

U.S. SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY

CONTACT: David Carle, 202-224-3693

VERMONT

Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), State, Foreign Operations Subcommittee Hearing On Fiscal Year 2009 USAID Budget Request March 4, 2008

Good afternoon. This is the first hearing of this subcommittee this year. Senator Gregg and I share a strong interest in ensuring that our foreign aid dollars are used wisely. There have been many examples of when they have been, and many examples of when they have not been.

Iraq comes to mind as one example of how not to do it. If USAID had been listened to earlier I think there would have been a lot less money wasted. The Appropriations Committee will hold a hearing on the Iraq reconstruction fiasco a week from today.

We also have concerns with the effectiveness of our programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and countries that do not get much attention where we should be doing more.

Today we welcome Henrietta Fore who is the Director of United States Foreign Assistance and Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development. That is a mouthful of a title. Ms. Fore, we appreciate you being here.

Some say there is not enough time in an election year to accomplish anything significant. I disagree. We have a lot to do and we should make the most of the time we have.

Today we want to focus on the President's Fiscal Year 2009 budget request for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

There is much in the President's request that I support. He proposes higher levels of funding for Development Assistance than he has before. These funds support USAID's core programs that also have strong, bipartisan congressional support.

For international health, the President proposes higher amounts for HIV/AIDS, malaria and neglected tropical diseases. But, yet again, he cuts funding for child survival and maternal health and for family planning and reproductive health.

One of the President's proposals is to recruit and train 300 new Foreign Service Officers to begin to rebuild USAID's professional workforce. This is long overdue and I strongly support it. I and others called for this years ago. Imagine how much farther along we would be today if OMB had listened to us.

USAID's professional staff is a shadow of what it once was. We routinely hear that the reason USAID has become a check writing agency for a handful of big Washington contractors and NGOs is because you don't have the staff to manage a larger number of smaller contracts and grants.

Sometimes these big contractors do a good job, although they charge an arm and a leg to do it. Other times they waste piles of money and accomplish next to nothing, although they are masters at writing glowing reports about what a good job they did.

Meanwhile, the small not-for-profit organizations are shut out of the process. This is bad not only for U.S. taxpayers but also for the countries that need our help.

When your predecessor testified here last year he had big plans for reforming foreign aid, but he did not appear to have much of a grasp of USAID's budget and programs.

You come with considerable USAID experience. The best advice I can give you is to focus on two or three key areas where you can make a real difference to help make USAID a more accessible, responsive agency that is not beholden to a select few.

I will stop there so Senator Gregg can make any opening comments.

senator_leahy@leahy.senate.gov
<http://leahy.senate.gov/>