



**U.S. CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING ON  
GLOBAL SERVICE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM ACT (S.1464)  
MAY 24<sup>TH</sup>, 2007**

Remarks by Senator Russell Feingold (D-WI):

Yesterday, I was pleased to introduce, along with my colleagues Senators Coleman, Voinovich, Casey, Menendez, Lautenberg, and Cochran, the Global Service Fellowships Act. This important bill provides more Americans with the opportunity to volunteer overseas and strengthen our existing international education and exchange system. I believe the U.S. government needs to take a greater leadership role in providing opportunities for U.S. citizens to volunteer overseas and our bill will enhance U.S. efforts to be a global leader in people-to-people engagement.

Before I continue, I would like to briefly thank Brookings and the International Volunteer Working Group for their efforts thus far. It is your expertise and extensive network of volunteers who will make this bill -- and this program -- a success. I recognize the hard work and dedication you have put into international volunteer programming and I truly appreciate your efforts. The fact that your networks of volunteers are so active, energized, and extensive, indicates the deep commitment of U.S. citizens to working with others overseas. The extensive nature of the networks also indicates the true need for a significant expansion of federally supported opportunities to volunteer internationally.

People-to-people engagement is one of the United States' most effective public diplomacy tools and, today more than ever, we need to be investing in every opportunity to improve upon how our country is perceived around the globe.

Studies have shown that, in areas where U.S. citizens have volunteered their time, money, and services, opinions of the United States have notably improved. A 2006 Terror Free Tomorrow poll found that, "In Indonesia, almost two years after the tsunami, American aid to tsunami victims continues to be the single biggest factor resulting in favorable opinion towards the United States. Almost 60 percent of Indonesians surveyed nationwide in August 2006 said that American assistance made them favorable to the United States. This number has remained solid following tsunami relief, despite a growing number of Indonesians who oppose American-led efforts to fight terrorism."

Greater investment in volunteer opportunities has significant potential to improve the image of the U.S. overseas and while there are many good programs already in place -- such as the Peace Corps and other education and exchange programs administered by the State Department -- we can and should be doing more.

Not only does international volunteering improve the perception of the U.S. overseas, it greatly benefits the volunteers themselves. Participants are able to broaden their understanding of other cultures, which is an important component of diverse and democratic societies and of an increasingly interconnected world.

The Global Service Fellowship Program Act not only provides more opportunities for people-to-people engagement, but it also reduces barriers that average citizens face when trying to volunteer internationally in two key areas. First, the Global Service Fellowship Act reduces financial barriers by awarding fellowships that can be applied towards airfare, housing, or program costs, to name a few examples. By providing financial assistance, the Global Service Fellowship program opens the door for every American to be a program participant – not just those with the resources to pay for it.

Second, this bill offers flexibility in the length of time for which an individual can volunteer. I often hear from constituents who do not seek opportunities to participate in federal volunteer programs because they cannot leave their jobs or family for years at a time. The Global Service Fellowship Program provides a commonsense approach to the time constraints of many Americans who seek volunteer opportunities by offering a timeframe that works for them – from a month up to a year.

Not only does this bill open the door for any U.S. citizen to apply for fellowship consideration, it allows Congress to be part of the decision-making process. The Global Service Fellowship Program integrates members of Congress by calling on them to nominate applicants to the Department of State for consideration. Through this process, members of Congress will see firsthand the benefit international volunteering brings to their communities and the nation.

I am pleased to be joined by my colleague, Senator Coleman, who has been involved in the development of this bill since the beginning.

### Remarks by Senator Norman Coleman (R-MN):

First of all I would like to thank the folks at Brookings for all their leadership, scholarship, and public policy input on the issue of international service. Senator Wofford, it is certainly an honor to work with you on this initiative. I would also like to acknowledge Senator Feingold and thank him and his staff for their excellent work with my office in putting together our legislation.

As a product of the 1960s, I will never forget the impact of those 17 words, “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” The Peace Corps, which grew out of those words, remains one of our most effective public diplomacy tools, and is in many ways a model for what we are proposing today.

Many years ago Marshall McLuhan said, “The medium is the message.” If America’s message is “We care. We respect other cultures. And we want to globalize democratic values, not just markets...” then what is the medium?

I submit the medium is thousands of Americans of good will heading out to the nations of the world in service. The medium that communicates American know-how, American enthusiasm, American optimism and American respect is oldest one on the planet: friendship, based on mutual service.

This kind of approach is needed today more than ever. We all know we are engaged in a daily battle to win hearts and minds around the world. Peace Corps Volunteers and American students studying abroad everyday do more to change negative views about Americans than all the blogging or talking points we can cook up here in Washington.

For example, a recent poll by Terror Free Tomorrow found that nearly 60 percent of Indonesians and 75 percent of Pakistanis held more favorable views of the United States as a consequence of humanitarian assistance we provided after the tsunami and earthquake rocked their respective countries. Importantly, this change in perception lasted beyond the initial aid and service, underscoring that America's actions can have lasting impact.

It goes even beyond public diplomacy, I would submit. There is something about service to your community that goes to the heart of American culture and American values. Sharing that culture of service with people continents away is not only an incredible witness to what we are about as a country, but deeply enriching for the volunteer personally.

The bill that Senator Feingold and I have proposed begins with what is already happening on the ground. Thousands of Americans are answering the call to service overseas, and they are doing so through non-governmental organizations, through faith based organizations, and through university programs. Our legislation will provide small stipends to help more Americans take advantage of these opportunities, in other words, to multiply the reach of so many good works out there.

These are not large grants – we are looking at about \$7,500 maximum – but they will go a long way in defraying obstacles like the cost of airfare, accommodations or program materials. Volunteers will probably still have to do some of their own fundraising and will look to their sponsoring organizations for support, but we think that's a good thing. A little seed money will go a long way.

Another aspect of this approach which is innovative is the role for Congressional offices to nominate volunteers for the program, like we do for service academies. We believe this will help to spread the word about America's commitment to volunteerism, and make it a truly national effort.

I've said a lot about the Peace Corps this morning, and I'd like to underscore that this program won't alter the Peace Corps in anyway. It builds upon the Peace Corps' success by enabling shorter-term volunteer service with organizations that are already in the business, so to speak. And it does so in a cost-effective manner.

Another monumental figure in the 60s, Dr. King, once said, "Everyone can be great because every one can serve." We are here today to discuss how we can help them do that on an international scale.

