Opinion
Guest Voices
Man carries bag of wheat that says "USAID."

A man is pictured in a file photo carrying a bag of wheat supplied by Catholic Relief Services and USAID for emergency food assistance in a village near Shashemane, Ethiopia. The Trump administration has cancelled thousands of humanitarian aid programs that received funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development. (OSV News photo/Catholic Relief Services/Nancy McNally)



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During Holy Week, Christians are called to reflect on Jesus' ministry, His love for all and His sacrifice on the cross. I and many of my Senate colleagues, both Republican and Democrat, will be reflecting on His sacrifice this week.

This year in particular, I am also reflecting on how our nation is falling short of His teachings. Nowhere is this more clear to me than in the Trump administration's continuing effort to dismantle our foreign aid programs that for decades have prevented hunger, sickness and suffering for millions around the world.

Scripture is not a political document. It does not tell us to vote for Democrats or Republicans; it does not tell us to support tax cuts or universal health care. There are, however, core lessons and values it imparts. Between the Old and New Testament, Scripture has more than 2,000 concrete references that make clear

righteousness is rooted in service to the poor, no matter where they may be. This is clear from Jesus' first sermon in Nazareth, as he proclaims in Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."

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Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments are to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbor as yourself — and His parables worked to dramatically redefine who is our neighbor. From the good Samaritan to the woman at the well, Christ's parables over and over push believers to embrace the widest understanding of neighbor, to see all people as God's children, even those of different nations, races, languages and faiths.

This administration has missed that core message. Nowhere is this more glaring than its destruction of our nation's global network of partnerships that deliver foreign aid. For just 1% of our total federal spending, we have for years fought disease, fed the hungry and improved the lives of millions around the world.

Our foreign aid apparatus in previous administrations was not perfect. I worked with colleagues on both sides of the aisle — including some of the most conservative Republicans in Congress — to reform and improve our foreign aid and development programs during both the first Trump and Biden administrations. I've introduced multiple bills to further reform foreign aid in this Congress.

What we've seen from this administration, however, are not reforms but wholesale destruction, and our neighbors are suffering.



A magnitude-7.7 earthquake rattled buildings across Mandalay, Myanmar, on March 28, causing this one to lean to one side. (Courtesy of Catholic Relief Services)

In shutting down foreign aid, this administration has ended lifesaving food aid and disease prevention programs for conditions like tuberculosis and malaria. They fired USAID workers while they were on the ground in Myanmar trying to save lives following a massive earthquake. These cuts have already cost lives; they will cost countless more. Even when this administration has claimed that lifesaving aid has been restored, the facts on the ground prove them wrong. Our nonprofit partners who are doing the work around the world aren't receiving the funds that they're

owed. In many cases, they're shutting their doors.

Some of these organizations you probably know well. Cutting off aid has damaged some of the highest-profile charities who do this work in Jesus' name, such as Catholic Relief Services, Samaritan's Purse and World Vision. Each of these organizations has had to lay off people and shut down programs. For some, the harm has been extensive. Catholic Relief Services has sounded the alarm that the 50% cut in their funding will cut off critical aid to more than 20 million people worldwide.

I know in many cases, people of faith and private donors will seek to fill these gaps, but the size and scope of the American government's investments cannot be filled by the private sector alone. They also cannot undo the lessons the Trump administration's cuts have taught the world: that we are not a reliable partner defined by its compassion, but an unreliable one defined by cruelty and indifference. We are now a nation drifting towards the not-so-golden rule of Elon Musk, who has said that "the fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy."

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It's a stark departure from the golden rule of my faith, and nearly every other one: that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Until this year, we sought to demonstrate by our actions that we were capable of kindness. Through that aid, we showed hundreds of millions of people across scores of countries that we are a nation who cared about others. What are we showing them now? How should we expect them to treat us in return?

We are days from Easter Sunday, and the Resurrection that brings redemption. It is never too late for redemption, whether for ourselves or our country. We can draw on our faith to restore America's compassion, to call on the Trump administration to use a small fraction of our federal budget to feed the hungry, to care for the widow and the orphan, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. After all, whose golden rule would we rather our nation aspire to?

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