

# The Seattle Times

**U.S. foreign aid is not a luxury but a critical investment in global stability**

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**By Adam Smith, Jim McDermott and Bill Clapp**

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In the federal budget debate, Rep. Paul Ryan proposes cutting back U.S. foreign aid significantly. Here, U.S. Reps. Adam Smith and Jim McDermott as well as Global Washington founder Bill Clapp argue that such aid helps U.S. security and trade.

WITH our country facing mounting debt, and the federal budget standoff nearly bringing the government to a halt earlier this month, some voices in Congress are clamoring to toss foreign assistance on the chopping block.

While an 11th-hour compromise on spending for the rest of 2011 trimmed foreign aid back to 2010 levels (about \$8.4 billion below the president's request), the budget debate has only just begun.

Last Thursday, Rep. Paul Ryan's proposal for FY2012 hit the House floor. Along with massive cuts to domestic programs, Ryan's long-term plan would cut international affairs and foreign assistance by 29 percent in 2012 and 44 percent by 2016.

Cuts to diplomacy and foreign assistance are creating less controversy than domestic cuts such as the changes to Medicare and Medicaid laid out by Rep. Ryan. However, there are widespread misconceptions about how much of the budget is actually devoted to international investment and about the true benefits of these programs.

Foreign aid is far from wasteful spending: Dollars spent abroad help maintain America's economic and political leadership, as well as support our vital national-security interests. These programs have amplified benefits for global stability through contributions to poverty alleviation, health and disease prevention, and infrastructure-building worldwide.

A recent poll reveals many Americans believe that international development makes up 25 percent of the budget, when in reality it is currently only 1 percent. This amount is in danger of being slashed even further by Ryan's funding proposal. Such cuts to an already minor segment of our spending will do nothing to address the current deficit. Here is a small sample of what they will do, according to many experts:

- Take away access to tuberculosis treatment and testing for 370,000 people worldwide.
- Halt progress in AIDS education and prevention, including access to lifesaving medications that would have eliminated mother-to-child HIV transmission by 2015
- Diminish our ability to effectively conduct disaster-response activities such as our assistance efforts in Japan.

The long-term cost of the proposed cuts is unreasonably high, and not just for those whose lives will be directly affected. Remember, it cost \$100 million to eliminate smallpox on the planet, but now saves the world \$1.3 billion annually.

Investment in foreign aid is an investment in global relationships and our shared financial future. As developing nations become more prosperous, they will become less dependent on assistance, and Americans will benefit

from our established relationships with these emerging markets. Washington state — the fourth-largest U.S. exporter in 2009 — would reap significant economic benefits from such opportunities.

Foreign assistance is the first line of our national defense, making us safer by stabilizing volatile nations. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates emphasized, "development is a lot cheaper than sending soldiers."

Further, Gen. David Petraeus has praised development programs and expressed concern that "levels of funding for our State Department and USAID partners will not sufficiently enable them to build on the hard-fought security achievements of our men and women in uniform."

Many of our nation's leading development organizations are based here in Washington, and as the state's elected officials and business leaders, we support the vibrant global-development sector in our community. We have advocated strongly for the maintenance of the current foreign-assistance appropriations and today we ask you to join in supporting this critical work.

Let your elected representatives and community know that you support crucial investments in our safety, economic interests and long-term prosperity. Our budget challenges are immense, but ultimately, we cannot reduce foreign aid without considering the greater cost in global poverty and instability such cuts would produce, now and for future generations.

*U.S. Rep. Adam Smith, D-Tacoma, represents Washington's 9th Congressional District; U.S. Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Seattle, represents the 7th District; Bill Clapp is founder of Global Washington and Seattle International Foundation.*