

On May 19, Alex Carnes, Clerk/Staff Director of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on the Department of State and Foreign Operations (SACFO) held an off-the-record development dialogue with UAA members during which he shared his insights into Congressional priorities for foreign affairs and foreign assistance programs.

Alex explained the process by which the appropriators were able to develop the Fiscal Year 2026 foreign operations funding bill, which was especially challenging given the fact that the Senate was not able to introduce its version of the bill for consideration, an unprecedented situation. He explained that the bill does NOT codify the DOGE dissolution of USAID and in fact maintains traditional development sectors, including humanitarian assistance, health, basic education, food security, etc, albeit at lower levels than prior years (yet still significantly above the Administration's budget request). He emphasized that the bill seeks to close loop holes and gray areas and includes more oversight requirements that seek to ensure the funds are spent in accordance with Congressional priorities in the legislation.

Another example he noted of Congressional efforts at tighter oversight of the use of foreign assistance funds is the recent letter led by his boss, Senator Schatz, Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, with a group of 17 senators, demanding that the Administration reverse course on withholding \$19 billion in appropriated funds and spend down the funding as Congress directed. In their letter to Secretary Rubio, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russell Vought, and OMB Deputy Director Eric Ueland, the senators wrote, **“The plan includes spending up to \$3.2 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 development and global health funding on close-out costs, instead of lifesaving and other congressionally-directed programs, which constitutes an unnecessary and illegal impoundment of funds.”** The full text of the letter is [available here](#).

The outlook for FY '27, Alex said, is uncertain. While the House has passed its version of the bill, the Senate Foreign Operations Subcommittee has not been given its funding allocation, and thus no dates have been set for introducing or marking up their bill.