



The stakes are too high to cut back American diplomacy and leadership

BY LIZ SCHRAYER, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 06/13/17 10:00 AM EDT



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This week, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, along with other cabinet secretaries, will make the annual pilgrimage up to Capitol Hill to defend the Trump administration's budget request. But this year, something is remarkably different when it comes to Foggy Bottom and the resources needed for America's civilian forces around the world.

A resounding chorus of voices — from the battlefields to the halls of Capitol Hill, from houses of worship to the boardrooms of our country's CEOs — is singing off the same song sheet. And their message is loud and clear: cutting one-third of our footprint around the world would endanger our national security, threaten our economic prosperity, and profoundly weaken our moral leadership around the world.

Most profound has been the steady drumbeat of our nation's most decorated combatant commanders testifying on Capitol Hill over the past several months, underscoring the critical role that diplomacy and development contribute to protecting America. The fact that these active duty commanders have joined with the voices of Defense Secretary James Mattis, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford, and more than 120 retired three- and four-star generals and admirals is significant, but not surprising. They know better than most that the military alone cannot keep our nation safe.

I was moved when I heard the voices of more than 100 evangelical and Catholic faith leaders who [wrote to Congress](#) saying, “we cannot turn our backs on those in desperate need.” Most recently, 225 chief executives and business leaders from the likes of Coca-Cola, Land O’Lakes, Cargill, UPS, Walmart, and hundreds more from across the country added their voice, reminding us that engagement overseas is about jobs here at home and that strategic investments in the State Department and USAID “make America safer and more prosperous.”

But this powerful chorus can also be heard on Capitol Hill with nearly 200 lawmakers from both sides of the aisles on record opposing these steep cuts. From the Freedom Caucus to the Progressive Caucus, members raised alarm bells about the risks to America’s interests if we pull back from the world — and they don’t seem to agree on anything.

The reality is that cuts of this nature impact America’s interests at their core. Whether it’s the proposed cuts of 66 percent to the Republic of Georgia — an ally who is on the frontlines pushing back on Russian aggression — or gutting our assistance to nine Latin American countries who could run to China, America’s leadership is on the line. What will a 26 percent cut to global health programs mean for our ability to swiftly respond to the next Ebola? I suspect these are some of the questions that lawmakers will pose in the hearings this week.

What is most unusual is not citizens rising up, but the unusual chorus of voices. For more than 30 years, I’ve organized bipartisan coalitions in support of America’s global leadership. I learned a lot over the years, helping found the Congressional Human Rights Caucus as a young Hill staffer and galvanizing a diversity of ideological support. I had a front row seat to district-by-district grassroots mobilizing as political director of AIPAC.

Yet today, as the founder and head of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC), I’m in awe of the profound demonstration of political power, including Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, along with our nation’s military, faith, humanitarian, and business leaders standing together in support of America’s diplomats and development workers.

This week more than 500 influential leaders from our “strange bedfellows” coalition from around the country will come together in our nation’s capital for the USGLC’s State Leaders Summit. It will be my greatest privilege to join veterans who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan alongside small business leaders and pastors as they share their stories from Main Street with their elected officials on why America’s global leadership matters.

But they also will speak to the need for effective, accountable, results-driven, and robust international affairs programs. They will share the story of the decade-long bipartisan efforts to transform how our nation delivers results for the American people. From the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) to [Feed the Future](#) and [Power Africa](#), a transformation has taken place from providing merely a hand out — which we thank goodness do at times of humanitarian crisis — to providing a hand up. But there is more reform that is needed and our nation is well-positioned to continue building on this success with the nomination of [Ambassador Mark Green](#) to lead USAID.

At a time when some voices are calling for America to pull back from the world, I still remember a reporter asking me how I would grade a Republican presidential candidate that was vocal in his disdain for “nation

building.” While the 2000 presidential campaign is long gone, President George W. Bush became one of the greatest champions for American leadership in the fight against global poverty — with more than 11 million people alive today because of the HIV/AIDS program launched during his presidency. So I remain an optimist, as I see lawmaker after lawmaker learn, engage, and reach that same conclusion: development and diplomacy matters.

As the focus returns to the budget this week for the State Department and USAID, I know that when citizens raise their voices, members of Congress listen. And this chorus of citizen voices is not just singing loud and clear — but they’re also keenly listening to what policymakers have to say, because when it comes to America’s global leadership the stakes couldn’t be higher.

Liz Schroyer is president and CEO of the [U.S. Global Leadership Coalition](#), an alliance of more than 500 businesses and organizations that advocates for American diplomatic and developmental efforts around the world.

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