

Can USAID Recover? Devex, 13 Feb 2025

That was the question asked by Sen. Chris Coons, who spoke during a hearing in the U.S. Capitol yesterday. Twelve Democratic lawmakers gathered to discuss the shattering of what was recently the largest bilateral donor in the world — and four foreign aid and national security experts were there to provide answers.

“Trust takes a long time to gain, but a short time to lose,” said Cindy Dyer, the former U.S. ambassador-at-large to monitor and combat trafficking in persons.

The others — former top USAID officials Sarah Charles and Jeremy Konyndyk, along with Bruce Swartz, a former leader at the [U.S. Department of Justice](#) — agreed. They and the lawmakers spoke about how **China, Russia, and others were already filling the vacuum** that USAID’s dismantling had created. They also highlighted the national security risks to Americans, from illegal migration to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

“The U.S. is basically MIA on [Uganda’s Ebola] outbreak right now,” said Konyndyk, who is now the president of [Refugees International](#). “Up until three weeks ago, we would have routinely had a robust USAID [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] team out there, partnering with WHO and the Ugandan government. Instead, **we’ve basically abandoned that role.**”

The list went on. Lawmakers talked about how China funded a \$4.4 million grant in Cambodia within days of the foreign aid freeze beginning. They highlighted how Russia was praising Elon Musk, the billionaire charged with downsizing the U.S. government, for slicing away foreign aid. But the room was full of Democrats, who hold limited power to actually do anything right now. And Sen. Jeanne Shaheen — the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee — said that though she’d invited her Republican colleagues, she didn’t know whether they would attend.

“I hope my Republican colleagues will overcome their fears of Elon Musk and join us in saying no,” said Shaheen, speaking at the start of the hearing.

But by the time it concluded at 5 p.m., **not a single Republican lawmaker had dropped in.**

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