



Protesters rally against Trump's stop-work order for USAID

FEBRUARY 5, 2025 · 9:36 PM ET



Luke Garrett



Hundreds of people gathered near the Capitol to protest the dismantling of USAID, the international agency charged with dispensing humanitarian aid around the world on behalf of the United States.

Ben de la Cruz/NPR

Protesters — led by Democratic lawmakers and nonprofit workers — demonstrated in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday in response to the Trump administration's decision to furlough nearly all employees at the United States Agency for International Development.



WORLD

'Thank you for your service': Trump administration puts USAID staff on leave

This week, the [USAID website](#) announced all personnel "will be placed on administrative leave globally," with exception to those working in "mission-critical functions." This directive comes after tech billionaire and special government employee Elon Musk said he is in the process of "shutting down USAID" with the

support of President Donald Trump.

"USAID is a ball of worms," Musk, the leader of DOGE, said Monday. "There is no apple. And when there is no apple, you've just got to basically get rid of the whole thing."



GOATS AND SODA

Why does Musk want USAID 'to die'? And why did its website disappear?

A current USAID employee — who spoke to NPR on the condition of anonymity over fear of being fired — attended the rally and said they've been locked out of their work email, phones and timecard software for days. The employee wasn't sure whether or how USAID workers will receive pay while on administrative leave since the timecard system is how they get paid. The next scheduled pay day is next week.

The USAID employee also worried about the work that's been halted around the world.

"We are not in the fight against Ebola," they said. "It's only a matter of time before Ebola breaks out of Uganda because USAID is not there."

During the rally, those gathered at the Upper Senate Park along Constitution and Delaware avenues — chanted "Elon Musk has got to go" and held signs that said "USAID SAVES LIVES!!!"



Protesters carried signs blaming tech billionaire Elon Musk for what critics have called the unconstitutional dismantling of USAID.

Ben de la Cruz/NPR

Lenore Flower from Greenbelt, Md., said her friends are directly impacted by the shuttering of USAID and that they are afraid.

"I'm here to support the many, many people who are in a position where they can't advocate because their jobs are in danger and all they can do is hold on to their positions," Flower said. "And at the moment, our democracy is in crisis. I'm here to fight back as best I can."

Family of aid workers also attended, like Linda McCoy of Washington, D.C.

"We have a daughter-in-law who's living in Nairobi doing good work in hunger, but she's waiting to have the plug pulled on her job any minute because she works very closely with USAID people."



POLITICS

Public needs to rise up to fight 'constitutional crisis,' says Democratic senator

McCoy and others at the rally said Democrats weren't doing enough to oppose Musk and Trump.

"The guardrails don't seem to be holding," she said. "And the courts take too long and they're not shutting down the Senate. Democrats aren't shutting down the Senate, which they should do."

At the rally, Democratic lawmakers criticized the Trump administration.



Rep. Dina Titus of Nevada was among the Democratic lawmakers who addressed the protesters, reiterating the importance of soft power diplomacy in keeping America safe.

Ben de la Cruz/NPR



WORLD

What is USAID, the U.S. Agency for International Development?

"No one is more delighted that the United States is retreating from its global leadership role than the Communist Party of China," Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, vice chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, said. "I want to be clear: The latest attempt by the Trump administration to freeze U.S.-funded foreign aid assistance and punish the men and women who are working at the agency is a gift to our adversaries that will make us less safe."

Before being nominated and confirmed as secretary of state, then-Sen. Marco Rubio led the Senate intelligence committee.

On Monday, [Rubio told reporters that he is the acting USAID director](#), and there are things that USAID does "that we should continue to do and we will continue to do. But everything they do has to be in alignment with the national interest and the foreign policy of the United States."



During the rally, protesters also took aim at Congress for not doing enough to prevent the Trump administration from shutting down USAID.

Ben de la Cruz/NPR

Late Wednesday, five former USAID administrators issued a joint statement calling on Congress and the Trump administration to "swiftly protect the agency's statutory role," noting that they "have served different presidents and voted for different

political parties." The statement was signed by J. Brian Atwood, Peter McPherson, Andrew Natsios, Samantha Power and Gayle Smith.

USAID was established in 1961 when Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act and President John F. Kennedy signed an executive order. In 1998, Congress made the agency independent by law.

In 2023, USAID managed more than \$40 billion in federal spending on humanitarian and development assistance in more than 100 countries.

usaid

doge

elon musk



READ & LISTEN

- Home
- News
- Culture
- Music
- Podcasts & Shows

CONNECT

- Newsletters
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Press
- Public Editor
- Corrections
- Contact & Help

ABOUT NPR

Overview

Diversity

NPR Network

Accessibility

Ethics

Finances

GET INVOLVED

Support Public Radio

Sponsor NPR

NPR Careers

NPR Shop

NPR Events

NPR Extra

terms of use

privacy

your privacy choices

text only