

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 17, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express serious concerns about the politically and fiscally irresponsible manner in which \$10,000,000,000 in U.S. foreign assistance funds have been made available for the international COVID-19 response, and to urge you to take immediate action to ensure that such funds are held to the same rigorous standards of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness as they would have been if provided for under regular order.

In just one year, the COVID-19 pandemic has claimed the lives of more than 2.6 million people, upended economies, and shattered livelihoods around the globe. The Chinese Communist Party withheld critical information that allowed a local outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan, China to become a global pandemic. The toll on the American people has been particularly severe, and so it is right to prioritize needs here at home. Still, we are acutely aware that a pandemic threat anywhere is a threat everywhere. America will not fully recover and Americans will not be safe from future variants until the spread is contained overseas.

This is why we specifically urged House and Senate leadership, in a bipartisan manner, to provide sufficient resources for “a robust, coordinated, and sufficiently resourced international response” to the COVID-19 threat through supplemental appropriations. This also is why we are deeply disappointed by our Democratic colleagues’ decision to alternatively pursue a highly partisan budget reconciliation process that prioritized expediency over a sound policy process. Such action threatens to undermine the bipartisan consensus that has guided American support for U.S. foreign assistance for decades.

In the American Rescue Plan (PL 117-2), we are specifically concerned by:

- the confusion created by the comingling of funds and authorities under section 10003, including with regard to the directive to use Economic Support Funds (ESF) to support activities traditionally funded by International Disaster Assistance (IDA) and Global Health Programs (GHP) – three distinct accounts with unique authorities and purposes under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C 2151 et seq.);
- the lack of specific reference to essential terms and conditions routinely carried in authorizations and appropriations measures that advance effective foreign aid principles, including consultation and notification requirements, transparency and accountability

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measures, pro-life protections, burden sharing, and consideration for absorptive capacity, partner country commitment, opportunity for impact, and long-term sustainability; and

- the likelihood that the unchecked flow of U.S. foreign assistance funds absent such explicit terms and conditions will crowd out other potential donors, increase the likelihood of widespread waste, fraud, and abuse, and ultimately undermine U.S. taxpayer support for such programs in the future.

We therefore request that the Department work expeditiously to provide to the Congress a comprehensive strategy, and accompanying spend plan, that aligns the \$10,000,000,000 provided for the international COVID-19 response with the national interests of the United States. We expect this strategy to establish clearly defined goals, priorities, objectives, and benchmarks for combatting and mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It must not be used as a means to augment or divert funding toward non-COVID-19 related objectives. Moreover, it must reflect long-standing principles of effective foreign aid, including that all funding decisions will be guided by data-driven assessments of need, capacity, opportunity, and partner commitment to achieving and sustaining long-term results.

We further expect that all funding decisions under the strategy will be notified to the Congress, consistent with section 634A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. Such notifications should include robust monitoring and evaluation plans, as is customary. Contributions to multilateral entities also should be accompanied by agreements to share data with the Inspectors General of the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development, and sufficient resources should be set aside from the Department's and USAID's operations accounts for their oversight work. Moreover, the Administration should prioritize resources to vaccinate all foreign and civil service officers of the Department and USAID, and local employees at our Embassies and Missions, in order to keep our diplomatic and development professionals safe, and to enable them to safely oversee programs.

Consistent with the Department's and the U.S. Agency for International Development's planned contributions to COVAX, any contributions to multilateral entities, including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, should be made in tranches rather than in single lump sums payments, with additional funds being made available based upon assessments of need, capacity, performance, and contingent on substantial support from other donors. Voluntary contributions to the World Health Organization should also be conditioned upon attainment of sorely needed reforms.

Finally, we urge the Administration to ensure that all U.S. foreign assistance provided under this strategy is clearly branded with the American flag, in line with the USAID Branding Modernization Act (P.L. 116-334), and to take other effective measures to counterbalance the Chinese and Russian governments' disinformation and vaccine diplomacy campaigns.

Again, we do not dispute the need to mount a robust international response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It's the right thing to do, and it's the smart thing to do. Yet, the provision of \$10,000,000,000 in foreign assistance funds through a partisan, nontransparent process – without

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any meaningful guardrails or protections – is neither right nor smart. The rush to pass this package may have unintended consequences including waste, fraud and abuse. U.S. global health security can best be secured, and the bipartisan consensus to support foreign aid can best be preserved, by working together to set out clear goals, objectives, and benchmarks that ensure the effective use of U.S. taxpayer dollars. We look forward to working with you toward that end.

Sincerely,



JAMES E. RISCH  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
U.S. Senate



MICHAEL T. McCAUL  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives