

Testimony of Jane Sargus
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For the Subcommittees on the Legislative Branch
Committees on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
and the United States Senate

“Since participating in Open World as a journalist several years ago, I have often referred to the lessons learned and best practices that were demonstrated during my program. As Head of the Parliamentary Committee on Preventing and Combatting Corruption, I remember well that most of the Americans I’ve met believed they can achieve anything they want. Open World’s network of alumni in Ukraine consists of a new generation of Ukrainians working to improve their country and fight corruption in these trying times. I hope that Congress continues this program as it is important for Ukraine.”

Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record on the Open World Leadership Center (the Center). Congressional participation on our governing board and in our programs has made the Center uniquely qualified to support Members’ conduct of Congressional diplomacy and to serve Members, their constituents and communities across America. All of us at the Center are deeply grateful for your support.

Overview

In 1999, Congress authorized the Open World program (then called the Russian Leadership Program) as a pilot project as a result of discussions between then Librarian of Congress, Dr. James H. Billington, and a bicameral and bipartisan group of Members of Congress. The project focused on the question of how to increase mutual understanding between Russia and the United States and to support Russia’s democratization efforts. In December 2000, the success of the Russian Leadership pilot program and the continued importance of its mission led Congress, through the leadership of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, to establish a permanent, independent entity in the Legislative Branch to administer the program: the Open World Leadership Center.

The Center conducts the Open World program, one of the most effective U.S. exchange programs for countries in transition. Participation on the program has enabled more than 29,000 young global leaders to engage in and interact with Members of Congress, Congressional staff, and thousands of other Americans, many of whom are the delegates’ direct professional counterparts. The Open World program focuses on assisting Congress in its oversight responsibilities and on conducting exchanges that establish and foster lasting professional relationships between the emerging leaders of Open World program countries and Americans dedicated to showcasing U.S. values and democratic institutions. The Center’s non-partisan nature and independence from the priorities of the executive branch is an important asset for the program.

The highly-regarded Open World program has played an increasingly vital role in the political landscapes of many countries throughout Eurasia and has been effective in improving relationships with these countries by introducing emerging leaders to their professional colleagues and thematic best practices throughout the United States. The Center brings rising leaders who have become influential in the national arena and within their communities. The Center has a long record of providing substantial expertise in conducting exchange programs tailored to support the Legislative Branch. As it embarks on its third decade, the Open World Leadership Center continues to strive for excellence in providing relevant, informative, and timely programs for foreign legislators and the best and brightest young professionals in Open World program countries.

By the close of 2019, over a 20-year span, the Center had brought more than 29,000 young and emerging leaders from 21 countries.¹ These talented and engaged political and civic leaders were hosted in all fifty states by nearly 8,000 families in some 2,300 communities across the United States.

As a U.S. Legislative Branch entity, Open World actively supports the foreign relations role of Congress by linking delegates to Members and their enthusiastic constituents throughout the United States who are engaged in projects and programs in Open World countries. Open World programs routinely involve Members in hosting activities. More than eighty percent of delegates met with Members of Congress and their staff last year.

The Center also regularly consults with the Commission of Security and Cooperation in Europe, the House Democracy Partnership, the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, the Senate Ukraine Caucus, the Albania Issues Caucus, Congressional Georgia Caucus, Congressional Serbian Caucus, the Friends of Kazakhstan Caucus, the Congressional Caucus on Central Asia, the Congressional Mongolia Caucus, other Congressional entities, and individual Members with specific interests in Open World countries or thematic areas.

Open World Activities in 2019 and Plans for 2020

In 2019, the Open World program included seventeen participating countries and 1,020 emerging leaders who were able to benefit from direct exposure to the workings of the United States Congress; to understand the impact of legislation on all aspects of society; and to experience the robust and dynamic democracy and free market system that exists in the U.S. and makes up its form of federalism. Also of significance is that these Open World participants broke bread with their American counterparts, woke up in an American household, and saw families/children getting ready for work/school. They witnessed social activism, a free and aggressive media, and the incredible volunteerism that makes up this great country.

¹ Fiscal 2020 countries (17) include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, North Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan; past countries (4) include Egypt, Lithuania, Peru, and Turkey.

Parliamentary Program in 2019

In developing its latest strategic plan, the Center's Board of Trustees emphasized the importance of parliamentary programs that link Members of Congress to their counterparts from Open World countries. A goal was then set that 15% of delegates would be Members of Parliament, parliamentary staff or regional legislators or their staff. We met that goal in 2019. The interaction between our Parliamentarians and Members of Congress created numerous opportunities for unfiltered dialogue between the U.S. Congress and Parliaments from Open World countries. It also provided timely discussion of the political and economic conditions affecting these countries. Overall, fifteen parliamentary delegations consisting of 89 participants from ten countries (Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan) traveled to the United States for home stays from Olympia, WA to Burlington, VT and ten states in between.

The Open World Leadership Center made great strides in 2019 to further strengthen its relationship with the U.S. Congress and further engage Members of Congress in our parliamentary programs. To that end, 2019 was the first year that the Center cooperated with congressional caucuses to put on joint events to introduce Open World delegations of Members of Parliament. In November 2019, the Center paired with the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues to hold a reception for a delegation of Members of Parliament from Armenia. Also in November 2019, the Center paired with the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus to hold reception for a delegation of newly elected members of the Ukrainian Parliament. The Center plans to increase the number of congressional events held in conjunction with congressional caucuses and committees in 2020. The Center is also increasing ties with the Parliaments in other participating countries. In 2019, the Center cemented a close relationship with the Parliament of Georgia to such an extent that the Secretary General and the Center are in the process of finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Parliament towards improving the functioning of the administration of both legislative bodies, bearing in mind the importance of bilateral relations and recognizing the will to further enhance mutual cooperation. According to the Chief of Staff of the Vice Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia:

“Open World’s Parliamentary exchange program has been the most successful program ever in its history.”

Open World's Parliamentary program is profoundly effective because it provides the participants the opportunity to present their country and its issues to Members of Congress. The relationships established during this program leads to great relationships with Open World parliamentary alumni, who are then eager to nominate other strong candidates and to help develop programmatic themes based on the necessities of their country. This one-on-one contact and unrivaled access, the sharing of meals, and the fact that the Center individually tailors each program has made these exchanges beneficial for both the visiting Parliamentarians and the Members of Congress with whom they meet and whom the Open World Leadership Center serves. The Center plans to continue and enhance this important programming in 2020.

Following is a country by country review of the seventeen nations that participated in Open World in 2019 and for which programming is planned for 2020.

Russia

From 1999 through 2019, the Open World Leadership Center hosted 20,134 young Russian leaders. In calendar year 2019, the Center hosted 341 Russian participants in 57 exchanges. Delegates came from 67 of Russia's 89 administrative subjects, included a wide range of ethnic groups, and were hosted in 42 host communities in 30 U.S. states. Women made up 56% of the delegates.

The Center has maintained a robust program in Russia, despite the continued deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations. In 2019, the Center welcomed its 20,000th Russian participant. The alumni community in the country continues to show a willingness to meet with their American counterparts in Russia, and recommend the program to their colleagues and professional contacts. Furthermore, American diplomats often reach out to the Center for contacts in cities that they are visiting because they know that Open World alumni are leaders in their communities, are objective and forward thinking. Also, because of their firsthand experience in America, they are confident enough to meet with U.S. embassy officials without fear of rebuke.

In 2020, as the U.S.-Russia bilateral relationship is likely to remain severely strained, Open World programs will focus on maintaining partnerships, increasing people-to-people contacts in order to counter disinformation and to foster greater mutual understanding. We will prioritize programs that reinforce long standing partnerships and that further newly formed ones, such as sister city relationships and Rotary club partnerships. The program will counter anti-American propaganda and promote a positive image of the United States by linking professionals with their U.S. counterparts and providing a host family experience for each participant. Program themes will also focus on areas of mutual interest, such as health issues, business and innovation, entrepreneurship, education, national parks/conservation, and inclusion. Many program themes will also include local legislators and those seeking to run for local office.

Open World alumni occupy a wide array of positions at various levels across the country and are willing and eager to help promote a positive U.S.-Russia relationship. For example, a delegation of zoologists visited the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Nebraska in September 2018. The delegation included two employees of the Moscow Zoo, one of which was promoted to Scientific Director not long after completing the program. While at the Zoo in Omaha, local staff mentioned to the group that they had been trying to acquire an Amur tiger from Russia and how difficult it was. The Open World delegates from the Moscow Zoo pledged to help on their side. After returning to Moscow, the alumni advocated for the transfer of a tiger to the Omaha Zoo and the process quickly re-started, after having been stalled for some time. In the summer of 2019, the tiger was transferred to Moscow and in November, the tiger arrived in Omaha. This is a great example of American and Russian scientists working together on a conservation program to save the Amur tiger, an endangered species.

Another strong area of cooperation between the Center's host communities and our Russian delegations stems from sister city and other existing partnerships. In 2019, there were many events held that showed the strong dedication each city has to maintain, or revitalize, their

partnerships. The Zelenograd-Tulsa Sister City partnership was reinvigorated in March, when an event was held to organize the Zelenograd City Cultural Center, with 32 participants in attendance, including alumni, city administration officials, local NGO leaders, and local media and journalists. A videoconference was held to include their counterparts in Tulsa, and they decided to set up a Tulsa informational stand in Zelenograd's local museum. A delegation from Portland, ME traveled to Archangelsk over the summer, where they held 5 Sister City partnership-focused events for alumni. The events served to strengthen relationships forged while on the Open World program. Another successful partnership Cleveland-Volgograd Sister City partnership held an alumni conference in Volgograd, which was attended by alumni and representatives from several other Sister City committees, including Yaroslavl, Archangelsk, and Vladimir. This event completely revitalized the Cleveland-Volgograd Sister City partnership. The success of these partnerships comes from the genuine desire of Open World delegates and their American partners to continue a friendship that grows stronger with each year that new groups visit their Sister Cities.

In December 2019, based on the recommendations of the Open World 20th Anniversary Symposium, 17 Russian alumni of the Open World program gathered to create an Open World Program Alumni Association. The group formed a council, elected a chairman, and are planning their first formal meeting in the first quarter of 2020.

Ukraine

From 2003 through 2019, the Center hosted 4,037 Ukrainian emerging leaders. In calendar year 2019, the Center hosted 321 Ukrainian participants from all current unoccupied regions of Ukraine. They were hosted in 47 host communities in 29 U.S. states, and women made up 61 percent of the delegates. The Center's objective in Ukraine is to increase exposure to democratic processes by providing a new generation of Ukrainian leaders with the vision, skills, and tools needed to develop their country at this critical juncture in its history and while it faces Russian aggression in its Southern and Eastern regions. Open World programming in Ukraine is aimed at furthering the reform efforts of the new government; furthering legislative reform; assisting in the decentralization process; promoting the rule of law; improving transparency in the public and private sectors; responding to the humanitarian needs of a war-torn society; and providing a secure safety net to a population demanding change.

In the past year, the Center has seen many of its alumni take critical positions in the new government and become the vanguard on reform. Among the Center's more than 4,000 alumni in Ukraine are the Minister and Deputy Minister of Healthcare; the Deputy Minister of Veteran Affairs/Temporarily Occupied Territories; two Deputy Ministers of Education and Science; the Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports; and the First Deputy Prosecutor General. The Center also works closely with four additional alumni that are close advisors to Ukraine's President. In addition, twenty-one Members of the Parliament of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada) are alumni, including fifteen new Members. These alumni include the Heads of the Committees on Legal

Policy, Education, and on Science and Innovation; the First Deputy Heads of the Committees on Anticorruption Issues and on Budgeting; and the Secretaries of the Committees on Foreign Policy, Inter-parliamentary Cooperation, and Health. In addition, five Open World alumni have been appointed to the newly formed High Anti-Corruption Court, three in the General Chamber and two in the Appeals division.

The power of the Center's alumni network can be gauged by the success of recent alumni programs such as those on Health Care/Medical Reform Issues, Veterans Affairs, and Decentralization/Economic Development in Eastern Ukraine, with the first two being larger Kyiv-based activities and the other being an innovative program held in Mariupol. All together, the Center conducted 11 alumni events in Ukraine throughout 2019 with the participation of more than 450 program alumni. At the February 2019 Medical Reform event, the former Acting Minister of Healthcare of Ukraine, Ulana Suprun (an active nominator of the program), expressed her admiration for Open World program alumni and spoke about the long-term successful cooperation the Ministry of Health has had with the Center, even indicating that she specifically looks for Open World program alumni when she is hiring. Outstanding Open World alumni served as speakers and they delivered various views on the timely issue of medical reform and held active discussions with the program attendees. At the Veterans Affairs event in October 2019, Open World alumna, Member of Parliament and wounded warrior Yana Zinkevych spoke about her Open World program experience and shared how her participation gave her the courage to join the election campaign and run successfully to become a Member of Parliament. Ms. Zinkevych was followed by Deputy Minister of Veteran Affairs/Temporarily Occupied Territories and wounded warrior Oleksandr Tereshchenko who spoke about how the Open World program inspired him on his professional accomplishments having risen from the director of a small NGO in Mykolaiv to the Deputy Head of the Academy of Patrol Police to his current position.

Open World program results are widespread among emerging Ukrainian leaders in many sectors. Open World program alumni teams have received U.S. Embassy grants aimed at transparency in educational budgeting, empowering youth in remote areas, supporting socially responsible youth startups, promoting women in politics, and furthering best practices in education and academic integrity. From the NGO Director who worked on developing and transforming the war-torn Donetsk region being awarded an Honorable Service medal personally by President Zelensky on Freedom Square on Independence Day, to small-scale woman agriculture leaders expanding the use of greenhouses in the village of Levkiv in the Zhytomyr region to an alumna winning international grants to install solar panels on the roof of a rural school in the Poltava region and to organize a camp for climate activists, the Center is proud of the achievements of its more than 4,000 alumni in Ukraine. The Center hosted its 4,000th participant from Ukraine in October 2019. This delegate from Kharkiv was also able to participate in the celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the Cincinnati-Kharkiv sister city partnership, which the Center has been supporting since it added Ukraine in 2003.

Due to Ukraine's strategic significance, the Center regularly consults with House and Senate Ukraine Caucus members and works closely with the leadership of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv to design programming that is responsive to the needs of a new government promising reform and that is still facing aggression and the occupation of about seven percent (7%) of its territory. In 2020, the Center will focus its programming on new Members of the Ukrainian Parliament/Legislative Processes, Decentralization/Regional Government, Health System and Education Reform, Rule of Law, Media/Investigative Journalism, Minority Inclusion Issues, Anti-Corruption Efforts, Entrepreneurship and Business Development, Agriculture, Energy Issues, Veteran's Programs and other Social Safety Net Issues. All programming is aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and promoting good governance.

As part of the 2020 planning efforts, the Center is embarking on an initiative to provide as many of the 323 new Members of Ukraine's Parliament as calendars permit with programming aimed at providing them exposure to the U.S. Congress and legislative processes at all levels of governance. Four new members of Ukraine's Parliament, including two high-ranking members representing President Zelensky's party, one representing the "Fatherland" party, and one independent representative of the "For the Future" faction, visited with the Center for four days in November 2019, to work on the design of this ambitious initiative. The Open World Leadership Center's Executive Director Jane Sargus and Deputy Executive Director Maura Shelden followed up this visit by traveling to Ukraine in December on a program planning mission and met with the leadership at the U.S. Mission, the Speaker of the Parliament, and other stakeholders, such as the USAID implementer of the Responsible Accountable Democracy Assembly (RADA) program, with which the Center has worked very closely.

Armenia

From 2011 through 2019, the Center hosted 157 delegates from Armenia. Many emerging Armenian leaders have been introduced to their American counterparts and observed firsthand the power of civic engagement and accountable governance. With the Center's very short programming timeline, we are able to adapt themes to the current situations in Yerevan. Following Armenia's Velvet Revolution, the Open World program for Armenia was configured to reflect the needs of that country's new government and its citizens.

After the December 2018 parliamentary elections, the Center saw an important opportunity to bring newly elected Members of Parliament on the program to meet their U.S. counterparts. In November 2019, the Center welcomed its first parliamentary delegation after the Velvet Revolution in a program that was highly touted by Members of the Congressional Armenian Caucus. The Center plans to continue this parliamentary program in 2020, focusing on newly elected members. It is an opportunity to expose these members to new mechanisms of law making and deepen their knowledge of the United States legislative process in this crucial time in Armenia's history.

Following the peaceful transition of power during the Velvet Revolution, a new generation of young and dedicated professionals has moved into key roles in the government, and Open World alumni have flourished and risen to leadership positions. During the Velvet Revolution, Open World alumnus Alen Simonyan played a very active role in the peaceful revolution. In December 2018, he was again elected to Parliament and in January 2019, he was elected to be Vice President of the National Assembly. Mane Tandilyan was the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs in 2018 and now serves as a Member of Parliament. Vahe Danielyan, who participated on the program as a parliamentary staffer, has been promoted to Advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister.

In 2020, we will continue to bring emerging leaders from Armenia on the Open World program as we have seen how much of an impact they have in shaping the future of that country.

Azerbaijan

From 2007 through 2019, the Center hosted 337 delegates from Azerbaijan. Delegates from Azerbaijan benefit immensely from participating in the Open World program. Open World is working to enhance women's role in society since women face numerous social barriers in Azerbaijan. Our programs dedicated to all-women participants include Women in STEM and Women in Politics and Civil Society. Farida Asgarzade, who participated on the Women in Politics and Civil Society program, was recently nominated for the "Influencer of the Year" award at Innovation Week 2019 in Baku. She is the founder of the Human Foundation platform, the director of the Center for Social Business, a teacher at the Business School at Azerbaijan State University of Economics, and is a social entrepreneur.

Open World programming in Azerbaijan is also aimed at recognizing those who are underserved and underrepresented, including the disabled, refugees, and Internally Displaced Persons. Elman Suleymanov, who participated on a Disability Advocacy and Reform program, received a grant for a project that designed and produced a special guide for people with visual disabilities. This guide included a printed braille alphabet, audio books, and covered the topics of medical first-aid and instructions for responses to natural disasters for people with visual disabilities. The guide was circulated among people with visual disabilities and state libraries. Elman, who is visually impaired, was greatly appreciative that he was able to participate on the Open World program. He felt that his participation helped him grow as a professional and boosted his confidence.

A fellow extraordinary alumni from the Disability Advocacy and Reform program is Nihad Gulamzada. He is the CEO and Founder of the first inclusive theatre consisting of actors with disabilities in Azerbaijan and the Caucasus. In 2019, Nihad was able to gain government support and organize his productions in partnership with various ministries. Nihad partnered with fellow Open World alumnus Elman Suleymanov by handing out copies of the guide for people

with visual disabilities to guests of the theater performances. Nihad is currently running for Parliament in the February 2020 parliamentary elections.

Belarus

In 2004, and from 2017 through 2019, the Center hosted 54 delegates from Belarus. The program has focused on fostering a stronger civil society, economic resilience, issues of good governance and transparency, respect for human rights, and countering misinformation. Program themes have focused on healthcare, intellectual property rights, marketing, tourism, alternative energy, media, and entrepreneurship. The year 2020 marks four straight years of Open World programs with Belarus.

The Open World alumni community in Belarus is growing and becoming more active. In May 2019, Program Manager Matt Tucker traveled to Minsk to meet with alumni, embassy staff, and nominators from the public and private sectors. During a small alumni event held around the visit, fellow Open World alumni from different parts of the country and representing different professional fields, were able to meet, share experiences, and discuss ways of collaborating amongst themselves.

A delegate who participated in a recent media literacy program has already made plans to invite a professional speaker from her local program in Detroit, MI to visit Minsk and conduct a series of speaking events and outreach programs on media literacy at her institution, Press Club.

Estonia

From 2013 through 2019, the Center brought 26 delegates from the Estonian judiciary. These delegations were hosted by federal judges that were identified in cooperation with the International Judicial Relations Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States. The Judicial Training Department of the Supreme Court of Estonia supported 90% of the cost of this programming. Federal district judges in Nevada, Maryland, Ohio, North Carolina, and Mississippi have hosted their Estonian counterparts. This year, in response to a request from a Member of Congress and due to the critical nature of the programming, the Center's program for Estonia will feature a delegation of six Cybersecurity professionals. The Center is working closely with the staff at the U.S. Embassy in Estonia to design this important and timely program.

Georgia

From 2007 through 2019, the Center hosted 746 delegates from Georgia. The Center's programming for Georgia is planned in close consultation with the U.S. Embassy in that country and has focused on Responsive Governance, Social/Ethnic Inclusion, Rule of Law and Economic Development/Cultural Heritage.

In 2019, the Center cemented a close relationship with the Parliament of Georgia to such an extent that the Secretary General and the Center are in the process of finalizing a broad Memorandum of Understanding with the Parliament “towards improving the functioning of the administration of both legislative bodies, bearing in mind the importance of bilateral relations and recognizing the will to further enhance mutual cooperation.” Through this MoU, the Parliament of Georgia will cost-share several delegations of leading Parliamentary staffers by paying all airfares for such delegations, and will provide the nominations/candidates for future planned Parliamentary delegations. According to the Chief of Staff of the Vice Speaker, Open World’s “Parliamentary exchange program has been the most successful program ever in its history.” The Chief Specialist of the Parliament’s Department of International relations, following a Dobbs Ferry-based program that featured a private lunch with the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, reported, “The program was excellently arranged. Meetings were brilliant. All the interests that the delegates were expecting were met.”

In mid-November 2019, Member of Parliament and Open World alumnus George Khatidze (Member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the E.U.-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee, the Foreign Relations Committee, the Legal Issues Committee and the Permanent Parliamentary Council on Open Governance) joined us in Washington, D.C. He reported on the impact his 2017 Open World program had on him, on several meetings that he had with Open World delegations before their departure for U.S. programming, and with Open World hosts when they visited Georgia.

One area of programming that is producing extremely meaningful results is the work the Center is doing to support inclusion among different nationalities, religions and lifestyle choices in this very diverse country that has witnessed ethnic, religious and social unrest. One alumna has risen to head the Public Movement Multinational Georgia and is now a Visiting Lecturer at Ilia State University. Her programs include promoting the wider engagement of ethnic minorities (particularly the youth of the Samtskhe-Javakhet region) in participatory democracy, and working to mitigate and enhance communication between ethnic minority constituencies. In another project, she is working to improve the peace building and mediation capacities of the youth, media professionals, and representatives of community-based civil society organizations representing ethnic Armenian and Azeri communities to mitigate tensions between them. This alumna is also a regular contributor and organizer of timely European-based activities on behalf of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, a unique multi-layered regional civil society platform aimed at promoting European integration and facilitating reforms and democratic transformation in the six Eastern Partnership countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Another alumnus in this field recently finished a Fulbright Graduate Student Program in conflict transformation and then went on to work with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to design an approach for its new project to promote civic and political

awareness among youth in minority regions. Another alumnus founded the organization “Regional Empowerment for Democracy” which is actively working to improve the participation of ethnic and remotely based minorities in democratic processes, and recently one alumna participated in a program ran by the Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung program in Brussels aimed at preparing young citizens to have a better understanding of European Union practices, policies and ideals.

Finally, an alumna was recently named to Forbes’ 2019 30 Under 30 Europe list for her outstanding tourism and wine company. She produces four varieties of wine that are all native to Georgia and she recently started exporting to the United States. Her current goal is add more acreage to her farmland and increase her production capacity.

Kazakhstan

From 2008 through 2019, the Center hosted 539 delegates from Kazakhstan. The Open World program has impacted participants from all over Kazakhstan and across a wide range of sectors, from Members of Parliament and Supreme Court Justices to local entrepreneurs and leaders of NGOs.

The Open World program in Kazakhstan focuses on promoting more effective, accountable, and transparent government institutions in all three branches of government at the national and local levels, as well as building a stronger and more engaged civil society. Recent program themes have included: Members of Parliament, parliamentary staffers, judges, local legislators, and librarians. In 2020, the Center will continue working with parliamentary staffers, judges, and local legislators, while adding programs for English teachers and on NGO management.

The Open World alumni community in Kazakhstan has been very active. Several alumni have taken up leadership positions in regional alumni networks for past participants of U.S. government exchange programs. In 2019, the U.S. embassy funded four Open World alumni projects through the Alumni Small Grants program. One project was aimed at supporting youth in their region and received a grant. The project focuses on conducting courses for minors at the Center for the Adaptation of Minors in Petropavlovsk. The courses include lectures on human rights and children’s rights, media literacy and online safety, career counseling, and personal development. They also provide mentoring to participants and involve students in volunteering.

After returning to Kazakhstan, Open World alumnus Emin Askerov founded GreenTal, which provides employment and job training for people with disabilities. His tireless work in this field is now promoted all over Kazakhstan. Last year he won an Alumni Small Grant to travel to the regions and share his experiences.

Another open World alumnus helped found a sister city partnership between Pavlodar and Madison, Wisconsin. Since then, he has worked closely with his U.S. counterparts and organized six Kazakh delegations to travel to Wisconsin and hosted four American delegations through the Citizen-to-Citizen Diplomacy program he founded with his partner from Wisconsin,

Gary Kirking. They also created a sister school partnership between a rural school from Pavlodar and a rural school from Wisconsin. They are proud that this partnership has been thriving for 10 years.

Kosovo

From 2014 through 2019, the Center hosted 158 delegates from Kosovo. The Open World program in Kosovo works to enhance transparency and reduce corruption with past and future programs focusing on the use of public funds and rule of law program, specifically highlighting economic-related crimes. The Center is excited to reinstate a program for Members of Parliament from Kosovo in 2020 to help these elected officials work to improve accountability. We hoped to bring a parliamentary delegation in 2019, but with the resignation of the prime minister, we had to move the delegation into early 2020. We adapt to situations in our countries and are able to move and add programs as need be.

The two Open World program delegations that traveled in 2019 are eager to adapt what they learned in the U.S. to their communities in Kosovo. After traveling on a program focusing on Energy Independence-Integrating Renewable Energy, one alumnus was so inspired that he is writing a policy report to implement what he learned about during his meetings in Utah, including providing several electric car charging spots around Pristina and making the energy free of charge.

A delegation focusing on Economic Development-Community-led Tourism showed interest in pursuing future partnerships and projects with their counterparts in Washington. Two alumni have begun an initiative to expand international tourism to Kosovo. They used new ideas that they gained from their program and motivated people to apply as volunteers for an International Festival of Medieval Arts. They have also initiated discussions on environmental issues and the creation of a pedestrian zone in their city to create a tourist hotspot to increase economic development in the area.

Kyrgyzstan

From 2007 through 2019, the Center hosted 530 delegates from Kyrgyzstan. The Open World Program in Kyrgyzstan has made great strides in enhancing transparency and accountability in the legislative process by bringing at least one parliamentary delegation each year. A delegation of Kyrgyz Parliamentarians, while visiting their sister state of Montana, were presented with a copy of the Montana state constitution by the President of the Montana State Senate. A short time later when one of the Kyrgyz MPs found himself responsible for rewriting a portion of the Kyrgyz constitution on the judiciary, he drew on his experience and used the Montana constitution as a model.

Following Member of Parliament Elvira Surabaldieva's participation in the program, she returned home and with the additional knowledge and leadership skills that she gained, was

elected as the Chair of the Women's Forum. Traditionally this seat was taken by older women MPs. In addition to her regular lawmaking responsibilities, Elvira relentlessly defends gender equality. She has convinced her male colleagues to support a law against domestic violence, and she pushed for gender quotas for elected positions at the local level. Currently, she is working on legislation against sexual harassment that she hopes will pass before the October 2020 elections. Though Kyrgyzstan has made strides towards greater gender equality in recent years, the country continues to struggle with ingrained patriarchal attitudes. Seeking to raise awareness of the consequences of sexual harassment, Elvira partnered with USAID, her fellow women MPs, activists and celebrities to produce a short video featuring examples of harassment: in the workplace, online, and on the street. Public reaction to the anti-harassment video was overwhelmingly positive. The video went viral on Facebook and was uploaded onto the Forum's website.

Moldova

From 2007 through 2019, the Center hosted 494 delegates from Moldova. The Open World program in Moldova has focused on parliamentary exchanges, rule of law, economic development, and partnerships, all aimed at strengthening institutions, fighting corruption, countering misinformation, and developing civil society.

The outcome of the February 2019 parliamentary elections in Moldova produced an unusual coalition government, and resulted in 57 newly elected MPs out of the 101 members. The Open World program for parliamentarians will continue the dialogue between legislators from Moldova and their counterparts in the U.S. Congress. The program reinforces effective and democratic governance practices, and allows Members of the United States Congress to discuss timely issues such European integration, countering disinformation, and combating corruption with their colleagues from Moldova. The Open World judge-to-judge program for Moldova resumed in 2019, after being on hold in 2018 due to the annulment of the Chisinau Mayoral election results. This program pairs Moldovan judges with a U.S. federal judge to share best practices in jurisprudence, ethics, and the importance of an independent judiciary, all of which are essential to justice sector reform in Moldova.

In 2020 the Center will expand program for Members of Parliament and parliamentary staffers from Moldova, while also continuing to support the North Carolina-Moldova State Partnership program with a program focused on regional economic development and waste management.

The North Carolina-Moldova Partnership has expanded programs in English language education, conducted a librarian exchange, pharmacy school exchange, and most recently a nursing school exchange through the Open World program. With the help of the Partnership, the medical university in Chisinau was able to create the first Bachelor of Science program in nursing. In May 2019, an Open World Program Manager travelled to Moldova with a delegation from North Carolina led by the North Carolina Secretary of State, Elaine Marshall, as part of the Center's efforts to support this dynamic partnership.

Open World alumni in the legislative and judicial branches in Moldova are working to implement many reforms across the country, both at the national and local level. A recent MP, who participated on the program after being newly elected in February 2019, was so inspired after a meeting with the Senate Ethics Committee that she took a copy of the ethics rules manual back to Moldova, made a speech about the program on the floor of the Moldovan Parliament, and is currently working to establish a subcommittee on ethics in parliament.

Mongolia

From 2011 through 2019, the Center hosted 123 delegates from Mongolia. The Open World program in Mongolia focuses on Parliamentary and Rule of Law exchanges. In 2019, the Center signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Mongolian Prosecutor General's Office to host programs for Mongolian prosecutors. In addition to hosting programs for Members of Parliament, judges, and prosecutors, in 2020 the Center will also include a program for court administrative staff.

In September of 2019, a Member of the Judicial General Council of Mongolia (JGC) visited the United States and signed the 2020 MOU between the JGC and the Open World Leadership Center to continue the partnership to host programs for Mongolian Judges.

Alumni from Mongolia have made many achievements since participating in the program. For example, after being impressed by the transparency and openness of U.S. courts, delegates returned to Mongolia with new ideas on how to reform the court's interaction with the citizenry. Today, court decisions in Mongolia are public and the court offers multiple ways for citizens to observe trials. In addition, many delegates have been so impressed by the standard of ethics and accountability of their U.S. federal judge hosts that they returned home to become trainers among their peers on judicial ethics.

North Macedonia

In 2019, the Center hosted its first delegations of Members of Parliament and Judges from North Macedonia. To date, the Center has hosted 15 delegates from North Macedonia, including three parliamentarians in a 2014 joint delegation in cooperation with the House Democracy Partnership. The Open World program in North Macedonia is focused on strengthening the relationship between the North Macedonian Parliament and the U.S. Congress, as well as sharing the U.S. experience in constituent relations, oversight functions, and the importance of separation of powers in a democratic and transparent government. The judicial program is aimed at strengthening the rule of law and supporting key judicial reforms.

The Parliamentary program took place in February not long after the country's name change and signing of the NATO accession protocol. During the program in Washington, the delegation had the opportunity to meet with senior staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to discuss the U.S. process of ratifying North Macedonia's NATO accession treaty. The delegation was also able to meet with six Members of Congress to discuss the importance of

NATO and EU integration, and what remaining reforms need to take place. A few months after the program, one of the MPs was appointed Minister of Local Government.

The judges who participated on the program in 2019 were hosted in Oklahoma City, OK by U.S. Magistrate Judge Suzanne Mitchell. The judges returned home impressed and looking forward to implementing and sharing with their peers the experience gained on the program to advance North Macedonia's judicial independence, professional standards, and ethics. Judge Mitchell also accepted an invitation by the delegation to visit North Macedonia in December 2019 to present professional development programs for judges and other justice officials.

Serbia

From 2012 through 2019, the Center hosted 532 delegates from Serbia. The Open World program in Serbia aims to strengthen democracy and the legislative process, and also focuses on combating corruption. The program also reinforces the Rule of Law sector by bringing judges working on domestic violence and judicial efficiency in criminal proceedings. Joining in on Serbia's fight against corruption, one Open World alumna, a judge, will be leading a training course through the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program. This training will help to support Serbia's newly formed anti-corruption and economic crimes prosecutorial and police units.

Another exemplary alumna from Serbia is the acting Secretary General of the European Movement in Serbia, who is responsible for the successful implementation of the "Share Your Knowledge: Become a Mentor" project, a unique mentorship program designed for women. The main goal of this project is to empower and enhance young women's capacities and skills by gathering expert leaders from different professions to share their knowledge and experiences with young women with similar interests.

An Open World alumna from 2013 was granted \$19,894 from U.S. Embassy Belgrade for her "Women Entrepreneurship Start-Up Accelerator" project taking place from September 2019 through March 2020. The project involved the launch of the first accelerator for women entrepreneurs in Serbia with the goal of providing a complex set of services and a platform for learning, sharing, networking and having access to venture capital funds. Participants are educated in developing business ideas, business idea marketing, business incubation and business acceleration, with the goal of generating at least five business ideas which will be presented to potential investors.

Tajikistan

From 2011 through 2019, the Center hosted 541 delegates from Tajikistan. In 2020, the Open World program in Tajikistan will continue its work with the Parliament of Tajikistan, while also hosting programs for government managers, in support of higher education reform, and supporting women entrepreneurs. These programs are aimed at promoting more effective,

accountable and transparent institutions, as well as investing in Tajikistan's human capital, ailing education system, and the untapped potential of women, who are afforded far fewer opportunities than men.

Open World alumni in Tajikistan are extremely active, and regularly develop new projects while also sharing their Open World experience with others. In 2019, the Embassy approved nine Open World alumni projects for grants, which accounts for 33% of the total approved project proposals for that U.S. Embassy. The Center's Alumni Outreach Assistant traveled to Tajikistan in October 2019 for an Open World alumni conference and met alumni that are working on projects they implemented after traveling to the United States. Many alumni, as well as U.S. Embassy staff attended the conference.

An Open World alumna from 2019 is one of the most successful women leaders in Tajikistan. In 2013, she established her own Public Organization "IDEA" that provides a team of experts to provide women with the necessary skills and information they need to find proper jobs, expand their businesses, and find their place in society. After her Open World program, she felt more confident in her role as a woman business leader. Meeting her American counterparts inspired her to implement more large-scale projects in Tajikistan. In 2019, she implemented three projects: a 21-day leadership and entrepreneurship development project; a collaboration between her organization and the Embassy of Great Britain; and, the forming of a partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development focusing on female entrepreneurs.

One alumnus, who was hosted in Sacramento in 2016 on a volunteerism theme, was so inspired by what he saw in the U.S. that he created the "Open Hut" project when he returned back to Tajikistan. The alumnus realized more needed to be done in his small rural community to help children with disabilities. With an alumni grant, he was able to create the Open Hut project which provides lawyers, medicine, and therapy for children with disabilities and their parents. He is working to combat the stigma that surrounds children with disabilities and their families in rural and very religious areas of Tajikistan and change the mentality that leads to children with disabilities being "hidden" from public exposure. His goal for the future is to continue working with children with disabilities and create recreational clubs for them to improve their lives.

Turkmenistan

From 2008 through 2017, the Center hosted 197 delegates from Turkmenistan. Open World is planning to resume programming in Turkmenistan in 2020, after not hosting programs for the past two years. This year's programs will focus on sustainable tourism in rural environments and on sports for youth with disabilities, which will also support the sister city relationship between Albuquerque and Ashgabat. These programs will help to increase Turkmenistan's integration into regional and global economic markets, as well as increase commercial ties between the United States and Turkmenistan, improving economic stability and the quality of life.

Uzbekistan

From 2003 through 2019, the Center hosted 185 delegates from Uzbekistan. The Open World program in Uzbekistan is focused on supporting the robust reform efforts of the new President and the government, primarily in the areas of parliamentary governance, rule of law, and economic development.

In 2020, the Center will expand its work with the Uzbek Parliament by hosting two delegations of Members of Parliament and one delegation of parliamentary staffers. In addition, programming will be conducted in e-governance, transparency and governmental accountability, and agriculture in the modern market.

Last year's delegation of Members of Parliament from Uzbekistan were able to give Members of Congress firsthand actionable information about key developments in that country and provided an update on the progress of comprehensive reforms initiated by President Mirziyoyev. This group of MPs was also particularly interested in how Congress serves their constituents, and was able to return home with a wealth of new ideas. As the new President has called on the Uzbek Parliament to be more accountable, these interactions and sharing of best practices has inspired many of the new and less experienced MPs to return home and implement reforms.

Open World alumni in Uzbekistan include senators, mayors, the Deputy Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade, and the Deputy Minister of Innovative Development. In spring 2019, the current Chairman of the Senate met with the Center's leadership in Washington and subsequently nominated a delegation of women leaders to participate in the program.

Conclusion

Before closing this statement about the Open World Leadership Center, it is important to talk about the continuing participation of Russian delegates once their program is over. Russia continues to play a critical role in events in the region, in Europe, and its reach extends much further. Kremlin control of media within Russian borders, and the very effective disinformation campaign in neighboring states, has brought the intended results – strong internal support for the Russian president and for his policies; a resurgent pride in Russia's expanded role on the world stage; and a reassertion of its spheres of influence. A few years ago, the United States had more than 300 active exchange programs with Russia. Today there are just a few, and only one, the Open World program, has the means to reach throughout this vast country and to attract rising leaders who might otherwise eschew a U.S.-sponsored program.

Ukraine is entering its sixth year of conflict with the Russian Federation and its sixth year of sporadic, though effective, reforms. While relations with Russia and between Russia and Ukraine remain unsettled, there looms the issue of how the United States Congress can continue to support Ukraine while maintaining an authentic conversation with the people of Russia.

Our Russian, Ukrainian, and other delegates, who stay with American families for their intense ten-day program, return with an understanding of a people in the United States who share many of the same aspirations they have: a prosperous, peaceful country; hope that their children will fulfill their potential; and a desire to understand one another. With at least a third of the delegates under the age of 30, and recognized as leaders among their peers, these Open World program participants can explain to their broad range of contacts that the United States is not as portrayed in the mass media, but nuanced as is their own country.

The Open World program, in some ways, is a last hope for cooperation with Russia and is a lifeline to democratic processes in Ukraine. As a resource for Congress and the nation, the Open World program is a crucial American effort to sustain cooperation with Russia and to build a future relationship. Our alumni there, 20,000 strong, fill important positions in all regions, and consists of dedicated professions in key areas of development. In Ukraine and throughout Eurasia, the Center has bolstered relations between these Parliaments and Members of Congress, and supported critical reform efforts. Congress is right to be proud of what they funded and supported.

Advancing democracy and strengthening civil society worldwide is a strategic long-term investment in our nation's security and a crucial source of America's influence and strength in the world. The Center is committed to these efforts recognizing the possibility of uncertainty and setbacks, and understanding that progress requires unwavering dedication to the enduring principles and goals that make the United States a country that others look to with admiration.

Russia and Ukraine are keys to the future of the region. By supporting reformers and Euro-integrationists in Ukraine, by supporting those engaged in countering disinformation, and by helping committed officials use the laws on decentralization, health, and educational reform succeed, we in a small way help balance the overwhelming advantage Russia enjoys at this moment. Our intertwined interests and rivalries with Russia will not fade, and we need to be smart enough to engage the post-Putin generation for they will soon enough influence whether their country continues its role as a destabilizing force or cooperates with the community of nations in Europe and Eurasia.

The Open World program has been carefully honed through the years based on an ongoing and constant review of the programming. Bearing in mind that quality will not be compromised, the Center continues the trend of reducing unit cost per appropriated dollar; of adjusting the strategies for nominations to bring legislators as a significant portion of our delegates; of working with many host organizations in all fifty states to make the programs highly relevant; and of fostering partnerships and projects involving alumni and hosts. To that end, Congressional leadership in supporting the Center and its highly-regarded Open World program is paramount to the Center's continued success.