

**Statement of Ambassador John O’Keefe
Executive Director
Open World Leadership Center
Before the
Subcommittee on Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Request
March 24, 2010**

Madam Chair, Mr. Aderholt, and other Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on the Open World Leadership Center’s budget request for fiscal year 2011. The Open World Leadership Center, of which I am the Executive Director, is a unique congressional center that is a resource for Members of Congress and their staff and constituents. It seeks to assist Congress in its foreign policy oversight responsibilities and aid Congress in interparliamentary and similar legislative activities. In this capacity, the Center conducts one of the largest U.S. exchange programs for Eurasia, through which some 6,100 volunteer American families in all 50 states have hosted thousands of emerging leaders from former Soviet countries. As a result of these exchanges, hundreds of projects and partnerships beneficial to all have been initiated and enhanced. All of us at the Center are very grateful for Congress’s continued support, and to the Members of Congress who participate in the Center’s Open World program and who serve on our governing board. We look forward to working with you, other Members of Congress, congressional interest groups, and volunteer hosts throughout the United States to set the future path of Open World.

Last year, this subcommittee suggested that the Center seek greater congressional involvement in the Open World program and develop a strategic plan that makes our agency an even more valuable resource for the legislative branch. I am pleased to share with you that nearly one out of two program participants in 2009—48 percent—met with Members of Congress or their staff. This is an increase of 100 percent from 2008. When our board convened on February 4, 2010, we discussed important legislative components of a new strategic plan for 2012–2016, and I look forward to sharing these components with you. First, though, I would like to update you on the Center’s operations and some recent program accomplishments.

More than 15,000 emerging leaders from Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Lithuania, and Uzbekistan have participated in Open World. Significantly, more than 48 million Muslims reside in countries where Open World is active, and these countries have approximately 2,000 miles of shared borders with Iran and Afghanistan.

Since its inception, the Center has awarded grants for overseeing our U.S. exchanges to **60 organizations** headquartered in **25 different states** and the District of Columbia. These grantee organizations host delegations themselves or award subgrants to local host organizations to do so. By 2010, **well over 600 local host organizations**—

including universities and community colleges, Rotary clubs and other service organizations, sister-city associations, and international visitor councils and other nonprofits in all **50 states** and the District of Columbia—had conducted Open World exchanges for the Center.

More than **75 percent** of Open World’s fiscal year 2009 appropriated funds were expended on U.S. goods and services through contracts and grants—much of it at the local community level. American volunteers in **48 states and the District of Columbia** home hosted Open World participants in calendar year 2009, contributing a large portion of the estimated \$1.9 million given to the program in the form of cost shares.

In fiscal year 2010, Open World had a 14 percent reduction in appropriated funds. As a consequence, Open World terminated one of its most important but costliest programs, the nonproliferation exchange program for Russian nuclear experts and decision makers. Open World was also forced to reduce the number of calendar year 2010 participants from the 1,400 planned to 1,300. Still, through cost shares, contract renegotiations, donations, and an interagency transfer, the Center was able to maintain the quality of the Open World program as well as to double the number of participants from the Republic of Georgia.

The Center’s budget request of \$14 million for fiscal year 2011 was set at the direction of our Board of Trustees. We will seek to fulfill our Board-approved strategic plan to expand to Armenia, Uzbekistan, and Belarus, as well as to bolster our development efforts. We plan to bring 1,400 participants in calendar year 2011 through additional cost shares from our U.S. hosts as well as from our partners abroad. We estimate that, again, more than 75 percent of the appropriated funds will be spent on U.S. goods and services, including \$4.47 million in direct grants to American host organizations. The funds will allow thousands of Americans throughout the United States and their counterparts abroad to generate hundreds of new projects and partnerships and other concrete results.

Open World Program Results

There are many examples of solid, productive results from the Open World program:

A Moscow principal who is pioneering inclusive education at her school instituted new curriculum activities for her students with disabilities—and became an advocate for Individualized Education Programs for special-needs students—after her 2008 Open World education exchange to Worcester, Massachusetts. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met with this alumna and toured her institution on September 1, 2009, the first day of the Russian school year. The Russian president was impressed by the curriculum additions and by the alumna’s point that inclusive schools like hers do not receive any government funding to defray the cost of the extra services provided to special-needs children. President Medvedev said he would have the Ministry of Education look into

this funding issue and praised the alumna's school for being in the vanguard of inclusive education. The school visit was covered by three national TV channels.

In agribusiness, a Moldovan alumnus, Dr. Gheorghe Arpentin, commenced a series of Skype online lectures recently at the request of North Carolina grape growers, many of whom have recently converted their tobacco fields into grape vineyards. The first lecture, on using organic viticulture, was well received; Dr Arpentin's recommendations were referred by members of the North Carolina Wine and Grape Council to North Carolina State University, where they are now being field tested on North Carolina soils for prospective application. Dr. Arpentin was recently named a deputy minister of agriculture. His second lecture is scheduled for late April 2010.

This is what one of the American participants in Dr. Arpentin's first Skype class had to say:

The SKYPE Lecture on Grape Growing by Dr. Arpentin from Moldova was exactly what we needed. We Americans tend to reach for "chemicals" to increase our crop productions. Dr. Arpentin directed us to "go natural with use of select rotated wild grasses" which will increase our yield, decrease bitterness of the grape, maximize plumpness and yes, save us money. With Moldova's three thousand year history of successful grape growing and wine making and with Moldova's awards in the field, I listened closely and learned.

In an example touching on U.S. security interests, Open World Georgian delegates involved in drafting their country's personal data protection act met in November 2009 with House Energy and Commerce Committee staff members working on H.R. 2221, the Data Accountability and Trust Act, to discuss and compare their legislative provisions. Upon returning home, one of the delegates became the director of the Georgian Ministry of Justice's Data Exchange Agency, which is responsible for the nation's cybersecurity and e-government program. He continues to communicate with those he met on Open World, including representatives from the Department of Homeland Security's Computer Emergency Readiness Team and congressional staffers.

At the Civil Society Summit held in Moscow last July in conjunction with the U.S.-Russian Presidential Summit, 12 of the 75 American and Russian attendees were Open World partners. All 12 now serve on working groups for the U.S.-Russian Bilateral Presidential Commission, which was created as a result of the presidential summit to explore new opportunities for U.S.-Russian partnership. In January 2010, a Russian alumnus was invited back to Washington, D.C., where he had spent much of his 2008 Open World visit, to participate in the inaugural meeting of the Commission's civil society working group. The alumnus, who heads a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that aids homeless, exploited, and at-risk children and teens in Astrakhan Region, is an authority on child welfare issues, a major focus of the working group's first meeting. He is also active in advocating for Russia to create a counterpart agency to the Virginia-based National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which he first learned

about—and visited—during his Open World exchange. This same alumnus was just appointed to and made chairman of the Astrakhan city election commission.

Open World alumni are continuing to climb up the ladder into leadership positions while bringing about changes from the periphery in and the bottom up. The Open World Leadership Center tracks these and other such results using eight categories, or “bins,” such as partnerships with Americans, alumni projects inspired by the Open World experience, and benefits to Americans. Since launching a results database in August 2007, Open World has identified more than 3,000 results (see attached Results Chart).

Open World and Congress

As a U.S. Legislative Branch entity, the Open World Leadership Center links Congress to experienced and enthusiastic citizens throughout the United States who are engaged in projects and programs in Open World countries, and actively supports the foreign relations initiatives of Congress. The Open World program routinely involves Members in its hosting activities and is responsive to congressional priorities. Seven of the 18 congressional members of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission) met with Open World delegates last year. The Center also regularly consults with the Congressional Georgia Caucus, the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, the Russia Caucus, the Congressional Azerbaijan Caucus, the Congressional Caucus on Central Asia, the Friends of Kazakhstan Caucus, other congressional entities, and individual Members with specific interests in Open World countries or thematic areas.

Some examples of Member and congressional staff interaction with Open World in 2009 and early 2010 are:

- In January 2010, Congressman David Price of North Carolina hosted a group of Moldovan parliamentarians in Raleigh and then in Washington, D.C. The group’s visit coincided with that of Moldovan Prime Minister Vlad Filat to both of these cities in order to further cement sister-state relations between North Carolina and Moldova. The Moldovan delegates proposed and discussed the idea of forming a North Carolina Caucus in their parliament.
- Representative Robert Aderholt of Alabama, a cochair of the Friends of Kazakhstan Caucus, met in September with Kazakhstan’s youngest member of parliament, Bakhyt Syzdykova. During their meeting, they discussed the idea of establishing a relationship between the Alabama Youth Legislature and the Kazakh Youth Parliament. Since then, we have begun making plans to bring regional coordinators for the Kazakh Youth Parliament to Alabama on an Open World exchange.
- Pennsylvania Representative Allyson Schwartz, cochair of the Congressional Georgia Caucus, met in November with Georgian parliamentarians to discuss

opportunities for future collaboration with the Caucus, and Georgia's geopolitical situation.

- Representative Tom Price of Georgia, who cochairs the Russia Caucus, met in October with 10 health care leaders from across Moscow Region who had traveled to Atlanta for an intensive weeklong program at Emory University. He discussed his ideas about the work of the Caucus and learned about the ongoing collaboration on perinatal care between citizens in Atlanta and Moscow.
- Representative Chris Van Hollen met in December with Russian civic leaders who were exploring special education during a weeklong visit to Montgomery County, Maryland. They discussed his sponsorship of legislation to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Open World arranged meetings with alumni leaders for the members of a congressional staff delegation during their late August–early September visit to Moldova, Georgia, and Russia. In Moldova, the congressional staff delegation met with mayors who had been hosted in North Carolina in 2007 on Open World. During this meeting, the staff delegation presented the mayors with letters of greeting from North Carolina State Representative Larry Brown and Winston-Salem Mayor Allen Joiner, who had both taken part in the Moldovan mayors' Open World visit.
- At the invitation of **Chairman Eni Faleomavaega** of the House Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, I participated this past December in a roundtable discussion with high-ranking Kazakhstani government officials about their country's human rights record.

Open World plans to build on these congressional partnerships and to be even more active in serving Congress.

Nonappropriated Open World Funding

The Center, which is authorized to receive contributions from private sources, has redoubled its efforts to seek a wide range of supporters to increase and further diversify funding and strengthen the Open World program through cost-share partnerships. The major sources of nonappropriated funding are direct contributions from foundations and individuals, interagency transfers of funds, cost shares from Open World grantees and American hosts, and other forms of in-kind contributions, especially for Open World's alumni program, which receives no appropriated funds.

In an effort to track the very generous in-kind support Open World receives from grantees and American citizens, the Center in 2007 initiated a cost-share reporting requirement for all grantees participating in the program. We received \$1.7 million in donated goods and services from hosts and grantees in 2008—**equal to 19 percent of the**

Center's fiscal year 2008 appropriation. While the exact figure for 2009 will not be available until later this spring, early estimates indicate it will be near \$1.9 million.

As an example of cost shares from grantees, Supporters of Civil Society in Russia (SCSR), the American partner of the prestigious Moscow School of Political Studies (MSPS), contributed \$95,000 worth of lodging, meals, interpretation services, and other goods and services—53 percent of the total U.S. programming cost—to bring one group of 20 emerging Russian leaders nominated by MSPS to St. Louis, Missouri, in April 2009 and another group of 28 to Chicago, Illinois, in October 2009 for intensive accountable governance programming. Open World awarded a 2010 grant to SCSR to host again in both these locations with a similar cost share.

Concurrently, Open World actively seeks donations from private sources. In 2009, Open World Trustee Walter Scott made three-year pledge of \$525,000 from his family foundation to support Open World programs. Under the expert guidance of our development consultant, the Center is also approaching other individuals and organizations interested in the region.

Reciprocal visits by Americans to Open World alumni help fulfill Open World's mission of strengthening peer-to-peer ties and partnerships. These visits by American professionals, hosts, or grantees involved in Open World are self-funded. For example, in May 2009, eight representatives of the League of Woman Voters, an Open World grantee organization, traveled to Moscow, Kaluga, and St. Petersburg, Russia, and discussed electoral processes and women's political leadership with more than 25 alumni who had been hosted by various chapters of the League. Numerous U.S. judges and legal experts involved with Open World exchanges also make independently financed reciprocal trips to meet with program alumni. In 2009, American jurists involved with Open World's rule of law program made 59 reciprocal professional visits to Open World countries to meet with program alumni and senior judicial leaders to discuss judicial reform.

Direct contributions from individuals, foundations, and other private sources during the same time period totaled more than \$400,000. A fiscal 2009 interagency agreement with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) supported all the hosting costs (up to \$500,000) of the Russian Cultural Leaders Program.

Finally, in response to the House Appropriations Committee report language directing Open World to further accelerate its fundraising efforts, the Center has temporarily engaged the services of a development consultant. In tandem with helping define and update our strategic goals and agency mission statement, this specialist will help the Center establish an in-house capacity for fundraising.

Open World 2010 Activities, 2011 Plans, and 2012–2016 Strategic Planning

Interest in the Open World program remains vibrant within the American hosting community. The “demand” for Open World visitors from Russia in 2010 is more than

double the “supply”—potential American grantees applied to host up to 1,816 Russian participants, while the Center will only have funding to bring 750 to the United States. For the 2010 Ukraine program, demand was triple the supply of available hosting slots, and for Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, potential grantees proffered a total of 1,158 hosting slots, while Open World can afford to host only 314 visitors from these seven countries.

Open World continues this year to host in thematic areas that advance U.S. national interests in general, and congressional interests in particular, and that generate concrete results while strengthening the ties between American communities and their partners abroad. This programming emphasizes and builds on Open World’s incremental successes in such areas as governance (focusing on the legislative branch’s role in helping to bring about good governance and affecting public policy), the rule of law, human-trafficking prevention and prosecution, and environmental issues. This year Open World will also increase its non-Russian programming to approximately 46 percent of its total programming, which is double Open World’s 2007 level of non-Russian programming.

One example that demonstrates Open World’s commitment to supporting existing partnerships and initiatives is our involvement with the 15-year-old relationship between Maryland and Russia’s Leningrad Region. Open World has sponsored 14 Leningrad-Region delegation visits to Maryland since 2002, helping this sister-state partnership work on such substantive areas as accountable governance, education, social services, and the rule of law.

In turn, the State of Maryland has funded reciprocal visits to Russia. In August 2009, a delegation of Maryland educators led by the director of international affairs of the Maryland Secretary of State’s Office visited Leningrad Region. Then in December, an official Maryland Sister States delegation met in Russia with over 40 Open World alumni associated with this partnership and worked with government officials to nominate an Open World delegation of Leningrad regional legislators.

These regional legislators were hosted for Open World in January 2010 by the Maryland Secretary of State’s Office. The delegation spent much of its time in the Maryland legislature, focusing on how a state-level legislature functions and on the legislative process. Other programming covered such topics as legislative advocacy, lobbying, ethics, state taxation and fiscal structure, and economic development.

The Center will also continue women as leaders programs, like the one planned in April 2010 for a delegation of women parliamentarians from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Their programs will focus on women’s issues, with the Kyrgyzstani leaders participating in Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson’s Women’s Peace Initiative in Dallas, Texas, and the Kazakhstani leaders being hosted in Illinois by Congresswoman Debbie Halvorson.

In 2010 and 2011, the Center will actively seek to host more regional legislators—especially legislators from Central Asia and the Caucasus, based on congressional interest. We will have a large pool of newly elected regional legislators to draw from. Rule of law programming for Open World countries whose judiciaries demonstrate continued movement towards independence will also have a focus. Finally, with Board approval and in consultation with the Appropriations Committees, the Center is prepared in 2011 to expand the Open World program into other countries.

By the end of this fiscal year, the Center will have finalized a new strategic plan spanning 2012–2016 with a focus on making the Center an even more valuable resource for Congress and its constituents. There will be in-depth program changes to increase congressional involvement in Open World and focused efforts to provide support to the constituent hosts who have established programs and partnerships in Open World countries. The Board, in its preliminary discussion of the new Strategic Plan, suggested considering the following:

- Ensuring that a substantial portion of future program participants are legislators, either at the national, regional or local level.
- Engaging more Members of Congress to host Open World parliamentarians.
- Increasing the percentage of Open World delegations that meet with Members of Congress, congressional entities, and/or congressional staff to discuss issues of relevance to both sides.
- Ensuring that every delegation gains a working understanding of the role of the U.S. Congress and state and local legislatures in government operations.
- Adding subthemes to Open World programming to highlight how citizens and interest groups work to affect the legislative process at the federal, state, and local levels.

Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Request

Funding at the requested level of \$14 million will enable the Center to fully respond to congressional interests in the region and beyond while continuing its proven mission of hosting young political and civic leaders who return home to launch projects and programs in cooperation with their American counterparts and hosts. The Board of Trustees believes that maintaining a robust grassroots-based Open World presence in the region is necessary and important for future U.S. relations in these politically significant countries.

The budget request, in conjunction with projected donations and cost shares, will also allow the Center to increase hosting to a level of approximately 1,400 total participants. Actual allocations of participant slots to individual countries will be based on Board of Trustees recommendations and consultations with the Subcommittee and the

U.S. Embassies in these countries. The requested funding will also help offset an expected decrease in prior year recovered funds and Trust revenue income.

Major categories of requested funding are:

- Personnel Compensation and Benefits and other operating expenses (**\$1.73 mil**)
- Contracts (**\$7.8 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 temporary health insurance for participants
- Grants (**\$4.47 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
 - Community activities
 - Local transportation
 - Professional interpretation
 - Administrative support

Conclusion

In an increasingly connected world, where citizen ambassadors on Main Street are conducting important work in the sphere of public diplomacy, Open World gives community leaders a unique institutional base in the legislative branch for partnering with Congress while providing them with the resources to succeed. As Dr. James Billington, chairman of the Open World Board of Trustees, stated at the annual Board meeting on February 4, 2010:

Citizen diplomacy is becoming much more important. In an increasingly connected world, it is not just State Department officials but North Carolina farmers who now have access to a deputy minister in Moldova. And the federal judge who hosts counterparts in Kentucky is now in direct contact with a supreme court justice in Ukraine. The secretary of state from Maine regularly exchanges emails with the mayor of Arkhangelsk, Russia. Open World helps create these and thousands more lines of communication.

Open World offers an extraordinary “bang for the buck” in terms of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and value. The Center boasts an overhead rate of about 7 percent, every grant contains cost-shared elements, and more than 75 percent of our appropriation

is plowed back into the American economy every year. At the local level, where the funds and the jobs are most needed, our delegates, as part of their “after hours” Open World experience, participate in American life at local restaurants, cultural sites, sporting events, shopping centers, and other places in the community. During the professional portion of their local program, they not only benefit from working with their American counterparts, but also share their own expertise in turn. In this way, the Center is both a mini-stimulus plan as well as a true international exchange program.

Funding the 2011 Open World program at the requested level of \$14 million will allow Americans in hundreds of Congressional Districts throughout the United States to engage up-and-coming Eurasian political and civic leaders—such as parliamentarians, environmentalists, and anti-human trafficking activists—in projects and ongoing partnerships. Americans will, once again, open their doors and give generously to help sustain this successful congressional program that focuses on a region of profound interest to U.S. foreign policy. To that end, the Subcommittee’s interest and support have been essential ingredients in Open World’s success.