

**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
April 19, 2005**

Chairman Allard, Senator Durbin, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The United States Congress initiated the Open World Russian Leadership Program as a pilot exchange program at the Library of Congress in 1999 (Public Law 106-31). Congress in December 2000 established an independent Legislative Branch entity, the Open World Leadership Center, to conduct the Open World Program. The Center is governed by a Board of Trustees.

The Open World Program was crafted in 1999 to bring emerging federal and local Russian political and civic leaders to the United States to meet their American counterparts and gain firsthand knowledge of American civil society. Program participants experience American political and community life and see democracy in action, from the workings of the U.S. Congress to debates in local city councils.

A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report¹ on the Open World Program concluded that “Open World has exposed a large, broad, and diverse group of Russians to U.S. economic and political systems” and stated that many of the alumni interviewed for the report said they have “taken concrete actions to adapt what they learned from their U.S. visits to the Russian environment.” GAO analysis indicates that Open World has achieved a remarkably high degree of proportional geographic representation, and that U.S. ambassadors and embassy officials consider Open World “a valuable tool to complement U.S. mission activities and outreach efforts” in Russia in part because of its unique place in the Legislative Branch.

Since July 1999, Open World has brought **8,900** current and future decision makers from all 89 regions of the Russian Federation to more than **1,300** communities in all 50 states. In 2003, as testament to the success of the Open World model, Congress expanded Open World to include cultural leaders in Russia and political leaders in the 11 remaining Freedom Support Act countries and the Baltic republics (Public Law 108-7). The Open World Leadership Center Board of Trustees in 2003 approved pilot programs in Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Lithuania and also approved a new cultural leaders program for Russia. From countries other than Russia, 370 young leaders have experienced the practice of American democracy and community life through Open World in the past two years. The Board has expressed concern that program

¹ General Accounting Office, *International Exchange Programs, Open World Achieves Broad Participation; Enhanced Planning and Accountability Could Strengthen Program*, GAO-04-436, Washington, D.C., March 2004.

expansion not jeopardize the strength of the Center's original and continuing commitment to the Russian Federation.

In December 2004, Public Law 108-447 expanded Open World program eligibility to any other country that is designated by the Board of Trustees, provided that the Board notify the House and Senate Appropriations Committees of such a designation at least 90 days before it is to take effect. Over the life of the program, Congress has signaled its intention for Open World to function flexibly and strategically for U.S. interests around the globe. With key Members of Congress on its board, Open World has supported parliamentary relationships led by the Speaker of the House and Senate Majority Leader and remains a flexible and important tool for public diplomacy within the Legislative Branch.

Board of Trustees

As Chairman of the Board of Trustees, I am honored to serve on the Board with several of your distinguished colleagues, as well as regional experts and private citizens. The Congressionally appointed members are Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (TN), Senator Carl Levin (MI), and Representative Robert E. (Bud) Cramer (AL). Senator Ted Stevens (AL) is honorary chairman. Former Ambassador to Russia James F. Collins and Walter J. Scott, Jr., Chairman of Level 3 Communications, are the current citizen members. We are awaiting an appointment by the Speaker of the House to replace the seat held by retired House member Amo Houghton.

Since its inception in 1999 in the Legislative Branch, the Open World Program has gained from the active interest and direction of this Committee. In accordance with a recommendation made by our Board of Trustees last year, Congress has added the Chair of this Committee and the Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Legislative Branch to the Board. Your membership on the Board will greatly enhance our ability to provide effective direction for the future of the Open World Leadership Center.

Fiscal Year 2006 Budget Request

The Center's fiscal year 2006 request of \$14 million (Appendix A) will allow Open World to continue to operate the core Russian programs, including work with alumni and cultural leaders, and to continue funding for expansion programs in selected countries. The requested 4.5 percent increase above fiscal year 2005 funding represents unavoidable price increases and the weakened purchasing power of the dollar abroad.

Program Objectives

Open World was created by the Congress both to make a contribution to democratic developments in Russia and to combat negative and manipulated images of America fostered by long years of isolation from the West under Soviet power. Through Open World, emerging leaders in previously authoritarian countries experience short but intensive immersion in the

reality of civil society and the rule of law in the United States. George F. Kennan summarized what an effective public-diplomacy effort like Open World is about when he suggested that our system is most persuasive not when we talk about it, but “when we show other people what can be done in a democracy, and nothing is more useful than that.”

Open World was created to allow participation by non-English speakers, and, as a result, the program has successfully engaged a very broad sector of young political leadership in each participating country. Programs are matched carefully to participants’ professional interests and responsibilities, and almost all include the following elements:

- \$ **Meeting** U.S. government, business, and community leaders at the federal, regional and local levels;
- \$ **Understanding** the separation of powers, checks and balances, freedom of the press, and the transparency and accountability of democratic government;
- \$ **Experiencing** a free market economy;
- \$ **Learning** how U.S. citizens organize voluntary and nongovernmental initiatives to address social and civic needs;
- \$ **Building** a continuing relationship with the U.S. hosts;
- \$ **Sharing** approaches to common challenges;
- \$ **Participating** in American family and community activities.

Strategic Goals

As the Open World Program has matured from its six-month Russian pilot in 1999 to its current scale in four countries, the Board and staff have been guided by strategic goals that shape the annual budget submission and our year-round operations.

Goal I: Improving U.S.-Open World program-country relations and mutual understanding.

The Open World Program is located in the Legislative Branch, housed in and administratively supported by the Library of Congress, but its work abroad is shaped and implemented in cooperation with the embassies in each Open World country. All elements of the program—its focus, candidate nomination and selection, parliamentary delegations—are closely coordinated with the U.S. Embassy and such organizations as the Helsinki Commission.

Goal II: Provide the highest caliber program within the United States so that Open World participants return with a good understanding of America’s democracy, market economy, and civil society.

Open World has improved the quality of its programs by continuous monitoring of programs, site visits, post-visit evaluations, and annual participant surveys. There is an annual review and evaluations of all program elements. The program has increasingly focused on a few key themes central to building democracy and the rule of law.

Goal III: To extend the catalytic effect of a 10-day U.S. stay by fostering continued, post-visit communication among Open World participants, with alumni of other USG-sponsored exchange programs, and with their American hosts and counterparts.

Open World's multilingual website maintains communication among participants, American hosts, and other interested parties. The visit to the United States is just the beginning of a Russian delegate's association with the Open World Program. Open World encourages continued contact with U.S. hosts and among participants themselves. In 2004, Russian alumni participated in more than 250 workshops, interregional conferences, meetings, and professional seminars. An alumni bulletin and web forums are available to all 8,900 Russian participants.

Many of Russia's larger cities now also boast Open World alumni associations and clubs organized by the alumni themselves—supporting special projects, such as support for orphanages or environmental efforts and career development seminars. Alumni-led activities in 2004 included a youth health fair in Tver and a seminar for Novgorod educators on how to encourage volunteerism among high school students.

Strategic Decisions

Russian Federation

The Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, **Senator Richard G. Lugar**, at a recent hearing on "Democracy in Retreat in Russia" said, "The states of the former Soviet Union present a special challenge to the advancement of democracy . . . The biggest concern in the region for democracy advocates is . . . Russia. Despite elections and the experience of post-Soviet personal freedoms . . . the fate of democracy in Russia is perhaps more ambiguous now than at any time since the collapse of the Communist system." Noting the decline in State Department funding for democracy programs, Senator Lugar commented: "With so much at stake in Russia, this is not the time to diminish our funding in this area."

Despite the authoritarian direction of much recent Russian policy, Russia remains a key ally for the United States in antiterrorism and nonproliferation efforts. Open World's 8,900 alumni in all 89 regions are a strategic asset in the continuing struggle to secure a constitutional democracy in Russia. Assessments of Russia's current political state by the International Republican Institute (IRI) point to the dichotomy of suppression of democratic voices at the national level, but "re-invigoration at the regional level." [Testimony of Stephen B. Nix, Director, Eurasia Programs, IRI; appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; February 17, 2005.] Open World's base of participation in Russia spans the entire country and is not concentrated in Moscow at the federal level.

Expansion Beyond Russia

Meanwhile, Open World offers a unique and effective tool for Congress to respond to new realities and opportunities around the globe. The Open World Board's decision in 2003 to invest in a **Ukraine** pilot has yielded a broad-based program in operation before the Orange Revolution that brought the first delegations to the United States in the wake of the 2004 presidential elections. A pilot program in **Lithuania** focused on building regional government expertise and pointed the way toward important regional activity that Open World might undertake in Kaliningrad and Belarus. Similarly, Open World's prior experience in the largely Islamic regions of Russia helped shape a successful investment in **Uzbekistan**. Despite continuing and legitimate concerns about the repressive central government, Uzbekistan remains strategically important to the United States, and Open World delegates have returned to strengthen independent media and economic development and lead efforts to combat trafficking in the region.

With a Congressional authorization to operate in any country in the world, Open World represents an asset that deserves continued investment to allow its continued development as an important tool of American public diplomacy, particularly in regions of the world that are not the principal focus of State Department efforts.

What the Investment Has Yielded:

Russia

Russia Civic and Cultural Program

The Open World Russia Program completed its fifth year in 2004. Open World's core exchange program—with the Russian Federation—brought 1,567 young leaders in calendar year 2004, with wide regional representation (87 of the 89 Russian regions), diverse hosting experiences throughout the United States (44 states), a high percentage of women delegates (58 percent), and multiethnic representation. The selected themes for 2004—economic and social development, environment, health, rule of law, women as leaders, and youth issues—focus on key areas essential to democracy-building. The focus on rule of law, especially in the context of current evaluations of Russia's commitment to an independent judiciary and a constitutional democracy, deserves special mention.

In 2004, Open World emphasized programs on the elections process and media coverage of the presidential and local elections process. Participants in all themes who traveled during the months leading up to the election came away with unique election-year experiences of watching the debates with their host families, seeing signs for presidential and local government candidates posted in front lawns, and observing volunteers of all ages as they supported their candidates at campaign headquarters.

Eight delegations received an insider's view into Election Day in the United States. Three Russian delegations consisting of government officials and aides visited Baltimore, Maryland; Moorhead, Minnesota; and Saratoga Springs, New York. The delegations observed the activities of polling stations in their host communities, visited voter advocacy organizations, and witnessed firsthand the reactions of individual citizens as they watched television coverage of the voting results. Five delegations of print and television media professionals visited Atlanta, Georgia; Louisville, Kentucky; Portland, Oregon; Reno, Nevada; and Rochester, New York. These groups visited local news outlets to discuss and watch election coverage, interviewed election workers and voters, and even wrote on-the-spot news articles to be published in Russia.

Additional examples of Open World's impact in Russia and elsewhere in our participants' own words are found in Appendix B.

Open World in Colorado

As I speak to you today, four women leaders from Russia – a businesswoman, a president of a regional NGO, an education administrator, and a legislative staff assistant — are visiting Longmont, Colorado to examine women's leadership roles. Highlights of the delegation's agenda include a meeting with an NGO director; a discussion with senior women bankers on banking relationships with women-owned businesses; talks with Colorado senators and representatives about elections, government and the role of women in politics; and a panel discussion with a district attorney and chief district judge. Their visit is being conducted by the Longmont Rotary Club, a five-time Open World host organization that has helped make it possible for Colorado to welcome 200 other Open World participants.

Rule of Law Program

Open World's specialized rule of law program is the largest U.S.-Russia judicial exchange. Working in close cooperation with federal judges associated with the International Judicial Relations Committee of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, and with a network of state judges, Open World sponsors intensive, 10-day U.S. professional visits for Russian judges, judicial branch officials, prosecutors, defense attorneys, legal educators, and court staff. Since its inception in 2001, the program has enabled prominent jurists from all over Russia to observe and participate in the U.S. judicial system and to form lasting working relationships with their American judicial hosts and counterparts.

Just last month, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy hosted a high-level Open World delegation at the U.S. Supreme Court for two days of intensive working sessions on U.S.-Russian judicial cooperation and the status of judicial reform in Russia. Our distinguished delegates were Russian Supreme Court Chief Justice Vyacheslav M. Lebedev, Justice Yuriy I. Sidorenko, who chairs Russia's Council of Judges, and a top regional judge. Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices John Paul Stevens, Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, David Hackett Souter, and Stephen G. Breyer all participated in the Russians' Supreme Court visit, as did U.S. District Judge Michael M. Mihm of Peoria, Illinois, and other prominent U.S. judges. Not only did the Russians discuss jury trials, judicial independence, and the rule of law

with the highest judges in the land, they also saw the U.S. judicial system in action by observing oral argument at the Supreme Court and attending proceedings at the federal courthouse in Alexandria, Virginia.

As the Lebedev delegation visit illustrates, the Open World specialized rule of law program contributes to Russia's progress toward judicial reform by demonstrating the concepts and practices that underpin the United States' strong, independent judiciary. By observing and discussing the workings of the U.S. legal system with their American counterparts, participants have developed a better understanding of some of the new procedures that they are being required to adopt by Russia's judicial reform legislation, and they have demonstrated great enthusiasm for implementing many U.S. practices that are relevant to their own situations. Another important program outcome is the establishment and strengthening of a number of sister relationships between the courts of our U.S. host judges and those of their Open World participants. And American host judges have made return trips to Russia to participate in follow-up alumni work on the all-important issue of ethics.

In 2004, 258 participants (43 delegations) visited 30 communities in 25 states and the District of Columbia on the specialized rule of law program. A total of 31 federal and state judges hosted for Open World in 2004. An illustrative example of Open World's work in this important area:

Cultural Leaders Program

The late Academician Dmitri Sergeevich Likhachev was co-chairman of the original Russia-focused Open World Program in 1999. Likhachev was a lifelong advocate of the need for Russia to learn about and have contact with Western culture. The expansion of Open World to Russian cultural leaders is based on this principle.

In 2004, 44 young folklorists, writers, and jazz musicians participated in Open World exchanges designed to foster an understanding of American culture and how it is sustained. The goal is to forge better understanding between the United States and Russia by enabling Russian cultural leaders to experience American cultural and community life, and to share their talents with American artists and audiences. Performances and readings are an essential component of the visit.

The jazz musicians, creative writers, managers of folk arts institutions, and arts administrators who took part in the 2004 program were hosted by prominent arts organizations and educational institutions in five states. Each host community selected by Open World boasts rich cultural institutions and is the center of a flourishing arts scene.

The cultural leaders program has continued in 2005. Currently, the University of **Mississippi** is hosting four young Russian authors who specialize in poetry, fiction writing, literary criticism, and translation. The delegation participated in the twelfth annual Oxford Conference for the Book, and is taking part in translation workshops with students and faculty in the Ole Miss creative writing program and panel discussions on Russian and American culture. The National Endowment for the Arts provided financial support for this hosting.

Pilot Programs

Ukraine

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

Elections formed a central focus for the Open World Program's 2004 Ukrainian exchange, which took place in August, when both the American and Ukrainian presidential campaigns were in full swing. The 50 Ukrainian participants came from 19 of the country's 27 regions and represented a wide range of political views. Two delegations of Ukrainian party activists, NGO election monitors, and campaign experts participated in the "electoral processes" theme, and three delegations of print and broadcast journalists took part in the "independent media" theme, which included a concentration on political and election coverage. The five Ukrainian delegations that visited under the NGO development theme also had opportunities to learn about campaign practices and citizen engagement in politics in the United States.

In March, Open World held the first major post-Orange Revolution exchange in the United States, hosting 45 Ukrainian judges, journalists, elections experts, NGO leaders, and researchers. Their U.S. community visits, which had been rescheduled from December 2004 (when the presidential election was still unresolved by the courts), focused on the rule of law, elections, and the role of an independent media.

This exchange was very much a two-way learning process, as everyone the Ukrainians met with was interested to hear about the Orange Revolution and the current political climate. The Ukrainian delegates were here to strengthen ties to the United States and their own professional understanding of their role in a democracy. On arriving in Washington, delegates had frank and future-oriented discussions with Representative Marcy Kaptur of the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, Supreme Court Justice David Souter, and two former U.S. ambassadors to Ukraine.

Ukraine Program in Ohio

The March exchange marked the debut of Open World's rule of law theme for the Ukraine program, and our highest-ranking judicial delegation was hosted in Columbus, Ohio, by state Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas J. Moyer and Judge Robert Cupp of the Ohio Third District Court of Appeals. The visit began with a Ukrainian bread-and-salt welcoming ceremony at the Ohio Judicial Center and concluded with a live television broadcast of a symposium on Ukrainian democracy with the Ukrainians and Chief Justice Moyer. In between, the delegation — which included a Ukrainian Supreme Court justice — observed court proceedings, including a jury trial; took part in roundtables with Ohio judges; and met with Governor Bob Taft. Rule of

law delegations simultaneously visiting Georgia, Minnesota, New York, and Pennsylvania had similar experiences.

Lithuania

Lithuania was selected for an Open World pilot because of its prospects for building a successful market economy and democracy and because of Congressional interest in including a Baltic country. Lithuania's independent parliament (Seimas) and historical ties with the United States made a legislative-based program very welcome.

Open World launched its Lithuania pilot program in 2004, bringing mayors, journalists, business and NGO leaders, environmental experts, and youth activists from nine of the country's 10 administrative districts to the United States in February and September. Lithuanian Ambassador Vygaudas Usackas held receptions for both travel groups at his embassy during their Washington, D.C., orientations.

Open World's newest program received high marks from the 100 Lithuanians who participated. Higher education, lobbying, business associations, health care, Social Security, and citizen participation in local government were rated among the most useful topics studied. In a representative comment, a delegate on a **Fort Collins, Colorado**, program on youth issues stated, "My best moments were when I realized that people in the U.S. work very hard in order to accomplish their goals, especially helping the youth. This motivates me to work harder in Lithuania."

Chicago, Illinois, hosted several of our inaugural Lithuanian delegations in 2004, with significant participation by the large Lithuanian-American community there. Among the highlights of the Chicago visits were a Q-and-A session for Lithuanian journalists at the *Chicago Tribune*, a fundraising workshop for NGO leaders at the Donors Forum, and, for a Lithuanian business-development delegation, a nuts-and-bolts overview of how U.S. business incubators work at the Industrial Council of Nearwest Chicago.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan was chosen for an Open World pilot on the basis of its large population, its cultural and intellectual prominence among the new independent states of the former Soviet Union that are principally Islamic, and its strategic position in Central Asia. The Open World Board believed that furthering democracy and a market economy in Uzbekistan would promote stability in the entire region.

Open World hosted its second Uzbek exchange in October 2004. The 50-person group included senior representatives from Uzbekistan's ministries of economics, finance, and public health; Central Bank officials; judges; prominent journalists; agricultural experts; women entrepreneurs; and health advocates. Delegates came from 10 of Uzbekistan's 14 political subdivisions.

Open World has received numerous reports on how participants have used the knowledge they gained while in the United States. A business consultant running for the Nukus City Council

campaigns on themes inspired by her U.S. visit: creating favorable conditions for private business through legislation and defending the rights of female entrepreneurs. The head of the Agro-Industrial Stock Exchange in Tashkent reports that, as a result of his visit to the Kansas City Board of Trade, his exchange has now introduced electronic trading.

A doctor who practices in the populous Fergana Valley conducted a workshop on premature infant care for 45 of her colleagues to share the neonatal techniques she had seen at Tampa General Hospital. And a Tashkent newspaper reporter is publishing two long articles, "Two-Story America" and "The White Stele [Monument] of Washington," that describe in detail how his impressions of America and Americans changed for the better as a result of his Open World visit to Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C. He writes, "The one thing that really impressed me in the United States is the people. To tell the truth, having watched Hollywood films, I expected to see an undisciplined public where people did whatever they felt like. But already in Washington, I was sincerely surprised by the proper and polite Americans that I met. On the street, people were smiling ... and no one looked at us with unfriendliness. At the end of my stay in the U.S. capital, I felt as though I were at home in Tashkent."

Future Directions

Stacy Hoffhaus 5/21/04 12:34 PM
Formatted

In 2004 the Senate requested that Open World study the feasibility of expansion to Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Open World model, with appropriate U.S. in-country support, has demonstrated its suitability in a variety of environments. The key question for the Open World Board, which includes the Chairman of this Subcommittee, as well as the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, is to decide the allocation of available resources among the countries in which Open World is authorized. Recent concerns have been raised by Members of Congress about Belarus, Moldova, and Georgia. Congressional interest in Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Lithuania have remained strong. Yet Open World's annual budget has been modest since its inception. In the current budget environment, significant expansion is unlikely; therefore, decisions will be influenced by available resources.

A regional approach, centered in Russia, the western NIS, and Central Asia, would allow Open World to respond flexibly to U.S. strategic interests but avoid the upfront investment devoted to setting up a new country-focused program. Open World might offer a cost-effective means of delivering current exchange programs in a number of countries. If Congress so approves, the Board could request that a new regionally aimed model be developed for fiscal year 2007. The fiscal year 2006 budget request is based on the current country-specific model. The staff evaluation of the feasibility of pilot programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan is included as Appendix C.

Fiscal Year 2006 Budget Request

The Center's budget request for fiscal year 2006 reflects an increase of \$.612 million over fiscal year 2005, in order to continue the Center's proven mission of hosting young political and civic leaders from Russia and other countries of the region. The Board of Trustees believes that maintaining a robust Open World presence in Russia is necessary and important for future U.S.-

Russia relations. Program capacity in fiscal year 2006 at the requested level remains far below the limitation of 3,000 set in the Center's authorizing legislation.

The budget request maintains hosting and other programmatic activities at a level of approximately 1,400 participants total (continuing a decrease in hosting levels begun in fiscal year 2003), based on airfare and other travel increases above the overall inflation rate, and projected higher foreign exchange rates. The Department of State Capital Security Cost Sharing charge for the Center's two Foreign National Staff is also included. Actual participant allocations for individual countries will be based on Board of Trustees recommendations and on consultations with the Committee.

Major categories of requested funding are:

- \$ Personnel Compensation and Benefits (**\$.883 mil/11 FTEs**)
- \$ Contracts (**\$8.435 mil**)
 - \$ Management of delegate nomination and vetting process
 - \$ Visa and other document processing
 - \$ Travel arrangements, including international and domestic air travel
 - \$ Management and coordination with grantees on delegate host placement
 - \$ Database maintenance and development
 - \$ Information services
- \$ Grants (**\$4.354 mil**) (U.S. host organizations)
 - \$ Professional program development
 - \$ Food and (limited) lodging
 - \$ Cultural activities
 - \$ Local transportation
 - \$ Interpretation

The requested funding support is also needed for anticipated fiscal year 2006 pay increases. Overall administrative costs remain at a low 6 percent of the Center's annual expenditures.

Other Program Contributions

Major financial support to the Open World Program is contributed by American citizens who host program participants in their homes and communities. Private American citizens freely provide cultural activities, community-wide activities, and housing for one week, which often reduces the program's per diem expenses—by a substantial amount when estimated over the life of the program. During 2004, Open World also received financial support from The Russell Family Foundation for support of environmentally focused programming and from TNK-BP for general support of Open World programming and alumni activity in Russia and Ukraine.

The fiscal year 2006 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.

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