



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

Remarks by Steven Rosenthal, Executive Director of Cross-Cultural Solutions:

I am Steven Rosenthal Executive Director of Cross-Cultural Solutions which is one of the largest international volunteer organizations in the US sending more than 4,000 volunteers overseas each year. I am also the chairman of the Building Bridges Coalition which has come together in support of the Global Service Fellowship.

The Building Bridges Coalition is an unprecedented consortium of leading international volunteer organizations, universities & colleges, corporations and government agencies working collaboratively to double the number of international volunteers serving abroad by 2010. Collectively, our organizations send more than 50,000 American volunteers overseas each year. The list of institutions is impressive:

National Peace Corps Association
American Express
General Electric
Habitat for Humanity
American University
IBM
Pfizer
Georgetown University
Washington University in St. Louis, Center for Social Development, and many, many others.

More than 70 leading organizations have come together in an unprecedented fashion as a result of the Brookings Initiative on International Volunteering and Service and in support of this legislation. Across our nation hundreds of thousands of individuals have already joined in support as well. Why have all of these organizations and individuals come together with such resolve? Because we all believe that increasing the number of American volunteers serving overseas is critically important to our world.

In a time where the image of America is trending downwards we need to show the world the best of the American people – our spirit of generosity, our humanity, our compassion and our integrity. International service provides vital support in helping our world reach the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals of fighting against poverty, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education. And most importantly in this context, international service builds bridges of understanding across cultures that are lasting and substantial. International volunteering is one of the most powerful ways to build international good will towards the U.S., which is sorely needed right now.

International volunteering builds peace through increasing cultural understanding and tolerance. I've experienced the power of international service myself as a volunteer and I continue to see it through the thousands of volunteers my organization sends each year. When someone overseas has a positive and powerful experience with an American volunteer it makes a lasting difference to that person. That person will forever recall the kindness expressed by a volunteer.

These impacts cannot be underestimated. Who knows where we would be today if we had had 1 million more American ambassadors of goodwill who had served overseas in the last decade. Today, the field of international volunteering is thriving. There are many programs enabling people to volunteer overseas that cannot commit two years in the Peace Corps, and because these programs are largely funded by the volunteers themselves, funding is the primary obstacle to more people serving overseas.

The Global Service Fellowship will remedy this in one fell swoop by enabling 10,000 Americans to serve overseas each year. The Global Service Fellowship will be the biggest event since the creation of the U.S. Peace Corps. Unprecedented times lead to unprecedented events. The U.S. Peace Corps was created during an era of greatness for our country by leaders such as JFK, Sargent Shriver and Senator Wofford. Today we again stand in unprecedented times and the Global Service Fellowship is this generation's call-to-action for Americans to act as international messengers of peace.

The Peace Corps alone cannot achieve the mission at approximately 7,000 volunteers per year. The Global Service Fellowship will make this happen virtually overnight by leveraging an already thriving field of service programs and the thousands of Americans that want to serve but can't afford to.

On behalf of the many nonprofit organizations, corporations, and universities that I represent and the hundreds of thousands of American volunteers that stand behind me today, I urge you to support the Global Service Fellowship. It is critically important to America's future.

Remarks by Helen Claire Sievers, Executive Director of WorldTeach:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about this important issue affecting international service. I am Helen Claire Sievers, Executive Director of WorldTeach, an NGO affiliated with the Center for International Development at Harvard University. WorldTeach partners with Ministries of Education and other educational systems to send volunteers to teach in developing countries.

Each year we send about 300 volunteers in year-long programs and 125 in summer programs, primarily to teach English, but our volunteers also teach science, math, and whatever else is requested. We are in rural and urban schools, in elementary and high schools, and in community colleges, in 12 countries.

But persons from many more countries have requested WorldTeach volunteers. Just last week I was contacted by the Permanent Secretary of Education of Thailand. We are currently in serious dialogue with persons from three other countries and in the past have been approached by persons or educational systems in 48 developing countries. Especially now that many countries are declaring

English as their second language, there is a dramatic need for native English speakers abroad. There is also great interest, especially on the part of young Americans, to go abroad to make meaningful contributions in education, as well as in healthcare, in the environment, and so much more.

And so, the volunteers want to volunteer, and the developing countries want volunteers. That sounds ideal. But no, the problem is always money. There are significant costs to transport, house, feed, insure, train and support volunteers. It costs WorldTeach between \$7,000 and \$10,000 a year to support a volunteer abroad. Who pays these expenses? Currently some portion is carried by the inviting countries and the rest by the volunteers. But these young people, who are eager to volunteer, have college loans, and certainly little or no savings, and developing countries are strapped for money already. The Ministries of Education of Honduras and Cameroon and Palau were eager for us to come, but had too little money to contribute. Schools in India and Kenya and Vietnam have requested our volunteers, but they too did not have the funding. Supporting this legislation could make it possible for WorldTeach and other organizations like ours, to open programs where we are needed, where we could help, and in doing so where we would bring not only the requested help, but also goodwill and enhanced understanding of America, and also genuine affection and appreciations for Americans.

We feel the most effective way to administer this proposed program, the best way to impact the country as a whole, would be for these fellowships to be awarded through Congressional districts, much as the military academy appointments are. If this bill were passed at the requested amount of \$50M annually, there would be funding for each Senator and for each member of the House of Representatives to support between 15 – 20 volunteers a year. If stories from this number of volunteers were covered in the local newspapers, on the local radio and television stations, if the returned volunteers were to speak at the local elementary and high schools, at the various community and faith-based organizations, a significantly greater sense of internationalism would quickly be brought to every corner of this country.

Your public support, in announcing the terms of the Fellowships, in awarding them to the new Fellows, in greeting the Fellows as they return from their service, all newsworthy events, are further opportunities for publicity for international service in your states and districts.

How to award the Fellowships would be up to you. You may want to award them to the most useful service projects, to the ones that would do the most good and bring the most good will for America. But you may also want to shape the program to meet specific needs in your districts and states. Are you trying to bring a Chinese partner to your state? Maybe you would want to sponsor a significant percentage of your Fellowships for constituents who want to volunteer in China, who will return with an understanding of Chinese language and culture, and so creating in your district a more comfortable environment for your new Chinese partner. Maybe you have under-performing high schools and want to award, say, two Fellowships to each of them for juniors who have studied Spanish to volunteer for the upcoming summer in Latin America. There are limitless possibilities of how to use these Fellowships. You know your states and districts. You know your constituents. You know the strategic plans you have for the future of your state. You are in the best position to know how to best use these international opportunities for your constituents, and for your states, and for our country.

For these reasons, and for so many more, I hope you will decide to support this important bill.

Remarks by Jim Lindsay, Executive Director of Catholic Network of Volunteer Service:

My name is Jim Lindsay and I am the Executive Director of Catholic Network of Volunteer Service, based in Takoma Park, Maryland. CNVS is a membership organization of 212 faith-based volunteer programs that annually place more than 10,000 full-time volunteers throughout the U.S. and around the world. Volunteers in CNVS member programs are serving in the favelas of Sao Paulo, Brazil, resettlement camps in war-torn Liberia, and the far flung atolls of Micronesia, to name but a few places. Among our members are 37 programs that send volunteers internationally. Last year, these organizations placed 906 volunteers in 112 countries outside the U.S.

CNVS member programs are sponsored by Catholic and Protestant institutions. While they may be supported by sectarian bodies, the volunteers are engaged in activities that meet the human needs of the poor and marginalized. They serve in virtually all fields: healthcare, education, social services, construction, agronomy, immigration and refugee services, and in many other areas. While CNVS represents faith-based groups that engage volunteers in full-time service, it in no way embodies all the good works that are being performed by religious organizations. In a recent study conducted by the Center for Social Development of Washington University in St. Louis, of those who volunteered internationally, 50% were associated with a religious organization. This was significantly higher than those who only volunteered domestically; with 33% of domestic volunteers affiliated with a religious organization.

The volunteers who serve with CNVS are highly qualified and motivated individuals, with 88% possessing a four-year college degree or higher. The impact they have on U.S. society upon their return from service is significant. About 40% of our returned volunteers find employment in the field of education, while nearly 30% work in social services. Many also pursue graduate or doctoral training in these and other areas.

Many of our volunteers must raise thousands of dollars to cover their travel to and from the placement sites, as well as their ongoing living expenses. Most are responsible for paying for necessary immunizations prior to departing the U.S. Some of our member programs are able to offer modest stipends and only the most basic forms of health insurance and housing to the volunteers.

The Global Service Fellowships that we are discussing today would allow our faith-based volunteer programs to place a substantially higher number of international volunteers each year by making volunteer placements more financially feasible. In turn, many more people in need throughout the world would be served by U.S. volunteers, enhancing their quality of life as well as the good relations between the U.S. and the countries in which its volunteers serve.

I strongly encourage Congress to establish a program of Global Service Fellowships that will support American volunteers serving abroad and advance concrete initiatives that will improve the lives of the poor and disadvantaged throughout the world.

Remarks by Malcolm Butler, President & CEO, Partners of the Americas:

International volunteering by Americans is one of the most potent but least appreciated components of this country's international image. Those of us who are involved in mobilizing the remarkable energy of American volunteers know that the Global Service Fellowship will help fill that critical gap by offering a flexible and efficient program to stimulate and inspire increased volunteering.

We've talked a lot today about the successes of long-term volunteer programs. The equally impressive record of short-term volunteers is less broadly appreciated and understood. The ability of the GSF to reach short-term volunteers will help us better realize this potential. This is true whether we measure impact in the well-being of communities overseas or in the consciousness of Americans at home.

Short-term volunteers tend to be mid-career professionals whose family and professional responsibilities make it difficult for them to spend lengthy periods away from their communities. They bring both deep commitment and proven professional skills. But perhaps precisely because time is so valuable for short-term volunteers, they give up precious evenings and vacations and business opportunities, they focus intently on real-world results and impact. They are doctors, and teachers, and musicians, and businessmen and city council members. They go because of personal history, or curiosity, or business interest, or faith, or commitment to international understanding. Their reasons and the volunteers themselves are as diverse as America.

Short-term volunteers may spend only a few weeks at a time overseas, but they provide impressive and continuing return on investment. They come back to their communities and leverage their knowledge by building linkages between their experiences and their jobs, their professional associations, their universities and their churches. They often make repeated visits, intensifying and magnifying the "ripple effect" of their contributions through the relationships they build. This is fact; I could cite hundreds of examples from Partners alone.

The non-profit organizations involved in this effort all have outstanding records of achievement in terms of impact both overseas and in our own communities. These organizations, of which Partners of the Americas is only one, carefully prepare and support and follow up volunteer experiences. Partners' chapters in every state act as amplifiers and echo chambers in their communities.

The beauty of the GSF is that it will support short-term volunteers as well those with more time to offer. Thus it can reach into the American heartland, drawing typical individuals from typical communities across the country. If the American image abroad is ailing, what better way to rebuild its health than by using real Americans to put an American face on a restored American image?



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