

Press Releases: FY 2018 State Department Budget Request

Testimony
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Secretary of State

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CHAIRMAN CORKER: Thank you, sir. Mr. Secretary, since I know you just made an announcement, before you begin your opening comments, would you like to go ahead and share with us what has just occurred and then do your opening statement?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, some of you may have seen a press release that was put out just before I arrived announcing that at the President's direction, the Department of State has secured the release of Otto Warmbier from North Korea. He is on his way, en route home, to be reunited with his family. We continue our discussions with the North Korean regime regarding the release of the three other American citizens that have been detained. We have no comment on Mr. Warmbier's condition, out of respect to him and the family, and that is the statement that was released.

CHAIRMAN CORKER: Very good. Well, listen, we look forward to your opening comment and questions. Thank you again for being here, and you can begin with that, if you would. Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you, Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this administration's State Department and USAID request for Fiscal Year 2018.

As we all know, America's global competitive advantages and standing as a leader are under constant challenge. The dedicated men and women of the State Department and USAID carry out the important and often perilous work of advancing America's interest every day, 24/7, 365 days a year. That mission is unchanged.

However, the State Department and USAID, like many other institutions here and around the world, have not evolved in their responsiveness as quickly as new challenges and threats to our national security have changed and are

changing. We are challenged to respond to a post-Cold War world that set in motion new global dynamics, and a post-9/11 world characterized by historic new threats that present themselves in ways never seen before, enabled by technological tools that we have been ill-prepared to engage.

The 21st century has already presented many evolving challenges to U.S. national security and economic prosperity. We must develop proactive responses to protect and advance the interest of the American people.

With such a broad array of threats facing the United States, the Fiscal Year 2018 budget request of \$37.6 billion aligns with the administration's objective of making America's security our top priority. The first responsibility of government is the security of its own citizens, and we will orient our diplomatic efforts toward fulfilling that commitment.

While our mission will also be focused on advancing the economic interest of the American people, the State Department's primary focus will be to protect our citizens at home and abroad. Our mission is at all times guided by our longstanding values of freedom, democracy, individual liberty, and human dignity. The conviction of our country's founders is enduring: that all men are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. As a nation, we hold high the aspiration that all will one day experience the freedoms we have known.

In our young administration's foreign policy, we are motivated by the conviction that the more we engage with other nations on issues of security and prosperity, the more we will have opportunities to shape the human rights conditions in those nations. History has shown that the United States leaves a footprint of freedom wherever it goes. Ensuring the security and prosperity of the American people and advancing our values has necessitated difficult decisions in other areas of our budget.

The Fiscal Year 2018 budget request includes substantial funding for many foreign assistance programs under the auspices of USAID and the State Department, but we have made hard choices to reduce funding for other initiatives. Even with reductions in funding, we will continue to be the leader in international development, global health, democracy and good governance initiatives, as well as humanitarian efforts. If natural disasters or epidemics strike overseas, America will respond with the care and support it always has. And I'm convinced we can maximize the effectiveness of these programs and continue to offer America's helping hand to the world.

This budget request also reflects a commitment to ensure every tax dollar spent is aligned with the department's and USAID's mission critical objectives. The request focused the State Department and USAID's efforts on missions which deliver the greatest value and opportunity of success for the American people. The State Department and USAID budget increased over 60 percent from Fiscal Year 2007, reaching a record-high \$55.6 billion in Fiscal Year 2017. Recognizing this rate of increase in funding is not sustainable, the Fiscal Year 2018 budget request seeks to align the core missions of the State Department with historic funding levels. We believe this budget also represents the interests of the American people, including responsible

stewardship of the public's money.

I know there is intense interest in prospective State Department and USAID redesign efforts. We have just completed collecting information on our organizational processes and culture through a survey that was made available to every one of our State and USAID colleagues. Over 35,000 surveys were completed, and we also have held in-person listening sessions with approximately 300 individuals to obtain their perspective on what we do and how we do it. I met personally with dozens of team members who spoke candidly about their experiences. From this feedback, we have been able to get a clearer overall view of our organization.

We have no preconceived outcomes, and our discussions of the goals, priorities, and direction of the State Department and USAID are not token exercises. The principles for our listening sessions and subsequent evaluation of our organization are the same as those which I stated in my confirmation hearing: for our foreign policy. We will see the world for what it is, be honest with ourselves and the American people, follow the facts where they lead us, and hold ourselves and others accountable. We are still analyzing the feedback we have received, and we expect to release the final findings of the survey soon.

From all of this, one thing is certain: I'm listening to what my people tell me are the challenges facing them, and how we can produce a more efficient, effective State Department and USAID. And we will work as a team and with the Congress to improve both organizations.

Throughout my career, I have never believed, nor have I ever experienced, that the level of funding devoted to a goal is the most important factor in achieving it. Our budget will never determine our ability to be effective – our people will. My colleagues at the State Department and USAID are a deep source of inspiration, and their patriotism, professionalism, and willingness to make sacrifices for our country are our greatest resource.

I am confident that the U.S. State Department and USAID will continue to deliver results for the American people. I thank you for your time and am happy now to answer your questions.

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