

Opinion: International aid and trade fuel Utah's economy



The Adobe headquarters, in background, and other commercial developments around Point of the Mountain in Lehi are pictured on Wednesday, May 16, 2018. Spenser Heaps, Deseret News

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When people hear “foreign aid,” too often, they picture wasteful spending or endless checks to corrupt governments. But here in Utah, international assistance isn’t about charity. It’s about strategy. It’s about building global markets for our products, creating jobs for hardworking Utahns and ensuring that America, not our adversaries, sets the rules in a fast-changing world.

For Utah’s economy and for America’s future, targeted international assistance isn’t just the right thing to do; it’s the smart thing to do.

Utah isn’t just a landlocked state with sprawling mountains and a strong emphasis on family values. It’s also a hub of international business. In 2024 alone, Utah exported \$18.2 billion worth of goods, supporting an estimated 45,000 jobs in our state.

Companies like Adobe, Texas Instruments and Northrop Grumman, which have major offices in Utah, depend on access to stable markets abroad. International assistance helps keep these markets open and

growing. When America supports global health, critical infrastructure and education programs abroad, it's not a handout. It's a strategic investment.

For example, U.S. assistance programs in [Latin America](#) help stabilize local economies and can stem the flood of illegal immigrants flowing to the U.S. This is good for America's borders and for Utah businesses looking for new markets and reliable trading partners.

Every well-spent dollar in America's global footprint helps to generate long-term demand for American-made products, including the ones produced right here in Utah. Again, that's not charity — that's economic strategy.

Take our agricultural industry: Utah's farmers and ranchers shipped [\\$512 million](#) worth of exports in 2023. When we help developing countries build stronger economies, we are not just providing aid; we are creating future customers for Utah beef, alfalfa and dairy products.

The same goes for tech. Utah's growing tech industry thrives in global markets. As middle classes grow in regions once reliant on aid initiatives, they become new markets for cloud-based software, cybersecurity tools and digital services, many of which are developed by Utah companies.

Global competition is not taking a break. China is pouring billions of dollars into Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia through its [Belt and Road Initiative](#), which is all about control, not building goodwill.

Every time America withdraws from international engagement, we leave a vacuum that China and Russia are more than happy to fill. That's why it is crucial to ensure that international assistance programs align with our national interests. These initiatives not only help build alliances and promote American values, but also serve as strategic counter measures to the [rising power](#) of authoritarian influence around the globe.

Utah's own [Sen. John Curtis](#) has argued that U.S. leadership abroad is essential to keeping America and Utah safe and competitive. He's right. By investing in smart programs that support our international partners, we are creating relationships that benefit our state's businesses and help us outpace our rivals.'

Reform is certainly necessary to ensure that every dollar we spend on international assistance delivers a clear return for the American people. I applaud the efforts of President Trump and Secretary of State Rubio to refocus strategic American aid and development. Ending wasteful spending on programs lacking strategic focus or outdated priorities of previous administrations was long overdue.

For Utahns who believe in American exceptionalism, self-reliance and free enterprise, international assistance is a bold assertion of leadership. It's how we shape the global economy to our advantage and protect our values from authoritarian threats.

Now is the time to recognize that what happens abroad matters here at home. To protect our workers, farmers and families, we must invest wisely in international assistance programs that put America and Utah first.