

**Statement of James H. Billington  
Chairman of the Board of Trustees  
Open World Leadership Center  
Before the  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representative  
March 10, 2006**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, 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 of 2005, as amended by Public Law 109-13, added to the Board the chair of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives or his designee. We look forward to the Committee's participation on the Board 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 fiscal year 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 percent of increase), airfares and impact of changing exchange rates (60 percent of increase), and domestic transportation, per diem and other programmatic costs (29 percent of increase).

In calendar year 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 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 U.S. District Judges Paul A. Magnuson of St. Paul, Minnesota, and Michael M. Mihm of Peoria, Illinois, two of the program's key architects. 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. In addition to representation from the House Appropriations Committee, Public Law 108-447 added to the Board 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 and share approaches to common challenges with their U.S. counterparts;

- 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**

The Center annually reviews and evaluates all program elements through site visits, post-visit evaluations, and participant surveys. Quantitative program performance measures are tracked 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 correspondance 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 selected him as the first person outside of Ukraine to learn 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 firsthand the workings of our

democratic institutions. 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.

## **Recent Activities**

### *Russia*

Among the 1,410 Russian participants in calendar year 2005, delegates came from a wide range of regional and ethnic groups, and had hosting experiences in 47 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Open World's 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 U.S. Department of Energy national laboratories in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Richland, Washington.

Open World's new local governance theme is illustrated by two 2005 exchanges to Bakersfield, California, and Syracuse, New York. In Bakersfield, former Kern County supervisor Pauline Larwood helped arrange for a delegation of young Russian leaders to see several government institutions "in action," including the Bakersfield City Council and the juvenile court. The delegates also had individualized sessions that ranged from job shadowing a television news crew to reviewing budget spreadsheets with the county administrative officer.

In Syracuse, one of the top 10 most-visited cities under Open World, Russian officials studied small-town to federal-level government operations. Federal and city officials briefed the delegates on economic-development, housing, and finance issues, while Onondaga County Executive Nicholas Pirro and North Syracuse Mayor John Heindorf provided firsthand accounts of overseeing a county and a village government.

As a result of legislation passed in 2003, the Open World Russia program now also includes up-and-coming arts administrators and artists—important leaders to the development of a democratic society. Support from the National Endowment for the Arts enables the cultural program to offer two- and three-week residencies to participants. For example, a delegation of Russian poets in residence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel

Hill in 2005 gave public readings there and in Asheville, took part in a panel discussion on contemporary Russian literature, and met with local writers and publishers. In Louisville, five Russian jazz musicians just participated in the University of Louisville's Jazz Week 2006 festival. Performing as the Open World Jazz Quintet, the Russians headlined one of the evening concerts and played at several other venues during their stay. The Russian musicians also took lessons and workshops with jazz greats in town for the festival.

### *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 an exchange on media and elections. Visiting Ukrainian journalists observed candidates being interviewed by the press, spent a half day with editors of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, and watched election results come in at the Board of Elections. They also sat in on newspaper editorial meetings and a television news broadcast, allowing them to feel like “part of the editorial team.”

Election law was the focus for a 2005 Ukrainian exchange in Arlington, Virginia. The delegation of election experts explored voter registration and polling-site management with the Arlington Registrar of Voters and discussed election administration at the National Association of Secretaries of State. During their visit, the delegates also met Representative Jim Moran and National Endowment for Democracy staff involved in programs in Ukraine.

### **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 Board committee 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 committee will submit an overall strategic plan for the Board’s 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 with 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.