

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-NY), Ranking Democrat on the Appropriations State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, today delivered the following statement at subcommittee markup of the FY2012 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Act.

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“The bill we consider today is only one and a quarter percent of the overall budget, yet it has an enormous impact on our national security, economic prosperity, and leadership in the world. I thank Chairwoman Granger for accommodating some of our concerns; however, this legislation would be a step back from U.S. leadership and substantially weaken the United States’ efforts overseas by decreasing economic opportunity, stability, and access to critical services for millions of the world’s poorest people.

“It does include several critical measures I fully support. First, security assistance for Israel is critical to U.S. national security interests. In a dangerous and volatile region of the world, Israel is a stable, strong democracy, and I am pleased this bill fully funds our important ally and continues strong restrictions on funding for the Palestinian Authority. It also continues strong language on Iran sanctions that is critical to our continued efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

“I support language that encourages the Administration to contribute to a multilateral education fund. Our participation in the Fast-Track Initiative will allow the U.S. to leverage funds from other donors to multiply the impact of each U.S. dollar spent to increase access to basic education. Education is the backbone of healthy, stable societies, and our investment today will reap great rewards in the future.

“Funding at the FY11 level has been included for two important programs: the Peace Corps and the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Both effectively communicate American values and directly engage local populations, which are invaluable to our diplomatic efforts.

“Finally, given the constantly changing and endlessly challenging situations in countries like Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt, and Pakistan, I appreciate the responsible approach of the Chairwoman to expand certification requirements before funding can be directed to those countries.

“Given the many challenges facing us here at home, we expected an appropriate reduction in our overall foreign operations spending. However, even within the confines of a reduced allocation, many of the cuts are deeply problematic.

“The operating budgets for the State Department and USAID have been cut by 35%. These cuts will substantially diminish capacity at both agencies and reverse our bipartisan efforts to rebuild our corps of diplomatic and development professionals. This raises questions of how the majority plans to continue the work that we all agree is vital. Neither of the likely scenarios – either cutting back programs that are necessary to our national security, or returning to an overreliance on private contractors – is acceptable. As we speak, we are trying to transition from military- to civilian-lead in Iraq and Afghanistan, protests across the Middle East are bringing down governments, and famine is spreading across the Horn of Africa. We cannot cripple the agencies whose missions address these volatile situations.

“Multilateral development banks and strategic investment funds are being scaled back at a time when our domestic economy could benefit from access to overseas markets. Last month, more than 50 leading American businesses and associations, including the U.S. Chamber of

Commerce, Caterpillar, Lockheed Martin, Ford, Boeing, Johnson & Johnson, General Electric, Cargill, Microsoft, Xerox, and Pfizer, sent a letter to Congress in which they wrote, “U.S. businesses understand that international development and diplomacy programs play a vital role in creating American jobs and spurring U.S. economic growth... The International Affairs Budget funds valuable tools for advancing U.S. economic and strategic interests around the world and is vital for achieving a more prosperous future for American workers and businesses.” When job creation should be our top priority, it is unacceptable that the majority is not adequately supporting programs that directly impact economic growth here at home by helping developing countries become reliable trading partners, increasing transparency, promoting good governance, and opening markets to U.S. exports and investment.

“The Development Assistance account – which funds a wide array of programs including education, microcredit, environmental protection, agriculture development, democracy promotion, and women’s empowerment – is cut by nearly 20%. The programs in this account represent America at its best because they reduce human suffering and empower people throughout the world to live healthy and productive lives. Cuts to this account threaten both our ability to be an effective agent of change as well as our longstanding global leadership.

“Finally, it is beyond dispute that international family planning programs, which include providing contraceptives, prenatal care and screenings, education on birth spacing and healthy pregnancies, and other interventions aimed at improving maternal and child health, lead to fewer unwanted pregnancies, fewer abortions, and fewer maternal and infant deaths. Yet this bill cuts these critical programs by \$115 million, which would lead to millions of women and families without access to basic reproductive care, including contraceptive services and prenatal screenings.

“In addition to the funding cuts, it is extremely disappointing that outrageous, divisive policies have been included, such as the ban on funding for the United Nations Population Fund and the global gag rule. The UN Population Fund is frequently the only provider of critical and often life-saving services in the poorest parts of the world; in fact, UNFPA operates in over 110 countries where the U.S. does not provide family planning assistance.

“The combined effect of the funding cuts to our bilateral programs and UNFPA will lead to 7,700 maternal deaths, 35,000 orphans, and 1.3 million more abortions next year. I’ll say that again: The funding level proposed by the majority would lead to 1.3 million more abortions – most of which would be unsafe.

“And the global gag rule – which would be unconstitutional in the United States – inserts a controversial policy into private and deeply personal conversations between a woman and her healthcare provider. It muzzles doctors and nurses throughout the world who work for entities receiving any U.S. assistance – even in places where abortion is legal. In real world terms, that means an expectant mother who has walked six hours while bleeding to reach the only health clinic in the region may not get the life-saving care she needs – or even a referral. Or consider the village where the only health provider must close without U.S. assistance, denying a full range of care – including, for example, HIV screenings and treatment – to the entire local population.

“Whether you call yourself a Republican or a Democrat, pro-choice or pro-life, it is clear these unconscionable and unnecessarily divisive policies and cuts are counterproductive to our shared goals of reducing unwanted pregnancies, maternal and infant deaths, and abortions.

“It is deeply troubling that this bill fails to maintain our longstanding tradition of a more bipartisan proposal. Many of the cuts as well as the problematic policy riders would hurt America’s standing on the international stage; impede our ability to save lives and help build healthy, stable societies; diminish our economic prospects; and undermine our national security interests. As we move through the appropriations process, I hope that we can work together to improve this bill.”

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