

AFSA Honors RIFed AID Staff for Constructive Dissent. By Helen Murphy, Devex
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Return to dissenter

“We were already one of the biggest proponents of ‘America First,’” says **Randy Chester**, a USAID veteran forced into early retirement after the Trump administration dismantled the agency. Now vice president and USAID liaison for the American Foreign Service Association, or AFSA, he’s working to keep its mission alive.

[AFSA recently honored aid workers for “constructive dissent”](#) at its annual awards, Devex Managing Editor Anna Gawel writes. **Sam Kraegel**, a former contracting officer, was recognized for coauthoring a memo opposing Trump’s aid cuts. Signing it was “terrifying,” he says. “We felt like we were going to lose our jobs, and then we did anyway.”

Kraegel and Chester both argue that USAID boosted the U.S. economy. **“We were spending taxpayer dollars reinvesting in America,”** Kraegel says, while Chester noted: “We always supported ‘America First’ ... because it was a mandate ... to buy America first.”

Their frustration? The lack of discussion. “We were expecting budget cuts ... but we were expecting to have a dialogue,” Chester says. “We never got that opportunity.”

Chester has harsh words for U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s folding of USAID into the [State Department](#), **calling it a shift that strips staff of security without saving money.** Kraegel calls AFSA’s dissent award “the honor of a lifetime,” his proudest moment in nearly 20 years of service.

Read: [Former USAID staff honored for their ‘constructive dissent’](#)