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Tiffany Smiley: International assistance: A choice for Washington's future

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By Tiffany Smiley

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America's global leadership has always been a cornerstone of our national security and prosperity. From World War II to the Cold War and beyond, we've shaped the world through strategic alliances, economic partnerships and military strength.

The current international landscape is growing increasingly complex. The rise of China, the resurgence of Russia and the persistence of radical extremism demand a new approach to global engagement – one that is strategic, targeted and above all, smart.

This kind of international assistance is not just a moral imperative. It is a national security necessity.

When the U.S. steps back, China, Russia and other authoritarian regimes rush in, and Washington state feels the consequences directly.

This erosion of American leadership not only undermines our security but also diminishes opportunities for Washington state's workers, manufacturers and farmers. Rather than retreating from the global stage, America must double down on its engagement – but with a smarter, more effective approach.

As President Trump himself has said, this reform of our international aid system requires a scalpel, not a sledgehammer.

We don't need to spend more money. We need to spend our money more wisely.

This means readjusting our international assistance to achieve maximum impact and consistent return on investments, with a focus on protecting and promoting American interests at home and abroad.

The heart of smart international assistance is its ability to combat the influence of China and other geopolitical rivals. China's Belt and Road Initiative is a prime example of how it is using economic aid to exert control over developing nations. By offering loans, infrastructure projects and trade deals, China has created a network of dependencies that will serve its strategic and economic interests, often at the expense of the sovereignty of those nations.

America can and must provide a compelling alternative. Rather than engaging in a race to pour more money into social programs that advance political ideologies, we must focus on smart, targeted investments that offer long-term solutions for our foreign partners to succeed.

Equally important, international assistance creates opportunities for American businesses and workers. As emerging markets grow and develop, manufacturers, farmers and tech companies right here in Washington can benefit from new trade relationships and access to new markets.

For example, in 2024, Washington exported \$57.8 billion in goods, making our state the ninth-largest exporter in the country. Our businesses are some of the most recognizable in the world – from Boeing to Microsoft to Starbucks – and our agricultural products – including apples, cherries and blueberries – are enjoyed by consumers everywhere.

These exports supported an estimated 160 thousand jobs in 2022. To be specific, these are not temporary, low-paying jobs. They are stable career opportunities that pay up to 18 percent more than the national average.

Our farmers and businesses rely on global markets for growth and profitability. Through sensible international initiatives, we can help ensure hard-working Americans have access to the emerging markets that will help them thrive.

It is clear that the world has changed and so must our approach to foreign aid. The outdated, one-size-fits-all model of international assistance that has been in place for decades is no longer effective for our nation.

Aid programs must be reformed to ensure they are as targeted and high-impact as possible. This is not about eliminating programs altogether, but ensuring that every dollar we spend serves a clear strategic purpose and advances U.S. interests.

In the coming years, the choices America makes regarding its role in the world will have lasting consequences for our national security, economy and global influence.

As a mother of three boys, I think about how the decisions we make today are shaping the world my sons will inherit. If we want to protect America's global leadership, we must embrace a new model of foreign aid – one that is tailored to the challenges of the 21st century.

Through smart, strategic international assistance, we can counter the influence of our rivals, strengthen our alliances and create new opportunities for Washington businesses and families. We have a choice, and that choice must be to lead.

Tiffany Smiley is the former Republican nominee for U.S. Senate from Washington state. She is a long-time veteran advocate and founder of Endeavor PAC. Smiley resides in Pasco with her husband and three sons.

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