USGLC President Liz Schrayer update on US midterms and foreign policy, and more.
Liz Schrayer, USGLC, 22 Oct 2026

Are you watching the midterms closely? Given nearly $3 billion has already been spent just on Senate and House races this election cycle, it's hard to miss the campaigns, especially with so many toss-up races.

Now don't laugh at how wonky this sounds – but for the USGLC team, the nail-biter "race" this year included the end of this fiscal year!

- **Here's why**: Right up until the final hours on September 30, we were working to ensure critical funds – nearly $20 billion – Congress had already appropriated for strategic international assistance actually was obligated before the clock struck midnight.

- **Here's the great news**: Nearly all of that funding was obligated in time. That means these resources for security, global health, economic development and humanitarian programs can be used to stop threats before they reach our shores, fight hunger and disease, and advance U.S. security and economic interests.

As I told Devex in an interview, **this outcome was far from inevitable**.

- To all of you who made calls, joined meetings back home, and kept making the case to policymakers on why these investments matter for America's security and prosperity: ***thank you***.

- And a big thank you to the many bipartisan champions in Congress who spoke up, along with the Administration officials at the State Department and OMB who worked around the clock to get this done in time.

The reality is that this year is different than last:

- **Last summer for example,** a "pocket rescission" was proposed to cut $16 billion in previously Congressionally approved international assistance programs. Fortunately, after enormous engagement from our community, only $5 billion was unspent – still painful, but a long way from where it started.

- **Yet this summer,** a new "pocket rescission" was proposed and it barely mentioned international affairs programs. I'm no fan of pocket rescissions, but this is a meaningful shift – and reflects how much ***your*** engagement with Congress and the Administration made a difference.

I know there are plenty of challenges ahead – so here are a few brief items I'm watching, besides election ads:

LIFTING UP UKRAINE

- **Strong bipartisan response for Ukraine.** After last week's announcement by President Trump to waive a majority of Russia sanctions and to purchase Russian diesel, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle pushed back saying that it not only rewards Putin, but it threatens Ukrainian civilians. A few examples, especially noting the GOP voices:
    - A bipartisan group of 12 senators **– 6 Republicans and 6 Democrats –** are **calling on Trump to rescind the deal** and implement the sanctions.
    - **Sen. McCormick:** "I'm concerned about taking the pressure off Vladimir Putin."
    - **Sen. Rick Scott:** "I think it's clear Russia is the aggressor, and we've got to do everything we can to put economic pressure on Russia."
    - **Sen. Britt via spokesperson**: "Senator Britt wants to see Putin held accountable and the war – and tragic loss of life – come to an end. She continues to believe the United States should apply maximum pressure on Russia to end its unlawful war of aggression against Ukraine."

EBOLA ON THE MOVE

- **Outbreak is widening.** Concerns continue to rise as Ebola moves both in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and beyond. The DRC outbreak has spread to eight provinces, with more than 9,400 cases and 4,600 deaths reported. Kenya has nine confirmed cases, though no community transmission has been identified.

- **Cuts are raising concerns.** First, there are new concerns for a spillover from DRC's border to war-torn Central African Republic (CAR), which could be devastating, particularly given limited surveillance and health infrastructure would slow detection and response. In addition, CDC offices are closing across Africa, including in South Sudan, a neighbor of the DRC, which makes it harder to spot Ebola early and respond quickly if it crosses the border.

- **And in Zimbabwe,** negotiations over a bilateral health agreement have collapsed, and without U.S. assistance there, progress could be reversed in fighting against diseases, including HIV and malaria on top of outbreaks.

FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDTERMS

- **From the campaign trail:** USGLC local leaders have met with nearly 300 candidates running for either the Senate or House of Representatives. While this election, like most elections, is dominated by domestic issues, candidates and

voters are tuned into foreign policy, drawing clear connections to gas and grocery prices through the lens of the war in Iran and the tariff debate.

- **Polling shows this connectivity**: 86% in a **Chicago Council on Global Affairs** survey and 81% in an **Institute for Global Affairs** survey say the war in Iran is bad for the cost of living.

- **The good news:** Many candidates who are expected to win have international experience and expressed great interest in learning more about the tools of American engagement in the world. We have met veterans, those involved in overseas missionary work, international business leaders, and family of Peace Corps volunteers.

» Stay tuned for USGLC's signature election analysis after the midterms.

LAME DUCK: WHAT TO WATCH

- **Government shutdown talk, again?** Congress will return soon after the election and have to deal with the looming December 11 government funding deadline to avert a shutdown.

- **The immediate question:** Can lawmakers finish FY27 appropriations, including funding for diplomacy and international assistance, or will those decisions slide into the next Congress under another stopgap? Negotiations will certainly be impacted by the results of the elections, including the debt limit returning as a top issue.

AN INNOVATIVE BRIGHT SPOT

- **Food security labs continue.** Last week, the State Department announced **$71 million for eight Feed the Future Innovation Labs** in partnership with U.S. land-grant universities, providing research that helps farmers address threats like crop disease, poor soil, and drought before they become food crises.

- **The ROI.** USGLC's **Blueprint for Effective International Assistance** spotlighted that the research not only reduces future reliance on emergency assistance, but also has a domestic payoff: U.S. university research generated $2.9 billion in net benefits in developing countries, while sorghum research alone returned $1.1 billion to the U.S. economy. That's a real win-win.

- **Big thanks to bipartisan champions**:

  - **Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith** (R-MS) defended Mississippi State's Fish Lab;
  - **Sen. Jon Ossoff** (D-GA) pushed to restore UGA peanut research with benefits for Georgia farmers;

- **Sen. Eric Schmitt** (R-MO) sponsored an amendment to spare the labs from last summer's rescissions package;
- **Sen. Jerry Moran** (R-KS) helped reinstate funding for Kansas State University's lab last year; and
- **Sen. Brian Schatz** (D-HI) has tied the program to Hawaii's coffee and cacao growers and more resilient supply chains.

» Read our full Blueprint here.

Next week, I'm off to Manchester, New Hampshire for an event with retiring **Sen. Jeanne Shaheen** (D-NH), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, while our team heads across the Midwest for roundtables with **Acting USTDA Director Thomas Hardy** in Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Omaha.

After that, I'll be heading to spend Halloween with some of my grandchildren before the election, though still trying to figure out my costume.

Send me your midterm predictions or recommendations for Halloween costumes – and get ready for a wild Lame Duck session. Keep an eye out for USGLC's election analysis soon after the election.

Take care,

Liz

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