

LATIN AMERICA FORGOTTEN: A LOOK AT PRESIDENT BIDEN'S FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET PRIORITIES

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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LATIN AMERICA FORGOTTEN: A LOOK AT PRESIDENT BIDEN'S FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET PRIORITIES

Wednesday, July 24, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:08 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Maria Elvira Salazar (chair of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. SALAZAR. The Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere will come to order.

The purpose of this hearing is to analyze the State Department and the USAID's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request for the Western Hemisphere. I now recognize myself for an opening statement. It will be short and—sorry, am I following the right order here?

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR

All right. So as I'm sure you know, no region is more important to the well-being of the United States than Latin America. Miami, the city that I represent, is closer to Cartagena, Colombia than New York City. Latin America is our back door, is our backyard—a region that is vital for national security.

But, unfortunately, actions are speaking louder than words. In the last 4 years President Biden has made it clear that Latin America is really not a priority for this country and here are the facts.

The President has traveled to 24 countries. He is the first president in 50 years not to visit the Western Hemisphere, just a quick trip to Mexico.

Last year he canceled a visit to Brazil and to Chile with no explanation. Also, he has not designated a single Special Envoy for crisis like migration crisis in Central America, elections in Venezuela, human rights in Cuba, political prisoners in Nicaragua, the southern border. You know the usual—the usual problems.

He did not go to Central America and to South America but he did not invite any of the dignitaries either. What do I mean by that?

One of the highest honors given to a foreign dignitary is holding a State dinner at the White House and you know at least one coun-

try in every continent has had a State dinner except for the Western Hemisphere, and when he speaks to the Nation through the State of the Union there is no mention of Latin America.

In the meantime, unfortunately, the Chinese are filling the void. In the last 4 years Chinese investment has increased by 300 percent in the region.

In 2022 alone \$450 billion in Chinese money have gone to Latin America and for this reason today China has surpassed the United States as the top trading partner in the region.

That is a problem for our national security. On top of that is disastrous for our economy, national security, and for the well-being of our allies that are always yearning to do business with the Americans.

If we lose Latin America to the Chinese, who are not really very nice actors, we are definitely in trouble and we lose here at home. So I think that you agree with me that we have to wake up and defend and embrace and be part of this hemisphere in the future years.

So I now recognize the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Stanton, for any statements he may have. Thank you for being here in lieu of Ranking Member Castro.

OPENING STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE GREG STANTON

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Chair Salazar, for hosting this important hearing. Thank you for the witnesses for being here today.

The Western Hemisphere is a critical region for the United States, full of our top trading partners and incredible potential for nearshoring and economic growth. But we must be clear eyed about the challenges.

The President's budget recognizes the importance of the region, requesting an additional 7.9 percent in funding for critical priorities, tackling the flow of fentanyl, improving the rule of law, and addressing the root causes of migration.

It is disappointing that the appropriations bill the House voted on just a few weeks ago cut the international affairs budget by 12 percent.

It decreases developmental assistance by over 30 percent, eliminating all funding for safe mobility offices and underfunding the operations and staffing of the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development. It is an unwise strategy at a time when our strategic competitors continue to grow their influence in the region.

Last week I was in Mexico where I had the opportunity to meet with President Lopez Obrador and President-Elect Sheinbaum as a bipartisan, bicameral congressional delegation. We spoke at length about the untenable security situation in Mexico where cartels control one-third of the country and contributed to the most violent election in Mexico's recent history.

We discussed the need for the United States and Mexico to cooperate in combating these cartels and trafficking of synthetic opioids across the border.

I represent Arizona, a border State, and I know how important our relationship with Mexico is for the strength of our own econ-

omy. Right now we have an unprecedented opportunity to near-shore our supply chains and capitalize on historic investments made under the CHIPS and Science Act.

I urged Dr. Sheinbaum to take advantage of this moment and she was enthusiastic about building Mexico's footprint in the tech space, especially working with Arizona's semiconductor industry.

It was a fruitful visit but there was much more to do to create a reliable environment for direct foreign investment in Mexico and throughout the region.

The flow of illicit fentanyl has devastated far too many American families. We have taken important steps to stop the trafficking of fentanyl in the United States including the recent passage of my bill, the American Cooperation With Our Neighbors Act, which promotes collaboration between State and local entities on both sides of the border to counter fentanyl.

As former mayor of Phoenix I deeply understand the importance of this subnational collaboration and the critical role local authorities play.

I urge the Senate to swiftly take up this bill and I look forward to working with the State Department in formulating an effective plan to combat cartel influence, gang recruitment, and the flow of synthetic opioids and precursor chemicals.

We have to reduce migration. In the last 2 months we have seen unlawful crossings drop by 50 percent to the lowest level in many, many years. But we must continue to invest in programs like safe mobility offices that disincentivize travel to our southern border.

We have to invest in deep diplomatic relationships with our neighbors taking in migrants and addressing root causes of migration including through nearshoring our supply chains, which mainly shores up our national security but has the added benefit of creating necessary stable jobs that keep people in their home countries.

Venezuela—they will be holding elections this coming Sunday. This is such a consequential moment for Venezuela and comes after years of chaos and tragedy. I know these elections Sunday are not perfect. Far from it.

The Maduro regime has disqualified legitimate Presidential candidates, particularly Ms. Maria Corina Machado. They have attempted to split the opposition and denied access to international observers.

But the elections still represent the best opportunity for the Venezuelan people to make their voices heard. The opposition, including Ambassador Edmundo Gonzalez and Ms. Maria Corina Machado, should there resolve in the face of these actions and I think the Biden administration, including the State Department, USAID, and the National Security Council deserves immense credit for doing the hard work of diplomacy to bring us to this important point.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on our efforts to support democracy in Venezuela and what we can expect on Sunday and the days to follow.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thanks to you, Congressman Stanton.

Other members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

Today we have witnesses from the State Department, the USAID, who handle U.S. foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere for the Biden administration, starting with Hon. Brian Nichols, who I always appreciate the fact that you always come every time we call you.

I mean, I know it's fatiguing but this is democracy and I love the fact that you are following the rules.

He is the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs within the United States Department of State.

And Hon. Julieta Valls Noyes is the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration at the United States Department of State, and Mr. Michael Camilleri is the Acting Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean for the United States Agency for International Development.

And thank you for being here today. Once again, I extend the welcome and the thank you for both of you being here. Your full statements will be made part of the record and I'll ask each of you to keep it to 5 minutes in order to allow time for members to pose their questions.

I now recognize Hon. Brian Nichols for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN NICHOLS

Mr. NICHOLS. Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Stanton, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the administration's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request for the Western Hemisphere.

The President's budget request includes \$2.2 billion in foreign assistance for the Western Hemisphere that addresses the hemisphere's most pressing challenges, from democratic resilience and irregular migration to economic growth and climate change.

Our approach is rooted in the administration's commitment and the request prioritizes increasing resources for Haiti migration management, sustaining assistance for Central America, and support for democratic actors, building Caribbean countries' climate and economic resilience, advancing a positive economic agenda across the hemisphere, and countering the influence of the People's Republic of China.

Haiti is 650 miles from the United States. We share close historical, familial, cultural, and economic ties. Supporting Haiti and the multinational security support mission ranks as a top foreign assistance priority.

The situation in Haiti remains critical and our funding is essential to improve security on the ground, lay the groundwork for free and fair elections, and encourage additional financial and personnel contributions from other international donors.

The 2025 request includes \$356.7 million for Haiti across multiple accounts including funding to support the multinational security support mission.

Under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection endorsed by 22 countries in the region we have affirmed our collec-

tive commitment to respond to migration and forced displacement across the region.

The Fiscal Year 2025 request includes \$218.7 million in development, economic health, and security assistance to ensure the Department of State and USAID can sustain and expand regional efforts to manage migration safely, humanely, and effectively.

As we address democratic challenges in the region we also endeavor to unlock the region's economic potential and ensure democracies can deliver prosperity to their citizens. The Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity represents a pivotal initiative to support economic growth and strengthen our affirmative offer in contrast to our strategic rivals.

We also emphatically support a capital increase for IDB Invest and the administration's budget requests \$75 million as a first payment.

A reinforced IDB Invest will deliver on key U.S. objectives for the region by bolstering private sector-led growth, building resilient supply chains, creating economic opportunity for entrepreneurs in the middle class, and offering a transparent and accountable alternative to PRC lending in the region.

APEP also supports a transparent procurement and regulatory framework that open opportunities for our partners and enable them to rely less on the PRC.

Central America remains a focal point for our foreign assistance strategy. The Fiscal Year 2025 request provides \$658.6 million in State and USAID bilateral and regional funding, robustly resourcing the five pillars of the U.S. strategy for addressing the root causes of migration in the final year of the President's commitment to provide \$4 billion over 4 years.

This funding will deepen our engagement on priority issues such as migration and security cooperation. It will also foster inclusive economic growth, combat corruption, and safeguard human rights.

Through the root causes strategy we work with diverse partners including civil society and the private sector. Vice President Harris' Central America Forward initiative has mobilized over \$5.2 billion in private sector commitments that have already created over 70,000 jobs in Central America.

By addressing the causes of migration we aim to create a more stable, prosperous region where citizens can thrive in their homelands and benefit their communities while avoiding the dangerous journey of irregular migration.

The Caribbean remains another critical area of focus. The Fiscal Year 2025 budget provides over \$190 million across various accounts to strengthen the region's ability to withstand climate shocks, respond to natural disasters, build energy resilience, and support conservation efforts.

The restoration of democracy in Venezuela remains at the center of our foreign policy. We continue to harness all diplomatic tools and leverage sanctions to this end including working with Venezuelans and regional and international partners to encourage Maduro and his representatives to hold a competitive and inclusive election on July 28.

The Fiscal Year 2025 request includes nearly \$54 million to support these and other efforts including critical health support. While

we are clear eyed about the prospects for a competitive election on July 28th we must prepare for a scenario that Venezuela returns to democratic rule in the future.

In conclusion, the Fiscal Year 2025 request for the Western Hemisphere reflects our commitment to address the hemisphere's biggest challenges through a partnership-driven foreign policy.

Our efforts are guided by the principles democracy, human rights, economic growth and security, as well as a focus on fostering strong partnerships.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss our foreign assistance request for the Western Hemisphere and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Nichols follows:]

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**Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs
Brian A. Nichols
Testimony for House Foreign Affairs Committee,
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
“Latin America Forgotten:
A Look at President Biden’s FY 2025 Budget Priorities”
July 24, 2024**

Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2025 budget request for the Western Hemisphere.

The President’s budget request includes \$2.2 billion in foreign assistance for the Western Hemisphere that addresses the hemisphere’s most pressing challenges, from democratic resilience and irregular migration to economic growth and climate change.

Our approach is rooted in the Administration’s commitments, and the request prioritizes increasing resources for Haiti, migration management, sustaining assistance for Central America and support for democratic actors, building Caribbean countries’ climate and economic resilience, advancing a positive economic agenda across the hemisphere, and countering the influence of the People’s Republic of China.

Haiti is 650 miles from the United States. We share close historical, familial, cultural, and economic ties. Supporting Haiti and the Multinational Security Support mission ranks as a top foreign assistance priority. The situation in Haiti remains critical, and our funding is essential to improve

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security on the ground, lay the groundwork for free and fair elections, and encourage additional financial and personnel contributions from other international donors. The FY 2025 request includes \$356.7 million for Haiti across multiple accounts, including funding to support the Multinational Security Support mission.

Under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection – endorsed by 22 countries in the region – we have affirmed our collective commitment to respond to migration and forced displacement across the region. The FY 2025 request includes \$218.7 million in development, economic, health, and security assistance to ensure the Department of State and USAID can sustain and expand regional efforts to manage migration safely, humanely, and effectively.

As we address democratic challenges in the region, we also endeavor to unlock the region's economic potential and ensure democracies can deliver prosperity to their citizens. The Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity represents a pivotal initiative to advance economic growth and strengthening our affirmative offer in contrast to our strategic rivals. We also emphatically support a capital increase for IDB Invest, and the Administration's budget request includes \$75 million as a first payment. A reinforced IDB Invest will deliver on key U.S. objectives for the region by bolstering private sector-led growth, building resilient supply chains, creating economic opportunity for entrepreneurs and the middle class, and offering a transparent and accountable alternative to PRC lending in the region. APEP also supports transparent procurement and regulatory frameworks that open opportunities for our partners and enable them to rely less on the PRC.

Central America remains a focal point of our foreign assistance strategy. The FY 2025 request provides \$658.6 million in State and USAID

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bilateral and regional funding, robustly resourcing the five pillars of the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in the final year of the President's commitment to provide \$4 billion over four years. This funding will deepen our engagement on priority issues, such as migration and security cooperation. It will also foster inclusive economic growth, combat corruption, and safeguard human rights.

Through the Root Causes Strategy, we work with diverse partners including civil society and the private sector. Vice President Harris' Central America Forward initiative has mobilized over \$5.2 billion in private sector commitments that already created over 70,000 jobs. By addressing the root causes of migration, we aim to create a more stable and prosperous region where citizens can thrive in their homelands and benefit their communities while avoiding the dangerous journey of irregular migration.

The Caribbean remains another critical area of focus. The FY 2025 request provides over \$190 million across various accounts to strengthen the region's ability to withstand climate shocks, respond to natural disasters, build energy resilience, and support conservation efforts. Climate change poses a significant threat to the Caribbean, and our assistance aims to help these countries build resilience and adapt to the changing environment. This funding also advances the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative to continue building our Caribbean partners' capacity to disrupt illicit trafficking and transnational crime.

The restoration of democracy in Venezuela remains at the center of our policy agenda. We continue to harness all diplomatic tools and leverage sanctions to this end, including working with Venezuelans and regional and international partners to encourage Maduro and his representatives to hold competitive and inclusive elections on July 28th. The FY 2025 Request

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includes nearly \$54 million to support these and other efforts including critical health support. While we are clear eyed about the prospects for a competitive election on July 28th, we must prepare for a scenario that Venezuela returns to democratic rule in the future.

In conclusion, the FY 2025 request for Western Hemisphere foreign assistance reflects our commitment to address the hemisphere's challenges through a partnership-driven foreign policy. Our efforts are guided by the principles of democracy, human rights, economic growth, and security, as well as a focus on fostering strong partnerships with our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss our foreign assistance request for the Western Hemisphere, and I look forward to answering your questions.

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Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Assistant Secretary Nichols.
Now I recognize Hon. Julieta Valls Noyes for her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JULIETA VALLS NOYES

Ms. NOYES. Good morning, Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Stanton, and distinguished members of this committee.

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the Fiscal Year 2025 Migration and Refugee Assistance, or MRA, budget request for the humanitarian needs of refugees and displaced and stateless persons in the Western Hemisphere.

There are more than 120 million forcibly displaced people around the world and more than 21 million of them are here in the Western Hemisphere.

Violence, crime, persecution, human rights abuses, and natural disasters are driving them from their homes. Millions of people are also on the move in search of economic opportunity or family reunification.

While these movements create complex challenges, it is important to note that the vast majority of the displaced persons in this hemisphere are not coming to the United States but rebuilding their lives in other countries.

The Fiscal Year 2025 MRA budget request includes \$475 million for humanitarian programming in the Western Hemisphere and \$300 million for the safe mobility initiative. It would provide lifesaving assistance for those in need and help integrate refugees and vulnerable migrants into communities closer to their countries of origin.

The administration will support these solutions through robust humanitarian diplomacy. The request advances a holistic approach to forced displacement and migration management in the Western Hemisphere.

The funding in the budget request is intended to strengthen national asylum, registration, regularization, and integration frameworks, prevent the forcible return of persons to a place that where they would be persecuted or tortured, protect and assist the most vulnerable refugees and migrants, and increase refugee resettlement and other lawful migration pathways.

The MRA funds Congress has generously provided in this and previous fiscal years have had a significant impact in stabilizing displaced populations and host communities throughout the hemisphere.

By strengthening access to legal status including asylum and regularization displaced people in the region can find employment and stability in their countries of first refuge rather than undertaking dangerous journeys north.

For example, PRM has provided nearly \$400 million since 2021 to support over two and a half million Venezuelans settled in Colombia. Supporting legal status and integration of displaced persons in partner countries is a critical aspect of our strategy.

The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration also continues to prioritize assistance to people with dire needs. This budget request supports our core mandate to provide lifesaving assist-

ance and protection to refugees, asylum seekers, vulnerable migrants, and stateless persons.

It will fund water, nutrition and hygiene support, urgent health care, and basic humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable where they are.

It will help reunify displaced separated children from their families, provide medical and psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence, and help meet the basic needs of especially vulnerable refugees and displaced populations.

To increase regional cooperation PRM also supports our partners' humane migration management, strengthening their protection systems, policies, border management and emergency response preparedness.

For example, our programs in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras have advanced adoption of new national strategies for safe, orderly, and humane migration management. The budget request will also strengthen lawful migration and protection pathways, providing a critical alternative to irregular migration.

The safe mobility initiative facilitates access to information for migrants about local integration and other options to prevent irregular migration. It supports safe and lawful migration pathways so refugees do not have to undertake dangerous journeys in search of safety.

For those with protection needs the safe mobility initiative has provided expedited refugee resettlement to both the United States and other countries. Safe mobility offices are operational now in Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Ecuador.

In closing, I'd like to thank the members of this committee for the opportunity to discuss the President's budget request. The United States' humanitarian diplomacy, assistance, and durable solutions are key aspects of our approach in this hemisphere.

PRM advocacy also encourages other governments to step up as hosts, donors, and resettlement countries to protect the most vulnerable.

We are pursuing contributions and greater collaboration from other governments, international financial institutions, and the private sector to address these needs.

The Fiscal Year 2025 budget will support U.S. leadership to save lives, alleviate suffering, provide protection, and advance durable solutions to today's historic levels of forced displacement in the Western Hemisphere and globally.

I appreciate your support and look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Noyes follows:]

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**Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees,
and Migration (PRM) Julieta Noyes's Testimony Before the
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
July 24, 2024, Hearing**

Good morning, Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. I am pleased to be here today to talk with you about the Fiscal Year 2025 Migration and Refugee Assistance budget request as it relates to the humanitarian needs of refugees, vulnerable migrants, displaced persons, and stateless persons in the Western Hemisphere.

Context and Needs

At the end of 2023, there were more than 117 million forcibly displaced persons around the world, more than 21 million of them in the Western Hemisphere. Violence, organized crime, persecution, human rights abuses, and natural disasters are driving them to leave their homes. Millions of people also are on the move in search of economic opportunity or family reunification, resulting in unpredictable movements, complex challenges, and opportunities across the region. It is important to note that the vast majority of the over 21 million forcibly displaced persons in this hemisphere are not coming to the United States, however, but seeking opportunities and rebuilding their lives in other countries. Nearly 19 million of those displaced at the end of 2023 were residing in Central and South America or the Caribbean. For instance, Colombia alone is currently hosting nearly 3 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees, with Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Chile hosting another 3 million.

The Department's FY 2025 budget request for Migration and Refugee Assistance includes \$475 million for humanitarian programming in the Western Hemisphere and another \$300 million for the Safe Mobility initiative. The request takes into consideration the unique reasons people are on the move with humanitarian assistance for those in need and promotion of solutions for refugees and vulnerable migrants to integrate

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into host communities closer to their countries of origin. The Administration will support these solutions through robust humanitarian diplomacy in our Hemisphere and with like-minded partners.

This request advances a holistic approach to addressing forced displacement and migration management in the Western Hemisphere through enhanced access to protection and integration in the region. The humanitarian assistance funding in the President's budget request is intended to:

- **Strengthen** national asylum, registration, regularization, and integration frameworks throughout the Western Hemisphere;
- **Prevent** refoulement, the forcible return of persons to a place where they would be persecuted or tortured;
- **Protect** and assist the most vulnerable refugees and migrants; and,
- **Increase** refugee resettlement and other safe, humane, orderly, and lawful migration pathways.

This humanitarian assistance request is part of the Department's comprehensive approach, with other U.S. agencies and partners, to address irregular migration and displacement. Other aspects of this strategy include stabilizing **host communities** to welcome migrants in other countries; strengthening **humane border enforcement** and repatriation capabilities abroad; tackling **root causes of irregular migration** so people do not feel compelled to leave their homes; and expanding **lawful migration pathways** to growth and opportunity in the United States and other partner nations. No country can address irregular migration alone, which is why the President has partnered with countries across the hemisphere to pursue a comprehensive regional approach. The Biden Administration led the adoption of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, an innovative framework endorsed by 21 other partner countries to promote dialogue and solutions on migration and displacement. PRM's FY 2025 budget request is consistent with the Declaration's principles and the Administration's Collaborative Migration Management Strategy.

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Integration

The Migration and Refugee Assistance funds Congress generously provided in this and previous fiscal years have had a significant impact in stabilizing displaced populations closer to home in host countries throughout the Hemisphere, while also supporting their host communities. By strengthening access to legal status, including asylum and regularization, in countries in the region, displaced people can remain in their countries of first refuge and find employment and stability, rather than undertaking dangerous journeys north. Of the nearly 8 million Venezuelan refugees and asylum seekers, over half remain without valid legal status, and the 2025 budget request will help bridge that gap.

In **Colombia**, for example, PRM has provided more than \$400 million since 2021 to support refugees, Colombian returnees with protection concerns, internally displaced people, vulnerable migrants, and host communities. Over 2.5 million Venezuelans have settled in Colombia with legal status and accessed education, health care, and employment. On a recent trip to Colombia, I met with Venezuelan refugees who had started their own businesses and even created jobs for Colombians. They are inspiring examples of how good protection policies can help turn adversity into opportunity. In June 2024, the Government of Colombia announced a new regularization program to expand residency options for certain populations with corresponding access to services. PRM support has been critical to the successful integration of Venezuelans with temporary status and will continue to be essential as Colombia expands regularization.

PRM funding also supports **Brazil's** Operation Welcome, which has enabled the voluntary relocation of more than 128,000 Venezuelans in over 1,000 cities across Brazil for jobs and family reunification. Our support has helped Brazil provide temporary residency to more than 420,000 individuals since 2018 and fostered their successful integration. A recent International Organization for Migration (IOM) survey showed eight out of ten adults in these populations had found jobs or started their own businesses.

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We also are supporting similar efforts to regularize and integrate refugees and vulnerable migrants in **Ecuador, Peru**, and other countries across the region. **Costa Rica** hosts more than 600,000 Nicaraguans and is a regional leader on migration. The FY 2025 budget request includes continued support for Costa Rica's asylum and regularization programs, via partners like the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), to help thousands of refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable migrants find protection and integrate into Costa Rican society. PRM's funding in Costa Rica is needed to support historic reforms to refugee and regularization programs facilitating economic integration.

PRM's support for **Mexico's** asylum agency (COMAR) through UNHCR has increased Mexico's capacity to receive and process asylum seekers by over 500 percent since 2017. COMAR registered more than 140,000 asylum applications in 2023. Mexico now operates one of the largest asylum programs in the world. PRM funding for local integration in Mexico has relocated and matched over 39,000 refugees with jobs. Over 70 percent of participants remain where they are long-term.

Protection for the Most Vulnerable

While we invest in regularization and integration as solutions to displacement in the region, PRM continues to prioritize life-saving assistance to meet dire needs. Many asylum seekers in Northern Central America, for example, face risks of targeted violence and extortion by organized criminal groups and need emergency shelter, medical care, and other assistance. This budget request prioritizes the PRM's core mandate to provide life-saving assistance and protection to refugees, asylum seekers, vulnerable migrants, and stateless persons. It will fund water, nutrition and hygiene support, urgent health care, and basic humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable where they are. It will help reunify displaced and separated children with their families, provide medical and psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence, and improve access for refugees with disabilities and members of displaced indigenous populations to meet their basic needs.

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Irregular migration through the Darien continues to be a challenge, despite it being one of the world's most dangerous migration routes. PRM's budget request includes life-saving humanitarian assistance in **Panama** for refugees, asylum seekers, vulnerable migrants, and host indigenous communities. PRM programs supply potable water and provide emergency health services and nutritional support to tens of thousands, including children and lactating women. PRM funding also supports access to protection for asylum seekers in Panama, including those arriving through the Darien, and provides essential health services for survivors of gender-based violence and family tracing for unaccompanied and separated children.

In **Guatemala**, PRM's support through international organization and NGO partners provides water, sanitation, health, and protection services to thousands of vulnerable migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. At the same time, with U.S. support, Guatemala is slowly becoming a destination for refugees. PRM's budget request includes support for its nascent but growing asylum system. As a result of U.S. support through UNHCR, Guatemala's refugee recognition rate has climbed from less than 50 percent to around 80 percent since 2019, when PRM began scaling up its response. PRM's partners support the successful integration of refugees and asylum-seekers into Guatemalan society by supporting access to services, documentation, and livelihoods alongside robust support for host communities.

Humane Migration Management

In our work to increase regional collaboration, PRM supports our partners' humane migration management, strengthening their protection systems, policies, border management, and emergency response preparedness. We have expanded access to circular labor pathways within the region as alternatives to irregular migration to the United States. Through a tailored labor migration program, U.S. assistance has enabled over 39,000 migrants to travel regularly from Panama and Nicaragua to work in Costa Rica, filling critical labor shortages while providing access to legal documentation and

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services. Due to its success, this program is expanding to other countries in Central America. Our programs have similarly supported Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras to adopt new national migration strategies for holistic approaches to safe, orderly, and humane migration management.

Since 2018, our programs have also assisted over 10,000 vulnerable migrants in our Hemisphere to voluntarily return to their countries of origin in safety and with dignity.

Lawful Pathways

This budget request also will strengthen lawful migration and protection pathways, providing a meaningful alternative to irregular migration. Since 2021, the United States has expanded lawful pathways to help refugees, vulnerable migrants, and forcibly displaced persons in the Western Hemisphere. Individuals seeking international protection and new opportunities have options for lawful migration to the United States and other countries, including refugee resettlement, parole processes, family reunification, labor pathways, and asylum. Some may also access support services provided by international organizations and NGOs in the region.

The Safe Mobility initiative (known by the Spanish name *Movilidad Segura*) is one of the ways the United States is allowing eligible individuals to apply for safe and lawful migration pathways from countries in the region, so migrants do not have to undertake dangerous journeys in search of safety. Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs) are currently operational in Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Ecuador.

Applicants apply via an online platform through which experts from international organizations, specifically IOM and UNHCR, help individuals assess the options available for them. Applicants may receive information about services and programs available to them in their country of origin or country of application so that they are able to remain where they are. Working closely with international organization partners, and running

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extensive messaging campaigns, we are exponentially increasing the number of people who receive information or services via the SMOs.

For those with protection needs, the Safe Mobility initiative has revolutionized how we identify and process individuals in the region for refugee resettlement to both the United States and other countries. Applicants must meet the same requirements as refugees elsewhere in the world and undergo the same rigorous vetting process as others approved by the U.S. government for refugee status. The great innovation of the SMOs is that they co-locate many aspects of the refugee resettlement process in one location, significantly improving coordination among UNHCR, IOM, and government officials. This streamlining and colocation has provided efficiencies that have reduced the processing time for refugee resettlement and could be duplicated around the world. However, I would like to emphasize again that refugee applicants from SMOs still undergo the exact same multi-layered security vetting process as applicants do anywhere else in the world.

As of June 30, through the Safe Mobility initiative, more than 45,000 individuals have been referred for potential resettlement to the United States, and more than 22,600 individuals have been screened for other lawful pathways to the United States. More than 12,000 individuals have already arrived in the United States under the Safe Mobility initiative.

We are also working with other countries to expand the reach of the SMOs and provide additional lawful alternatives to irregular migration, including labor-related resettlement pathways with Spain and Canada. More than 500 vulnerable migrants in Costa Rica have been referred for resettlement to Spain via the SMO mechanism. The Administration is also working with several other countries to connect them to applicants from the Safe Mobility initiative.

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UNCLASSIFIED-8-***CONCLUSION***

In closing, I'd like to thank the members of this Subcommittee for the opportunity to discuss the President's budget request. The United States' humanitarian diplomacy, assistance, and durable solutions are key aspects of our approach to our Hemisphere. PRM advocacy also encourages other governments to step up their own responsibility as hosts, donors, and resettlement countries to protect the most vulnerable. The United States is also pursuing contributions and greater collaboration from other governments, international financial institutions, and the private sector. The FY 2025 budget request will support U.S. leadership to save lives, alleviate suffering, provide protection, and advance durable solutions to today's historic levels of forced displacement. I appreciate your support and look forward to your questions.

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Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Assistant Secretary Noyes.
I now recognize Mr. Camilleri for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL CAMILLERI

Mr. CAMILLERI. Chair Salazar, Ranking Member Stanton, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the President's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request for Latin America and the Caribbean.

This is a pivotal moment. Our investments today will shape the region and our own national security for decades to come.

In Haiti, USAID programs continue despite significant challenges on the ground, providing humanitarian and food security assistance, supporting health clinics, expanding economic opportunity, and strengthening citizen security.

With support from the multinational security support mission the Haitian government is taking steps toward stability and paving the way for free and fair elections.

USAID is supporting these efforts including by providing identification cards that will facilitate more than 2 million people voting. Across the hemisphere we look for opportunities to surge efforts where democratic leaders seek to promote reform.

The budget request prioritizes this approach in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Guatemala, which is rejecting corruption and the PRC's economic coercion in favor of accountability and inclusive economic growth.

In more challenging environments USAID supports the civil society groups documenting abuses and fighting for individuals' human rights and fundamental freedoms.

For example, in Venezuela courageous citizens have responded to years of repression by mobilizing for democratic change. USAID has been proud to support these efforts, which have been instrumental in the lead up to this weekend's elections.

USAID's investments can lead to long-lasting impact. In Colombia our decades-long partnership has helped the country move toward peace. The requested budget would allow us to continue efforts with national and local government institutions, civil society, and other partners to implement the peace accord and address key challenges, including migration and coca production.

Across the hemisphere migration is at historic levels. In response, USAID strategy supports integration, expands lawful pathways, and addresses root causes. In Colombia, USAID, together with our PRM counterparts, has helped more than 2 million individuals obtain legal residency.

We support one-stop shops where migrants can access schools, health care, bank accounts, and jobs and rebuild their lives.

In Peru we have supported degree validation so migrants can contribute their full potential to their host countries. USAID also works to reduce irregular migration by expanding access to lawful pathways that provide access to temporary work opportunities abroad.

We have strengthened the capacity of our government counterparts in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, allowing them to nearly triple their citizens' access to H-2 temporary work visas.

Finally, under the administration's root causes strategy USAID supports good jobs, safe communities, and more transparent, accountable institutions. These initiatives help mitigate some of the push factors that lead people to leave their homes.

Indeed, both intentions and actual migration from northern Central America have fallen significantly since the strategy was launched. As the region's challenges continue to evolve USAID is working to meet them.

In the aftermath of the COVID—19 pandemic that took such a toll in the Americas our global health security programs work to detect public health threats, enable rapid response, and prevent threats from turning into regional or global crises.

In the Caribbean and across the region we're helping to provide early warning systems that will help save lives, drought and heat resistant crops that provide a more reliable source of food, and secure, affordable and clean energy.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today about how USAID works to advance America's interests and build a more secure, democratic, and prosperous hemisphere. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Camilleri follows:]

**Written Testimony of
Michael Camilleri, Acting Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean
Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
“Latin America Forgotten: A Look at President Biden’s FY 2025 Budget Priorities”
July 24, 2024**

Chair Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to discuss USAID’s role in advancing the United States’ foreign policy priorities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This is a pivotal moment for the region, one of challenge and opportunity. Historic levels of migration are impacting nearly every nation in the hemisphere, democracy is gaining ground in some places and facing threats in others, and malign actors continue to seek influence. The President’s fiscal year 2025 budget request of \$1.31 billion for USAID-managed programs in Latin America and the Caribbean recognizes that the investments we make today in these critical areas will help shape the region and our own national security for decades to come.

USAID has spent the last 60 years building enduring bilateral and regional relationships that have helped create peace and prosperity. We invest not only in programming but also in local partners, creating regional capacity for inclusive and sustainable development through a collaborative approach that provides a clear contrast to the transactional nature of our strategic competitors, including the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The resources requested in this budget will allow USAID to continue this vital work.

Expanding Democracy & Stability

That includes helping to promote stability in the most fragile place in the region, Haiti, where we continue to operate our programs despite significant challenges on the ground. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, USAID supports health clinics, works to expand economic opportunities, provides food security assistance, and builds stronger communities through citizen security programs. The requested \$87.4 million for programming in Haiti will allow USAID to sustain our investments in improving health and education outcomes, advancing economic and food security, and re-establishing and strengthening government institutions. With support from the Multinational Security Support mission, the Haitian government is taking steps toward stability and paving the way for free and fair elections. USAID is supporting these efforts to make it possible for the Haitian people to elect a representative government, including by providing identification cards that will facilitate more than 2 million people voting. All told, this work is helping to lay a foundation on which Haiti can build a more secure, prosperous, and democratic future.

Indeed, this is our goal for nations across the hemisphere. To pursue it, USAID champions democracy, stability, and opportunity wherever we can.

We look for opportunities to capitalize on democratic advancement and surge our efforts when courageous citizens peacefully advocate for reform. We find the bright spots of democratic renewal and help reformers show that democracies can and do deliver. This budget request prioritizes the continuation of that work in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and the region's most recent democratic opening, Guatemala, which is rejecting corruption and the PRC's economic coercion in favor of accountability and inclusive economic growth. Additionally, we look forward to working with Mexico's first female president, Claudia Sheinbaum, on shared priorities including citizen security, economic development in Southern Mexico, and environmental conservation.

In more challenging environments, USAID supports civil society groups doing the courageous work of documenting abuses and fighting for individuals' human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In Venezuela, courageous citizens have responded to years of repression and highly dysfunctional governance by mobilizing for democratic change and human rights. USAID has been proud to support those efforts, which have been instrumental in the lead up to this weekend's elections. No matter how July 28th plays out, there will be work to do. Therefore, this budget requests \$50 million to increase our support to civil society, human rights defenders, independent media, and democratic actors.

Similarly, USAID stands with the brave Nicaraguans who are continuing to demand respect for human rights protections in an increasingly authoritarian environment. The requested \$15 million to foster the conditions for democracy in Nicaragua is especially critical as USAID is one of only a few donors supporting human rights defenders and activists both in the country and in exile.

Our tenure in the region has allowed us to see the long-term impact of these investments. USAID has worked in and with Colombia for decades, helping them as they moved from war to peace. The requested budget for Colombia would allow us to continue supporting Colombia's peace accord implementation, increasing access to justice, improving citizen security and public services, and generating sustainable and licit livelihoods that offer alternatives to coca cultivation. These efforts with national and local government institutions, civil society, and other partners have helped build a platform that allows us to maintain progress and advance

our strategic interests across administrations. Colombia's strong partnership in the response to unprecedented levels of regional migration is one example of the benefits that come from such sustained investments.

Migration Management

Historic numbers of people are migrating out of, through, or into nearly every nation in the hemisphere. In response, USAID is taking a holistic approach focused on supporting long-term integration, expanding access to lawful pathways, and addressing root causes. This budget requests \$218 million for USAID and the State Department to expand that work at a vital juncture for our migration response.

More than 7.7 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees have been displaced, and nearly 85 percent of them have relocated within the region. To help meet this moment, we are supporting the bold, generous policies of our partner countries, which allow migrants to regularize and integrate into their new host communities. USAID has helped Colombia register 2.5 million Venezuelan migrants and issue legal residency to more than 2 million individuals so far. We support "one-stop shops" where they can access schools, health care, bank accounts, and jobs and rebuild their lives. In Peru, we have supported degree validation so migrants can work and contribute at their highest potential. We also have backed similar integration efforts in Brazil, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize. The budget request includes \$120 million to build on this win-win approach, which not only deters onward migration toward the United States but also helps grow the economy, workforce, and tax base of the host countries.

USAID also works to decrease irregular migration by expanding access to lawful pathways that provide access to temporary work opportunities abroad. We have strengthened the capacity of our government counterparts in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, allowing them to nearly triple their citizens' access to H-2 temporary work visas. This helps American companies fill critical labor gaps and gives workers access to jobs where they can gain skills and resources to reinvest in their home communities. Evidence shows it also deters irregular migration. In communities that received a high share of temporary work visas, irregular migration rates were around 11 percent, compared to nearly 30 percent in similar communities that did not.

Finally, under the Administration's Root Causes Strategy, USAID supports good jobs and training programs that are creating opportunity and anti-corruption programs that create more confidence in local government across Central America. These initiatives, among others, help mitigate some of the push factors that force people to search for stability outside of their home communities. While we cannot claim direct causality, 2023 data has shown a sustained, double-

digit decline in intentions to migrate from Guatemala and Honduras since the Root Causes Strategy launched in 2021. Total numbers of encounters of Northern Central Americans by Customs and Border Protection have also fallen by nearly a third over the same timeframe. At the program level, emerging evidence shows USAID programs can influence participants' plans to migrate. The number of young people in USAID's vocational training program in El Salvador who planned to stay in El Salvador increased by 13 percentage points. In Honduras, schools in our basic education program show high retention, low dropout rates, and lower rates of out-migration.

Meeting Evolving Needs

USAID also works to enhance stability and security through our ongoing efforts to improve access to basic government and health services and our efforts to respond to environmental challenges. That includes working with partner governments on improving a variety of services including water treatment, nutrition, public lighting, and waste collection.

This budget request also includes \$53 million to help the region rebuild its health services in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic which took such a toll on the Americas. Our Global Health Security programming will work to detect public health threats, enable rapid response, and prevent threats from turning into regional or global crises.

In addition, as the region faces challenges such as forest loss and increasingly frequent and intense periods of heat, droughts, floods, and storms, this budget will help communities access: early warning systems that will help save lives; drought and heat-resistant crops that provide a more reliable source of food; and secure, affordable, and clean energy. It will also allow us to continue investing in the future of the Amazon by conserving biodiversity and combating deforestation, while providing sustainable livelihoods for local people and national economies.

Conclusion

As we seek to maintain our competitive advantage in the region, resources do make a difference. If we have to reduce our footprint due to budget cuts, it will not only jeopardize the hard-won gains we have made alongside our partner nations, it will open the door for other actors including the PRC, Russia, and Iran to fill that space.

This budget will allow us to continue operating and investing in America's foreign policy priorities and national security. As always, we will continue to look for every opportunity to take our dollars further by leveraging our programs to encourage effective policies, bringing in

private sector and other partners, and using our programming to build the capacity of our local partners so they can sustain progress beyond our programs.

As our closest neighbors, Latin America and the Caribbean are critically important to the United States, and our futures are inextricably linked. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today about how USAID looks to advance America's strategic interests and build a more secure, democratic, and prosperous hemisphere. I look forward to your questions.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Mr. Camilleri, and I recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning.

I'm going to start with you, Mr. Nichols, and we're going to start with Venezuela. We're 4 days away probably from the most important event in the recent history of that country.

Edmundo is the opposition. He is leading the polls by 30 points according to what we have access to. That means around 3 million votes. You and I know that President Maduro is in the business of power and his intention is not to concede. But he is at a major disadvantage.

So my question to you is do you know what type of fraud they are planning to put together? What are they planning to do? Stuff the ballots? Change the Smartmatics(?)?

[Speaks in Spanish.]

Ms. SALAZAR. Asking for a photo of your ballot. I mean, whatever. What info do you have? Do you recognize, first and foremost, that they're going to try to steal the election, yes or no?

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Well, we have already seen important steps that the Maduro side has taken disqualifying two earlier opposition candidates, harassing opposition campaign workers, arresting them, vandalizing vehicles, punishing people that provide support. So we have already seen—

Ms. SALAZAR. So let's put that aside. I understand. I agree with you that they tried but now they are—now we're in the show. So how are they going to try to steal the show? What info do you have?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, I think the key barometer early on will be turnout for the vote, and as you note polls indicate a significant lead for the opposition and we expect that if they're able to turn out their voters they should perform well.

Ms. SALAZAR. But what info do you have? What are the schemes they're trying to put together? Do you have that info? Because something they're planning.

What is it that they're planning? I cannot figure it out because there are many different ways. But I want us to ask the State Department what are you guys expecting?

Mr. NICHOLS. I don't have any specific information on what they might—what the Maduro side might do. What I will say is that this election represents a major opportunity for Venezuela to return to the community of nations and to have an opportunity for a better future.

Ms. SALAZAR. Well, you know that that's not Maduro's plan. I mean, they're in the business of power. What do you mean conceding victory? You're giving power away. That's not part of the agenda.

So since we know that is not part of the agenda so what can we do in order to—can we talk to Lula? Can we talk and we put more pressure? I mean, we are the United States and you guys are in charge.

What can we do to send the message to Maduro after, let's say, polls are going to close at 7 o'clock at night? I mean, I've covered this before as a journalist.

So let's say by 2 o'clock in the morning they are still counting. We know. So what are we going to do in those key hours, we meaning the United States—you the State Department? You're going to pick up the phone and what are you guys going to do?

Mr. NICHOLS. We continue to engage with partners from around the world to maintain a united—

Ms. SALAZAR. Who are those partners? Tell me. Who are you—who are you calling as an ally to call Maduro and say, you got to go, guy?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, I think we're like-minded with countries throughout the hemisphere—Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile.

Ms. SALAZAR. Have you enlisted them already? Have you been talking to them and say, hey, I need you to be on standby?

Mr. NICHOLS. During the OAS General Assembly in Asuncion, Paraguay, we had the opportunity to talk to more than a dozen partners from around the hemisphere about key issues including our collective support for democracy in Venezuela.

Secretary Blinken engaged a dozen colleagues during the ministerial meeting of America's Partnership for Economic Prosperity.

Ms. SALAZAR. Mr. Nichols, I understand everything you've told me and I'm on your side. I just want to hear something more forceful—that we, the United States, in this magnificent moment of Biblical proportions for the history of the Venezuelans that we are going to be a little bit more forceful. But I hear what you're telling me.

Is there anything else that you want to share with us? I have another question. I know that Maduro, when he realized that he's 3 million votes down, he calls the Biden administration through Jorge Rodriguez, who is one of the top lieutenants next to Maduro.

Can you share with us what was discussed? That happened, what, earlier this month. They picked up the phone. They called the Biden administration. What did they say?

Mr. NICHOLS. So we did have a conversation with some of the Maduro side representatives. They expressed their unhappiness about—

Ms. SALAZAR. About what? How they're going to lose?

Mr. NICHOLS. About the fact that we have not lifted sanctions.

Ms. SALAZAR. Okay. Yes. Right.

Mr. NICHOLS. And we expressed our disappointment at the disqualification of earlier candidates and our hope that this would be a competitive election and—

Ms. SALAZAR. What did they say to that? Of course, yes.

Mr. NICHOLS. I'm not going to get into all of the back and forth that we had in a negotiation but I will say—

Ms. SALAZAR. Was something negotiated?

Mr. NICHOLS. We've—no. We value the channel of communication that we have and it's important as we go forward to be able to have conversations between our two governments—between our government and the Maduro side.

Ms. SALAZAR. But you cannot share with us anything that was spoken specifically or negotiated in that—

Mr. NICHOLS. I'm not going to get into the contract with Nicaragua.

Ms. SALAZAR. All right. What about in Qatar last year? There was also a discussion between Biden administration officials and the Maduro regime. Was a transition discussed?

Mr. NICHOLS. As a part—the pending phase of the Barbados agreement talked about the next phase would be some type of a civic pact and discussion of what would happen from the time of the election until the January inauguration of whomever the victor is in the election.

All of those discussions are still pending.

Ms. SALAZAR. Moving forward, the morning after Maduro comes out and says, I won by 50.315, what are we going to do if we know that they stole the elections just like they have done before? What's going to be our first reaction?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, under Venezuelan electoral law their electoral council has until the following day to announce the results and then August 2d they're supposed to publish detailed results.

There will be international observers on the ground. There will be thousands of domestic poll watchers from the opposition as well as from parties that support the Maduro side.

We want to look—and there'll be international diplomats present—we want to look at all the information. We're not going to rush to judgment, and then we will make a decision.

Ms. SALAZAR. All right. And then we'll be in touch because, as you said, we both agree on the fact that the Venezuelans deserve to be free and choose their own leaders.

Now, I'm just—I just want to have a little bit more time after that. We have to—you know, I'm trying to be courteous to my fellow members of the committee.

All right. Vice President Kamala has been in charge of the border. Her visits have been considered—I'm not saying it, the headlines say it—a failure.

Right there you have CNN that—it's a pretty friendly news outlet for the Democrats—saying that the problem is now much bigger. That's not a very good headline to Vice President Harris.

She goes to Guatemala and then she implies that the country is corrupt in this press conference that she puts together with Giammattei, who was the president at the time, and she tells the Guatemalans right there on the air, hey, don't come. Don't come.

Then she was assigned to go to El Salvador where real progress—in El Salvador has been made, to address the root causes of migration. So, in other words, Madam Harris is now in a very peculiar position.

Probably everything indicates that she's going to be the nominee for the Democratic Party and I just want to ask you what grade would you give her?

According to the headlines, she gets an F in the job or in the assignment that she was given by the President to control or to be the border czar. What grade do you give her?

Mr. NICHOLS. So Vice President Harris launched the U.S. root causes strategy to tackle the drivers of irregular migration by improving conditions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras so people do not feel compelled to leave their homes.

She leads the implementation of this strategy. The root causes strategy is on track to provide \$4 billion in U.S. investment to the region over 4 years.

Ms. SALAZAR. Mr. Nichols, she hasn't even gone to the border.

Mr. NICHOLS. So—

Ms. SALAZAR. I mean—I mean, just give me a little better explanation.

Mr. NICHOLS. Arrivals at the U.S. border from the countries in Central America are down dramatically over the last 4 years.

Ms. SALAZAR. But that was 5 minutes ago. I mean, that happened 5 minutes ago during 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923. We know reality. I mean, I just want to get some true statements from you.

I mean, why do you think that she failed so dismally at this job that she was given? Why didn't she pay any attention to the southern border or be one of the most important topics affecting the national security of this country? Do you have any explanation?

Mr. NICHOLS. I think this has been a dramatic success. We have seen double digit drops in arrivals at the U.S. southern border from every country we measure, up to 96 percent drops.

Even the Central American country that's had the lowest drop is still a 26 percent drop over the last year. Arrivals are at their lowest level since before this administration took office.

The Vice President has mobilized over \$5.2 billion in commitments for investment in the region, generating over 70,000 jobs—

Ms. SALAZAR. You are a great soldier.

Mr. NICHOLS [continuing]. Through private sector investment in the region.

Ms. SALAZAR. I think you're doing a great job. Let me just—doing a great job. I think that they are really definitely going to reward you for your assistance in this hearing.

Let me just go to Colombia now. There are many accusations right now about President Petro's personal life. I may be tough but I do not want to pry into anyone's private life, much less in public.

All right. But the issue is that he is constantly late and has to cancel many meetings. Not only that, he has missed 150 public engagements during his presidency. Are you aware of this?

Mr. NICHOLS. I hadn't seen that specific statistic, no.

Ms. SALAZAR. One hundred and fifty public engagements. In the last week during the Vente de Julio—July 20th—parade, which celebrated an important date for the Colombians, that parade had to start without the president because he was more than 3 hours late.

Recently, even more damaging, I think, for his image he was spotted walking hand in hand with a woman who was not his wife who appears to be Lady Linda Yeppes, who is a trans woman who was a host on the program Buendia in Colombia through RCN, one of the main networks in Colombia.

When did that happen? During the inauguration of Jose Raul Mulino in Panama. The pictures are there for everyone to see. He has admitted that he has been drunk at many public events.

So my question to you is this. Do you think that what I just mentioned and the concerns from some Colombians is affecting these dalliances and this new ways of conducting his private life are affecting his ability to govern? What do you think about that?

Mr. NICHOLS. Our relationship is with the Nation of Colombia. It goes back two centuries. They are some of our closest allies in the world. We work with them across a whole host of issues.

Ms. SALAZAR. Mr. Nichols, but he's the one—he's the one conducting the ship.

Mr. NICHOLS. That relationship goes beyond the—any single individual and we will focus on our government-to-government relationship with Colombia.

Ms. SALAZAR. Aren't you concerned about that erratic behavior from one of our top allies?

Mr. NICHOLS. I'm not in a position to verify or to comment on the specific allegations.

Ms. SALAZAR. So why don't we then—after the hearing we could have a conversation? We can continue talking about this because this is just not—this type of behavior is not very Presidential for an ally as close, as you just mentioned.

Now I'm going to yield back so I can give an opportunity to the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Stanton, and thank you very much for your patience.

I yield back.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I think we have votes that we're going to have to go to in just a moment and I think because of the—all the activities on Capitol Hill today including the prime minister of Israel who's coming to give a speech, we won't come back after votes. So I'll just speak for maybe a minute or two and then call it a day because we don't be late for votes.

But I just want to say first in response to your comments, you know, we will be paying close attention what happens in Venezuela and if there are irregularities. I look forward to working with you and for—I know you asked the administration about their response but I look forward to working with you on an appropriate congressional response to any irregularities in that.

As it involves the vice president you gave her a poor grade for her involvement in immigration and border security. I say we need to actually look in the mirror and say Congress—Congress is actually the entity that needs to step up to the plate and finally pass a real border security plan in a bipartisan way, real immigration reform, a real policy as it relates to trade with Mexico, Central and Latin America, and a real policy as it relates to the root causes of migration and the failure of Congress to be able to come together in a bipartisan way to do that has led to so many of the challenges that we are discussing right here today, and the failure of Congress to pass common sense policies on border, immigration, trade, and root causes is one of the great failures of this Congress.

Chair, I want to compliment you because you have been someone that has put forward—worked in a bipartisan way and put forward a real plan—a real bipartisan plan—I know with real political risk to do that and I just want to personally compliment you.

And I wish there were more like you that are willing to reach across the aisle, come together in a bipartisan way, take political risk, because it's going to take real political risk on both sides to get this done.

But we can do this in Congress. We shouldn't cast blame on other people because it's Congress that has to take this important step.

And with that, we're going to close out the hearing because we got votes, and I know we have an important speech later so I don't want to force everyone to come back. So thank you for being here.

Ms. SALAZAR. And we are coming back, according to the staff, and the committee will recess until 11 o'clock for votes. No, we're going to come back at 11. So we may be coming back at 11 and if you don't mind staying and continue with our questioning we very much appreciate it.

We'll come to—we'll reconvene then at 11.

[Recess.]

Ms. SALAZAR. The committee will come to order.

Now I recognize Congressman Huizenga for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And, Madam Chair, if you don't mind indulging me.

I know that there's been a lot of debate about who's in charge of the border, who's been assigned a task to deal with the border. Some have used the term border czar. Maybe czarina would be—would be more applicable.

For clarity's sake I do want to add, if you don't mind, a AP article from March 24 of 2021. The headline is "Biden taps VP Harris to lead response to border challenges," and I'm going to read the very first paragraph.

"President Joe Biden has tapped Vice President Kamala Harris to lead the White House effort to tackle the migration challenge at the U.S. southern border and work with Central American nations to address root causes of the problem," close quote.

And I'd like to submit that for the record because I think it is important that we have clarity about not only what has been happening but what the response has been and the responsibility of that.

[The information referred to is located in the appendix:]

Mr. HUIZENGA. I'm going to start, frankly, in a slightly different direction, though. I'd like to talk about China and the Chinese nationals.

More Chinese nationals have presented themselves at the border this current Fiscal Year than in the entirety of Fiscal Year 2023 and I would like to hear, Secretary Nichols, is the administration concerned about the intent—not just numbers but the intent of the Chinese nationals when they arrive and is there any indication that they are connected to the CCP either overtly or covertly?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, I think the arrival of migrants from the PRC is a stunning indictment of the leadership of that nation.

The PRC's economic slowdown, government repression—that's what's driving this increase in migrants and migrants arrive from all regions in China and the majority of migrants are middle class and professionally skilled.

We continue working with partners to identify countries of concern and coordinate responses to disrupt flows whether they be from China or any place else.

Mr. HUIZENGA. So you don't—you don't believe there's any nefarious intent behind this? This is just people trying to flee a lousy China's economic policy?

Mr. NICHOLS. I think it's driven by people's deep dissatisfaction with the lives that they have. People don't pick up and leave where they are unless they are——

Mr. HUIZENGA. Well, we have slightly different views of the PRC and the CCP and their motives, and we know that this isn't just happening at the southern border. I happen to be the chair of the U.S.-Canada, IPG. I live in Michigan. I'm very familiar with the northern border.

Two-thirds of all of those who have been caught—not the getaways but who have been caught who have been on the terrorist watch list—have been actually at the northern border, not at the southern border.

There's two borders that have been exploited here, and I'll give you another example. So my wife used to be Canadian. Has family in Canada. I'm sure you're familiar with what a nexus card is, correct?

Okay. A nexus card is a unique joint U.S.-Canada permit that allows easier travel for those that sit in front of both a U.S. and Canadian Border Patrol at the same time. It's a very unique thing.

So recently while my wife was getting her nexus card I was with her and was talking to one of our Border Patrol agents in Detroit and I said, hey, do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?

About three questions in he looked at me and said, what do you do exactly? Because I was fairly specific in my—in my questions. And he was indicating to me that as my question was is the northern border more vulnerable because of what's been happening at the southern border and he said, absolutely, sir.

He said, we have mandatory 6-month rotations. It's voluntary at first but if they don't have enough spots to fill they are moving us off of the northern border down to the southern border. And he happened to be in the El Paso area for 6 months just recently.

He recounted a story about how a family showed up from Brazil. He said they were very well dressed, very nice luggage, and we started asking them and interrogating them, what are you doing and where do you plan to go?

Well, it turns out—according to him, it turns out that this family—almost everybody in the family could get a visa except for the dad. They were trying to go to Disney World. I kid you not.

So they all flew to Mexico and decided to come across the border. They did their vacation and then, according to him, presumably they left because he said, they gave us no indication that they actually wanted to stay in the country.

This is how porous the border is right now and how ineffective, in my opinion, the enforcement of current law has been where we have potentially people looking to come to the United States for vacation purposes, not just economic purposes.

But we have such a reputation for what's going on, and I cannot fathom—you know, this family from Brazil may not have had nefarious reasons to be here. They wanted to go see Mickey and Minnie.

But guess what? The people from China and from a lot of other places may not have that same motive and what I'm trying to figure out is how this administration can argue that after hundreds of millions of dollars has been spent in Central America to curb migration we haven't seen that. After all of the other, quote, "additional enforcement" we're seeing a clearly a more porous border than we ever have, and how do I look at my constituents and my taxpayers and say this isn't a waste of your money?

I mean, that's what we're here today to talk about, right, is your—the request from State about getting more money to put into these programs, which I would argue have not been effective.

So please try to convince me here briefly.

Mr. NICHOLS. So with regard to Central America and our root causes strategy I'll just note over the last 12 months arrivals from nationals from Guatemala are down 75 percent, from Honduras down 86 percent, and from El Salvador down 27 percent and they were already at a very low level.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Any of that seasonal?

Mr. NICHOLS. No, this is—

Mr. HUIZENGA. No, none of it's seasonal?

Mr. NICHOLS. This is—

Mr. HUIZENGA. Come on.

Mr. NICHOLS. We're at the lowest levels we have been since before this administration took office.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Sir, we know that there's seasonality to border crossings. We know that.

Mr. NICHOLS. The other—

Mr. HUIZENGA. There are—there are—there were 400,000 inadmissible—legally inadmissible aliens that we know about that has—that the mass parole program has allowed—400,000 legally inadmissible aliens have been flown directly into the interior of the United States.

I actually have a bill that would require you all to report to Members of Congress and to Governors when that happens because we're in the dark. We don't know about that until they land. We have had examples of that in Michigan as well.

And by the way, Madam Chair, I'm sure you are very well aware of this. Numerous migrant caravans of thousands of people are still continuing to go.

Monday of this week the AP reported that another migrant caravan left southern Mexico on foot heading for the U.S. border and the article states, quote, "Some of the members of the group said they hoped to make it to the U.S. border before elections are held in November because they fear that if Donald Trump wins he will follow through on his promise to close the border," close quote.

That's the AP. That does not sound like a border under control to me or an actual working strategy. So that is part of my hesitancy in granting more—hundreds of millions of dollars more to these programs.

I'm well over my time, Madam Chair. I appreciate the indulgence, and I yield back.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Congressman Huizenga.

Now I recognize Congressman Self for 5 minutes.

Mr. SELF. Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I would point to one of your comments about Haiti moving toward stability. Haiti has been unstable for decades and I will point you to the Cubs—Chicago Cubs fans.

They thought it was going to be different next year for decades. It finally was but it took decades for it to be different.

I think using the word stability in the same sentence as Haiti is a rosy projection at best. I've heard nothing but rosy projections from all three of your testimoneys here and yet we know if every report is right that the CCP is making tremendous gains throughout the Western Hemisphere.

So the first question is I want to know what kinds of activities does the countering PRC influence fund support in the region and what impact do you think that has?

Mr. Nichols?

Mr. NICHOLS. So among the things that we seek to do is educate populaces on the reality of the deals on offer from the PRC, whether that's investment or media or cultural centers, and educate people on what's really on offer, what the terms of credit that their countries might receive.

We seek to provide financing for key infrastructure projects and other investments in countries in the region so that they have—

Mr. SELF. That's a great—that's a great point. So what is your percentage of the PRC spending in the Western Hemisphere?

Mr. NICHOLS. Sorry, I'm not sure I understand the question, sir.

Mr. SELF. How does your spending compare to the DFC or whatever? What is our soft power spending in the Western Hemisphere? How does it compare to what CCP is spending?

Yes, ma'am?

Ms. NOYES. Sir, I could speak to that, perhaps, in the space of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. SELF. Well, I'm looking at a total cost. I think we are being vastly outspent and, frankly, in one of our previous hearings the State Department was bragging about being the chief investment partner of the Western Hemisphere instead of the chief trading partner, and I think that bodes us no good.

Now, Argentina apparently has most of the rare earth minerals that we need and rare earth minerals, frankly, are not that rare. Alaska alone has 49 out of the 50 rare earth minerals and yet the Biden administration is trying to turn it into one large national park.

But Argentina has many of them as well. So what would you do to try to get us rare earth minerals of which China controls some 90 percent around the world?

So as long as we're talking about investment in South America, what would you do to try to get us rare earth minerals out of Argentina? Because we now have a government that I think would be amenable to that idea.

Mr. NICHOLS. We have an excellent relationship with the Milei government in Argentina under the leadership of Under Secretary Jose Fernandez.

We have engaged in discussions about promoting U.S. investment in the critical minerals sectors in countries like Argentina, Chile, Peru, and around the region.

That means engaging partners, ensuring that policies are in place in countries that welcome foreign direct investment and U.S. investment.

In the case of Argentina specifically, mineral resources—subsoil resources are controlled by the provinces and not by the central government so that means working with Governors and our embassy engages with the Governors around the—

Mr. SELF. Okay. That's process but what are you doing to encourage U.S. companies to go get the rare earths that we need?

Mr. NICHOLS. That means working with nations to create an environment that is welcoming to foreign direct investment, working with the private sector in the United States to share opportunities for investment.

Mr. SELF. That's generalities, though, Mr. Nichols. What are you doing to—

Mr. NICHOLS. Leading trade delegations to countries in the region, working with our partners in the Department of Commerce to facilitate visits by businesses around the hemisphere, engaging with private sector organizations like BCIU, Council of the Americas, Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. SELF. Let me ask you—let me ask you this then. Those countries that you've named is China extracting rare earths out of those countries?

Mr. NICHOLS. Yes.

Mr. SELF. And have we started?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, in some cases there are—in Chile and Peru there are U.S. mines that do mine critical minerals in those countries.

Mr. SELF. I will just make the point that I think our soft power has gotten a little soft. We need to be going after these things that our industry needs in great quantities and we need to be reducing the—our reliance on China.

Mr. NICHOLS. I agree with you 100 percent on that point.

Mr. SELF. I yield back, Madam Chair.

Mr. NICHOLS. I agree, and we need to do more. We need to fund DFC. We need to fund the Inter-American Development Bank so that the financing piece is there for these multi-billion-dollar investments.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Congressman Self.

Now I recognize Mr. Stanton from Arizona for 5 minutes.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

During last week's congressional delegation trip to Mexico I did have the opportunity to speak with President-Elect Sheinbaum about the security situation in Mexico and the power that cartels yield to inflict violence and ship fentanyl illegally across our border.

We have an opportunity now to curb cartel activity. In most of Mexico police act as first responders but they don't investigate crime. That is instead led by prosecutors' offices that are too small to effectively investigate and prosecute crime.

As mayor of Mexico City Dr. Sheinbaum allowed police to investigate crimes and hire more investigators, worked with the United States security officials and ultimately reduced crime by almost 60 percent.

We need to seize this opportunity for deeper cross-border collaboration to combat the cartels including and especially stopping the flow of illicit fentanyl.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, how does the State Department plan to work with the incoming administration in Mexico to combat the flow of fentanyl and build upon the commitments of the U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for security, public health, and safe communities, and how do proposed budget cuts affect those plans?

Mr. NICHOLS. We work intensively with the current Mexican government and we have begun to consult with the incoming government about our cooperation on law enforcement issues, and there's no issue more vital to the security and welfare of Americans than combating fentanyl trafficking into our country.

That means continuing to work to identify chemical precursor suppliers into Mexico, identifying clandestine labs in Mexico, using intelligence-driven operations to disrupt the financing of drug cartels, training and supporting vetted investigative units in Mexico and making sure that that partnership, in addition to our bilateral engagement, works with other key partners around the hemisphere and around the world to combat this scourge.

Mr. STANTON. This is a key moment in the relationship with Mexico, Central and Latin America, particularly on the issue of the nearshoring opportunity, this unique nearshoring moment, capitalizing growth with our trade partner Mexico and preparing for the upcoming review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement—USMCA.

Earlier this month this committee, in a bipartisan way, passed reauthorization of the BUILD Act, which allows the Development Finance Corporation more flexibility to invest in Latin America including in the semiconductor industry.

These investments would shore up U.S. national security, give the United States more tools to compete with China, and create stable jobs in Latin America that contribute to a regional semiconductor ecosystem.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, how does nearshoring bolster our national security and what can be done to ensure regional security in the Western Hemisphere, creating a more reliable business environment and limiting crossings into the United States?

Mr. NICHOLS. Diversified supply chains provide greater security to the United States. We have already seen what can happen when a region of the world or international trade is disrupted as it was during the pandemic.

Having supply chains closer to home means that we will have access to those important inputs and resources for our Nation. It creates good, high-paying jobs in our region, which gives people an incentive to stay at home rather than migrate to the United States.

It creates economic growth that strengthens democracy and provides better trading partners for the United States. Recently Secretary Blinken hosted foreign ministers as part of the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity.

Eleven other foreign ministers were there talking about how we can promote these measures in the Western Hemisphere including from Mexico as well as Central American countries that are attracting investment like Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

Mr. STANTON. Safe mobility offices—they help to reestablish operational control at the southern border and they disincentivize travel to our southern border.

To date four existing SMOs in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Guatemala have processed more than 21,000 people. USCIS recently told my office that strides made by the SMOs are, quote, “proof of concept” but acknowledges that there is room to grow, room for improvement.

Assistant Secretary Noyes, what resources are required to expand the impact and reach of the SMOs and preserve regional security and how is the administration engaging governments around the world on SMO activities?

Ms. NOYES. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

The administration request for a safe mobility initiative in Fiscal Year 2025 is \$300 million. Those funds would be used to manage the operations of the safe mobility offices but in addition to that we’re engaging in robust diplomacy with our partners including through the Resettlement Diplomacy Network which is an informal grouping of countries to enhance refugee resettlement by our partners.

We recently led a visit by a number of partners from Europe, the Americas, and Asia to visit the safe mobility office in Colombia and part of our effort will be to continue to expand that outreach and to expand the opportunities for other countries to provide lawful pathways to migrants within our hemisphere to their regions.

There are a lot of countries in the world that have labor shortages and that could provide safety as well as labor opportunities for those migrants. So this is an opportunity that allows everyone to win.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Congressman Stanton.

And I’m going to then recognize myself for 5 minutes.

I have a question for each one of you. I’m going to start with you, Mr. Nichols, about El Salvador.

You and I, we were at the second inaugural for President Bukele. We agreed that the guy has done a great job, that he has secure and eradicated the roots of violence in El Salvador.

Now he’s starting a second phase to bring prosperity and to bring investments—American investments—and to be able to grow the economy. But they need international financing. They need for the United States to bless them so the international banking community opens up and starts giving them loans.

Are we ready to bless the Bukele administration so they can start that second phase and bring prosperity—economic prosperity to the country?

Mr. NICHOLS. So we very much want to work with the government of El Salvador to promote economic growth in the country.

I think among the challenges to increasing the levels of foreign direct investment in El Salvador are ensuring that the system of rule of law in El Salvador is transparent and gives investors equitable treatment and that’s something that we want to work with this government on, and I know from the conversations we had

when we were in country at the same time that President Bukele is interested in working with us on that.

Ms. SALAZAR. Are we interested in working with him?

Mr. NICHOLS. Yes. Yes, we had a high level delegation to his inauguration and we want to work with his government on these issues.

There are a number of things that we think will improve the economic situation in El Salvador. But the United States is not the only actor in this space and, obviously—

Ms. SALAZAR. But you know it's always the most important one because everyone wants American companies to go and set up shop and absorb some of the labor force and bring prosperity.

You know, the Americans—that's why we're in this hearing because everyone wants to deal—everyone meaning the Western Hemisphere—wants to deal with the Americans, not only American government but the American companies. Everything that says USA. Do you agree?

Mr. NICHOLS. Let me give you a specific example—

Ms. SALAZAR. Tell me.

Mr. NICHOLS [continuing]. Of a concern that we express, which is limitations on the use of cloud servers in the financial services sector. So that means that the most secure ways of storing financial information are not available to U.S. companies or their customers for things like mortgages, for example.

So all that information has to be stored in El Salvador under their current laws. Allowing cloud data services would allow greater security and would meet the high standards that U.S. and other international companies expect.

So working with the government of El Salvador to change that requirement is something that would immediately improve the investment environment—

Ms. SALAZAR. Well, those are technical details that I am sure there's political willingness will be able to be worked out. Thank you, Mr. Nichols.

Now I'm going to ask you, Secretary Valls, could you explain to us the new migration policy that was negotiated between—negotiated between the Biden administration and the new president of Panama, Jose Raul Mulino?

Why do I say that? Because right now the Darien Gap, which is that magic place where everyone has to go through, meaning everyone that is not in Central America needs to go through in order to get to the United States, we're only talking about 30 miles and that's why we believe that the influx of people coming through the southern border has been reduced so—to the present numbers that we have been discussing.

What did—what was negotiated?

Ms. NOYES. Thank you, Congresswoman.

During the inauguration of President Mulino in Panama the head of the U.S. delegation, Secretary Mayorkas, signed an MOU with the new foreign minister of Panama that would facilitate U.S. assistance, technical training, capacity building for Panamanian migration officials to assist them in conducting repatriation flights for individuals who do not have international protection concerns.

It was an agreement that we had negotiated for several months but that satisfied the requirements or the desire to repatriate those who didn't have a legal basis for remaining but also providing protection concerns to make sure that the repatriations didn't include people who had fear of persecution or torture when they return.

Ms. SALAZAR. No, I understand. But why do you think it was negotiated now in 1924? Why couldn't we do that in 1921 or in 1922?

Ms. NOYES. The negotiations began earlier and took a while to come to conclusion and President Mulino, upon entering into office, agreed to sign. So those negotiations had been going on for some time before that.

Ms. SALAZAR. And are you satisfied with the results—the results up to now?

Ms. NOYES. Yes.

Ms. SALAZAR. All right.

Now, Mr. Camilleri, when I was a news reporter USAID, oh, it was the star. Everyone wants to deal—every country in Latin America would love to have USAID help and presence and agents and staff.

So it's the pretty face of the United States. It's the noble face. It's like the signature agency that takes prosperity, hope, our American values.

So I hold the USAID in high regard. So I want to ask you—that is our role. We know that we should be investing a lot more money, a lot more resources, more people, more of everything, because that's like the American flag when it comes to nonpolitical and nonmilitary aid.

Are the Chinese—what are they doing in order to counteract what—that noble purpose that USAID has?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the support for USAID's work. I think we feel proud of the work we do in the region for precisely the reasons that you know so well, having spent so much time with the people of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Certainly, the strategic environment in the Americas has evolved. We have strategic competitors, the PRC probably principal among them, and so now more than ever it is critical that we have the resources to invest in the things that USAID does so well, working with our other agency partners.

Ms. SALAZAR. What are they doing?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Well, they're, you know—

Ms. SALAZAR. What are they doing that we're not?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Their model is different than ours in a couple of ways. One is that they burden countries with debt so for every \$10 that the Chinese bring to the table—

Ms. SALAZAR. Nine.

Mr. CAMILLERI. —\$9 of it is debt and \$1 of it is aid. We're the reverse.

Ms. SALAZAR. You see right there. Look at how noble this country is. Out of \$10, \$9 we give, \$1 we lend. They, the Chinese, they're communists, obviously. They give—they lend \$9. That means that you got to pay me back, and \$1 is given for free.

Mr. CAMILLERI. On top of that, the—I think we're seeing significant—

Ms. SALAZAR. That's a very—that's important for you to stress.

Mr. CAMILLERI. It's absolutely critical and it's, I think, increasingly apparent to our partners in the region why the United States should remain the partner of choice, not just because we're bringing aid to the table rather than burdening countries with debt but the quality of what we bring to the table, the values that we imbue our programs with, is distinguishing us from what the PRC brings in terms of, you know, the corruption often associated with their—with their projects—the shoddy infrastructure, the debt burden, as I as I mentioned.

So we think that our—

Ms. SALAZAR. What about social programs? Like, I know that you have gender identity programs. You have all types of social programs to teach English, to learn how to put together a bank account, right. To teach the some of the residents of Guatemala, let's say, how to open up a business.

So do they do something similar is what I'm saying. I don't know the answer to this.

Mr. CAMILLERI. That kind of programming is more what we do versus the way we do. The rooted programming in local communities, the deep knowledge and dialog with those communities in areas like financial literacy, to mention one that you mentioned, the values—again, the democratic American values that imbue those programs that is a distinguishing characteristic of the way the United States does foreign assistance and, I would argue, a comparative advantage that we have over the PRC.

Ms. SALAZAR. Yes, ma'am?

Ms. NOYES. Chairwoman, if I could just jump in.

Ms. SALAZAR. Sure.

Ms. NOYES. The United States in terms of humanitarian assistance we lead with our values and I'd like to give a specific example. In 2022 the United States was, as it always is, the largest single country donor of humanitarian assistance funds in the world.

In 2022, the last year for which we have statistics for China, the United States provided \$17 billion in humanitarian assistance to save lives, alleviate suffering, provide protection to the most vulnerable people.

In that same period the People's Republic of China provided \$9 million. So for every \$1 provided by the United—by the People's Republic of China the United States provided \$1,200 in humanitarian assistance.

I think that that shows our partners in the hemisphere who really cares about them and who really leads with our values and who is really standing by their side.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, and I like your phrase “leading with our values.” Long live the United States. Thank you.

I yield back. Now I recognize Congressman Schneider from the State of Illinois for 5 minutes. Thank you.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Chair Salazar, and let me first say thank you. I'm not on this subcommittee but I'm pleased to be here and allowing me to join you.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak about the fiscal 1925 budget priorities that we are here today to discuss. I was just in the region last week. I was in Brazil, Argentina, and Guatemala. The

trip was an eye opener, reinforcing the critical importance of our engagement in Latin America.

We had the chance to meet with President Milei and President Arevalo who both emphasized their appreciation for and commitment to a strong United States relationship.

In Buenos Aires we commemorated the 30th anniversary of the AMIA Jewish Center bombing, honoring the victims of this tragic terrorist attack that still has not had justice served. The solemn event reminded us of the enduring threat of anti-Semitism and the need for vigilance and justice.

As many of you know, Hezbollah was responsible for the AMIA bombing, highlighting the group's capacity for violence and terror beyond the Middle East. This connection is very personal to me for I have a long history of working to counter Hezbollah's influence, including leading the original Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act.

Hezbollah's activities including money laundering and drug trafficking pose a serious threat not only to regional stability in Latin America but to United States national security.

Our experiences on the trip underscore the importance of sustained U.S. engagement in Latin America. Specific priorities protecting our vital interests include addressing and promoting economic opportunities while addressing economic challenges, dealing with, as was mentioned earlier, the strategic competitors, in particular the PRC, dealing with the effects of climate change and the threats of irregular migration and other issues are coming from that, and last but not least, dealing with crime and terrorist groups in the region.

We have to address democratic resilience. In Guatemala we met with the president. He talked about the efforts they're taking. I'd like to touch on that in a second as well.

Economic development—our ties with Brazil are robust. Two-way trade is reaching significant levels. Strengthening that relationship will benefit both nations, promoting job creation and sustainable development.

Of course, migration management is an issue and I'll come back to that in a second, but programs are having effect. In Guatemala we talked about the fact that border crossings are down by two-thirds since 2021.

And last, enhancing our efforts to counter Hezbollah's influence in the Americas is crucial.

In conclusion, our engagement in Latin America is not just a matter of foreign policy. It's about building a more secure, prosperous, and democratic hemisphere and that's what the 2025 budget request is all about and a step in the right direction.

So let me start with Acting Assistant Administrator Camilleri. How is USAID addressing the root causes of migration from Central America, particularly in Guatemala?

As I mentioned, we have seen a two-thirds decrease, other positive steps. But what should we be looking for?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Thank you, Congressman.

We have seen under the root causes strategy, which was launched in 2021, a new level of attention and resources committed to addressing those root causes of migration from Central America.

We have now invested almost \$3 billion in that strategy as well as mobilizing the private sector, as Assistant Secretary Nichols mentioned, to the tune of \$5.2 billion in additional investment, 50 companies investing to create jobs in the region.

So just to give you some examples of the impact of this work under the root causes strategy, in a single year USAID helped to create or sustain 90,000 jobs.

We reached nearly half a million youth through support for primary and secondary education. We kept 175,000 children from growing hungry in the region through our nutrition interventions.

The question, obviously, that we often get is what impact is this work, which is having tangible, meaningful effects on local communities and families, what impact is it having on migration, and there as you alluded to I think increasingly we have evidence that we are having an impact.

We know, for example, that our workforce development interventions in El Salvador showed a 13 percent decrease in intentions to migrate. We know that in Honduras our education interventions kept kids in school and that those higher retention rates are associated with lower irregular migration rates.

And more broadly speaking, as you mentioned we have seen since the launch of the root strategy—root causes strategy to today a two-thirds decline in border encounters from the countries of Northern and Central America.

So when we think about the budget environment we're in and we hear some of the discussion about potentially significant cuts to USAID's budget for the region we know what that means.

That means, you know, fewer kids in school. It means more kids going hungry. It means fewer jobs created. It means fewer women and girls protected from gender-based violence.

More broadly in the region, you know, less support for public officials and civil society and journalists who are combating corruption and human rights violations.

Coastal communities that are more vulnerable to storms and climate change, so not to mention our—you know, the space for transactional criminal organizations and our strategic competitors in the region.

So this is tangible. This is real. This really, you know, puts on the table the progress that I think we have made over the last few years under the root causes strategy and more broadly in the region and would just encourage those of you who have the opportunity to consider these questions to think, you know, carefully about the impact that we have had so far, the impact we can continue to have appropriately resourced.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Great. I'm over time. If I had more time, Assistant Secretary Nichols, I would love to talk more another time about efforts to support work in the region to address corruption like what we were hearing in Guatemala with great success.

With that, I yield back.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Congressman, for your participation.

Now I recognize Congressman Self from Texas for the next 5 minutes.

Mr. SELF. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Given the background of repression against matters of conscience, faith, the church in Nicaragua, I want to ask you—and I was also struck with your comment about lead with our values.

One of our—in fact, it's in the First Amendment, religious freedom. We have both the establishment clause and the free expression clause in our First Amendment.

So and please don't wander into humanitarian, education, migration issues. I want to know about the Biden administration's support for religious freedom—matters of conscience, matters of faith.

Does the Biden administration support religious liberty in the Western Hemisphere and I want to hear specifics about how they are supporting.

And, again, I ask you not to wander into humanitarian, education, or migration issues. I want to hear specifics about the religious freedom because that is one of our leading values.

So what is the Biden administration doing to support religious freedom in the Western Hemisphere?

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you very much.

The Biden administration has been focused on a country that has—Nicaragua that has deeply abused people of faith, going after Mountain Gateway missionaries, for example, and jailing them.

Mr. SELF. What does focused on it mean? What are they doing?

Mr. NICHOLS. We have repeatedly raised the unfair jailing and abuse of both evangelical and Catholic religious figures in Nicaragua with the Ortega-Murillo regime. We continue to advocate for the release of all prisoners of conscience in Nicaragua.

Mr. SELF. Can you provide me the proof of that? Do you have letters that you could give me? I would—I would like to see the specifics of what you've been doing rather than just a meeting date.

Mr. NICHOLS. I'll have to consult with my colleagues in the department about providing any specific documentation.

Mr. SELF. Yes, please.

Mr. NICHOLS. But I will absolutely stress that we have raised this on numerous occasions and we did secure the release of a number of political prisoners—222—at one time in—

Mr. SELF. Were these prisoners of faith or were they political prisoners of a different political party? Because, again, please don't—please refrain your remarks to religious liberty.

Mr. NICHOLS. So that was a broad spectrum of prisoners including people of faith. One of the other things I'm very proud of that we have done in the Western Hemisphere is to work to combat anti-Semitism in our hemisphere.

I issued a region wide policy on combating anti-Semitism and directed each of our Ambassadors in the field to develop their own anti-Semitism policies and work hand in hand with Ambassador Lipstadt, and we have persuaded numerous countries in the hemisphere, most recently Paraguay and Guatemala, to name special envoys to combat anti-Semitism and they signed a joint statement at the anniversary of the AMIA bombing.

Mr. SELF. And I appreciate that, Mr. Nichols. That is combating anti-Semitism.

What I'm asking about is religious freedom for the citizens of the Western Hemisphere. It is related but it is not exactly anti-Semi-

tism. You're combating anti-Semitism. I want to know what you're doing to support religious liberty. That's my question.

Mr. NICHOLS. So we, the State Department as a whole, reports on international religious freedom in every country around the world. We raise the issues of freedom of religion with governments wherever we are present. We seek out information.

When there are cases where people of faith or people who choose not to practice a faith are persecuted we raise that with the host governments.

Mr. SELF. Okay. I would like to know if you've got any documentation if you would followup on when you have actually done it. We can talk generalities all day long. That doesn't answer specifics. I would appreciate it.

With that, I yield back, Madam Chair.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Congressman Self, and I thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the members for their questions.

The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses and we will ask you to respond to those in writing.

Pursuant to committee rules, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and other materials for the record subject to the length limitations.

Without objection, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:08 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Maria Salazar (R-FL), Chairwoman

July 17, 2024

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere at 10:00 a.m. in room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Wednesday, July 24, 2024

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

LOCATION: 2172 RHOB

SUBJECT: Latin America Forgotten: A Look at President Biden's FY 2025 Budget Priorities

WITNESSES:

The Honorable Brian Nichols
Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs
Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
U.S. Department of State

The Honorable Julieta Valls Noyes
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State

Mr. Michael Camilleri
Acting Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean
U.S. Agency for International Development

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date July 24, 2024 Room RHOB 2172

Starting Time 10:08 am Ending Time 12:08 pm

Recesses ☐ (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)
Rep. Maria Salazar

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

Latin America Forgotten: A Look at President Biden's FY 2025 Budget Priorities

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Bill Huizenga, Rep. Keith Self, Rep. Greg Stanton, and Rep. Brad Scheider.

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

1. Rep. Bill Huizenga - Article for the Record

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 12:08 pm

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: Latin America Forgotten: A Look at President Biden's FY 2025
Budget Priorities

Date: 7.24.24

Convened: 10:08am

Adjourned: 12:08pm

Representative	Present	Absent	Representative	Present	Absent
Ms. Salazar	X		Mr. Castro		X
Mr. Green		X	Mr. Stanton	X	
Mr. Huizenga	X		Mr. Moskowitz		X
Mr. Davidson		X	Ms. Kamlager- Dove		X
Mr. Self	X		Mr. Schneider	X	
Mr. James		X			

BIDEN TAPS VP HARRIS TO LEAD RESPONSE TO BORDER CHALLENGES

BY JONATHAN LEMIRE, NOMAAN MERCHANT, LISA MASCARO AND AAMER MADHANI

Updated 7:29 PM EDT, March 24, 2021

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has tapped Vice President Kamala Harris to lead the White House effort to tackle the migration challenge at the U.S. southern border and work with Central American nations to address root causes of the problem.

Biden made the announcement as he and Harris met at the White House on Wednesday with Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandra Mayorkas and other immigration advisers to discuss the increase in migrants, including many unaccompanied minors, arriving at the border in recent weeks.

In delegating the matter to Harris, Biden is seeking to replicate a dynamic that played out when he served as President Barack Obama's vice president. Obama turned to Biden in his first term to lead the White House effort to draw down U.S. troops in Iraq and oversee implementation of stimulus in response to the Great Recession.

"When she speaks, she speaks for me," Biden said, noting her past work as California's attorney general makes her specially equipped to lead the administration's response.

Biden, who has faced stiff criticism from Republicans over the increased flow of migrants, is hoping to show Americans he's taking the situation at the border seriously. He also wants to prevent the growing humanitarian and political challenge from overshadowing his administration's ambitious legislative agenda.

But the high-profile assignment for Harris, who ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020 and is expected to run for the White House again in the future, could be politically fraught.

"Needless to say, the work will not be easy," Harris said. "But it is important work."

Harris is tasked with overseeing diplomatic efforts to deal with issues spurring migration in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, as well as pressing them to strengthen enforcement on their own borders, administration officials said. She's also tasked with developing and implementing a long-term strategy that gets at the root causes of migration from those countries.

Biden suggested President Donald Trump's decision to cut \$450 million funding in 2019 to the region was partly to blame for the situation.

Among the other reasons for the current increase: the thousands of Central American migrants already stuck at the border for months and the persistent scourge of gang violence afflicting the Northern Triangle countries.

Still, the numbers of both unaccompanied minors and families encountered at the border are lower than they were at various points during the Trump administration, including in spring 2019.

For Harris, the assignment gives her the first big opportunity to step to the front of the stage on a matter of enormous consequence for the administration. As the first Black woman elected vice president, Harris arrived on the job as a trailblazer. It has remained opaque how Biden would utilize her.

The move echoes not only Obama's decision to deputize Biden but also Trump naming Vice President Mike Pence to lead his coronavirus task force and President Bill Clinton handing Vice President Al Gore environmental and technology portfolios early in his presidency.

It's been a mixed bag for vice presidents in recent history who have been made the point person on delicate matters, said Joel Goldstein, the author of "The White House Vice Presidency: The Path to Significance, Mondale to Biden."

Pence's efforts on the coronavirus were stymied by Trump's hijacking of the task force's daily briefings early in the pandemic. Dick Cheney, who had been charged with leading George W. Bush's search for a vice president only to take the spot himself, carved out what was seen by many critics as a shadow presidency in which he had an outsized influence on shaping Bush's national security policies.

And Gore faced headwinds from Republicans in Congress who were reluctant to give him a win ahead of his unsuccessful 2000 run for the White House.

“Some of the risk versus reward depends to some extent on the vice president’s relationship with the president,” Goldstein said. “Whether or not the president had their back. Whether the president’s going to allow you to be in a position to accomplish things and be perceived to accomplish things.”

Biden made the announcement as a delegation of White House officials and members of Congress was traveled to the southern border on Wednesday to tour a facility in Carrizo Springs, Texas, where more than 750 migrant teenagers are being held.

The Biden administration has in recent weeks moved to open more than 10,000 new beds across the Southwest in convention centers and former oilfield camps. It notified Congress on Wednesday that it will open a new 3,000-person facility in San Antonio and a 1,400-person site at the San Diego convention center. HHS is also opening a second site in Carrizo Springs and received approval from the Defense Department Wednesday to begin housing teenagers at military bases in San Antonio and El Paso, Texas.

While acknowledging a “big problem” with the rising numbers of migrants, Rep. Norma Torres, D-Calif., one of five lawmakers to tour the facility Wednesday, credited the Biden administration with treating young migrants far more humanely than the Trump administration.

In an interview after the tour, Torres described children accommodated four to a room, and said she saw no signs of overcrowding. The young people attend school, have access to health care and are given weekly COVID-19 tests. Lawmakers were told 1 in 10 children are testing positive for the virus, but none at the facility had been hospitalized, she said.

“When I look at those kids, I see myself,” said Torres, an immigrant from Guatemala who arrived in the U.S. with her family as a child.

The White House faced criticism for limiting media access to Wednesday’s tour, keeping it to just one TV crew. It has still not allowed media to enter Border Patrol facilities where large numbers of children are detained or HHS sites that it rapidly opened under pressure. The Carrizo Springs facility was established in 2019 during the Trump administration and re-opened in February.

Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, who is leading a separate delegation of GOP senators to the border later this week, decried the lack of press access as a “muzzling” of the media by the Democratic administration.

“Joe Biden doesn’t want you to see,” Cruz told reporters at the Capitol.

Merchant reported from Houston and Lemire from New York. Associated Press writer Josh Boak in Washington contributed to this report.

AAMER MADHANI

Aamer Madhani is a White House reporter.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. James (No. 1 to No. 2),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
July 24, 2024**

Question 1:

I believe our priorities are to prevent mass migration, prevent further destabilization of Hispaniola, and prevent Russian/PRC influence in the Western Hemisphere. The Multinational Security Support Mission, or MSS, has drawn a great deal of criticism here in Congress because of the long history of failed international interventions in Haiti with no results and wasted taxpayer dollars. On the other hand, I am concerned that we are not doing enough to secure humanitarian aid to the Haitian people as they struggle with rampant violence.

Who is commanding or leading the MSS and who do they report to? With the U.S. contributing 27 percent to the MSS effort, what is the rate of return, what are the results of our contributions?

Answer 1:

Following the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2699 (2023), the Government of Kenya took on the responsibility of leading the authorized Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission in Haiti. The MSS mission commander is Senior Assistant Inspector General of Police Godfrey Otunge, a career police officer from Kenya. We coordinate closely with Mr. Otunge and his Haitian National Police (HNP) counterpart, Director General

Rameau Normil, on their combined efforts to counter gang activities in Port-au-Prince. Supporting the MSS mission's assistance to the HNP will help, for example, open the roads from the ports and facilitate rapid delivery of humanitarian assistance to the communities most in need.

Question 2:

National Haitian Police and Kenyans have secured the port and the airport but aid cannot get into the country because gangs control HWY 1 to the north and HWY 2 to the SE. I believe it's important to understand how we can be effective here. The DoD is spending \$200 million and the President is using drawdown authority to send \$70 million in defense articles. Yet Kenya, rightfully so, is over-extended. I want to express that I am concerned that if we don't get a handle on this soon the most likely scenario is Putin exploits the situation with the Wagner Group and makes a similar case to the World about how we cannot handle the security near our shores.

What are our policy alternatives or options when the money runs out or the political pressure at home gets too great for both us and for Kenya? And can I receive a commitment from you that the State Department will prioritize bring some order and transparency to this process?

Answer 2:

Our commitment to Haiti and the Caribbean is unwavering.

The United States stands with its Western Hemisphere partners, CARICOM members, the MSS mission donor community, and MSS mission lead country Kenya to help Haiti return to the path of democratic and economic stability. The MSS mission is still in the early stages of deploying, and essential equipment and personnel continue to arrive. As the capabilities of the MSS mission expands, its combined operations with the Haitian National Police (HNP) will also expand, including securing the ports and the critical

roadways that move cargo and supplies from the ports to Haiti's interior.

Our collective support to the HNP will facilitate its transformation into an established, modern, accountable, and professional law enforcement body that can uphold law and order by maintaining security, promoting stability, and protecting the interests of the Haitian people.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
July 24, 2024**

Question 1:

CCAMLR/ South Georgia - In recent years, there have been challenges in importing Chilean Sea Bass from the waters surrounding the South Georgia island in the South Atlantic following the Russian Federation's decision to impede decisions on catch limits under the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). What is the Department of State's assessment of the Russian Federation's actions in this dispute? What are you doing to address the situation?

Answer 1:

Since Russia blocked CCAMLR's adoption of a conservation measure establishing catch limits and other requirements for the toothfish fishery in Statistical Subarea 48.3 in October 2021, the Department has pressed for Russia to join consensus on science-based measures for this fishery. Our efforts include multilateral diplomatic engagement in CCAMLR meetings and technical conversations with Russia in the CCAMLR Scientific Committee about the science associated with the fishery. In the CCAMLR Scientific Committee, the United States commissioned a thorough, independent scientific review of CCAMLR integrated toothfish assessments in Subarea

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
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48.3. The United States subsequently considered the conclusions of the independent review panel and, where appropriate, worked to incorporate the panel's recommendations into the Scientific Committee workplan. This review took full account of all issues Russia raised about the toothfish fishery and debunked them. Nevertheless, Russia persisted in its refusal to join consensus to set reasonable catch limits for this fishery. We intend to continue to urge Russia to join consensus on adoption of a science-based conservation measure for limiting catches taken by the toothfish fishery in Subarea 48.3.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
July 24, 2024**

Question 2:

Honduras – US Trade Representative Katherine Tai has said that “President Biden does not believe corporations should receive special tribunals in trade agreements that are not available to other organizations, and he opposes the ability of private corporations to attack labor, health, and environmental policies through Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).”

Does the State Department share the President’s position of opposing Investor-State Dispute Settlement policies?

Answer 2:

The Department supports President Biden’s commitment to a worker-centered trade policy that grows the American middle class, creates new and better jobs, and benefits all Americans, not only those for whom the economy is already working. The Department does not believe corporations should receive special tribunals in trade agreements that are not available to other organizations, and it opposes the ability of private corporations to attack labor, health, and environmental policies through ISDS.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
July 24, 2024**

Question 3:

El Salvador - What is your assessment of El Salvador's fiscal outlook? Are there reforms you expect them to make to get access to IMF or other international assistance?

Answer 3:

The government of El Salvador is grappling with economic challenges related to food affordability, liquidity, and reducing spending on subsidies. The IMF has signaled that El Salvador will need to make fiscal adjustments, including budget cuts, to qualify for an IMF program, and addressing risks arising from Bitcoin as legal tender is a key part of ongoing discussions. At his June inauguration, President Bukele previewed Salvadorans might need to take "bitter medicine" to help improve El Salvador's fiscal outlook.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
July 24, 2024**

Question 4:

Inter-American Development Bank - Assistant Secretary Nichols: In your testimony, you discuss the Inter-American Development Bank's \$3.5 billion capital increase and the need for the United States, which is the bank's largest shareholder and most influential member, to invest in the bank. China is not a member of the bank but it has a minuscule share. If the United States does not participate in this capital increase, other countries – including China – still intend to participate.

What does that do to the relative stake of the United States and China in the bank?

Would choosing not to participate be an effective way of confronting China's influence in the bank?

Answer 4:

The United States has championed a capital increase for the IDB's private sector lending arm, IDB Invest, since President Biden announced support for it at the Ninth Summit of the Americas. The United States has the opportunity to contribute to this capital increase to maintain our current share in IDB Invest. If we do not contribute, our shares are likely to be purchased by other countries, including possibly China. This is what took place during the last IDB Invest capital increase, when the United States

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
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decided not to participate and the U.S. shareholding position was diluted from 22% to its current 15%. China was one of the countries that benefited from the lack of U.S. participation, enabling the expansion of its shareholding position.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
July 24, 2024**

Question 5:

Cuba - One week before the end of the Trump administration, then-Secretary Mike Pompeo designated Cuba as a 'state sponsor of terror' for "repeatedly providing support for acts of international terrorism in granting safe harbor to terrorists." In doing so, he cited the Cuban government's decision to host 10 Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN) members in Cuba and their refusal to extradite those leaders to Colombia following a request from the Colombian government.

Is the Petro administration in Colombia currently seeking the extradition of those members of the ELN?

Answer 5:

No, in November 2022, pursuant to an order from President Petro, the Colombian attorney general announced that arrest warrants would be suspended against 17 ELN commanders, including those Colombia previously requested that Cuba extradite.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
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Question 6:

Those individuals were initially in Cuba to facilitate negotiations between Colombia and the ELN for a political settlement to the ongoing conflict. Last year, the Petro administration re-started those discussions and met with ELN members in Cuba for negotiations.

Does the Biden administration support negotiations between Colombia and the ELN? How do you assess the Cuban government's role in these negotiations?

Answer 6:

Cuba is a guarantor to the ELN negotiations and has hosted two of the seven rounds of talks. The Biden administration understands President Petro's desire to expand the scope of the peace process in Colombia. At the same time, the right to justice for victims must be protected, and any agreements should comply with international humanitarian law, enhance the protection of civilians, and ensure there will be no impunity for criminal groups. We will continue to investigate and prosecute anyone who traffics drugs to the United States.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
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Question 7:

The entire basis for the designation pertained to Cuba's decision to host these ELN members. Given the active and ongoing negotiations between the Colombian government and the ELN and the Petro administration's decision to not seek extradition of these people, what is the current and ongoing rationale for keeping Cuba on this list?

Answer 7:

Cuba continues to harbor several U.S. fugitives from justice wanted on charges related to political violence, many of whom have resided in Cuba for decades.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
July 24, 2024**

Question 8:

Nicaragua - Assistant Secretary Nichols: In February 2023, the United States worked to free 222 Nicaraguan political prisoners who were imprisoned by the Ortega-Murillo regime. In fact, we flew those people directly to the United States on a US-government funded flight. Many of those individuals have been rendered stateless by the regime and they have applied for asylum so they are not at risk of deportation. I understand that of the 160 individuals who applied for asylum, only one has had an interview.

Assistant Secretary Nichols - Will you work with your colleagues at DHS to prioritize their asylum applications, especially given our role in bringing them to the United States?

Answer 8:

We refer you to DHS for specifics on asylum processes.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
July 24, 2024**

Question 9:

Foreign Relations of the United States - The State Department's Foreign Relations of the United States series, within the Office of the Historian, publishes official documentary historical records of major US foreign policy decisions. A number of volumes that pertain to the Western Hemisphere that concern the period between 1977 and 1992 are currently under declassification review or are ready to be researched or prepared.

What is the status of these volumes that pertain to the Western Hemisphere and when do you expect they will be published? If any of these volumes are expected to be published behind the schedule required by statute, please describe the challenges facing the Department in publishing these volumes.

Answer 9:

As discussed in the most recent reports to Congress on the status of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series, its publication involves a complex, multi-stage interagency process stretching out over many years. Predicting the number of volumes that will be published in any given year remains challenging. Such predictions have grown more difficult over time, as any number of factors – such as technical, procedural, resource, and national security issues – may delay anticipated publication

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
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timelines. The Office of the Historian is currently juggling the preparation of some 86 FRUS volume manuscripts, containing well over 100,000 pages of documentation, at various stages of production; their progress can be tracked on the Office of the Historian's website at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/status-of-the-series>.

All WHA-related FRUS volumes for the Jimmy Carter administration and one WHA-related volume for the Ronald Reagan administration have been published. The status of each unpublished WHA-related volume for the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations is as follows:

Submitted for Editing and Declassification Review:

- 1981–1988, Volume XIV, Central America, 1981–1984
- 1981–1988, Volume XV, Central America, 1985–1988
- 1981–1988, Volume XVI, South America
- 1981–1988, Volume XVII, Part 1, Mexico; Western Caribbean
- 1981–1988, Volume XVII, Part 2, Eastern Caribbean

Being Researched or Prepared:

- 1981–1988, Volume XXIII, Iran-Contra Affair, 1985–1988
- 1989–1992, Volume XXII, Cuba; Haiti; Caribbean

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
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- 1989–1992, Volume XXIII, Central America
- 1989–1992, Volume XXIV, Panama, 1981–1992
- 1989–1992, Volume XXV, South America
- 1989–1992, Volume XXXIII, Canada and Mexico

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
July 24, 2024**

Question 10:

Crisis in Haiti - Although Haiti now has an interim government in place, the political and humanitarian crisis in the country continues to unfold. The U.S. has been supportive of sending an international security force in response, but it has been delayed for months and the plan for this force remains unclear.

What can you tell us about next steps for this security force? As the main financier of the force, what will the U.S. role be in ensuring that this mission protects the rights of Haitian civilians?

Answer 10:

The Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission in Haiti initiated operations in June 2024. To date, more than 380 USG-vetted Kenyan police personnel have deployed to Port-au-Prince to support the MSS mission. Pledged personnel contributions from CARICOM nations and other countries are expected to grow the MSS force to approximately 1,000 personnel (the current logistical cap) by October.

In response to lessons learned from past stabilization efforts, the United States has devised near-, medium-, and long-term measures to mitigate human rights risks that incorporate, among other things, best

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
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practices regarding child protection and women, peace, and security,
through the lifecycle of the MSS mission, and also include a compliance,
oversight and accountability mechanism supported by third-party expertise
in human rights.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
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Question 11:

Migration through Central America - Last month, the Biden Administration called out the Ortega regime's dangerous weaponization of migration. As the announcement stated, "President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo have put in place permissive-by-design migration policies that have introduced opportunities for migrant smuggling and trafficking networks to exploit migrants for economic gain and fuel dangerous, irregular travel towards the U.S. southwest border."

What is the Administration's short-term response to the regime's continued exploitation of migrants through Nicaragua? How is the U.S. working with other countries in the region to address this challenge?

Answer 11:

No one should profit from vulnerable migrants – not smugglers, private companies, public officials, nor governments. In line with our commitments under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, we continue to engage with governments both within and outside the Americas, as well as the private sector, to eliminate this exploitative practice, which puts migrants in harm's way. Since the Department's November 2023 launch of a visa restriction policy that targets executives of charter flight companies transporting irregular migrants into

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
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Nicaragua, we have taken steps to impose visa restrictions against a number of individuals, resulting in a reduction in such flights. Additionally, we have sanctioned over 60 individuals and entities in Nicaragua and revoked visas for over 1,400 individuals responsible for the Ortega-Murillo regime's repression.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
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Question 12:

Arms Trafficking - Gangs in Haiti have become increasingly powerful this year: they've taken over most of the capital city Port-au-Prince, terrorized the population, and are increasingly militarized - often using U.S.-made weapons.

What is the Administration doing to halt the flow of arms from the United States into the hands of gangs in Haiti and cartels in Mexico?

Answer 12:

The Administration remains seized with slowing the flow of illicit arms from the United States into Haiti and Mexico. Using new authorities from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, DOJ has charged more than 200 defendants with offenses related to trafficking firearms to Mexico. ATF also signed an eTrace agreement with the Government of Haiti in November 2023 and has provided access to 22 states in Mexico. In February, HSI and the Government of Haiti signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to formally establish a Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit, which will facilitate cross-border investigations.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
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Question 13:

Beyond sanctions - Last month, the Treasury Department announced new sanctions against companies in Nicaragua that have been benefitting and propping up the regime. These sanctions included Russian-owned companies in Nicaragua.

What has been the response to these sanctions thus far? What else will the Biden Administration do to counter the Nicaraguan military partnership with Russia?

Answer 13:

On May 15, the United States sanctioned the Training Center of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs for its role in supporting the Nicaraguan national police, a sanctioned entity involved in repressing the Nicaraguan people. We closely monitor the Kremlin's support for Nicaragua, including its provision of military advisors, training and equipment, financial backing, and dissemination of disinformation. We are actively tracking Russia's desire to increase its influence in the Western Hemisphere as it seeks to decrease its global isolation following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Posts in the region have engaged in a positive, values-based approach to strengthen partnerships and build resilience against Russian information

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
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manipulation. Current public diplomacy programming uses in-person programs, exchanges, diaspora outreach, media and digital literacy education, civil society training, and independent media investment to address the disinformation challenge.

**Questions for the Record submitted to Mr. Nichols
by Mr. Castro (No. 1 to No. 14),
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
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Question 14:

Commitment to Democracy - In President Biden's recent trip to Europe he asked, "Will we stand against tyranny, against evil, against crushing brutality of the iron fist? Will we stand for freedom? Will we defend democracy?" What policy will offer a proportional response to the Ortega regime's repression and tyranny in Nicaragua?

Answer 14:

The United States is committed to promoting accountability for the Ortega-Murillo regime's brutal repression of civil society, blatant disregard for human rights, efforts to fuel irregular migration towards our southwest border, and actions to deepen ties with malign actors. To this end, the United States imposed financial sanctions on 51 individuals and 13 entities and has taken steps to impose visa restrictions on more than 1,400 Nicaraguans for their role in a regime that represses civil society organizations, closes civic spaces, and unjustly detains courageous individuals. We added 49 Nicaraguans to the Section 353 "Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors" list for undermining democratic processes or institutions in Nicaragua. Since 2022, Secretary Blinken has designated

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Nicaragua as a Country of Particular Concern for its engagement in or tolerance of particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

In May, the United States sanctioned the Training Center of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs for its support of the Nicaraguan National Police, a sanctioned entity for its role in repressing the Nicaraguan people. The United States also designated two Nicaraguan gold mining companies - COMINTSA and Capital Mining – for their roles in manipulating the gold sector, an area in which the regime profits from corrupt operations. This follows the March 21 designation of Nicaraguan Attorney General Wendy Carolina Morales Urbina as a Specially Designated National (SDN) for her role as a government official involved in the ruthless repression of peaceful opposition members in Nicaragua.

The United States continues to sound the alarm on Ortega and Murillo's abuses of human rights through public and private channels, bilaterally and multilaterally, including at the Organization of American States, and we encourage our partners in and outside of the region to do the

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same. Parallel to these efforts, we continue to regularly engage with and amplify the work of Nicaraguan human rights defenders, journalists, and members of the political opposition to ensure their voices are not lost or dampened from the distance of exile or counter messaging from the Ortega-Murillo regime. Combined, these actions signal to President Ortega and Vice President Murillo that the United States sees and condemns their campaign of abuse and repression and stands with the Nicaraguan people's calls for a peaceful return to democracy and respect for human rights.

**Questions for the Record for Acting Assistant
Administrator Michael Camilleri by Congressman
Joaquin Castro (#1)
House Foreign Affairs Committee July 24, 2024**

Question:

Democracy and Civil Society - What are the USAID funding priorities for strengthening civil society's capacity to promote the restoration of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean? In particular, what are the funding priorities for civil society in Nicaragua - where the Ortega regime has quelled opposition, including by expelling and revoking citizenship of his critics - and in Haiti, where the country has not held elections since 2016?

Answer:

USAID is the leading donor in the area of democracy programming in Nicaragua. We are committed to supporting Nicaraguans in advancing towards a more democratic country. We support democratic actors who are continuing to make their voices heard in support of the democratic principles and respect for human rights that will be critical to any democratic progress.

(SBU) To that end, USAID works alongside Nicaraguan civil society to promote democratic freedoms, including through human rights advocacy and documentation of human rights violations; supporting the survival of independent thought through independent media, think tanks, and civil society; and supporting political consensus-building among democratic actors. USAID programming also helps strengthen grassroots, community-level democratic actors engaging in community activism and civic engagement to keep alive a democratic culture and constituency.

USAID is funding activities to improve the oversight and advocacy by civil society organizations in relation to the upcoming elections. Civil society oversight and advocacy (leading up to elections) will increase independent scrutiny and in turn, the credibility of the electoral process. The initiative will ensure greater citizen participation and/or report where citizens were blocked or deterred from participation in the political process. A corollary to the activity's work with civil society is to strengthen the electoral institutions themselves and their capacity to implement inclusive elections and a peaceful transition of power.