

# FEDERALLY-FUNDED HIGH SCHOOL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

## KEY HIGH SCHOOL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

- **Youth Exchange and Study Program (YES):** Brings high school students from 31 countries with significant Muslim communities, as well as the West Bank and Gaza, to live with American host families and study in American schools; sends American high school students to live in several of these countries as well.
- **Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX):** Brings high school students from the countries of the former Soviet Union to live with American host families and study in American schools
- **America-Serbia and Montenegro Youth Leadership Exchange (A-SMYLE):** Brings high school students from Serbia and Montenegro to live with American host families and study in American schools
- **Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX):** Provides opportunities for young Americans to live with host families and attend German high schools, and reciprocal exchange opportunities for young Germans in the United States.

## LEGISLATIVE GOALS

- **YES: \$32 million in FY 2011** (up from \$25 million), with increases to be directed to outbound exchanges for American students
- **FLEX: \$19.2 million in FY 2011** to fund 1,100 FLEX participants
- **A-SMYLE: \$1.5 million in FY 2011** to build exchanges with Serbia and Montenegro
- **CBYX: \$6 million in FY 2011** (up from \$4 million in both FY 2010 enacted and FY 2011 request) to support parity in the exchange of U.S. and German participants

## PROGRAM DETAILS

High school exchange programs are a critical component of America's public diplomacy. Because of the age of the participants and rigorous selection processes that ensure high quality students, these programs offer a unique opportunity to build positive lifetime relationships with future leaders from around the world. In the current geopolitical climate, programs in countries with Muslim-majority populations and those in the struggling democracies in Eurasia and Southeast Europe take on special significance. Supporting the expansion of these programs into two-way exchanges strengthens the capability of U.S. youth to meet the challenges of an increasingly interconnected world and creates closer ties of mutual respect and understanding between the United States and countries around the world.

#### YOUTH EXCHANGE AND STUDY PROGRAM (YES), ALSO KNOWN AS THE KENNEDY-LUGAR YOUTH AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

The YES program had its genesis in legislation to increase exchange with the Islamic world sponsored in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress by Senators Edward Kennedy and Richard Lugar, and Representatives Henry Hyde and Tom Lantos. In the 2008-09 academic year, the program brought 845 students from 31 countries, the West Bank, and Gaza to the United States. While further growth in the U.S.-bound program may be inhibited in the short run by U.S. hosting capacity, U.S. public diplomacy would benefit enormously by investing in an expanded **outbound YES program for American students**. Such an initiative would increase the competitiveness of American students in an increasingly globalized economy, and send a strong signal of mutual respect to the Muslim world.

#### FUTURE LEADERS EXCHANGE PROGRAM (FLEX)

The FLEX program brings high school students from the countries of the former Soviet Union to the United States to live with American host families and study in American schools. Last year FLEX received more than 40,000 applications for approximately 1,050 scholarship awards. A U.S. government study demonstrated that the FLEX program stimulates positive attitudinal changes that remain with participants after they return home. Compared to others in their age cohort, FLEX alumni have strongly positive attitudes towards democracy, free elections, and market economies and are already taking leadership positions in business and government. FLEX alumni have shown extraordinary activism upon their return home and a real desire to make their countries a better place to live; alumni have taken up such causes as human rights, support for disadvantaged populations, and democratic process. The strongest supporters of these programs are U.S. ambassadors in the region, who view them as a critical long-term commitment to leadership development and strong bilateral relationships and see the contributions of the alumni to their home communities.

#### AMERICA-SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO YOUTH LEADERSHIP EXCHANGE (A-SMYLE)

The A-SMYLE program, currently in its fourth year, provides opportunities for high school students from Serbia and Montenegro to spend a year in the United States, living with American host families and attending U.S. high schools. The program focuses on youth leadership and the role that alumni can play in developing their communities. The A-SMYLE program received more than 1,000 applications for 50 student slots for the 2009-10 academic year. Alumni from this program have taken meaningful steps towards promoting peace in Southeast Europe.

#### CONGRESS-BUNDESTAG YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM (CBYX)

The Congress-Bundestag program has fostered productive dialogue and contributed to a strong transatlantic partnership for more than 25 years. The program, a jointly funded venture between the U.S. Congress and the German Bundestag, provides opportunities for young Americans to live with host families and attend German high schools, and reciprocal exchange opportunities for young Germans in the U.S. The scholarship began in 1983 as a part of the President's International Youth Exchange Initiative and is an essential and highly visible part of the U.S.-Germany relationship. The U.S. financial commitment for the program has been consistently underfunded, causing a decreasing number of U.S. participants.