

**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 House of Representatives
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Madam Chair and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on the Open World Leadership Center's budget request for fiscal year 2008. The Center, whose board of trustees I chair, conducts the only exchange program in the U.S. legislative branch and has hosted 11,780 leaders from Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, and other post-Soviet states to date. All of us at Open World are very grateful for the continued support in the legislative branch and for congressional participation in the program and on our governing board. We look forward to working with you on the future of Open World.

Open World has a U.S. hosting network of hundreds of local nongovernmental and governmental organizations and more than **six thousand** volunteer host families, enabling us to continue to bring large numbers of emerging young post-Soviet leaders to the United States. Program participants come to discuss topical issues of mutual interest and benefit, such as ways of containing the avian flu, developing environmentally responsible public policy, and improving educational curricula in primary and secondary schools. They meet with Americans who share their interests and are often eager to partner with them on collaborative projects.

The following statement by U.S. District Court Judge Stephen P. Friot of Oklahoma, who hosted five prominent Russian judges for Open World in 2006, effectively captures the impact of this program on both U.S. hosts and foreign visitors: “The opportunity to learn about the judicial system of the Russian Federation made hosting Open World delegates one of the most enriching professional experiences I have ever had. Russian and American judges face similar problems, and programs like Open World help us overcome them by providing the opportunity to learn with each other and from each other.”

In 2006, after seven years of operation, Open World assessed its accomplishments and completed a new strategic plan under the leadership of former U.S. Ambassador to Russia James F. Collins, one of our longest-serving trustees. The plan envisions expanding the Open World Program to all the countries of Eurasia¹ and the Baltic States by fiscal year 2011. Expansion programs are already under way in five new countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. One result of this expansion is that Open World will reach many more Muslims. Some 30 million Muslims live in the countries participating in Open World 2007, more than double the Open World 2006 figure of 14 million.

The Center’s budget request of \$14.4 million for fiscal year 2008 (Appendix A) reflects an increase of \$0.54 million (4.0 percent) over fiscal year 2007 funding. This funding will enable the Center to continue its

¹ Eurasia here means Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

proven mission of hosting young leaders from Russia and Ukraine; carry out the congressionally approved expansion to our five new countries; and respond to any requests for small-scale, preliminary expansion to additional countries made by the Board of Trustees in consultation with the Appropriations Committees.

Program Mission and Strategic Plan:

The Open World strategic plan, completed in 2006, adopted the following mission statement:

To enhance understanding and capabilities for cooperation between the United States and the countries of Eurasia and the Baltic States by developing a network of leaders in the region who have gained significant, firsthand exposure to America's democratic, accountable government and its free-market system.

In light of this mission, Open World will continue to bring emerging leaders from this region to the United States, while endeavoring to foster lasting ties and ongoing cooperation between Open World delegates and their American hosts and professional counterparts. The program seeks to nurture civic and political environments where civil society develops not only from the top down, but from the **ground up** and the **periphery in**. This goal is furthered by developing a network of leaders who regularly communicate and collaborate with fellow citizens and American peers on concrete projects.

The Open World strategic plan focuses on building and strengthening a network of American and foreign community leaders through both enhancing existing ties and forming new ones. It also stresses the importance of measuring progress quantitatively by numbers of partnerships, joint projects, and ripple effects, and by tracking how they grow and strengthen.

Open World's core competency lies in identifying promising young leaders, matching them with capable and appropriate U.S. host organizations, and networking them with their American counterparts. Open World has developed close coordination with U.S. Embassies and various nominating organizations. Wherever possible, Open World tries to complement other U.S. government-funded programs as well as other initiatives in Open World countries that involve U.S. citizens.

West Jordan, Utah, the sister city of Votkinsk, Russia, provides an example of such an initiative. To help develop projects based on this sister-city tie, Open World made it possible for a competitively selected medical team from Votkinsk to visit West Jordan in September 2006 to learn more about U.S. emergency medical care and community health fairs. One month after returning to Votkinsk, the Open World delegates replicated a community health fair. They invited the mayor of West Jordan as well as a health team from Jordan Valley Hospital to take part in the event. More than 600 Votkinsk citizens attended this one-day event and learned about Utah's ties to Votkinsk. Sister Cities International's Utah State Coordinator and veteran Open World host Jennifer Andelin had this to say after the trip:

“Open World is definitely a program that is positively impacting both Russia and Utah ... I often refer to Open World as the ‘glue’ that holds the Utah/Russia partnerships together.”

Calendar Year 2006 Activities

In 2006, Open World brought 1,132 Russians and 221 Ukrainians to the United States for high-level professional programs in 46 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Out of these:

- 228 delegates studied rule of law
- 279 delegates studied accountable governance
- 216 delegates studied women as leaders issues
- 345 delegates studied health, social issues, the environment, and education.

The Open World 2006 Russia civic program focused on topical and timely issues that unite American and Russian leaders in strengthening and protecting our communities. For instance, a team of Russian avian flu experts came to meet with their American counterparts at the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and spoke as panelists at the 2nd Bird Flu Summit in Washington, D.C. The trip initiated an ongoing dialogue between the NIH and Russian laboratories that will lead to cooperative projects as well as the formation of a formal cooperative partnership agreement to be signed in spring 2007. In fact, on March 10, 2007, another Open World delegation of infectious disease epidemiologists from Krasnodar and Adygei joined the State of North Carolina, the Scian Institute,

and the National Peace Foundation in a “Community Preparedness Planning Template Project (CPPTP)” partnership. Among other goals, this multiyear project will help small and medium-sized U.S. communities develop emergency response plans for dealing with the outbreak of pandemics.

Open World 2006 continued the 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 and has brought nearly 900 Russian judges to the United States since 2001. A highlight of last year’s program was the visit to Florida by a rule of law delegation from the St. Petersburg State University Faculty of Law. As a result of the visit, Stetson University College of Law and the St. Petersburg State University Faculty of Law signed an interinstitutional letter of intent to cooperate. Representatives of the Florida bar association and Stetson law school are planning to go to St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2007 to further develop these ties and also to participate in a proposed law conference to be organized with the support of the Russian Ministry of Education and the Association of Jurists of Russia.

An exemplary delegate from the Open World Russian cultural leaders program is Irina Scherbakova, president of the Arts Managers Association in Russia, who visited La Crosse, Wisconsin, where she studied different aspects of cultural tourism. As a result of her trip, she is now organizing a cultural tourism conference in Moscow that will take place in the fall of 2007, bringing together arts managers from across the Russian Federation, as well as some from the United States, to develop ideas for enhancing cultural tourism. Other outstanding alumni of Open World’s cultural leaders

program won three of the most coveted Russian literary awards in 2006: the Big Book prize, the Andrei Bely Prize in poetry, and the Russian Booker Prize.

Open World 2006 fostered partnerships with Ukraine, which has been an Open World country since 2003. In December, community leaders in Omaha, Nebraska, hosted a delegation of city administrators from Artemivsk, Ukraine, which applied to become a sister city of Omaha as a direct result of the visit. The U.S.-Ukraine Foundation partnered with Open World in order to solidify these relations. A delegation of Omaha city representatives (including university faculty and students) will make a return visit to Artemivsk in May 2007. Omahans have raised funds in the United States to help renovate an orphanage in Artemivsk this year; and for the first time, a group from the Omaha Ukrainian diaspora are visiting Artemivsk to build ties.

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 **6,000 U.S. families** have hosted participants in 1,575-plus **communities** in **all 50** states.

- Open World's 2006 host families lived in 227 different **congressional districts**.

American hosts' generosity toward and enthusiasm for Open World are a mainstay of the program. In 2006, interested host communities' demand for Open World visitors was more than **double** Open World's actual number of program participants. U.S. hosting organizations were prepared to host more than 2,300 Russian participants, well above our funded hosting capacity of 1,150 Russian participants. Americans' enthusiasm for the Open World Program is reflected in their generous giving in 2006 of an estimated **\$1.6 million worth of in-kind contributions** in terms of free accommodations and meals.

The blossoming relationship between Los Alamos, New Mexico, and the formerly closed nuclear research city of Sarov, Russia, offers other examples of the dedication of Open World's American hosts. In September 2006, Open World sent four delegates from Sarov to Los Alamos. As a result of the trip, a videoconference site was organized using equipment donated to Sarov by citizens of Los Alamos. Videoconferences are being used both to organize a 2007 trip to Sarov by Los Alamos firefighters and police officers to discuss how to control wildfire (a major issue of concern in both communities), and to make plans for six children from Los Alamos to attend a summer camp outside Sarov.

Open World delegates have impacted American communities by sharing ideas with their professional counterparts, university faculty and students, governors and state legislators, emergency response crews, and

other American citizens in a variety of settings, including group discussions, Rotary Club breakfasts, and town hall meetings.

One Rotarian, Wayne R. Oquin of Houston, Texas, had this to say about the impact of Open World on him as a host

“On a personal note, I have never been one to push the international side of Rotary. I’m recognized as a community service Rotarian. I must admit that the Open World Program has changed my perspective. I was very apprehensive about my role as an Open World coordinator for my District. It really turned out to be easy, informative and extremely rewarding to me personally. I can honestly say that my time with this Open World delegation has been my **most enjoyable** week ever spent as a Rotarian.”

Results and Impact of Program

Open World delegates return to their countries and apply their Open World experience to improve their local communities and regions. For example, an elementary school principal from Tver, Russia, was hosted in November 2004 by the Paso Robles (California) Rotary Club. Upon her return, she instituted a set of reforms based on what she had seen at the Georgia Brown Elementary School in Paso Robles. Among other projects, she started a board of trustees that was chaired by a mother of one of the students at her school. The board, in turn, worked with the principal to add electives to the school curricula, including a course on principles of democracy and election legislation. As a result of these reforms, the Russian

Ministry of Education awarded the school a one million ruble prize as one of the “Best Schools of the Year” for 2006.

In another instance, a city administrator from Ulan-Ude visited Louisiana and was inspired to launch a campaign in support of NGOs in her region. During a meeting with the Louisiana Office of Family Support, she was particularly impressed by the role of nongovernment community organizations such as Louisiana Eastern European Adoptive Families. Upon her return, she teamed up with the first deputy chairperson of her department, another Open World alumna, to promote NGO development in Ulan-Ude. As a result of their teamwork, on October 3, 2006, the City of Ulan-Ude declared 2007 “The Year of Civic Initiatives” and allocated 2.8 million rubles (approximately \$106,000) to be distributed among 32 local NGOs to organize 100 different activities and programs throughout this year.

Sometimes results take time to come to fruition. A judge from Barnaul, Russia, visiting Washington, D.C., in 2003 was particularly impressed by the use of information technology in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Upon her return, she started to take computer classes and, in 2005, was instrumental in instituting the use of web cameras and computerized court records in her region’s supreme court.

In another example, the director of an Yekaterinburg refugee aid organization and a Native American Open World host—who first met during the director’s 2004 Open World visit—just partnered on a March 14 videoconference between Native American children in Oklahoma and indigenous children in Ufa-Shigiri, Russia. The videoconference, which was

co-hosted by the U.S. Consulate in Yekaterinburg, is intended to be the first in a series of events that will allow these children to share information about their lives, cultures, and aspirations for their communities.

Scope of Program

In addition to the qualitative assessments described above, the Center also tracks quantitative performance measures to ensure that Open World is 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, Ukraine, and Lithuania, and from 13 of Uzbekistan's 14 political regions.
- **88** percent of Russian participants live outside Moscow and St. Petersburg.
- More than 6,500 federal, regional, and local government officials have participated, including 157 members of parliament and 1,158 judges.
- The average age of Open World delegates is 38.
- 93 percent of delegates are first-time visitors to the United States.
- 51 percent of delegates are women. (Women did not have significant leadership opportunities in the Soviet Union.)

Open World 2007 and Plans for 2008

In calendar year 2007 we plan to continue bringing Russian political, civic, and cultural leaders, as well as Ukrainian political and civic leaders, to the United States. In addition, through Open World, at least 175 leaders from Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan will visit the United States in 2007, virtually all for the first time. In early March 2007, the first Open World Georgian rule of law delegation visited Emory Law School (in Tbilisi's sister city of Atlanta), and a Georgian accountable governance delegation visited municipalities in Illinois. On March 30, 2007, Open World's first Moldovan delegations will be hosted in Raleigh, North Carolina, and here in Washington, D.C., to discuss public finance reform and human-trafficking issues.

Open World administrative activities in 2007 include developing annual plans for 2007–2011 as part of the strategic planning process, and finalizing all assessment tools to measure program successes. Open World will explore ways to recognize some of our most dedicated U.S. hosts, and the Board will identify additional countries for possible inclusion in the 2008 expansion program.

Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Request

The budget request supports hosting and other programmatic activities at a level of approximately 1,400 participants total. Actual allocations of hosting to individual countries will be determined by the Board of Trustees in consultation with the Appropriations Committees. The requested funding

support is also needed to cover anticipated fiscal year 2008 pay increases and the Department of State's obligatory Capital Security Cost Sharing charge for the Center's two Foreign National Staff attached to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

Major categories of requested funding are:

- Personnel Compensation and Benefits (**\$1.379 mil**)
- Contracts (**\$8.075 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 (**\$4.6 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
 - Local transportation
 - Professional interpretation
 - Cultural activities
 - Administrative support

Conclusion

The fiscal year 2008 budget request will enable the Open World Leadership Center to continue to make major contributions to the deepening 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 enabled this unique program to obtain gratifying results and a special status in the successor states of the former USSR.

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