

Testimony Delivered by Rep. Dina Titus (NV-01)
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs
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Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Frankel, Members of the Subcommittee – Thank you for hosting this Member Day. As you begin your work on the appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2026, I strongly urge you to fund democracy and governance assistance programs at the highest possible level and ensure such funding cannot be impounded. President Trump’s Executive Order halting all foreign assistance, including funding for advancing democratic governance, is causing immediate and grave harm to U.S. national security and economic interests.

Our constituents expect their government to reflect their values abroad, and democracy assistance has long enjoyed bipartisan support as a critical tool for securing U.S. interests around the world. The recent aid freeze has placed U.S.-based nonprofit organizations, local partners, and frontline democracy defenders in immediate jeopardy, undermining efforts to support emerging democracies and those resisting authoritarian rule. These programs not only promote democratic governance but also serve strategic U.S. interests: expanding commercial opportunities for American businesses, strengthening global stability, countering

terrorism, stemming irregular migration, and acting as a vital counterweight to adversarial regimes that seek to supplant U.S. leadership on the global stage.

The halt in democracy programming clearly weakens U.S. efforts to push back against China's aggressive influence in Asia and undermines support for U.S. interests in Taiwan, the Pacific Islands, and Tibet. It disrupts essential work exposing China's malign activities in Africa, such as its exploitation of strategic minerals, debt-trap lending, and its push to reshape the technological landscape to the disadvantage of the United States. Furthermore, the freeze suspends critical anti-corruption efforts in countries where U.S. companies seek to trade and invest, leaving the door open for opaque dealings with China and other malign actors to the detriment of U.S. businesses.

The consequences of this decision extend far beyond just countering China. Defunding democracy programs weakens the ability of democratic activists and watchdog organizations to press for political reform, respect for human rights, and democratic governance in repressive environments. In places like Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, North Korea, Hong Kong, Tibet, and Burma, these programs provide vital resources for those advocating for freedom. In Iran, this freeze halts efforts to provide citizens with accurate information, exposing the corruption and brutality of the Ayatollah's regime. This only empowers the IRGC and its proxies, allowing them to further destabilize the region unchecked.

Similarly, in Lebanon and Syria, democracy assistance programs play a crucial role in strengthening alternatives to Hezbollah's dominance and countering the corruption that fuels its influence. With Hezbollah weakened for the first time in years due to regional developments, this funding is critical to ensuring that U.S. interests prevail rather than giving Hezbollah the space to regroup and expand its hold. The suspension of these programs directly undermines these efforts.

If there is any doubt about who benefits most from this aid freeze, look no further than what the world's most oppressive regimes are saying. Dmitry Medvedev called the suspension of democracy assistance a "smart move;" Bruno Rodriguez, the Cuban Foreign Minister, lauded the Administration's termination of "destabilization operations;" and the IRGC released numerous statements with lines like "America cut the opposition's allowance," and "Trump shattered the overthrowers' illusion." The greatest argument for the continuation of democracy assistance programs should be the fact that these entities are relishing their dismantling.

At a recent Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, I asked former USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios – a Republican – what the consequences are for the U.S. if we are not investing in democratic development. He was unequivocal: If the cancellation of democracy and governance funding is deliberate and sustained, it is a disaster. He went on to say that the people around the world who want

democracy and freedom look to us, not to China. If we withdraw our support and abandon them, we cede that ground to autocratic regimes which will eagerly step in to promote their own interests at our expense.

This category of aid has historically been bipartisan, and I urge you to include robust funding levels for democracy and governance assistance programs in the FY26 National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs appropriations bill. Without it, we will leave a vacuum for authoritarian adversaries to fill, weaken U.S. global influence, and abandon the courageous democracy activists on the frontlines who rely on our support.

Thank you.