of America's democracy and market economy.

Open World has refined and focused on a few key themes central to democracy-building in order to improve the quality and focus of the U.S. program.

The catalytic effect of the 10-day U.S. stay is extended by fostering continued post-visit communication between participants and their American hosts and contacts, their fellow Open World alumni, and alumni of other USG-sponsored exchange programs.

In calendar 2005, Russian alumni participated in 168 interregional conferences, workshops, meetings, and professional seminars sponsored by Open World. A major conference for the program's Lithuanian alumni was held in the capital city of Vilnius, and three events were held for alumni in Ukraine.

Open World's multilingual website with online forums (and assisted Russian/English translation for cross-cultural communication) helps maintain communication among delegates, American hosts, and other interested parties. Open World also operates two listservs for Russian alumni, one with news of grants, competitions, and other sources of financial support, the other with weekly updates on Open World news and announcements and opportunities for cooperation and partnership with fellow alumni. All alumni activities and the website are supported through private funding.

Measures of Success

In addition to conducting the qualitative assessments described above, the Center also tracks quantitative program performance measures to ensure that Open World is meeting its mission of focusing on a geographically and professionally broad cross-section of emerging leaders who might not otherwise have the opportunity to visit the United States:

- Delegates have come from all the political regions of Russia and virtually all those of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Uzbekistan.

- 84 percent of Russian participants live outside Moscow and St. Petersburg.
- More than 5,000 federal, regional, and local government officials have participated, including 156 members of parliament and 935 judges.
- The average age of Open World delegates is 38.
- 92 percent of delegates are first-time visitors to the United States.
- Only 12.5 percent of delegates report having “above average” or better English-language skills. (Several U.S. exchange programs require some English-language skills. By not requiring knowledge of English, Open World is able to choose from a much larger candidate pool of young leaders. Interpretation is provided for all Open World delegations.)
- 49 percent of delegates are women. (Women did not have significant leadership opportunities in the Soviet Union.)
- The distribution of delegates among Russia’s seven “super-regions” roughly matches that of the country’s general population.

Open World in America

Open World delegates are hosted by a large and dedicated group of American citizens who live in cities, towns, and rural communities throughout the United States:

- Since Open World's inception in 1999, more than **5,300 U.S. families** have hosted participants in more than **1,500 communities** in **all 50** states.
- In 2005, the **204** locally based Open World host organizations in **147 congressional districts** included universities and community colleges, library systems, Rotary clubs and other service organizations, sister-city associations, courts, and nonprofits.

American hosts' generosity toward and enthusiasm for Open World are a mainstay of the program. In 2005, interested host communities' demand for Open World visitors exceeded supply by 34 percent. Americans' enthusiasm for the Open World Program is reflected in their generous giving. In 2005, Americans gave an estimated **\$1.9 million worth of in-kind contributions** through volunteer home hosting of delegates, a ratio of one dollar in contributions for every seven dollars in appropriated funds.

Visiting delegates, in turn, have impacted American communities by sharing ideas with their professional counterparts, university faculty and students, governors and state legislators, American war veterans, and other American citizens in a variety of forums such as group discussions, Rotary Club breakfasts, and town hall meetings.

During a 2005 Open World visit to Appleton, Wisconsin, for example, a Russian delegate from Kurgan Region, which borders Kazakhstan,

proposed an idea at a Rotary club event. Since there were so many World War II veterans in attendance, the delegate suggested an exchange of letters between Wisconsin World War II veterans and their Kurgan counterparts. One such letter from a member of the Appleton-Kurgan Sister City Program reads, in part:

“WWII efforts created a significant result in history and provided a great victory which was achieved with the help of the Russians for the benefit of the world. Many people, especially among our Russian friends, lost family members ... Some of my schoolmates lost their lives as well. They made the ultimate sacrifice from which all of us in the years since the war have benefited.”

Students from Appleton North High School became interested in the correspondence and decided to interview local veterans, record their stories digitally, and make them available online. The letters also inspired an op-ed article in the local paper on Memorial Day last year and will be displayed at the Appleton Public Library. We understand the U.S. Consulate in Yekaterinburg as well as Fox Cities Online are interested in displaying the letters on their websites. In short, the Open World delegation’s visit to Wisconsin is having a wide ripple effect.

Two other examples of interchanges that benefited the American host communities come from Urbana, Illinois, and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In Urbana, a visiting Open World rule of law delegate made a detailed presentation on the differences between the Russian and American court systems to the Champaign County circuit court judges, state’s attorney, and

public defender; this was followed up by a lively question and answer session. And in Harrisburg, the two Open World teams of child-trauma experts working with Beslan victims shared their harrowing experiences and the latest information on Russian child-trauma theory and practice during presentations to social-service providers and community leaders.

As a result of the Open World Program, American professional leaders are also expanding their own international networks, opening up multiple channels of dialogue to integrate new ideas and values. Today one of the best ways to connect with the Supreme Court of Ukraine might be through Charles R. Simpson III, a federal district court judge in Louisville, Kentucky. One of Judge Simpson's 2005 Open World delegates, Ukrainian appellate judge Tatyana Valentinovna Shevchenko, recently e-mailed him with the news that she had just been appointed to her country's high court.

The Importance of Russia

The Board believes that Open World should maintain a high level of hosting from Russia. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated in a February 12, 2006 interview, we must challenge "Russia as a whole ... the Russian people, to fully integrate [democratic institutional] values into their future." Michael McFaul of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace recently asserted the need for "exchanges, connections, anything that increases connectivity between Russian and American society."

The Open World Program is playing a growing role in helping Russia's emerging leaders experience first hand the workings of our democratic institutions to. The ranks of Russian Open World participants include:

- **719** senior regional administrators and **163** regional legislators;
- More than **1,000** mayors, city council members, municipal departmental heads, and executive-level city officials;
- **887** judges;
- **588** NGO directors; and
- **188** print editors and **68** heads of TV and radio stations.

In addition, the Open World experience has contributed to the establishment or strengthening of **65** sister-organization and Rotary International partner relations, including **17** partnerships between U.S. and Russian legal communities.

Calendar Year 2005 Activities

Russia

Among the 1,410 Russian participants in calendar year 2005, delegates came from a wide range of regional ethnic groups, and had hosting experiences in 47 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Open World's hosting themes were economic development, the environment, health and social services, rule of law, women as leaders, and, for the first time, local

governance. Under the health/social services theme, several Open World teams concentrated on AIDS prevention and treatment, disability issues, or substance abuse prevention and treatment. Open World also hosted two delegations of Russian nonproliferation specialists who worked with their counterparts at two U.S. Department of Energy national laboratories.

A highlight of our 2005 Russia program was a rule of law exchange hosted by Chief U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Sidney B. Brooks of Denver, Colorado, for a high-level delegation of Russian Supreme Commercial Court justices and regional commercial-court chief judges. The Russians held talks with federal and state judges and University of Denver law professors, observed court proceedings, took a workshop on alternative dispute resolution, and were briefed by the state attorney general on his office's role and structure. The delegates also attended the U.S. district court's weekly press briefing and analyzed it with court staff afterward. Thanks to the relationships established by this and earlier commercial-court exchanges, the head of Russia's Supreme Commercial Court will visit the United States later this month on a trip supported by the Department of State and Open World.

As a result of legislation passed in 2003, the Open World Russia program now also includes up-and-coming arts administrators and artists in a range of media—important leaders to the development of a democratic society. Support from the National Endowment for the Arts enables the Russian Cultural Leaders Program to offer two- and three-week residencies to these participants. The 2005 cultural program were brought Russian writers to the University of Mississippi to participate in the Oxford

Conference on the Book, and brought Russian documentary filmmakers to the Athens Center for Film and Video in Athens, Ohio, for an intensive residency.

Ukraine

Ukraine was selected in 2003 for an Open World program because of its strategic position in Eurasia, its large and educated population, and its important potential contribution to regional stability.

The 142 young Ukrainian leaders that Open World welcomed in calendar year 2005 were hosted in 14 states and the District of Columbia. The theme for Ukraine in 2005 was “civil society,” with subthemes in independent media, electoral processes, NGO development, and rule of law. Open World initiated a judge-to-judge program similar to its highly successful judicial exchange with Russia. Forty-two Ukrainian judges, including a Supreme Court justice and two members of the Supreme Commercial Court, were hosted in eight different states. In a number of the American communities that hosted Ukrainian leaders, the impact of the Orange Revolution was discussed in presentations, roundtables, and panels.

The September 13, 2005 mayoral primary in Cincinnati provided the backdrop for one of this year’s most successful Ukrainian exchanges: a study trip on American media and elections for a delegation of print and broadcast journalists. Hosted locally by the Cincinnati-Ukraine Partnership, the delegates observed mayoral candidates being interviewed by the press, spent a half day with key editors of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, had a workshop

on public relations and the press, and observed balloting at the Board of Elections on election night. They also sat in on newspaper editorial meetings and a live television news broadcast, allowing them to feel, as one delegation member said, like “part of the editorial team.”

Open World 2006 and Plans for 2007

For 2006, the Board of Trustees approved continuing the successful Open World programs for Russia (civic, cultural, and rule of law) and the rule of law and civic programs for Ukraine. I appointed a panel to assess and make recommendations for Board consideration on four major issues: (1) whether Open World should expand to other countries, and if so, which, (2) whether country programs should be linked by region, (3) what the scope and nature of alumni programs should be, and (4) what improvements could be made to the Russia and Ukraine programs. The panel will submit an overall strategic plan for board approval by June 2006. The Board will notify the Appropriations Committee of any countries selected for new Open World programs. Any program expansion will be initiated in calendar 2006 and fully implemented in 2007. By September 30, 2006, Open World will finish implementing the financial management and administrative

recommendations in the Government Accountability Office's March 2004 report on Open World.

The budget request maintains hosting and other programmatic activities at a level of approximately 1,400 participants total. Actual allocations of hosting to individual countries will be adjusted to conform to Board of Trustees recommendations and consultation with the Appropriations Committees. The requested funding support is also needed for anticipated fiscal year 2007 pay increases and to cover the Department of State Capital Security Cost Sharing charge for the Center's two Foreign National Staff.

Major categories of requested funding are:

- Personnel Compensation and Benefits (**\$1.197 mil**)
- Contracts (**\$8.48 mil** – awarded to U.S.-based entities) that include:
 - Coordinating the delegate nomination and vetting process
 - Obtaining visas and other travel documents
 - Arranging and paying for air travel
 - Coordinating with grantees and placing delegates
 - Providing health insurance for participants
- Grants (**\$4.72 mil** – awarded to U.S. host organizations) that include the cost of providing:
 - Professional programming for delegates

- Meals outside of those provided by home hosts
- Cultural activities
- Local transportation
- Professional interpretation
- Administrative support

Conclusion

The fiscal year 2007 budget request will enable the Open World Leadership Center to continue to make major contributions to an understanding of democracy, civil society, and free enterprise in a region of vital importance to the Congress and the nation. This Subcommittee's interest and support have been essential ingredients in Open World's success.

I thank the Subcommittee for its continued support of the Open World Program.