

U.S. Senator Russell D. Feingold
Statement for the Record

Mr. President, today I am pleased to reintroduce the Global Service Fellowship Program Act. This important bipartisan bill would provide more Americans the opportunity to volunteer overseas and strengthen our existing federal international education and exchange system. The U.S. government needs to be taking a greater role in providing opportunities for U.S. citizens to volunteer overseas, and my bill will enhance U.S. efforts to be a global leader in people-to-people engagement.

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 the perception of the U.S. overseas.

I often hear from constituents about their experiences volunteering overseas and how those experiences impacted their lives and the lives of those who they were helping. For example, I received an email from Eric Englund, from my hometown of Middleton, who wrote, “[My wife Jane and I] have been privileged to participate in international volunteering experiences in 2006 and 2007. In 2006 we spent four weeks in China teaching English to Chinese primary and secondary English teachers in Xingping, China....In 2007 we spent two weeks in Tanzania with Habitat for Humanity....We return[ed] from both experiences humbled in the understanding of how lucky we have been and hungry to continue to share with others a cultural exchange that is hopefully symbiotic in helping us grow/learn/appreciate while at the same time sharing our knowledge, compassion and abilities with others.” This email captures the life-changing effects that international volunteering often has on those who choose to commit their time and resources to volunteering across the globe.

Unfortunately, not enough of my constituents are able to volunteer overseas because of financial or time-related barriers. In an effort to reduce these barriers, I initially introduced, along with my colleague Senator Coleman, the Global Service Fellowship bill. And today, I am reintroducing a new and improved version of the bill.

This new bill builds on the original legislation but now ensures fellowships are not taxed, addresses the importance of geographical diversity in the selection process, and increases collaborative opportunities for the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department of State in establishing and administering the program.

Additionally, Congressional involvement has been changed from the original bill. The new version calls on participants to engage with Members of Congress prior to their departure and again upon their return by providing Members with a brief report of their experiences and impact abroad. The changes are intended to ensure that fellows are selected based on the merits while preserving for Members of Congress the opportunity, if they so wish, to engage directly with constituents who have volunteered for significant overseas work, whether by a personal exchange, a public event or correspondence that recognizes the value of their volunteer efforts.

Studies have shown that in areas where U.S. citizens have volunteered their time, money, and services, opinions of the United States have improved. Greater investment in volunteer opportunities has significant potential to improve the image of the U.S. overseas and while we

have important programs already in place – the Peace Corps, programs administered through the Department of State’s Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, and USAID’s Volunteers for Prosperity – we can and should be doing more.

My bill would cost \$150 million, which is more than offset by a provision that would require the IRS to deposit all of its fee receipts in the Treasury as miscellaneous receipts. CBO has estimated that this offset will save \$559 million over 5 years for net deficit reduction of just over \$400 million.

I am pleased that my colleagues, Senators Coleman, Casey, Cochran, Kerry, Voinovich, and Whitehouse have joined me in re-introducing this bill. This program will be a valuable addition to our public diplomacy and our private humanitarian efforts overseas and I encourage my colleagues to support the bill.