



**Senator Peter Welch
Remarks as Delivered
On the Elimination of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
February 4, 2025**

Mr. President, over the past two weeks political operatives in the administration of President Trump and Elon Musk have shown the American people and the world that they plan to destroy as much of the professional workforce in the executive agencies as they can get away with.

Whether it's illegal—and it is—or unconstitutional—and it is—is of no concern. Inspectors general and career civil servants who have served the American people for decades, some for their entire professional lives, are being summarily removed without any due process at all—and due process they're legally entitled to. They are being replaced with Musk-approved partisans who have little, if any, government experience or little, if any, substantive knowledge. They do have a “qualification” and that's total loyalty to the President.

On top of Mr. Musk's list of agencies to eliminate in the U.S. is the U.S. Agency for International Development, or U-S-A-I-D, as we know it. That has been the subject of a ferocious attack by Mr. Musk. That agency is one that not many Americans know about, but which fulfills a vital mission. It has a relatively small budget—less than 1% of the total federal budget—and it has a large responsibility to support humanitarian, economic development, and governance programs in more than 100 countries.

Whatever quote, “savings” Elon Musk might obtain from cutting USAID would have no appreciable impact in offsetting Mr. Trump's huge tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. It wouldn't even amount to a rounding error.

But last week—and the manner in which this is done, I find extremely disturbing—Mr. Musk, and by the way for all his “brilliance” has no government experience himself, he called USAID a quote “criminal organization.” Dozens of USAID's dedicated senior officials, including in its Office of General Counsel, were purged. That's not happened before. That has not happened before in this country.

And over the weekend, Musk called USAID “evil” and a “viper's nest of radical-left Marxists who hate America.” Others in the Administration have accused USAID personnel of “insubordination” and acting against American interests, without producing any evidence to back that up, reminiscent of the McCarthy era. Make the accusation,

destroy the reputation, and move on. That's a serious question, and we should each of us should be asking the implications of this action.

I find Mr. Musk's accusations are appalling. I know they're factually baseless, and frankly, I find them despicable. It's also curious, because in 2022, his company Starlink received millions of dollars from USAID for Starlink's operation in Ukraine. Not to mention the incredible amount of taxpayer subsidies that helped Tesla become the major company that it is.

And Mr. Musk, he's a billionaire, as we know, he has no reluctance to take taxpayer funds from USAID. He took money from USAID—it was a good organization when the money was coming from it to him to help us in Ukraine. But now he's calling it a "criminal organization." And I doubt that he knows what 99% of USAID employees do, or the positive impact they have on the lives of people around the world and on U.S. national security—the obligation all of us have as members of the United States Senate.

I wonder if he's ever met or has ever spoken to anyone who works at any of the 60 overseas missions, or seen with his own eyes what USAID does in countries like Indonesia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Mozambique, Ghana, or Guatemala, just to name a few, where the lives of countless people really do benefit from USAID.

And being billionaires, President Trump and Elon Musk may not be aware that fully one billion people in the world live on less than \$1 dollar per day. They may not be aware that the lives of hundreds of millions of people, especially children, are threatened by diseases that can be prevented or cured with drugs that cost a few pennies.

Or maybe Mr. Musk is not aware that the life of every American is threatened by the spread of infectious diseases. We saw that with COVID, and there's other diseases out there where what we do elsewhere protects the health and safety of people right here at home.

Or maybe Mr. Musk isn't concerned that the Earth's tropical forests and endangered species are being decimated by illegal miners, loggers, and wildlife traffickers, who are often in collusion with local police and transnational criminal organizations, to feed, by the way, China's insatiable demand for minerals, timber, and wildlife—consequences to the environment be damned. USAID works with local governments and organizations to protect forests in South and Central America, Central Africa, and in Indonesia, and to train wildlife rangers to combat poaching and trafficking.

It may make absolutely no difference to Mr. Musk, as it clearly doesn't to President Trump, that the rising acidity of the oceans and plastic pollution are destroying what remains of the world's coral reefs and marine species at the bottom of the food chain, due to the burning of fossil fuels. And USAID works to protect marine ecosystems and support the reduction of fossil fuels, carbon emissions, and reduce plastic waste.

Mr. President, government corruption, repression, and impunity may not be a priority in other countries for President Trump and Elon Musk to take on, even though they are major causes of poverty in the world, political instability and violence, narcotics trafficking, and migration in our own hemisphere. So, what happens in these countries makes a difference in what happens here, especially with respect to immigration.

And these are just a few of the many complex global problems USAID personnel work to address every day, every single day, partnering with foreign governments and thousands of non-governmental organizations. Those are real people. They're doing real work, even though they aren't CEOs. They're doing their best to address poverty, environmental degradation, corruption, and governance.

It's affecting non-governmental organizations, contractors, and institutions of higher education in Vermont, this attack on USAID. These are Vermont organizations, Mr. President, that have a long history of implementing USAID humanitarian and development programs. I'll mention a few: World Learning, TetraTech/ARD, Resonance, and the Vermont Afghan Alliance are examples. They're being decimated as a result of this order.

And suddenly, out of the blue, without even an hour's notice, these organizations and others were forced to shut down programs and lay off staff, with no idea of what comes next. Many of their employees are working overseas where they are stranded without even the ability to have funds to pay for flights home. That's how sudden it was. And Unlike Mr. Musk, they don't have their own private jets. It not only sends a message to the people of those countries that the United States can't be relied on—it's pretty cruel to create that uncertainty, that confusion, and then that desperation.

The U.S. Agency for International Development, like any federal agency, is not perfect. And any time there's talk of reform coming from your side of the aisle or ours, I'm all ears, because anything we can do to make what we have work better we all have an obligation to do our part. There are certainly ways to make it function more efficiently and achieve better results.

But USAID was established by an Act of Congress more than 25 years ago. And Constitutionally, no President, and no unelected billionaire, can lawfully shut a Congressionally-authorized agency down. There's no authority to do that. And we shouldn't stand by and essentially abdicate our Article I authority and cede the capacity to a president to pick and choose among agencies legally authorized by the Congress as to whether he will destroy it or continue it.

You know, some folks have said that shutting down USAID is part of the President's plan to reduce the national debt. It isn't. You know, I think the President cares a lot less about the national debt—it went up by more than \$7 trillion to pay for tax cuts. And eliminating the USAID would make no a dent in that at all.

Some have said we need to better align USAID's programs with the policies of the State Department. That's something that is worth discussing. And I'd have some confidence in Secretary Rubio taking a serious look at how that can be done. But that's already being done, by-and-large. Diplomacy is the job of State Department—it's not the same as development, which is what the USAID does. And you don't shut down an agency down, freeze billions of dollars in authorized programs, silence or remove entirely the senior staff, and lock thousands of employees out of their offices...I mean this is unbelievable. He locked the door so people show up for work and they can't get in. And do you that without any notice before having any discussion. You know, this is a difference between disruption -- that can be good -- and destruction—which is terrible.

And I believe, Mr. President, that it's our job, it's our job as senators to speak up in defense of the civil service, the foreign service, their families, USAID's autonomy in the foreign assistance programs, that Republicans and Democrats have strongly supported for generations. Programs that have been the building blocks of U.S. security partnerships and alliances around the world that we depend on to prevent conflict. Responding to humanitarian disasters and create, and by the way, create markets for U.S. exports and counter the malign influence of our adversaries.

Mr. President, my colleague, the senior senator from South Carolina has said year after year, when speaking about USAID, quote: "soft power is a critical component of defending America and our values." He's been a consistent defender of USAID's workforce and budget as have many other Republican Members of Congress, leaders of the U.S. business community, and senior military officers who understand that diplomacy and development are as important to preventing conflict as the threat of military force and a strong military, which we support.

It wasn't long ago that Secretary Rubio, then our colleague, Senator Rubio, praised USAID's work in global health, in aiding victims of natural disasters and supporting Venezuelans who were persecuted by that dreadful Maduro. Until Elon Musk decided that it's, quote, "time for USAID to die." He really said that..."time for USAID to die." USAID previously had always received bipartisan support.

This is no time for the Congress of the United States, the United States Senate, to stand by passively while an agency that plays a unique, indispensable role in protecting the interests and the influence, the security and the reputation of the United States around the world is decapitated and dismantled. Those responsible for the self-inflicted disaster have no respect for the law, no respect for the will of Congress, and no respect for the thousands of truly patriotic public servants who have devoted their lives to defending the interest of the United States and presenting a positive face of America in some of the world's most dangerous places.

Mr. President, I yield back.

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