

Congress speaks up about US foreign aid. Will it matter? By Anna Gawel,
Devex Newswire, 19 Jan 2026

Congressional comeback

I'm not exactly going out on a limb to say that Republican lawmakers have been largely deferential to Trump, their über-influential boss. So it came as a shock that appropriators from both the Senate and U.S. House of Representatives agreed on a **compromise bill to fund U.S. foreign assistance to the tune of \$50 billion**. It's a 16% drop from last year, but nothing compared to the nearly 50% cut Trump wants.

Last week, the House even [passed the compromise bill](#), overcoming a key hurdle in the process. But [the landscape is still littered with minefields](#) — the Senate must pass it and, gulp, Trump must sign it. Even if he does, his administration would have to implement it — and its track record of doing Congress' bidding isn't exactly stellar. And even if the bill survives intact, does the [State Department](#), which absorbed [USAID](#), have the capacity to shove all that money out the door?

The obstacles are plenty, but for now, the aid community is basking in a much-needed, albeit tenuous, win.

“We are very pleased to see the bill introduced, and are very pleased to see the levels of spending where they are,” **David Cronin** of [Catholic Relief Services](#) tells my colleague Adva Saldinger, who's been carefully following the budgetary fine print. “The most important thing from this bill is not even the text itself. It's **the fact that it exists, that it's been introduced, and that it's bicameral, bipartisan.**”

That text is pretty crucial, though. The bill would not only provide substantial funding for global health and humanitarian assistance, but it would also maintain support for food security, women and girls, education, and water and sanitation. The legislation also includes money for initiatives such as [Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance](#), which [the administration previously said](#) it wouldn't support.

So questions naturally abound as to whether the administration will “honor the direction Congress has clearly laid out here,” says **Erin Collinson**, the director of policy outreach at the [Center for Global Development](#), a D.C.-based think tank. “There are no assurances that it will actually materialize.”

Still, the proposed package is consequential, says **Justin Fugle** of [Plan](#)

[International](#), pointing out that this agreement seems to be “the current Congress and current White House saying this is what we want to do around foreign aid.”

“That’s maybe a little optimistic, but there probably will be some benefits that this compromise has been forged, and everybody’s got things that they want in it.”