

U.S. Senator Calls Cuba Twitter "Cockamamie Idea"



Washington, April 9 (RHC) – U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy called a Twitter-like social media network that the U.S. government built to stir unrest in Cuba a "cockamamie idea."

Speaking at a congressional hearing on the subversive program against Cuba spearheaded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Leahy said the idea for the so-called "Cuban Twitter" was doomed from the start.

The Vermont Democrat and chairman of the Senate panel that oversees the USAID also criticized the agency for failing to adequately describe to Congress the program it was secretly operating.

Rajiv Shah, USAID's top official, said the program, disclosed last week by The Associated Press, was not covert, claiming instead that the operation had been "discreetly" managed.

When Leahy pressed Shah on whether USAID programs always operate in countries with the knowledge and approval of U.S. ambassadors and embassy staff, Shah replied, "That's the aspiration."

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.

Leahy, who oversees the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that authorizes spending for USAID and the State Department, said he was not aware of the project, officially known as ZunZuneo, while it was in operation.

In addition to Leahy's committee, the USAID program is expected to be examined by a Republican-chaired House Appropriations subcommittee, as well as the House and Senate foreign relations committees.

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