

**Testimony of
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before the
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND
RELATED PROGRAMS**

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Chairman Diaz-Balart, Congresswoman Frankel, and Subcommittee Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the critical role that America's democracy assistance plays in advancing U.S. national security while manifesting Americans' most cherished values.

I am Dr. Tamara Cofman Wittes, the President of the National Democratic Institute, and I am here with my Republican counterpart Dr. Dan Twining to support \$315 million for the National Endowment for Democracy, \$345 million for the Democracy Fund, and \$2.9 billion for Democracy Programs, all of which are funded in current law.

The values of freedom and democracy that guided our Founders are some of the most powerful ideas in human history. They inspire people across the globe – and they bring cold shudders to every dictator. That's because our freedom and democracy have made America the most powerful nation on earth – and our success and support for the freedom of others is what makes us the most admired nation on earth.

In short, US democracy assistance makes Americans stronger, safer, and more prosperous. And for more than forty years, NDI and our fellow NED family members have toiled in some of the most difficult places to make Americans stronger, safer and more prosperous. NDI levels the playing field for American businesses, reduces conflict, and advances peace and security. Most of all, NDI's programs unleash the power of people to make their governments work for them. We partner with those who do the work of democracy, in community groups, political parties, parliaments, and public officials.

We know that freedom works to benefit individuals, whole nations, and international security. Where we succeed at strengthening freedom, people live longer and economies grow faster. Where we succeed at helping people forge peaceful politics, rooted in dialogue and pluralism, countries are less likely to collapse in conflict. Where we work to overturn corruption and shine sunlight on government operations, we open up new opportunities for businesses to grow, trade, and invest.

Where freedom works, we see less mass migration, less violence, and fewer threats facing the American military from extremists and adversaries.

Freedom Works! That's why, as we have seen through decades of work in some of the world's harshest places: when people have the choice, they choose democracy. It is our mission to ensure that every human being has that choice.

The following are just a few examples of NDI's work to help people unleash their power to make their governments work for them.

For many years, we have supported brave advocates for freedom from Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Hong Kong, North Korea, Tibet, Burma and Cambodia as they stood up to brutal dictatorships in their countries. Last year, in Venezuela, a unified, organized opposition movement was able to monitor the polls and report the results despite Maduro's coercion. They proved to the world that Nicolas Maduro lost that election and that Edmundo Gonzalez is the legitimately elected president of Venezuela.

In Syrian territories formerly held by ISIS, NDI works hand in hand with IRI to bring citizens and local governments together and create a bulwark against any future ISIS resurgence. We work with mothers freed from lives under ISIS control to ensure that their children are never recruited to terrorism.

At a time when Iran and Hezbollah have been put on the back foot by Israel's war in Gaza, highlighting the regime's diversion of funds to opaque security and defense channels that reward the IRGC, fund regional instability, and support terrorism is more important now than ever.

NDI opened our office in Ukraine almost immediately after Ukraine became an independent state. NDI has played a central role in building and sustaining free and open politics in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and across the Balkans — frontline states in the fight against Russia's brutal coercion and corruption, which is now aided by China, North Korea and Iran.

NDI has played a central role in promoting democracy across the African continent since the election of Nelson Mandela. We have stabilized fragile democracies, pushed back against violent extremists, helped expose debt trap deals with China, and leveled the playing field for U.S. businesses.

I served previously in government, as the State Department's director of foreign assistance. I know just how much pressure is on these accounts, and how important it is to ensure that foreign assistance delivers results for the American people. I have complete confidence that the work of our NED family and our democracy programs meet that mark. Dollar for dollar, you cannot find a better deal for the American taxpayer.

Unfortunately, nearly all of these NDI programs I just highlighted have been terminated.

As a result, NDI has been forced to withdraw from our work in dozens of countries around the world, and to let go three-quarters of our extraordinarily committed, experienced, and talented staff.

As painful as this has been, the impact on our partners has been far worse. In so many sensitive countries, brave freedom fighters and democracy defenders have been abandoned in the fight against the brutal regimes of America's biggest adversaries.

The United States is facing off against corrupt, violent dictatorships who are undermining democracies around the world, for the sake of their own power and influence, at our expense. And we find ourselves disarmed in this critical moment.

The only people celebrating this rollback in American national security are the dictators in Beijing, Tehran, Havana, Managua, Moscow and Caracas.

Mr. Chairman, I know how much you care about this work and I thank you for your steadfast support.

I urge you to continue to support and strengthen the National Endowment for Democracy and the core institutes. Please extend the current levels of funding for NED and the democracy assistance accounts, and please restore these critically important tools of American purpose and power.

I am confident that America's national security, economic strength and global leadership are best secured in a world where freedom prevails. NDI's work is a strategic investment that benefits the American people and reflects their values.

Thank you for your continued support for freedom worldwide.