

Zipline Africa CEO praises new State Dept health policy. *Devex*, 8 Jan 2026

Hitting the same notes

Caitlin Burton, CEO of Zipline Africa, **stood firmly with the State Department's new approach to foreign aid** yesterday — so much so that **Mike Henning**, the president of the workers' union that represents USAID and State Department employees, said it seemed like Burton had been “contracted to represent some of the government's current positions.”

“I am not here as a spokesperson for the State Department,” responded Burton, speaking from a stage at the [Atlantic Council](#), a Washington, D.C.-based think tank. “I have had a few meetings with them but I am not an expert here on them. I'm just an expert on Zipline and market-led development — that's my thing.”

Still, the parallels were clear. Throughout her remarks, Burton spoke about the formula [Zipline](#) — an American drone company that recently [received a \\$150 million grant](#) from the State Department — uses for success: scaling what works, paying only for results, and expecting that governments drive and contribute to their own development. She also argued that humanitarian assistance has lingered far beyond the moments it was meant to serve, and in some cases has even crowded out capable governments, stunting the very systems it intended to strengthen.

“I just really want to applaud the State Department, because that's what they're doing with their commercial diplomacy strategy,” she added. “They're **trying to invest in countries in ways that treat them as peers and trade partners.**”

After USAID's collapse, dozens of African countries lost access to the agency's global health supply chain project. But in countries where Zipline operated, Burton said governments passed those operations over to Zipline — and according to Burton, “things got better.”

“Access improved, stockouts improved, the reliability of the supply system improved, treatment rates improved,” she said. “Crisis averted, health care continued, people moved on.”

It was a claim Henning rejected. During a question-and-answer session, he spoke about the “massive death and destruction” that happened once that supply chain project — among others — was canceled. Today, experts estimate that USAID's dismantling **could lead to the death of over 14 million people.**

“I think it was weird that in non-Zipline countries, after six-and-a-half decades of investment in supply systems and health systems, and I don't know how many billions of dollars poured into it, things completely fell apart,” Burton said. “**Six-and-a-half decades of investment should have left something behind** that governments could carry forward and keep operating.”

ICYMI: [State Dept grants \\$150M to Zipline to triple African drone operations](#)

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