

**Ranking Member Peters Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Eliminating Waste by the Foreign Aid Bureaucracy
February 13, 2025**

I am very discouraged by this hearing, and by the witnesses you have chosen to give a platform to today.

Instead of having a serious discussion, we're going to hear conspiracy theories as the Committee holds what amounts to a pep rally in support of President Trump's illegal power grab.

I agree that this Committee should conduct rigorous oversight of federal spending – including wasteful foreign aid – and that we should always be working to identify waste and fraud in federal programs.

But today's hearing, where I'm sure we'll hear many of our colleagues on the other side of the dais cheer on President Trump and his cronies like Elon Musk in their illegal and unconstitutional efforts to cut off foreign aid. It is not only a sham, it completely misses the point on what this Administration is doing and how far President Trump will go to hurt American families so they can pay for tax cuts for billionaires.

We can't have a real debate about wasteful spending when President Trump has empowered an unvetted billionaire with massive conflicts of interests to cut off funding for any program that the Administration doesn't understand or doesn't agree with politically.

The Constitution doesn't empower a social media billionaire with massive conflicts of interest to decide how your tax dollars are spent. It doesn't even empower President Trump to make those decisions! The Constitution gives Congress – and only Congress – the sole power to decide how taxpayer money is spent. And, for the most part, we pass bipartisan laws to determine how that money should be spent.

But President Trump has directed Elon Musk and his other cronies to ignore Congress and the Constitution, and recklessly and illegally cut off funding that Congress has passed into law.

Not only is it illegal and unconstitutional, but President Trump's direction to shutter USAID will have damaging consequences across the globe and here in the United States.

I'd like to enter into the record numerous statements from organizations and experts detailing those consequences.

What my Democratic colleagues and I are most concerned about is what agency, what federal program, will be the next domino to fall? What's next on the chopping block?

President Trump has already directed his cronies to shut down the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Will they halt Social Security payments that seniors count on next? Will they stop Medicare reimbursements and prevent seniors from access critical health care?

Will they block disaster aid from states that have suffered damage from wildfires and hurricanes?

President Trump and his cronies have hinted that all of these resources that Americans count on and more could be shut off on a whim.

It's not just that it's illegal. It's not just that it violates the separation of powers. The bottom line is that these actions hurt American families and it's our job to fight back. That's what the Democrats on our Committee will be focused on today.

If this Committee is serious about defending American families and Congress' oversight role – a role, Mr. Chairman, that you said you would champion – then the hearing we should be having today would examine the blatantly illegal activities that President Trump has led to undermine the laws passed by Congress and to wreak havoc on the programs and services that support hardworking Americans.

At President Trump's direction, Elon Musk and his minions have illegally cut off funding that Congress passed to support farmers, child care centers, lifesaving cancer research, community health centers, religious charities and services that Americans rely on every day.

It's all been under the guise of addressing waste. But if the Administration is serious about combatting waste and fraud, then the President would not have fired 18 Inspectors General – the independent watchdogs who identify the very waste, fraud and abuse.

If the President is serious about addressing waste and fraud in foreign aid, then he would not have fired the Inspector General for USAID.

Let's remember, this isn't the first time a President has tested the limits of the law when it comes to presidential powers. We've seen this movie before.

But it is the first time that Republicans in Congress have simply rolled over and let the President seize the power the Constitution assigns to the legislative branch. We have the power of the purse, as the Chairman likes to say.

But let's look at an example from history. In the 1970s, when President Richard Nixon refused to spend money Congress appropriated for child care, job programs and environmental clean up programs, virtually every member of Congress from both parties rejected that and passed the Impoundment Control Act of 1974, which asserted Congress' constitutional power. And when it passed, it passed unanimously. Every Republican Senator stood up to Richard Nixon and said 'this is unacceptable.' Now clearly that was a time when we did not have feckless Republican senators. But it is a great time to look at how we came together to stand up to presidential power.

And it wasn't just Congress. President Nixon lost in the courts over and over again. No judge ever endorsed President Nixon's argument that he had a right to ignore the laws of Congress.

If President Trump thinks his actions are lawful, then his Administration should be able to answer straightforward questions from Congress.

They should operate in the light of day, instead of trying to hide what they are doing from Congress, the courts, and independent watchdogs.

Mr. Chairman, I was disappointed that over the last few weeks, I've had a number of oversight letters that you refused to sign. I would hope that you'd reconsider, and I look forward to meeting with you to talk through those letters in the near future.

And I think also, Mr. Chairman, many of the questions that we have today are about the actions that President Trump has directed Elon Musk to take. I think we should also call in Elon Musk to ask questions, particularly about his numerous and substantial conflicts of interest while he's making these kinds of decisions.

I hope that going forward, this Committee will work to defend Congress' roles and responsibilities under the law and conduct real, meaningful oversight of this Administration's lawless actions.