

House Foreign Affairs Committee – Member Day, December 11, 2025 – 10:00AM
Remarks – Rep. Lois Frankel

Thank you, Chairman Mast and Ranking Member Meeks.

I serve as the Ranking Member on the National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations Subcommittee, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today before the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Our two committees share a common purpose: using America's foreign policy tools to make our country safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

I rise today to highlight two areas critical to those goals: Women, Peace, and Security, and Food for Peace.

In 2017, Congress - Democrats and Republicans together - passed the Women, Peace, and Security Act. It recognized a fundamental truth: when women are included in peace and security decisions, America is safer. President Trump signed it into law, and it had strong bipartisan champions.

This matters because women experience conflict differently than men. They are often the first to see rising tensions in their communities, they face unique dangers - like gender-based violence - and when conflict ends, women are the ones rebuilding schools, caring for families, restarting local economies, and helping communities heal. Ignoring their perspective means missing half the reality on the ground.

Decades of research confirm that peace agreements last longer when women are involved; countries with greater gender equality are less likely to fall into conflict; and every dollar invested in conflict prevention saves many times more in humanitarian and even military costs.

Because of the WPS Act, our government built a real, working system across the Department of State, USAID, Department of Defense, and Department of Homeland Security, to put these lessons into practice. The U.S. trained women as conflict mediators, supported organizations that prevent extremist recruitment, expanded services for survivors of violence, and strengthened early-warning tools that often rely on women's networks.

But today, that system is being quietly dismantled. The Administration has failed to submit the legally required WPS report to Congress. Offices have been closed, experts let go, programs cancelled, and public data removed. The law remains in place, but the executive branch is not following it.

This is not just a “women’s issue.” It’s about national security and congressional authority.

Without WPS, preventable conflicts will escalate, early-warning systems will go dark, partner security forces will be less effective, and extremist groups will have more space to recruit and terrorize. And as we pull back, China is stepping in, using “women’s empowerment” as a tool of influence across Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

Congress must enforce the bipartisan law we passed. That means demanding overdue reports, restoring staffing and expertise, rebuilding WPS programs, holding public hearings, and ensuring WPS is fully integrated into our national security strategies.

And working with the Appropriations Committee, we must provide at least \$150 million for WPS annually, and focus on women-led organizations on the front lines.

WPS is still federal law. It makes America safer, stronger, and more prosperous. And Congress must ensure it remains a core part of U.S. national security policy.

I also want to address Food for Peace and the proposal to move it from the State Department to the Department of Agriculture.

Food for Peace isn't simply about sending food. It is one of our most effective tools for saving lives in crises and stabilizing communities so they don't fall into conflict or mass displacement.

For decades, it has been run by humanitarian experts trained to operate in war zones and fragile states, and to integrate food aid with health, education, and governance programs.

Moving Food for Peace to USDA would break that expertise apart. USDA is a strong partner, but its mission is domestic agriculture - not managing emergency operations overseas to reach the most vulnerable. This shift would slow our response times, fragment coordination, and risk turning a proven stability tool into a narrower export program.

If we want food aid to save lives and build long-term stability, it must stay within the State Department's humanitarian architecture, building on USAID's deep experience.

Every shipment should feed families today and reduce the need for more costly interventions tomorrow.

In closing, I stand ready to work with this Committee to strengthen and improve vital initiatives like Women, Peace, and Security and Food for Peace and the myriad other issues that intertwine our committees.

Thank you again to the Chair and Ranking Member for the opportunity to testify today. I yield back.