

USAID Chief to Face Questions on Subversive 'Cuban Twitter'



Havana, Apr 8 (RHC), – On Tuesday, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development begins a series of appearances before lawmakers asking questions about his agency's secret operation to build a social media network to stir political unrest in Cuba.

First up in the questioning of administrator Rajiv Shah is Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., who publicly called the USAID program "dumb, dumb, dumb."

Last week, an Associated Press investigation revealed that USAID oversaw the creation of the text message-based service, dubbed ZunZuneo, with goals including mobilizing anti-government demonstrations in Cuba.

According to interviews and documents obtained by the AP, USAID contractors went to extensive lengths to conceal Washington's ties to the project, using secret front companies and foreign bank accounts.

During the hearings, U.S. lawmakers will try to determine whether the program should have been classified as "covert" under U.S. national security law, which requires covert action to be authorized by the president and briefed to congressional intelligence committees.

The USAID has said that the ZunZuneo program was not covert, claiming instead that the operation had been

“discreetly” managed.

However, the AP report says shell companies were set up by the American contractors in Spain and the Cayman Islands to hide the money trail. CEOs were hired without knowing that they were working on a US taxpayer-funded project overseen by the State Department.

'There will be absolutely no mention of United States government involvement,' stated a 2010 memo from Mobile Accord Inc., one of the project's creators. 'This is absolutely crucial for the long-term success of the service and to ensure the success of the Mission.

Last Friday, the Cuban Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the subversive operation and demanding Washington stop its covert plans to destabilize the island's government.

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