

**Statement of James H. Billington
Chairman of the Board of Trustees
Open World Leadership Center
Before the
Subcommittee on the Legislative
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
May 11, 2004**

Chairman Kingston, Representative Moran and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Open World Russian Leadership Program began as a pilot exchange program in the Library of Congress in 1999 (Public Law 106-31). An independent Legislative Branch entity, the Open World Leadership Center, now conducts the program.

The Open World Program was designed 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 how American civil society works. Program participants experience American political life and see democracy in action, from the workings of the U.S. Congress to debates in local city councils.

Since July 1999, Open World has brought 7,537 current and future decision makers from all 89 regions of the Russian Federation to America, where they have experienced American political and civic life in all 50 states. The success of the Open World approach led Congress in 2003 in Public Law 108-7 to expand eligibility for Open World to the 11 remaining Freedom Support Act countries and the Baltic republics. The scope of the Russian program was also expanded to include cultural leaders.

In May 2003, the Open World Leadership Center Board of Trustees approved pilot programs in Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Lithuania and also approved a new cultural leaders program for Russia. The Board expressed concern that program expansion not jeopardize the strength of the Center's original and continuing commitment to the Russian Federation.

In FY 2004, the Center's Board will consider continuation of the pilot programs in Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Lithuania. The Center's staff is conducting in-depth assessments of program accomplishments. The Center is also enhancing the impact of the condensed, catalytic Open World visit to the United States with a robust alumni communication effort in Russia emphasizing outreach to new Open World alumni. Open World operates a dual-language, interactive website, issues alumni-oriented publications, and holds numerous regional and local meetings, seminars, and conferences for alumni in different parts of Russia.

The Center's FY 2005 request of \$15 million (Attachment A) will allow Open World to continue to operate the core Russian programs, including work with alumni and the new cultural leaders program, and to continue funding for expansion programs in other countries. The Center's operations remain efficient, but increases in airfares and costs for the visa application process under new national security guidelines necessitate requesting an increase of 11 percent over the FY 2004 funding levels.

Strategic Goals

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

Goal I: Contribute substantially to improving U.S.-Russian 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 essential Russian core has been shaped and implemented in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Major elements of the program—focus themes, candidate nomination and selection, parliamentary delegations, and alumni communications—are defined by and continually coordinated with U.S. Embassy personnel in Russia and with State Department leaders, with substantial input from Russia experts in the United States.

Goal II: Provide the highest-caliber program for the U.S. visit so that Russian participants return to the Russian Federation with a meaningful understanding of America's democracy and market economy.

Open World has refined and focused its grants award program to enhance the quality of the U.S. program. Continuous monitoring of local programs, site visits, post-visit evaluations and annual participant surveys contribute to the annual review and evaluation of all program elements. The program has increasingly focused on a few key themes central to democracy-building, with a special recent emphasis on the rule of law.

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

The new Open World bilingual website with online forums (and assisted translation for cross-cultural communication) and a new electronic newsletter for all U.S. and Russian participants are key elements in this effort. If pilot programs continue at adequate funding levels in Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Lithuania, alumni activities will be expanded to develop such structures for these countries as well.

The staff continues to evaluate and monitor the results of participation in Open World as a means of measuring the program's impact. Since its inception in 1999, Open World has conducted an exit survey of all participants both to evaluate the substance and quality of the program, and to assess attitudinal and other changes in the participants. In 2004, additional evaluation of specific program themes and hosts will be conducted in order to better shape the size and content of future program components.

2003 Program Overview and Highlights

In calendar year 2003, Open World hosted 2,120 participants—including 48 cultural leaders from Russia, 50 participants from Ukraine and 48 from Uzbekistan—and conducted an expanded alumni program in Russia. Descriptions and highlights of the 2003 program are below.

Russia Program

Open World hosted 2,022 young Russian leaders in calendar year 2003, accomplishing wide regional representation in Russia (82 of the 89 regions), nationwide hosting (46 U.S. states and the District of Columbia), a high rate of participation by women (58 percent of the delegates), and multiethnic representation. Open World hosting themes given special emphasis were rule of law, women as leaders, and health. Some highlights:

Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs Delegation. In July 2003, Open World hosted a delegation from Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs. Hosted by Vital Voices Global Partnership, the 11-member delegation focused on ways to combat human trafficking in Russia and elsewhere. The training session was developed in response to a request from the Ministry and is a follow-up to Open World hosting in October 2002. Members of the delegation, most of whom work on an antitrafficking task force at the Ministry, examined legislation, the role of law enforcement, interministerial cooperation, public awareness campaigns, and effective partnerships within and outside of government to combat trafficking.

Rule of Law St. Petersburg-to-St. Petersburg Exchange. On the occasion of the joint celebration in 2003 of the Russian St. Petersburg's tercentenary and the Florida St. Petersburg's centennial, Open World sponsored several delegations from the St. Petersburg region to visit their Florida counterparts. Two rule of law delegations, and a group of journalists who documented the relationship between the two cities, participated in the Open World programs. The two cities established a sister-court relationship to exchange ideas and information on a regular basis.

Information Managers from Russia. In 2003, Open World brought 203 Russian information managers to over 40 communities throughout the United States. The Russians librarians met their American counterparts and explored how libraries in the United States act as community centers, providing services, classes, and exhibits to their readers and others. At the invitation of the director of the National Library of Russia, this program culminated in an Open World alumni conference at the National Library in St. Petersburg in November 2003. Library directors participating in the conference decided to establish an Open World alumni section of the Russian Library Association in order to plan lobbying efforts and joint projects.

Alumni Programs. Open World began a revamped and expanded alumni program in Russia in 2003. Four professional development workshops, four information technology classes, and three regional thematic conferences took place during the year. Twenty-six part-time regional alumni coordinators now maintain regular contact with alumni in their regions, and provide them with computer seminars, consultations, and opportunities to meet each other to plan joint projects.

Open World Website. In August 2003, the Open World Leadership Center launched a new interactive and dynamic dual-language website containing information pertinent to Open World grantees, hosts, delegates, alumni, and other interested parties. New forums allow discussions among alumni, host organizations, host families, and others with assisted translation. The website also includes an interactive calendar of events, a subscription center for electronic updates, and a voting system to obtain feedback from alumni visiting the site. The website has been enormously popular: since August it has received more than 1,500,000 hits.

Cultural Leaders Program

In 2003, at the request of Congress, the Board of the Open World Leadership Center approved an important new dimension for the core Russia program—the inclusion of cultural leaders. The cultural leaders initiative was recommended by Members of Congress and is a logical and appropriate addition to a program founded upon the vision of the late Academician Dmitri Sergeevich Likhachev to foster cross-cultural communication, a vision I share. Dr. Likhachev, who at his death in 1999 was one of the new Russia's most revered figures and who served as Open World's honorary co-chairman in its first year, often stressed the importance of cultural interaction between Russia and the West as well as the political importance of cultural leaders in the Russian context.

The cultural program aims to forge better understanding between the United States and Russia by giving emerging Russian cultural leaders unique opportunities to observe and experience American cultural and community life firsthand. The initiative also enables Russian and American cultural leaders to learn from each other's experiences and to

discuss similar challenges—especially the challenge of funding cultural institutions in an era of tight budgets.

A total of 48 Russian arts administrators, visual and performing artists, and librarians from cultural institutions participated in the cultural leaders program in 2003. Specialized orientation sessions in Washington, D.C., were followed by intensive local programs in 10 states. The program was particularly notable for involving leaders from outside Moscow and St. Petersburg—at a time when regional centers are playing an increasingly important but often overlooked role in democratic development.

The participating cultural administrators and artists spent three weeks in the United States in order to have sufficient time to meet and work with their counterparts and examine U.S. cultural management and funding in depth. (Because the cultural leaders program involves intensive planning, longer host-community programs, additional interpretation services, and extended orientation and debriefing sessions, its cost per participant is higher than that of the regular Russian leadership program.) Among the topics studied were fundraising, student recruitment, advertising, and staff development. These cultural leaders traveled to either Michigan or North Carolina, with a program orientation in Washington, D.C., and a debriefing in New York City.

The National Endowment for the Arts was a key partner to Open World in planning and executing the first cultural leaders pilot. During their visit, participants met with Members of Congress, gave press interviews, and shared their cultural talents with their host communities. The program evaluation indicates that many participants established contacts with their American counterparts that they hope will continue, and learned valuable and transferable cultural management techniques. All participants also reported that their visits had led them to develop concrete plans for enhancing the productivity and success of both their institutions and their own careers.

Pilot Programs

The Open World Leadership Center launched pilot exchange programs with Ukraine and Uzbekistan in 2003, bringing 98 current and future leaders from the two countries to the United States under the theme “civil society.” (Leaders from Lithuania arrived on February 26, 2004.)

Ukraine

Ukraine was selected for an Open World pilot program 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.

The overarching theme for the initial Ukraine exchanges was “civil society.” Open World selected this theme on the basis of a thorough review of bilateral relations and

U.S. assistance programs in Ukraine, and consultations with State Department officials, staff of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, and Ukraine experts. Each delegation in 2003 concentrated on one of three aspects of civil society: NGO development, independent media, or electoral processes.

Open World hosted its first delegations from Ukraine in December 2003. The initial 25-person group consisted primarily of prominent journalists and lawyers. After a Washington, D.C., orientation program and a State Department briefing, one group traveled to Youngwood, Pennsylvania, for a program on electoral processes, another visited Atlanta for a program on independent media, and a third went to Cincinnati for a program on the media and electoral processes.

The second Ukraine exchange delegation consisted primarily of journalists and NGO leaders. After an orientation program and a meeting with State Department officials, two delegations traveled to Memphis, Tennessee, and three delegations stayed in Washington, D.C., for intensive programs, including meetings with experts on networking and lobbying; members of the media; and Ambassador Carlos Pascual, Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia.

The December exchange participants met with a wide variety of American journalists, including the director of *CNN World Report*; government and election committee officials; and the mayor and city council of Memphis. They discussed the role of the media during an election cycle, the development of effective NGOs and advocacy campaigns, and the role of a vibrant free press in a democratic society. Most delegates had home stays, which allowed them to directly experience American family and community life.

A preliminary review of post-program surveys of the December participants suggests that the feedback on the programming for the new Ukraine pilot will be overwhelmingly positive.

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 USSR 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.

Theme selection was made after consultation with U.S. government officials in Uzbekistan, as well as with high Uzbek officials. As in the Ukraine pilot program, “civil society” was chosen as the overall theme, with special concentrations on economic development, health, and independent media.

The first 48 participants from Uzbekistan arrived in Washington, D.C., on December 4, 2003. Delegates included senior representatives from Uzbekistan's Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Public Health, and Central Bank; prominent journalists; NGO leaders; and entrepreneurs, many of whom were women. After a two-day orientation, they traveled in small groups to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Des Moines, Iowa; Grapevine, Texas; Huntsville, Alabama; Kent, Ohio; Lexington, Kentucky; Los Angeles; Santa Cruz, California; and Seattle for their professional programs.

They met with NGO and media professionals; held discussions with governors, city mayors, representatives of the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank, and corporate executives; and visited local hospitals, universities, and community centers. The Uzbek visitors focused on the role of government in economic reforms; investment and international cooperation; women in business; rural health; TB/HIV and drug abuse prevention; and a democratic media. All delegates lived with host families, who introduced them to American family and community life.

Immediately before the Uzbek delegation left for the United States, Open World held a press conference in Tashkent that was attended by more than 35 journalists, a number of whom wrote articles on the program. Many of the Uzbek participants subsequently wrote informative articles on their Open World experience for their local newspapers.

Initial feedback from participants has been extremely positive. Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia James Collins, an Open World trustee, reports that during his recent visit to Uzbekistan, many Uzbek delegates commented on the value of making new professional contacts and of seeing how American society addresses challenges that also face Uzbekistan. They also appreciated the opportunity to educate Americans about Uzbekistan.

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.

Theme selection was made on the basis of consultation with officials in the U.S. mission to Lithuania and representatives of Lithuanian and international nongovernmental organizations. As with the other pilot programs, "civil society" was chosen as the main theme. The subthemes for Lithuania were entrepreneurship, community development, mass media, NGO/government relations, women's issues NGOs, and youth issues.

The first 50 participants from Lithuania visited the United States from February 26 to March 5, 2004. The delegations were hosted in Burlington, Vermont; Chicago; Detroit; Fort Collins, Colorado; Moorhead, Minnesota; Omaha, Nebraska; and Portland, Oregon.

General Accounting Office Report

On March 17, 2004, the General Accounting Office (GAO) submitted to the Chairman its report *International Exchange Programs: Open World Achieves Broad Participation; Enhanced Planning and Accountability Could Strengthen Program* (GAO-04-436). The GAO report concludes that “Open World has exposed a large, broad, and diverse group of Russians to U.S. economic and political systems.” It also underscores Open World’s success, since its inception as a pilot effort in 1999, in meeting its Congressional sponsors’ intent that the program be of sufficient size, scope, and geographic diversity to achieve ambitious public diplomacy goals.

GAO’s evaluation included interviews with a number of the Russian political and civic leaders who have participated in Open World. GAO concluded that they “generally hold highly favorable views of their experience in the program.” More significantly, many of the alumni GAO met with reported that 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 the Department of State considers 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, and because Open World attracts so many delegates who live outside Russia’s major cities and who have not previously visited the United States.

Open World has undertaken several steps in response to GAO’s specific recommendations for enhancing management, financial, and accountability mechanisms, and continues to consult with GAO staff. To guide its further development of strategic and performance plans with measurable goals and indicators, Open World is examining relevant federal government practices and models, especially those used by international exchange programs. A parallel examination of survey instruments is being conducted to improve on the program’s mechanisms for collecting data and reporting on performance.

Open World is working in consultation with the GAO and the Library of Congress Office of the Chief Financial Officer (which processes Open World’s financial transactions and maintains financial reports under an interagency agreement) to develop better written procedures for financial controls. All parties have agreed to have the Library of Congress’ auditor conduct an FY 2004 audit that will also examine Open World’s financial internal controls. Revised grant procedures and controls are being developed in consultation with the Library’s Grants Management Office. Open World has surveyed its grantees on methodologies to estimate gift-in-kind contributions from American hosts. Finally, the Open World Board of Trustees will consider the establishment of an audit committee or financial management advisory committee during its annual meeting in June.

Plans for 2004

Russia Program. The Center has further refined the hosting themes for 2004, while continuing to coordinate with the State Department and other agencies on desirable areas of emphasis. The election process is a subtheme that will be emphasized in programming throughout the summer and fall.

Cultural Program. In 2004 and beyond, the cultural program is diversifying from the performing and visual arts to include novelists, poets, playwrights, literary translators, folklorists, photographers, historic preservationists, and independent documentary filmmakers.

Pilot Programs. Staff are currently evaluating participants' post-program surveys. Preliminary results have been very positive. Decisions on continuation of the expansion pilots beyond the planned programs in FY 2004 will be made during the Center's Board meeting in June.

Fiscal Year 2005 Budget Request

The Center's budget request of \$15 million for FY 2005 reflects an increase of \$1.5 million over FY 2004, in order to continue the Center's proven mission of hosting young political and civic leaders from Russia, and to continue pilot programs in other selected Freedom Support Act and Baltic states. The Board of Trustees believes that maintaining a robust Open World presence in Russia is a necessary program mission and important for future U.S.-Russian relations. The requested level of funding will enable the Center to continue Open World contacts and activities with an expanding group of alumni in Russia and to maintain and diversify the cultural leaders program in Russia. Program capacity in FY 2005 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 the FY 2004 level of approximately 1,500 participants total. Decisions and allocations with respect to eligible countries will be reviewed and finalized by the Center's Board after pilot program assessments, within funding provided by the Committee.

Major categories of requested funding are:

- Personnel Compensation and Benefits (**\$.855 million/11 FTEs**)
- Contracts (**\$9.048 million**) (principally program support in Russia), including:
 - o Management of delegate nomination and vetting process
 - o Visa and other document processing
 - o Travel arrangements, including international and domestic air travel

- o Database maintenance and development
- o Alumni activities
- o Website and other information distribution
- Grants (**\$4.769 million**) (U.S. host organizations), including:
 - o Professional-program development and implementation
 - o Food and lodging
 - o Cultural activities
 - o Local transportation

The program needs an additional \$1.5 million over the FY 2004 budget of \$13.5 million to maintain the present level of hosting. The Center was able to reach the current level in FY 2004 only because FY 2003 no-year funds were used to implement the pilot programs in FY 2004. Airfares continue to rise at a level above inflation rates; the expense of sustaining a modest Open World alumni program has grown with the increased number of participants. The requested funding support is also needed to annualize the FY 2004 pay raise and the anticipated FY 2005 pay and price 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, access to community-wide activities, and housing for one week, which saves the program all or part of per diem expenses—a substantial amount when estimated over the life of the program. During calendar year 2003, Open World also received pledges totaling \$1.5 million from private sources, contributions that will be received over the next five years.

Proposed Change in Program Leadership Structure

Open World's Board of Trustees has authorized a request to the Committee to amend the Center's authorizing statute to add to the Board the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Legislative and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Legislative Branch. The addition of the Ranking Members to the proposed amendment is a change from our original submitted testimony to the Subcommittee and reflects consultations with the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Legislative Branch. The proposed amendment to the bill language is attached (Attachment B). Statute 2 U.S.C. § 1151 (a)(2) established a nine-member Board of Trustees to direct and supervise the Center, composed of the Librarian of Congress, four private individuals, and representatives of the majority and minority selected by the leadership of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Since its inception in 1999 in the Legislative Branch, the Open World Program has gained from the active interest and direction of the Chairmen and Ranking Members of both the House Subcommittee on Legislative and the Senate Subcommittee on Legislative Branch. The Board's ability to provide effective and efficient direction to the Center will be enhanced if the Congressional Appropriations Committees' perspectives on the funding priorities of the Congress are regularly represented in the Board's deliberations.



The FY 2005 budget request and the suggested legislative amendment language 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.