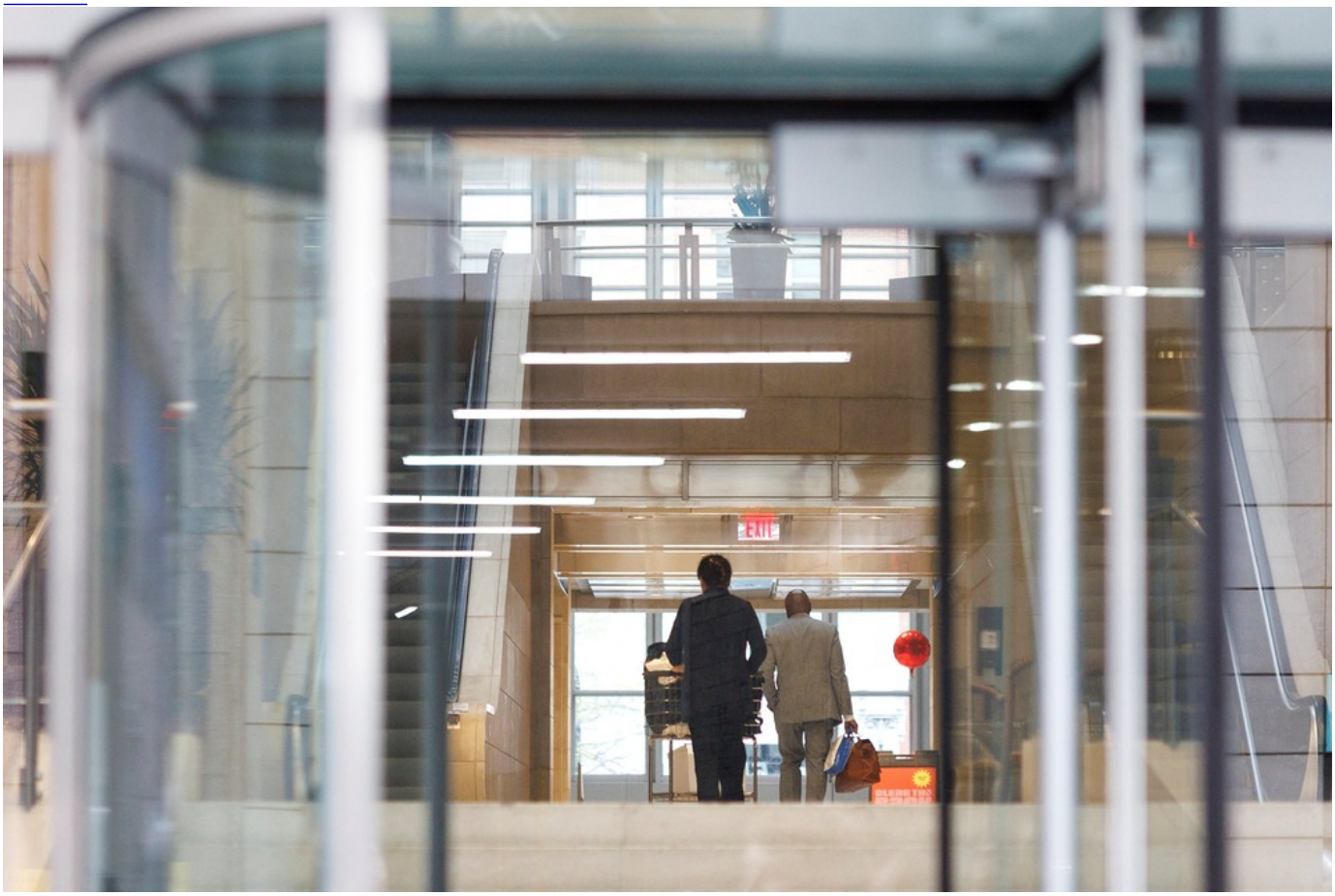
News



People walk with carts at the U.S. Agency for International Development in Washington March 28, 2025, where employees were being told they could go home. The Trump administration moved March 28 to formally close USAID and fold its remaining functions into the State Department. (OSV News/Reuters/Tom Brenner)

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As the Trump administration moved to formally dissolve the U.S. Agency for International Development, Catholic Relief Services, the overseas charitable arm of the Catholic Church in the U.S., has advocated for U.S. foreign aid to continue on a new path shaped by Catholic principles.

The State Department formally notified Congress March 28 it plans to dissolve USAID and move some of its remaining functions under the department's purview.

The reorganization will be done by July 1, the State Department said. But closing the agency authorized by Congress without congressional approval is likely to face legal challenges. In March, a federal judge said the shuttering of the agency by billionaire Tesla CEO Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency, an unofficial task force with the stated intent of curbing federal spending, likely violated the Constitution.

Cuts to funding for the government's now-shuttered humanitarian aid agency in countries all over the globe include funding for efforts by Catholic and other faith-based humanitarian groups such as CRS.

Amid that uncertainty, CRS submitted testimony to congressional lawmakers about how Catholic teaching can help form a new path forward on U.S. aid.

Bill O'Keefe, executive vice president for Mission, Mobilization and Advocacy at CRS, told OSV News in an April 4 interview that while the group generally does not "take positions in how the government structures itself," they will advocate for "the technical capacity and the skills and competencies that are in the USAID" in order that "our taxpayer dollars are being used in ways that are actually helping people and advancing the common good."

"it's not clear what the next step is, and that's, I think, where we're really going to be interested," he said.

In a written testimony submitted April 2 to the House Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs, O'Keefe urged Congress to maintain funding for critical programs abroad on programs for global health, development, disaster relief and migration and refugee assistance.

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"Catholic teaching has long held that governments, alongside the Church, must play a key role in promoting human life and dignity," O'Keefe said. He quoted Pope Francis, from his encyclical "Fratelli Tutti," where the Holy Father said states should be "present and active" and "primarily concerned with individuals and the common good." He also referenced the late Pope Benedict XVI's affirmation that cooperation between state and church agencies has increased the effectiveness of humanitarian endeavors.

O'Keefe thanked lawmakers for the opportunity "to share a Catholic, pro-life vision for U.S. international assistance — one which identifies the state as an indispensable partner to live out American values towards common purpose."

Asked about his testimony, O'Keefe told OSV News, "This is a time when they're kind of breaking it (foreign aid) back down to the studs and then rebuilding from the government's perspective."

"And so we felt that this was a time to share why we and the church consider international humanitarian and development assistance to be important for a state," he said.

O'Keefe said CRS is seeing some improvement in reimbursements and approval for its emergency relief services. However, he said, "a lot of the more developmental programs — the programs that address more chronic poverty — those are remaining terminated."

But there is a significant and important link between those two functions, he said.

"Certainly from the Catholic perspective, viewing integral human development as we do, it's not enough just to get somebody to survive till tomorrow," he said.

"We want to build the capacity of families and communities to fully participate in society," he said, "and make their contribution for the long term."

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.