

**FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET PRIORITIES
FOR THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN
HEMISPHERE, TRANSNATIONAL
CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS,
AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE

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FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET PRIORITIES FOR THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
TRANSNATIONAL CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES;
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:34 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Tim Kaine presiding.

Present: Senators Kaine [presiding], Menendez, Cardin, Shaheen, Murphy, Merkley, Rubio, Cruz, Young, and Hagerty.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TIM KAINE, U.S. SENATOR FROM VIRGINIA

Senator KAINE. The Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues will come to order.

It is a pleasure to welcome our distinguished panel of government witnesses and my colleagues. The focus of today's hearing is on State and USAID's budget priorities for the Western Hemisphere and how the budget can best complement and support U.S. interests and policy goals for this very, very important region.

I want to thank Senator Rubio and his team for their help framing up this hearing. I am proud of the work we have done on the region thus far during our time in the Senate together. We have kind of been trading chair and ranking back and forth, but we have been good partners whatever the lineup.

The U.S. and our 34 neighbors in the hemisphere share deep ties and a close history. Our collective prosperity and security are deeply intertwined. The U.S. people-to-people ties with the Western Hemisphere are extraordinarily robust with proud diaspora communities in Virginia, Florida, all of our states all across the country, and in this region we see a mutual commitment to democracy and free markets.

We also see evidence of backsliding in areas where we have to pay special attention. The economic ties in this hemisphere are similarly deep within the—during the first 6 months of 2022, U.S. trade in goods with the region totaled \$568 billion.

I am often kind of poking our statisticians to say trade in goods is one thing, but trade in services is often growing much faster, and we do not necessarily capture that and we need to. This trade in goods has rebounded to prepandemic levels, which is really important, but despite that the U.S. and the region as a whole are confronting a multitude of challenges across the hemisphere, and these are the challenges that a robust budget should be prioritized to address.

Despite being home to some of the world's most vibrant and active democracies, the hemisphere has also experienced by most metrics the sharpest decline in its democratic institutions of any region in the 21st century.

This includes worsening repression in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba, the collapse of Haiti's government, political violence in Ecuador, instability in Peru. The erosion of democracy and surge in political unrest leads to an increase in irregular migration flows. It creates opportunities for encroachment by foreign adversaries such as the People's Republic of China, which exploits corruption and weak institutions to its advantage.

It benefits cartels who further weaken and corrupt state institutions. The reach of narco trafficking networks is expanding. Fentanyl trafficking conducted by professional smugglers via Mexico to the United States has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans through fatal overdoses, leading the Senate in the recently passed *National Defense Authorizing Act*, to declare the fentanyl crisis a national security emergency.

The COVID-19 pandemic also swept away more than a decade of development gains and it has led to increases in food insecurity and humanitarian challenges such as human trafficking and increases in poverty.

U.S. assistance to the region is vital in shoring up U.S. interests and democratic principles as well as the overall stability of the region in the face of these challenges.

Every crisis faced by the region and its people deeply and directly impacts the United States. Our wise use of U.S. dollars to promote stability is not just a benefit to others, it is a benefit to American citizens.

The region faces challenges, but sometimes we focus only on challenges and we neglect to talk about bright spots. We should always talk about bright spots.

Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic have established the Alliance for Development and Democracy. Ecuador's previous government was part of that. There is a question about Ecuador's commitment, going forward, but at least these three nations in establishing the alliance have reaffirmed their support for strengthening of democratic institutions and promoting economic prosperity in their nations.

While the Venezuelan crisis is one of the world's most pressing humanitarian emergencies, neighboring countries like Colombia, Peru, Chile have stepped up and generously hosted millions of Venezuelans who have fled their home country. That has to be acknowledged and appreciated. In the Caribbean, the vast majority of countries remain robust democracies and close U.S. partners.

As our neighbors face difficult crises, the U.S. cannot stand on the sidelines. We owe it to our partners and allies, to our friends and families in the region, to take initiative and accountability in addressing these challenges.

I have maintained since joining this committee when I came to the Senate in 2013 that we should pay more attention to the Americas, not less, and that if we did, it would have tremendous benefit not only for the region, but for us.

Now, we are in a tough fiscal environment. We are in the middle of quite a budgetary discussion right now, so it is important to ensure that precious taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely, that they are advancing U.S. values and interests. I am interested in hearing from all of our esteemed witnesses today about how the Department of State and USAID are acting on Administration priorities for the region and how funding will be targeted to help friends in the hemisphere tackle shared challenges.

Let me now turn it over to our ranking member, Senator Rubio, for his remarks before I introduce the panel.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARCO RUBIO,
U.S. SENATOR FROM FLORIDA**

Senator RUBIO. Thank you, and thanks for holding this hearing and thank you all for coming and for your service.

I am going to apologize ahead of time. I have already told the chairman I—what I am going to try to do here is I have a—my other intelligence committee has called me to this meeting in about 5 minutes.

Hopefully that will not—that will last about as long as your opening statements, not that they are not great, either in writing, and then hopefully I will be back in time to answer questions, but what I thought I would do in my opening is sort of give you a preview of what I want to ask so in case that helps when I get back here to shorten the timeframe.

On Venezuela, the regime there is already—they have set up the selection commission, which they have staffed with their own people. They banned the leading opposition candidate, Maria Corina Machado, from running. This is certainly not a free and fair election, yet somehow they and others in the region are under the perception that some sanctions relief may be on the way if they are able to conduct what is not a free and fair election, but at least can cosmetically cover for it.

They are under that impression. Some, including in the regime, are under that impression from what they are telling others in the region. I really think it is important to know what has been communicated to the Maduro regime about what these expectations are and so forth.

The second topic related to this one, and the chairman mentioned it about the Venezuelan migration, I believe over the break while we were gone—I do not know if it was last week or just in the month of August—there was a record number of both Venezuelan and Ecuadorian migrants who were encountered in the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama.

The calculation is in about 5–6 weeks or less, some of those folks will begin arriving at our southern border and I am really inter-

ested to know how that correlates or how we work with not just the other countries in transit, but ultimately how we work with our own immigration enforcement officials to prepare for that sort of surge if you can see it coming 6 weeks ahead of time, 5 weeks ahead of time.

The addition—there has always been Ecuadorians, but not at large numbers like we are seeing now. Clearly that has a little bit to do—a lot to do with the deteriorating security situation we have seen, these Colombian cartel groups and so forth now operating using Ecuadorian territory as transit areas and it has really added to that.

In Mexico, I think about all the benefits of the trade agreement with Mexico, a lot of offshoring—a lot of reshoring going on in terms of small manufacturers and others moving operations from Asia to Mexico.

This is great. About 40 percent of that activity happens in a place called Nuevo Laredo, which also happens to be under the control of these Zeta cartels and they are using the same mechanisms of trade to embed fentanyl and other things into our country, and so I wonder how that works with our conversations.

Look, the government does not control that city. It is just, frankly, a real strange situation. On the one hand, we want trade, we want commerce, we want that, but they are using the mechanisms in one particular place that encounters 40 percent of that trade. It is a huge vulnerability.

The chairman mentioned Peru has had some instability. From my reading of it, it is a little bit more stably—is that a right term? It looks like it is trending in—at least in a more stable direction from what it used to be, but obviously still not ideal.

There appears to be potentially an opening now for more cooperation with the existing Administration to be able to work on some things with them. I think they are a willing partner on a number of topics and I am curious to see what work we have done in that regard.

Last, and kind of an overarching theme, and I will allow you—when I get back, we can discuss it more in-depth and it really is the one I wanted to focus on as much as anything else today, I just wanted to share with you and this is my impressions—maybe others get different feedback—but as I meet with leaders and others in the area, there is this perception.

This is what I am told. I am going to kind of give it to you verbatim. It is better to be America's adversary or irritant than it is to be America's ally. If you are an irritant or if you are not always falling in line or doing the things that the U.S. hopes you will do, you seem to get a lot more attention.

You seem to get meetings. You seem to get efforts to lift sanctions or other measures to sort of entice you to the light and away from the dark side. If, on the other hand, you are some of these countries—the Dominican Republic is an example—that clearly and openly wants to align with the U.S., you get travel advisories, you get commercial sanctions and things of that nature with regards to some of the things that have happened earlier in the year—a sense that we punish our friends and we reward or at least try to appease those who are viewed as irritants or even adversaries.

That perception—and I have had leaders frankly tell me it may be better off to be against the United States. By the way, this preexists this Administration. These are complaints I have heard under previous administrations at some point in the past.

How do we address that? Because that does not mean we have to agree with everything our allies are doing, but we probably live in a time now where we need to be pretty clear about we are going to be good to our friends and we are going to confront our adversaries and those who clearly are undertaking steps that undermine our national interest and national security. That is more of an overarching theme, but one I hope we will touch on.

Hopefully, I will be right back and I will be able—by the time I get here, if the timing is perfect, we will be in questions.

Thank you so much.

Senator Kaine. We will do a lot of filibustering till you get back, so you are going to have plenty of opportunity to talk to these witnesses. Thanks, Senator Rubio.

Let me now introduce the panel and then after I do the introductions, I will ask you to do your 5-minute opening statements in the order that I introduce you.

Brian Nichols is the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. He previously served as U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe and before that, Ambassador to Peru.

He was previously the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and served as DCM in Colombia. In May, President Biden nominated Mr. Nichols for the rank of Career Ambassador, which is the highest rank in the Foreign Service.

Next, Marcela Escobari. Dr. Escobari is the Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of Latin America and the Caribbean at the U.S. Agency for International Development. She previously served in this role in 2016 helping reinforce U.S. support for Peace Colombia, mobilize humanitarian response to Hurricane Matthew in Haiti, and support efforts to deliver humanitarian aid in Venezuela.

Prior to government service, Ms. Escobari was a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, the executive director at the Center for International Development at Harvard University. I think that is why I called you doctor, and maybe you are not a doctor, but I saw those universities. You will take doctor? All right.

Both Assistant Secretary Nichols and Assistant Administrator Escobari were witnesses at our recent hearing on Haiti and I thank them for their willingness to appear again to talk about budget on short notice.

Finally, Todd Robinson is the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs at State. Most recently he served as the director of International Student Management Office at the National Defense University, an important billet where we bring folks from around the world to train together with Americans.

Prior to his assignment at NDU, he served as senior advisor for Central America and the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. He was also the chargé d'affaires in Caracas, Venezuela, and the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Guatemala.

We are grateful to have the three of you here. Thank you for your service, and I would now like to ask in the order that I introduced you to offer your opening remarks. Your written comments are in the record. Confine your opening remarks, please, to 5 minutes and then we will jump into questions.

Mr. Nichols.

STATEMENT OF HON. BRIAN NICHOLS, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE, BUREAU OF WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Rubio in absentia, and distinguished members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to speak with you about the Administration's proposed fiscal year 2024 budget for the Western Hemisphere.

The Western Hemisphere is experiencing its most pivotal moment in the last 30 years. The ability of the United States to advance its national security interest in response to regional and global challenges requires a clear articulation of our approach to the Western Hemisphere.

The Department's fiscal year 2024 budget request demonstrates our sustained engagement in support of the President's long-term vision for a secure middle class and democratic hemisphere, in contrast to the transactional approach of our strategic competitors.

The Department's economic policies and programs in the Western Hemisphere focus on working with the region to create sustainable growth, support workers' rights, and root out corruption.

Funding for initiatives that the White House announced at the ninth Summit of the Americas will further enhance regional economic integration and shared wellbeing, including through America's Partnership for Economic Prosperity.

Countries in the region also want us to present a viable alternative to PRC economic engagement. It is vital that we answer their call. To respond effectively, the United States will deploy the full toolkit at our disposal.

Most countries in the Western Hemisphere view the United States as the natural partner on matters of governance, rule of law, and human rights. Citizens welcome our engagement and consultation with diverse stakeholders to advance regional support for democracy.

Bolstering democratic institutions and support to civil society, democratic actors, and independent media helps us push back against democratic backsliding, corruption, and the false narratives perpetuated by illiberal regimes.

Our proposed budget uses diplomatic engagement and foreign assistance strategically to build security partnerships. We help our partners analyze the risks of working with strategic adversaries and we help them develop safeguards against cyber-attacks, illegal resource extraction, and other problematic activities.

We work with our partners to combat transnational crime organizations and gangs and protect American lives by combating the illegal production and trafficking of fentanyl, cocaine, and other illicit drugs.

These investments are vital to our neighbors' safety, prosperity, and democratic future, as well as our own. This budget prioritizes comprehensive solutions to address the political, economic, and security challenges driving forced displacement and irregular migration.

We request \$979 million for the State Department and USAID to implement the U.S. strategy for addressing the root causes of migration in Central America in alignment with the *United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act*.

The budget also includes \$184 million in bilateral and regional assistance for programs that advance lawful pathways, integrate refugees and migrants, and stabilize the communities hosting them.

Of this amount, \$51 million for the Americas Partnership Opportunity Fund will help countries take responsibility for long-term migration management through sustainable public planning and community-based solutions.

Additional funds used to message directly to prospective migrants will raise awareness of ongoing U.S. border enforcement, the dangers of irregular migration, and the availability of lawful migration pathways.

The budget includes more than \$291 million for Haiti to address long-standing food insecurity, political instability, and gang activity and advances the objectives of the 10-year plan to implement the U.S. strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability in Haiti.

Efforts to combat gang activity focus on enhanced training and equipment for the Haitian National Police. We also focus on improving health and education outcomes, advancing economic and food security, and improving the independence and accountability of government institutions.

In coordination with the interagency, we will continue to evaluate assistance options to support a multinational security support mission. We seek to build a more stable and economically viable Haiti, working with Haitian actors to find a way forward.

Finally, the budget includes \$370 million to build climate resilience through programs that contribute to protecting biospheres like the Amazon, advancing clean energy solutions, enhancing food security, building early warning and response systems for natural disasters, and improving enforcement to combat environmental crimes.

Our budget priorities for the Western Hemisphere envision a hemisphere that thrives together to benefit the American people.

I look forward to your questions and your comments.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Nichols follows:]

Prepared Statement of Mr. Brian Nichols

Thank you, Chairman Kaine and Ranking Member Rubio, and distinguished members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to speak with you about the Administration's proposed FY24 budget for the Western Hemisphere.

The Western Hemisphere is experiencing its most pivotal moment in the last 30 years. The ability of the United States to advance its national security interests in response to regional and global challenges requires a clear articulation of our approach to the Western Hemisphere. The Department's FY24 budget request demonstrates our sustained engagement in support of the President's long-term vision for a secure, middle-class, and democratic hemisphere—in contrast to the transactional approach of our strategic competitors.

The Department's economic policies and programs in the Western Hemisphere focus on working with the region to create equitable and sustainable growth, support workers' rights, and root out corruption.

Funding for initiatives that the White House announced at the Ninth Summit of the Americas will further enhance regional economic integration and shared well-being, including through the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity. Countries in the region also want us to present a viable alternative to PRC economic engagement. It is vital that we answer their call. To respond effectively, the United States will deploy the full toolkit at our disposal.

Most countries in the Western Hemisphere view the United States as the natural partner on matters of governance, rule of law, and human rights. Citizens welcome our engagement and consultation with diverse stakeholders to advance regional support for democracy. Bolstering democratic institutions and support to civil society, democratic actors, and independent media helps us push back against democratic backsliding, corruption, and the false narratives perpetuated by illiberal regimes.

Our proposed budget uses diplomatic engagement and foreign assistance strategically to build security partnerships. We help our partners analyze the risks of working with strategic adversaries. And we help them develop safeguards against cyberattacks, illegal resource extraction, and other illicit and problematic activities. We work with our partners to combat transnational criminal organizations and gangs and protect American lives by combating the illegal production and trafficking of fentanyl, cocaine, and other drugs. These investments are vital to our neighbors' safety, prosperity, and democratic future—as well as our own.

This budget request prioritizes comprehensive solutions to address the political, economic, and security challenges driving forced displacement and irregular migration. We request \$979 million for the State Department and USAID to implement the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America in alignment with the *United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act*. The budget also includes \$184 million in bilateral and regional assistance for programs that advance lawful pathways, integrate refugees and migrants, and stabilize the communities hosting them. Of this amount, \$51 million for the Americas Partnership Opportunity Fund will help countries take responsibility for long-term migration management through sustainable public planning and community-based solutions. Additional funds used to message directly to prospective migrants will raise awareness of ongoing U.S. border enforcement, the dangers of irregular migration, and the availability of lawful migration pathways.

The budget includes more than \$291 million for Haiti to address longstanding food insecurity, political instability, and gang activity—and advances the objectives of the 10-year plan to implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability in Haiti. Efforts to combat gang activity focus on enhanced training and equipment for the Haitian National Police. We also focus on improving health and education outcomes, advancing economic and food security, and improving the independence and accountability of government institutions, including by creating the conditions for fair and safe elections. In coordination with the interagency, we will continue to evaluate assistance options to support a multinational force. We seek to build a more stable and economically viable Haiti, working with Haitian actors to find a way forward.

Finally, the budget includes \$370 million to build climate resilience through programs that contribute to protecting biospheres like the Amazon, advancing clean energy solutions, enhancing food security, building early warning and response systems for natural disasters, and improving enforcement to combat environmental crimes.

Our budget priorities for the Western Hemisphere envision a hemisphere that thrives together to benefit the American people. I look forward to your questions and comments.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Secretary Nichols.
Administrator Escobari.

STATEMENT OF HON. MARCELA ESCOBARI, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. ESCOBARI. Chairman Kaine, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today about USAID's FY24 budget request for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The region is facing profound challenges from historic levels of migration, to democratic backsliding, to acute instability in places like Haiti.

With the President's request of \$1.8 billion for USAID in the region, we can help our neighbors respond to these challenges, maintain our role as the region's preferred partner, and provide an alternative to the approach of the PRC.

USAID is there when disaster strikes. So far this year, USAID has provided nearly \$282 million in emergency response in 13 countries across the hemisphere.

During the pandemic, we helped deliver 70 million vaccines and contributed to a regional vaccination rate of over 70 percent, and we are requesting now \$54 million to strengthen health systems for future health threats.

We support the Haitian people whose lives have been upended by gang violence, providing food assistance to hundreds of thousands, keeping over 160 clinics open, and increasing rural livelihoods. As support builds for a multinational force, there is a narrow window of opportunity for our hemisphere to show that we stand with our Haitian neighbors.

The requested \$246 million will allow us to improve citizens' security in high-violence communities and chart the paths toward elections. Even as we respond to acute crises, we stay focused on the long term.

We have partnered with Colombia across five administrations, supporting their transition from war to peace. Together we have ensured that victims of the armed conflict can find justice. We have brought opportunity to isolated communities. We have helped farmers transition to legal crops.

This progress is fragile, so our commitment—our continued investment ensures that those gains take root. USAID also invests in institutions like Zamorano, or Earth University, that are producing thousands of change makers in their own countries. We invest in people, training the journalists and civil society groups that expose corruption, or the judges and prosecutors who bolster the rule of law.

These leaders are at the forefront of building more democratic and prosperous societies. We are seeing that play out in Guatemala right now. After attempts to undermine the recent election, it is the Guatemalan people who have taken to the streets to defend their democracy—and they are prevailing. This budget requests \$535 million to continue our wide-ranging work to defend democracy.

Inequality and slow growth also contribute to the reduced faith in democracy that we see in much of the region. USAID works to advance inclusive economic opportunity. We have brought technology to smallholder farmers, microcredit and connectivity to those on the periphery of economic hubs, and job skills to at-risk youth. We also create the conditions for increased FDI through faster customs in Central America and financing tools to attract investments in renewables throughout the Caribbean. This approach leverages our comparative advantage vis-à-vis China, our dynamic private sector.

The requested budget will also allow us to continue tackling other big challenges like the historic displacement of people across

the hemisphere. To meet the moment, USAID takes a three-pronged approach.

First, we address the root causes by creating economic opportunity and tackling insecurity and corruption—making it possible for people to stay in their communities.

Second, we expand lawful pathways. Our work with northern Central American governments has helped double the number of H-2 visas, allowing people to find lawful work and fill labor gaps here and across America.

Third, we support the integration of migrants into host communities. We have partnered with Colombia and Ecuador as they implement generous policies that have helped Venezuelans access schools, health care, jobs, and settle where they are.

The \$83 million in this budget and the \$200 million supplemental request will ensure that we can help these policies succeed. At the root of this massive displacement is the crisis in Venezuela. Venezuela's economy and democratic institutions have been decimated by 20 years of mismanagement.

We are not naive about the prospects of free and fair elections in Maduro's Venezuela, but 2024 presents a real opportunity for Venezuelans to demand the right to choose their leaders, and the energy that we have seen behind the opposition primaries show the Venezuelans have not given up hope.

USAID will continue to support voices pushing back against repression and mobilizing for competitive elections. The President's budget request will allow us to respond to this critical moment and build a more stable future for our hemisphere.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Escobari follows:]

Prepared Statement of Ms. Marcela Escobari

OPENING

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Rubio, members of the subcommittee—thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the Administration's proposed FY 2024 Budget and USAID's work in Latin America and the Caribbean.

There is no question that the region is facing challenges—from historic levels of migration, to democratic backsliding, to acute instability in places like Haiti. Helping our neighbors respond to these challenges is key to maintaining our role as the region's preferred partner and will set the course for the future of the hemisphere.

The President's FY24 Budget Request of \$1.8 billion dollars for USAID in Latin America and the Caribbean recognizes that reality and will allow us to continue advancing our foreign policy and development objectives in the region.

At USAID, we are working to meet the moment. We focus on showing up with immediate aid in cases of emergency and on promoting longer-term democratic stability and prosperity, in contrast to the opaque and opportunistic approach of the People's Republic of China.

MEETING IMMEDIATE NEEDS

When disaster strikes, we arrive with life-saving humanitarian assistance. So far, in this fiscal year, USAID has provided nearly \$282 million in emergency response in 13 countries across the hemisphere—from food security projects in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, to wildfire response in Chile, to response to storms and floods in Peru—providing protection, multipurpose cash assistance, search and rescue, and logistics support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we helped deliver 70 million vaccines donated by the U.S. Government in 29 countries—contributing to an over 70 percent vaccination rate in the region. We are now requesting \$54.5 million to build health systems that will be ready for the next pandemic.

And we continue to support the Haitian people, whose lives have been upended by surges in gang violence, political turmoil, and natural disasters. Our support has provided food assistance for hundreds of thousands of Haitians, kept over 160 health clinics open, ensured continued food production, and bolstered rural livelihoods—even through the current security crisis.

USAID is ready to work with Haiti toward a more stable future and to find ways to coordinate our assistance with the international community as support builds for a multinational force to reinforce the Haitian National Police. The FY24 budget request of \$246.2 million for global health and development programs in Haiti will allow us to improve citizen security in high-violence communities and help chart a path toward elections and democratic governance. While the world looks to the United States to lead on Haiti, there is a narrow window for the rest of the Western Hemisphere to join in this global response and show that we stand with our Haitian neighbors as they seek to regain control of their country.

BUILDING LONG-TERM STABILITY

Even as we respond to these acute crises, we are working with our neighbors to strengthen the foundations for more prosperous societies.

With the bipartisan support of this Congress, we have been able to stay focused on strengthening the foundations for stability and prosperity, even as we take on the challenges of the day. We focus on building partnerships that survive across political transitions, investing in the people and institutions that bolster democracy, and driving inclusive economic opportunity.

And we know that our aid alone will always be insufficient relative to the size of the challenges we are working to address. So, we work to mobilize others and catalyze the partnerships needed to deliver results far beyond our initial investment.

A Sustained Commitment to Progress

Our decades-long partnership with Colombia, which spans five U.S. administrations and five Colombian presidencies, is an example of what our sustained commitment can accomplish. We've walked alongside the Colombian people throughout their transition from war to peace. Together, we've ensured that victims of the armed conflict can be afforded truth and justice. USAID has also helped bring critical infrastructure, legal land tenure, and economic opportunity to isolated, rural communities—including 112 of the 170 conflict-affected municipalities included in the Peace Accord. And we've helped hundreds of thousands of farmers transition to licit products like coffee and cacao, so they can support their families and keep them safe. Finally, USAID has advanced the social and economic inclusion of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Peoples who were disproportionately victimized by war.

With the resources generously provided by the Congress, USAID has helped mobilize much greater amounts of Colombia's own public and private sector funds. With every dollar USAID invests in mobilizing funds to rural areas that have struggled with conflict and a lack of resourcing, we unlock an average of \$41 from other entities. Since 2015, we've invested \$44.6 million that has mobilized more than \$1.8 billion.

And while this progress is still fragile, our continued investment aims to ensure that the gains of the Peace Process take root, that state presence and economic opportunity reach even the most distant corners of Colombia, and that all Colombians see a role for themselves in Colombia's future. A secure, democratic, and prosperous Colombia is in the U.S. national interest.

Maintaining these types of long-term, multi-administration partnerships allows us to achieve results that once seemed impossible.

Investing in People & Institutions That Strengthen Democracy

USAID also grows our impact by investing in the people and institutions on the front lines of promoting more democratic and prosperous societies. USAID helped found some of the most successful universities in the region—Zamorano, ESAN, INCAE, and Earth—that are now producing thousands of newly minted graduates who will be the next generation of change makers in their countries. We support journalists and civil society groups who shine a light on corruption. We help digitize and modernize procurement and tax systems, creating transparency and efficiency. And we've helped train judges and prosecutors to hold their ground against corrupt actors and bolster the rule of law.

These leaders play a critical role in promoting accountability and the rule of law.

We're seeing that in Guatemala, which is dealing with attempts to undermine the election of a President-Elect who ran on an anti-corruption platform. USAID's support for civil society advocacy and observation helped increase engagement and pub-

lic confidence in this election process, but it is courageous election officials, civil society and community-based organizations, private sector leaders, and, above all, average citizens who are stepping up to defend Guatemala’s democracy.

We measure our success not with the results of any given election, but in the growing strength of democratic values and institutions. USAID will continue to support independent media, protect human rights and rule of law, tackle corruption, and help democracies deliver for citizens. This budget includes a request for \$535 million to continue and expand that work in the face of democratic backsliding across the region.

EXPANDING PROSPERITY & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Slow growth and persistent inequality are at the root of the political instability and reduced faith in democracy that we see in much of the region. USAID works with governments and the private sector to advance inclusive economic opportunity, recognizing that it is critical to regional stability.

We’ve brought technology to rural communities to improve farms’ productivity and connected those farmers to larger markets. We’ve worked to speed up customs processes in Central America, making the region more competitive and attractive for foreign direct investment. And we’ve helped the region leverage new finance tools like a catastrophe bond in Jamaica and the Blue Green Bank in Barbados, which will help finance projects addressing climate change and adaptation.

Our approach leverages our comparative advantage vis-à-vis the People’s Republic of China, namely our transparent and empowering model of investment, and our dynamic private sector with a focus on strategic sectors.

THIS BUDGET REQUEST WILL ALLOW US TO CONTINUE ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Our goal with the FY24 budget request is to continue tackling big challenges—like the massive displacement of people across the hemisphere and the authoritarian regime in Venezuela causing the largest portion of that exodus. The region’s success in responding to these challenges will have an impact for generations to come.

Migration

We are dealing with the largest levels of displacement in the hemisphere’s history. More than 7 million people have been displaced from Venezuela alone, most within Latin America.

To meet the moment, USAID is taking a three-pronged approach to managing migration. We work to address root causes of migration, expand lawful pathways, and support the integration of migrants into new host communities.

As part of the joint \$979 million State/USAID request for Central America, USAID’s work to create economic opportunity and tackle insecurity and corruption makes it possible for more people to stay in their communities. Our work under the Administration’s Root Causes Strategy is helping farmers like Dionel, who I met in El Salvador. He previously sold his crops to unreliable middlemen and made such little money that he felt forced to irregularly migrate to the United States to find work. After he was deported and returned to El Salvador, he started working with a USAID program that helps small farmers access the crops and irrigation technology they need to improve yields and that connects them with the largest supermarket chain in the country. Now, his local farm not only supports his own family, but also employs eight fellow Salvadorans, creating opportunities at home.

Our work with the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to expand lawful pathways like H-2 visas, is helping people find lawful work and fill critical labor gaps across America. Over the last 2 years, we’ve helped double the number of H-2 visas for Central American workers and supported the work of host country ministries to decrease the time it takes to match workers with employers to a third of what it was just 2 years ago.

Our request includes \$83 million to support the integration of millions of migrants—including those displaced by the disastrous Maduro regime—within host communities across the region. We’ve partnered with Colombia and Ecuador as they implement their generous Temporary Protected Status and regularization policies, which help Venezuelans integrate into communities, put their kids in schools, access healthcare, get jobs, open bank accounts, and settle where they are. This provides an alternative to the dangerous and costly journey through the Darien Gap.

But these policies are fragile, strained by rising xenophobia and the upfront costs of integration and humanitarian support to millions of migrants. This budget—and the \$200 million Economic Support Fund supplemental request for migration management across State and USAID—would help us meet the unprecedented level of

need, expand the reach of our innovative migration work, and ensure these integration policies are successful.

Venezuela

At the root of these huge migration outflows is the democratic crisis in Venezuela. Venezuela's economy and democratic institutions have been decimated by 20 years of mismanagement. But the upcoming elections provide a chance for progress. We are not naive about the prospects for truly free and fair elections in Maduro's Venezuela, but the 2024 elections present an opportunity for Venezuelans to demand their right to choose their own leaders. And the new energy generated around opposition primaries shows us that Venezuelans have not given up hope.

USAID will continue to support the democratic voices who push back against a repressive regime, mobilizing for more competitive elections in 2024 and 2025.

And our commitment to supporting pro-democracy forces remains unwavering in other repressive contexts as well—with the \$20 million in State and USAID funding requested for Cuba and \$15 million requested for Nicaragua, we will continue to support those who are on the front lines fighting for their most basic rights and freedoms.

CLOSING

At USAID we remain committed to showing up in times of need with help for today and plans for tomorrow. The President's budget request will allow us to respond to this critical moment for the region—and build a more stable future for the hemisphere.

USAID values this subcommittee's commitment to Latin America and the Caribbean. I thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator KAINE. Thank you.
Secretary Robinson.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. TODD ROBINSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. ROBINSON. Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Rubio, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs is responsible for nearly \$1.4 billion of foreign assistance globally under the INCLE account request. This includes \$536.5 million in INCLE funding for the Western Hemisphere and 30—which is about 38 percent of the total INCLE request.

Countering the flow of fentanyl and its precursors is a top priority for President Biden, Secretary Blinken, and me. The State Department is leading a global response to the synthetic drug challenge by disrupting transnational criminal organizations' ability to produce, traffic, and profit from these deadly substances.

Most fentanyl seized in the United States is trafficked through Mexico using diverted precursor chemicals sourced from the People's Republic of China.

To disrupt the flow of precursor chemicals, engagement with the PRC and others is critical to better track and control these chemicals. Cooperation with Mexico is critical to the success of our efforts to combat the fentanyl crisis.

To this end, we have requested \$48 million to support programing in Mexico. We have provided more than 500 canines to Mexican agencies to assist in seizures of fentanyl and other drugs.

These canines have supported 50 fentanyl seizures, including more than 485,000 fentanyl pills, and over 2,000 kilos of fentanyl

powder, as well as 2,700 doses of liquid fentanyl, representing hundreds of thousands of lives potentially saved.

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore other counter narcotics challenges in our hemisphere. Our approach in Colombia and Peru has evolved from a focus on cocaine reduction into also addressing factors enabling production and trafficking.

This includes promoting rural security, justice and development, drug demand reduction, and addressing corruption and money laundering.

In Ecuador, which is facing unprecedented levels of violence including the recent assassination of a presidential candidate and a mayor, INL programs aim to enhance security in critical trafficking zones.

We are requesting \$15 million to expand our support to counter criminal activity, reduce the flow of cocaine to the United States, and strengthen the judicial sector to combat TCOs.

With INL assistance, the government launched a specialized court—the government in Ecuador launched a specialized court in 2022 with jurisdiction over drug trafficking, human trafficking, kidnapping, and money laundering cases. That court delivered its first convictions on July 31 and August 2, sentencing 34 gang members.

In Haiti, INL is building the Haitian National Police capacity to counter the violent gangs driving instability. INL has allocated \$122 million since July 2021 to strengthen the HNP's capacity to counter gangs.

This effort is complementary to the ongoing development of a multinational security support mission to provide security and support to the HNP in its efforts to counter gangs, safeguard critical infrastructure, and protect citizens.

Through \$29 million for the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, INL programming will continue to reduce the trafficking of narcotics and illicit firearms, disrupt organized crime, and promote regional cooperation.

In Central America, INL efforts focus on reducing the governance and security drivers of irregular migration, through \$191 million requested under the Central American Regional Security Initiative, programs to improve community policing and engage youth, deter gang influence and crime.

In the Southern Cone, we work closely with Brazil to counter TCOs' trafficking of drugs and natural resources across the Amazon Basin and with Argentina to thwart the increasing threat of synthetic drugs and diversion of precursor chemicals.

Getting ahead of all of these threats requires strategic and innovative thinking. The challenges before us are immense, but I am confident we can address them together to keep our country and people safe.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Robinson follows:]

Prepared Statement of Mr. Todd Robinson

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Rubio, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the Department of State's fiscal year (FY) 2024 budget request for the Western Hemi-

sphere. The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is responsible for nearly \$1.4 billion of foreign assistance globally under the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account request. This includes \$536.5 million in INCLE funding for the Western Hemisphere, about 38 percent of the total INCLE request.

Countering the flow of fentanyl and its precursors from sources abroad is a top priority of this Administration, the Department, and INL. The State Department is leading a global response to the synthetic drug challenge, including countering the flow of fentanyl, analogues of fentanyl, and fentanyl-related substances into the United States by disrupting the ability of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) to produce, traffic, and profit from these deadly substances.

Since the People's Republic of China (PRC) scheduled all fentanyl-related substances as a class in 2019, most of the fentanyl seized in the United States has been produced in Mexico using diverted precursor chemicals sourced from the PRC. Our relationship with Mexico is critical to the success of our efforts to combat the fentanyl crisis. The U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities is the foundation for our mutual efforts to protect our people and combat fentanyl trafficking and other criminal activities and actors. We also recognize that disrupting the illicit flow of precursor chemicals to Mexico is crucial to our success. We will continue to seek productive engagement with the PRC to stem production of fentanyl and to work with partners around the world to better track and control the precursor chemicals that fuel drug production.

Under this framework, INL requests a total of \$100 million to combat fentanyl, to include \$48 million in programmatic funds to support our partnership with Mexico. INL has provided more than 500 canines to multiple Mexican agencies to assist in seizures of fentanyl and other drugs and contraband. INL-donated canines have supported over 50 fentanyl seizures including, more than 485,000 fentanyl pills, over 2,013 kilos of fentanyl powder, and 2,700 doses of liquid fentanyl. To assist with preventing the diversion of licit precursor chemicals for fentanyl production, INL is also expanding clandestine lab training and facilitating engagement with the private sector. We will continue to capitalize on these successes and expand areas of mutual cooperation with our Mexican counterparts, including working with Mexican regulators and public health agencies as we seek to tackle the challenge of synthetic drugs from all angles. We appreciate Congressional support and want to continue to work closely with you on this challenge.

While we direct our focus toward fentanyl, we cannot ignore the other counter-narcotics challenges in the Hemisphere, including those posed by methamphetamine and those related to cocaine and other plant-based narcotics. Colombia and Peru persist as the largest global suppliers of cocaine. Our approach to cocaine in these countries has evolved to focus not just on drug supply reduction, but on a holistic approach to address the full spectrum of forces that enable cocaine production and trafficking. INL requested \$160 million for Colombia and \$41.3 million for Peru, which will support a variety of strategic areas to increase security and decrease criminality. These include promoting rural security, justice, and development; addressing corruption; and preventing, detecting, and countering money laundering and other financial crimes in order to deprive TCOs of their profits. INL has facilitated the construction of two rural police stations that bolster Colombian authorities' abilities to stifle illicit activities perpetuated by TCOs. The co-location of these police stations with successful anti-TCO operations and community-police trust-building activities produces real results in decreasing crime: in early 2022, the Colombian National Police attributed a 42 percent drop in homicides from the previous year in Jardín de Tamaná, Antioquia, to the presence of the INL-constructed police station there.

In Ecuador, a key transit country for cocaine enroute to the United States that has suffered from increased violence including recent political assassinations, INL programs aim to enhance security in critical trafficking zones. INL partners have created several inroads to root out corruption in the national judiciary and to hold accountable TCOs that engage in and profit from drug trafficking and other crimes. In December 2022, Ecuador launched a specialized court with national jurisdiction over drug trafficking, corruption, crimes against humanity, human trafficking, illegal mining, kidnapping, fraud, money laundering, and TCO cases. Two years of INL efforts and technical assistance to advance legislative changes resulted in the establishment of this court, which issued its first convictions in July 2023. INL will continue supporting Ecuador with a requested budget of \$15 million in FY 2024.

In Haiti, INL requests \$45 million to support a targeted approach to develop the capacity of the Haitian National Police (HNP), and to implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability 10-year Plan for Haiti. The July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse exacerbated an already precarious security

environment. INL and its interagency partners have surged support and resources to Haiti to help stabilize the security situation. This effort is complementary to the international community's initiative to establish a multinational force (MNF) in Haiti. An MNF would support the HNP as Haiti's primary law enforcement institution in its efforts to counter gangs. Continued support for the HNP to lead counter-gang operations during this time is crucial to bringing stability to Haiti and protecting citizens.

The evolving security situation in Haiti reaffirms the importance of maintaining stability and combating transnational organized crime in the Caribbean, America's "third border." For the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), INL requests \$29 million in program funds to support collective and regional approaches to address shared threats. Strategic programming under CBSI seeks to reduce the flow of illicit narcotics and illicit firearms, disrupt organized crime, bolster citizen security and the rule of law, and promote regional cooperation. By working collectively to mitigate and contain these and other emerging threats, partner nations and regional institutions can develop the capacity to address them before they reach the United States. Due in part to INL's work building partner law enforcement capacity, CBSI countries participated alongside U.S. Government agencies in a September 2022 joint operation that led to the seizure of 350 weapons, 3,300 rounds of ammunition, and 10 tons of cocaine in the region.

INL also is supporting the Administration's efforts to address the record number of irregular migrants reaching the southwest border. INL leverages its strong interagency partnerships with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ), in particular, to strengthen law enforcement cooperation; detect, investigate, dismantle, and prosecute migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks; and promote accountability for those involved. In Northern Central America, consistent with the security and governance related pillars of the U.S. Strategy for Addressing Root Causes of Migration in Central America, INL efforts focus on community engagement and, where possible, security and justice sector professionalization, modernization, and training to address underlying causes of violence and insecurity. Programs to improve community policing complement youth engagement activities to deter gang influence. INL has requested \$191.2 million for the Central America Regional Security Initiative to support the aforementioned programs. In FY 2022, the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program reached over 100,000 at-risk youth in Northern Central America. These efforts are generating optimism as recent data has shown significant reductions in homicide rates from record highs only a few years ago.

Combating endemic corruption and impunity by strengthening institutions and the capacity of partner nations to better identify, dismantle, and prosecute the main drivers of corruption is a top priority. Unfortunately, in across many countries in our hemisphere the space for productive engagement with willing traditional government partners is constrained by anti-democratic governments and corrupt actors. We work increasingly with our interagency partners to develop the capacity of local civil society, the private sector, and independent media actors and organizations to equip them with tools to shed light on the corruption, crime, and impunity threatening their communities and dragging down their countries.

Corruption, insecurity, weak institutions, and lack of economic opportunities have dimmed the perception of democracy and the rule of law to many people in the region. This has allowed opportunities for external actors with nefarious interests or undemocratic values to exploit these challenges for greater influence and acceptance. In particular, the PRC seeks to capitalize on these factors to increase its presence in the hemisphere and outcompete the United States as the security partner of choice.

In response, INL priorities ensure our partners in the region remain committed to the rule of law, democratic governance, human rights, responsible citizen security, and the rules-based international system. It is essential they are aware of the risks to partnering with the PRC and continue to favor the United States as the partner of choice. We seek to counter the inappropriate or negative influence, actions, and messaging of the PRC and affiliated entities acting on its behalf that are detrimental to U.S. national security interests and those of our allies and partners. The threat from malign external actors is constantly evolving and growing and requires additional creative and innovative thinking. Working with our like-minded partners in the region, in the interagency, and in Congress, helps us ensure we are successfully countering this threat to our national security interests and to those of our allies and partners.

Chairman Kaine and Ranking Member Rubio, the challenges and issues INL is confronting in the Western Hemisphere cannot be solved overnight or alone. Getting ahead of these threats requires strategic and innovative thinking, including pur-

suings new partnerships with non-traditional actors, such as the nongovernmental and civil society community and potentially the private sector, and conceptualizing new creative ideas that are rooted in evidence and data to address continued and persistent challenges. At the same time, we can only affect meaningful change in places where we have willing partners. Where partner nations are not willing to cooperate, we must be proactive and creative so we can continue to advance regional priorities. The challenges before us are immense, but I am confident we can address them together to keep our country and people safe and secure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Secretary Robinson.

We will have 5-minute rounds of questions and I have a million questions, budgetary and nonbudgetary, but this is a budgetary hearing so I am going to focus mostly on the budget.

I do want to ask one nonbudgetary question about Haiti, given the fact that we were here recently in this subcommittee talking about Haiti and at the time there was some not expectation necessarily, but optimism about finding a partner to lead the multinational security effort.

It was reported in the news that there have been discussions with Kenya about it. Is there anything new to report about whether there is a nation that is going to step up and lead a multinational effort to enhance security in Haiti?

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There has been notable progress in that regard. A delegation of Kenyan experts traveled to Haiti to carry out an assessment. The Kenyan Government and Kenyan security forces have ample experience in peacekeeping on the continent and beyond, and they came back from their assessment with a very sophisticated view of the situation in Haiti.

You would think they have been studying it for decades, and they talked about their willingness to lead a mission. That process of deeper analysis of what would be required is ongoing in Nairobi, and much like the United States, Kenya requires legislative approval to carry out such a task.

I should note that my colleague, Assistant Secretary Robinson, traveled to Nairobi and met with the Kenyans before they went to Haiti and I am sure he will have some thoughts on this as well.

The Security Council is currently debating a resolution which would authorize a multinational security support mission and we hope that such a resolution could be approved by the time of Leaders Week in New York the week of the 18th.

Senator KAINE. Good. Well, that is encouraging and I would—obviously, Kenya’s willingness to take a leadership role depends upon the willingness of other nations to play major roles in participating. The U.S. is willing to do so. We will hope to have positive developments on that.

This is a question for Administrator Escobari and Secretary Nichols. Compared with the FY 2023 budget, the Administration has proposed a \$307 million increase in development assistance funding for the region, and that is nearly a 46 percent increase, with the majority of the additional assistance allocated to activities intended to address the root causes of migration from Central America and also to support democratic institutions in Haiti.

Can you elaborate on how the increase in development assistance funds can be used to bolster democratic institutions in the region?

For Secretary Nichols and Administrator Escobari.

Mr. NICHOLS. I had understood that was for Secretary Robinson and Administrator Escobari. I apologize.

Our focus is very much on addressing the root causes of the drivers of irregular migration and democratic instability. That includes focusing on improving people's daily livelihoods, providing support to develop the kinds of infrastructure that people need, supporting civil society, an independent press, and the kinds of government institutions that will promote better policies and livelihoods for the peoples of our region.

We are focused on this crucial moment, as I said in my opening remarks. We need to deliver across a whole host of areas for the peoples of this region. A key area of that is security. Crime and insecurity in places like Ecuador are driving irregular migration across our region. The lack of democratic opportunity in Venezuela similarly drives that irregular migration. These programs take time to have an impact, but we are seeing progress in a number of areas.

Senator KAINE. Let me say this before I turn to Senator Murphy. I do want to connect with the comments made by Ranking Member Rubio in his opening. I feel like one of the challenges we have in the region is that we often do not pay enough attention to our friends and the Ecuador situation seems to me a good example of this.

I visited with President Lasso shortly after he was elected, and then, together with Senator Menendez, was with him shortly before he stepped down, and there was a consistent ask during the Lasso administration—please engage with us on a trade deal of some kind. Add us into an existing one or do something significant.

The Administration's position is trade deals are not good politics anymore. That was the only ask, and I am not sure that had a trade deal happened that results would have been dramatically different, but when you have a nation that went from pro-China to pro-America and they had one ask of us and we could not produce, and now the situation in Ecuador is leading to more—the violence is leading to more Ecuadorian migration, people coming through the Darien Gap, and may well lead to a government that is once again hostile to the United States as the Ecuadorian Government was for decades, we miss opportunities with our friends.

We do some things right. The chips manufacturing bill that we did included a component for international manufacturing in friendly nations for nearshoring, and we made an investment in chips manufacturing capacity in Costa Rica. That is a positive.

I do want to associate myself with comments that Senator Rubio made, that we should be really focusing upon some of the bright spots and helping our neighbors that are doing well to do even better and that can be a great example in the region.

I turn now to Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for pulling together this hearing. I have two questions, one on budget and one on policy.

On budget, I will note that when we talk about the work that we need to do with Mexico and other partners to counter the flow of fentanyl to the United States, there is funding both in the State

and Foreign Ops budget, but also in the Homeland Security budget. That is the Subcommittee of Appropriations that I chair.

In fact, we have nearly a billion dollars in dedicated funding to help Homeland Security agencies work with the Mexican Government. That is a record amount of funding. I will also note that the Senate is taking this fight pretty seriously.

As you know, the State and Foreign Ops budget has \$125 million in dedicated counter fentanyl funding globally. Again, we have got about \$850 million in the homeland budget. The House has allocated virtually nothing to this fight and so, hopefully, we can convince our House colleagues to work with us to get serious.

I wanted to talk for a minute—and I will ask this question to you, Ambassador Robinson—about the degree of cooperation we are getting from Mexico and I will just put a specific example on the table and ask you to respond.

The Port of Manzanillo is a really important port. That is where a lot of this precursor comes through and we know a lot of it is moving pretty freely to the cartels. We know that there is an opportunity to interrupt a lot of that trade and we know that that is probably the more effective means to do it instead of waiting until it arrives at our southern border.

My understanding is we have had an offer on the table to work with the Mexican Government to partner our expertise with their expertise to better identify and intercept fentanyl and fentanyl precursor at that specific port, but that that offer still remains on the table—that the ball is effectively in the Mexican Government's court.

We have funding proposed to help fund that partnership, but it appears as one of, perhaps, several offers that we have made that have not yet been accepted by the Mexican Government.

Can you give us an update on that specific proposal that we have made and how it sits in the context of overall Mexican Government cooperation?

Mr. ROBINSON. Sure. Thank you so much, and you are absolutely right. Our relationship with Mexico on this issue is of the highest importance.

My understanding is our colleagues in DHS and DEA are continuing to talk with their Mexican counterparts on specifically what we can do at the Port of Manzanillo. I think everyone recognizes that this is a key entrance point for precursor chemicals. Those talks are ongoing.

Overall, I would say that our relationship across the board with our Mexican counterparts is quite good on operations at the border. We are looking at what we can do together to secure and shore up our border locations.

There is no doubt that there are differences between what certain members of the Mexican Government say regarding precursor chemicals and the production of fentanyl in Mexico, but despite those differences of opinion the relationship—the operational relationship remains on track.

Senator MURPHY. Well, listen, I am proud of the funding that we have put forward, but it is dependent upon having a willing partner and these discussions that you reference around this particular port have been going on for a very long time and it suggests that

we might not, at least on this set of potential cooperative efforts, not have a partner as willing as we would like.

My policy-related question will elicit an answer that will go far beyond my time so I will just reference it and put it on the record.

I am very interested to continue a conversation we have been having, Ambassador Nichols, on the efficacy of Venezuela's sanctions and to get an update from the Administration as to the purpose of a set of sanctions that have, frankly, not effectuated results in the way that we had hoped.

Obviously, we are coming up on an election in Venezuela that we hope is as open and fair and as free as possible and I think it is important that we continue to have a conversation as to what we are getting for a sanctions policy that is often making us look pretty feckless with our partners around the world.

I will submit that question for the record and yield back my time.

Senator KAINE. Thank you.

Chairman Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing on the Western Hemisphere and its budget priorities and for putting an august panel together. We welcome you all.

Fentanyl is the leading cause of drug overdose deaths in the United States, including in my home state of New Jersey with a staggering 193 persons a day—a day—dying from fentanyl poisoning.

We know that the vast majority of fentanyl trafficked into the United States is produced in clandestine labs in Mexico with precursor chemicals sourced from the PRC, something the Mexican President says does not even exist.

It is a little hard to deal with a partner when they start off from taking the proposition at the highest levels of government it does not even exist.

While Mexico's commitment has been, generously to say, slow to come around and we must recognize that realistic solutions to this crisis, I hope, as some are suggesting, U.S. military troops or bombs in Mexico. That is pretty outrageous. A sovereign country. As much as I do not like their lack of cooperation, that is pretty outrageous.

Instead it seems to me we require greatly improved law enforcement cooperation and greater port and border security measures.

Assistant Secretary Robinson, INL's budget request for Mexico does not speak, in my view, to the urgency of the challenge at hand, but it does indicate the challenges we have had in bilateral cooperation.

It also does not capture the whole host of initiatives that the Administration is carrying out to combat the crisis. Can you please lay out the work the Administration is doing and have you seen sufficient political will from the Government of Mexico to effectively tackle the fentanyl crisis?

I heard your answer to Senator Murphy. It was very diplomatic, but that is not what I am looking for.

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you, Senator—Chairman, for that question.

First, let me just say the challenge—to be honest, the challenge that we have with Mexico is the—their unwillingness to put their resources in the—into the—sufficient resources into the fight and we are pushing them to do that.

The partners that we are working with want to do more. They want to do better. They want to be—they want to partner with us on greater security both in Mexico and at the border—their northern border and our southern border.

The resources on the Mexican side up to this point have not been sufficient to the task and we continue to engage with them on that.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, you tell me where your resources are, I will tell you where your priorities are, and if the resources are not there, that it is not a priority for the Mexican Government.

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, we will—

Senator MENENDEZ. You cannot have a partner unless you have both sides of the equation working towards the same goal.

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, what I will say is we will continue to engage with our Mexican counterparts both diplomatically and at the operational level to see if we cannot convince them that they need to put more resources in that—

Senator MENENDEZ. At some point, we—if we keep doing the same thing and it does not work, you have to think about what other consequences there should be.

This year alone there have been over 2,400 murders and 950 kidnappings in Haiti. This has been the direct result of a worsening epidemic of gang violence and widespread criminal collusion between Haitian elites and gangs, an issue that I am working to address through my *Haitian Criminal Collusion Transparency Act*.

Given the appalling security situation in Haiti, I agree with the U.N. Secretary General's assessment that, "a robust use of force," by a multinational police force is necessary to help restore law and order. We have seen that the Kenyan Government has offered to lead such a force and conducted an assessment trip to Haiti last month.

Assistant Secretary Robinson, now that Kenyan assessment trip has concluded, what can you share about the specific resources the U.S. Government plans to contribute to the multinational force including any police or military assets, logistic support, and other financial resources, and what progress—concrete progress has been made in securing commitments from other nations to the multinational force?

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you, again, Senator Menendez—Chairman Menendez, for that question.

I was fortunate enough to go to Nairobi and speak with the Kenyans directly. We are grateful that they have—that they are considering this proposal to lead the—this multinational support operation.

We have committed to them that we are going to work with our international partners to make sure that they have the tools and the funding necessary. We have identified a substantial amount—both the State Department and the Department of Defense have identified a substantial amount to kick off the beginning of that funding, but we understand that we are not going to be able to do this alone.

We are reaching out to partners in the region. We are reaching out to partners outside of the region both for materiel, for personnel, and for financial resources.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, could you—could we engage with you on this to find out exactly where we are at on those efforts?

Mr. ROBINSON. Absolutely.

Senator MENENDEZ. Yes. Mr. Chairman, if I may, one last question.

Administrator Escobari, good to see you. I put out a paper on migration called the Menendez Plan. It recognizes that there are 20 million people in the Western Hemisphere—20 million—who are displaced refugees or seeking asylum in other countries.

Unless we deal with that reality, then the challenges that we have at the southern border will be minor today compared to 20 million people who, if they cannot be assimilated in these countries, will come marching north and that will be a major crisis.

I see that as part of this effort. I have legislation forthcoming on Venezuela that has \$300 million in assistance to Latin American communities hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants. I understand the President's supplemental budget request includes \$200 million to expand integration efforts.

Can you speak—help us understand in practical terms how important it is to have this additional funding for integrating refugees and migrants within the hemisphere itself?

Ms. ESCOBARI. Thank you, Chairman, for that question and you are absolutely right, and the reason we put those funds in the supplemental is because the timing could not be more consequential.

Of those 20 million people that are internally displaced, 7 million have come solely from Venezuela and it is now 7.5 and that is new. These are historic levels for the region, and the main countries—Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil—have taken on over 85 percent of that displacement.

It is through their policies that—their generous and pragmatic policies of integration—that these migrants are being absorbed in these communities. They are being provided jobs, health care, schools, but it is a very tenuous moment because these policies have a high upfront cost. Even if eventually migrants end up contributing robustly to those economies, the upfront cost is high, so straining local budgets, and the political cost is high.

Our ability to support our partners in integration, in policies that help them validate degrees, in providing schools and health care and the regularization process, really, as you said, will make a difference on whether those people can restart their lives in these countries or they will continue onward migration to our border.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, we will either help them there or they will be knocking on the door here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Chairman Menendez.

Senator HAGERTY.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Chairman Kaine. I would like to turn my attention to you, Secretary Nichols. It is good to see you here today.

In the FY 2024 budget request that you have got, there is over a billion dollars in the budget request for law enforcement in other

countries—law enforcement in Latin America, places like Colombia where policing needs to be reinforced, dealing with counter narcotics trafficking and that sort of thing. Are you in support of this element of the FY 2024 budget request?

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Senator. Great to see you again.

In order to provide our partners around the hemisphere with a better future that addresses the issues that affect us directly like illicit narcotics trafficking, fentanyl, irregular migration, we need to address these problems where they are and that means strengthening law enforcement capacity, judicial capacity, corrections capacity in the region. That is vital and that is—

Senator HAGERTY. In order to keep that from bleeding over into America?

Mr. NICHOLS. Absolutely, Senator.

Senator HAGERTY. Is that not the aim? I presume then you would oppose defunding this component of the FY 2024 budget request?

Mr. NICHOLS. Absolutely, Senator.

Senator HAGERTY. I am trying to then reconcile that. I have been reviewing the President's language on the ability to keep our economy open and—I am sorry, our government open past September 30.

In the language that the White House has sent over with the Continuing Resolution, there is a component of that that would essentially defund the agency here in America that is responsible for law enforcement, protecting our border, for deporting those who enter our country illegally.

It is very shocking to me that in order to avoid a government shutdown, the President is demanding the ability to defund ICE here in America and I would like to read directly from this language that the President has sent over to avoid a shutdown.

Amounts made available to U.S. immigration and customs enforcement operations in support in this or any other act may be used to provide services and support for refugees, referrals for social services and other related programs funded through contracts or through the award of grants or cooperative agreements to non-governmental organizations.

What this is saying is that the Administration wants the authority to reprogram over \$7 billion per year of ICE funding away from law enforcement and essentially turn ICE into a travel agency to facilitate the transportation of illegal immigrants to cities like New York—I think you have probably seen Mayor Adams and what is happening there in New York—to cities like mine or to yours.

I find this very shocking. I find it very concerning, in fact, and I wonder if you have had the opportunity to review this and would you support that.

Mr. NICHOLS. Senator, the process of enforcing our immigration laws is vital, but it does not just depend on the enforcement agencies. We have to be able to house migrants who are here irregularly—

Senator HAGERTY. Well, I think if you take the building—the enforcement agency that is responsible for deporting those people here illegally, for buying the tickets to send them home, is now going to be turned, according to this language—and, Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit this for the record.

Senator KAINE. Without objection.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to can be found in the “Additional Material Submitted for the Record” section at the end of this hearing.]

Senator HAGERTY. Page 41 of the language that comes along with this request to keep the government open past September 30 would require this Administration, the Biden administration, to have the ability to reprogram the entirety, over \$7 billion per year, of funding toward relocation of people into America.

It is going to create a magnet, if you will. It will undermine—it will overwhelm, frankly, north of \$7 billion per year, the \$1 billion that is being requested in your budget. I think that is a great concern. It should be a concern to you.

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, I am not an official with the DHS, but I will say that our partners in DHS need the ability to facilitate the repatriation of those persons not found to have a lawful reason to remain in the United States. They are under various judicial orders that they cannot hold migrants beyond a certain period of time. You need some place to refer those people—

Senator HAGERTY. I hear that, but this would allow the Administration to reverse all the funds that would be necessary to send those people back.

They would have the authority now to convert all of those funds into a resettlement program, and if you saw the video that I saw this morning of Mayor Adams in New York City talking about what is happening to the city right now, he is saying that this illegal immigration is destroying his city.

This provision, if we allow it to pass, will enable that. It is very disappointing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator Hagerty.

Senator Merkley.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much. Appreciate all of your testimony and expertise.

I want to start on the topic of Honduras. President Castro presents a new opportunity to address corruption. In the past, Honduras had had a commission, CICIH—that is the commission known as the International Commission Against Corruption and Impunity—and it was very effective in bringing to Honduras many of the tools of investigation and prosecution to hold top-level corruption accountable and that is quite contrary to kind of the tradition of impunity that has characterized so many governments in Central America.

The previous President dismantled that because of—basically many of his colleagues were getting investigated. His family was getting investigated. We have, we, the United States, have expressed a lot of support for supporting President Castro in taking on corruption, but right now that process of reestablishing CICIH is stalled.

What is going on? Let me just add how important this is. The drug trafficking corruption extends often throughout the political system. It infiltrates the police. It infiltrates the military.

As one President in Central America told me, the drug structures extend right down to the street level where virtually every business pays protection money, but if it is not addressed at the top, then it just is not going to change and the type of oppression that comes from these criminal enterprises certainly is a big factor in driving people desperately to the north.

Why is it that the work to reestablish CICIH is stalled and what can be done about it? Secretary Nichols or Director Escobari, I would love to get your insights on that.

Mr. NICHOLS. Thanks very much. The commission that existed in Honduras was called MACCIH. That was its abbreviations—acronym in Spanish.

That went away under the previous administration of Juan Orlando Hernandez, and President Castro has been working to establish a new commission in partnership with the United Nations in Honduras.

They have signed a memorandum of understanding for the creation of this new anti-corruption commission and they are working on the technical details with the United Nations.

I recently spoke to my counterpart in the United Nations and he assured me that the U.N. is committed to doing its part to establish this new commission that will aid Honduran institutions to address the issue of corruption.

I would note that the ongoing process of electing a new attorney general and deputy attorney general in Honduras is also important because they are the key partners for any international assistance on anti-corruption efforts.

Ms. ESCOBARI. Just to add, Senator, we are also very hopeful that Honduras will fulfill its electoral promise of starting CICIH and our understanding is that some of the stalling is around the level of independence provided to this institution, which we think is crucial, but USAID is prepared to make resources available to support CICIH once it is established and that is beyond the support of INL and State.

Senator MERKLEY. I just want to emphasize how important it is to continue to support the efforts to take on corruption. Without that, many of the programs and efforts that we are undertaking will take us nowhere.

I want to turn to safeguarding environmental defenders. Of the five countries that account for 80 percent of the murders of human rights defenders, four of them are in Latin America: Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Honduras.

This, of course, is devastating to those who are attempting to defend both established environmental preserves, those who are attempting to defend indigenous rights, and there is an appropriation for a USAID advisor for indigenous people, so I will direct this to you, Dr. Escobari.

How are those efforts going to help assist the frontline defenders—the environmental and human rights defenders who are being murdered to make them—to give them greater protection and work with their governments to give them greater protection?

Ms. ESCOBARI. Thank you, Senator, for bringing attention to this issue, and you are correct that Latin America and the Caribbean is the most dangerous region to be an environmental defender.

USAID is working with environmental leaders to protect them from intimidation and violence from armed groups and is also providing alternative economic options for those who often are forced to engage in illicit activities.

Our work, and many times in conjunction with the governments that we work with, is to really strengthen the judicial system so that these crimes can be brought to justice—but also creating protective mechanisms, sometimes community-based and sometimes individualized, in strengthening those protection mechanisms within the countries, often persuading governments to put more funds into them, but we will continue that work because we realize it is incredibly important.

Senator MERKLEY. Well, thank you. I am pleased that the Appropriations Committee here, the SFOPs committee—State and Foreign Affairs—has continued to see this as well worthy of funding.

I think it is incredibly important that we stand with those folks who are attempting to protect human rights, indigenous communities, and the environment. Thank you much.

Senator KAINE. Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Nichols, I am deeply concerned that the Western Hemisphere is being overwhelmed by anti-Americanism and that countries across the region are aligning themselves with our adversaries and our enemies.

I am deeply concerned that former U.S. allies are being replaced by leaders who are actively hostile to us and our interests and that the Biden administration has chosen to embrace many of those leaders.

President Biden warmly hosted Lula da Silva at the White House and called him a close friend. Lula is an anti-American chavista who embraces the Chinese Communist Party, Vladimir Putin, and the Iranian regime.

I will note that President Biden has not extended the same courtesy to Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and, indeed, the Biden White House has made clear that Israel's Prime Minister is not welcome in the Biden White House.

Now, one of the very insidious ways that our adversaries and our enemies have infiltrated the region is through corruption. China, Russia, and Iran all exploit endemic corruption including and especially corruption driven by left-wing movements to advance their geopolitical agendas.

Congress and specifically this committee has recognized the importance of combating such corruption and have given you powerful tools, in particular under Section 7031(c) sanction authorities.

The Biden administration has used these sanctions repeatedly across the Western Hemisphere, but not, I am dismayed to say, not against the left-wing, anti-American communists who are aligning with Russia and China and Iran.

Quite the opposite. Again, the Biden administration has looked the other way at malign behavior from such actors. I want to ask you why that is and I want to start in particular with Argentina.

In Argentina, the federal judiciary found Cristina Fernandez, Argentina's former President and current vice president, guilty of

overseeing and profiting from fraudulently-issued government contracts to her associates for public works.

According to the public record, the amounts we are talking about reach \$1 billion. She was sentenced to 6 years in prison and given a lifetime ban on holding public office.

Her current political role grants her immunity from jail, but I am not aware of any such restriction placed by Congress on you from sanctioning her under Section 7031(c).

You sanctioned the sitting Paraguayan Vice President last year. You have sanctioned former presidents in Panama and Ecuador. No one denies and, in fact, Argentina's courts have confirmed Cristina Fernandez is a kleptocrat. She has been indicted for obstructing investigations into Iranian terrorism.

Why has the Biden administration not sanctioned her?

Mr. NICHOLS. This Administration has used the tools for sanctions, both visa and financial sanctions, repeatedly in numerous instances. You talk about sanctioning left-wing leaders. Certainly, Nicaragua comes to mind. We have placed sanctions on scores and scores of officials from Nicaragua.

Senator CRUZ. Mr. Nichols, my question concerned Argentina. Why have you not sanctioned Fernandez?

Mr. NICHOLS. The United States does not discuss pending sanctions actions, so I would not be able to discuss what we will or will not do with regard to—

Senator CRUZ. Well, you are refusing to answer that and I have to say this is not changing.

A year ago I wrote Secretary Blinken about exactly this issue, sanctioning Christina Fernandez under Section 7031(c), and the State Department wrote back and I will quote what State said a year ago. "President Biden and Secretary Blinken have made it a priority to fight corruption globally using all legal authorities available to them."

That was nonsense then and it is nonsense now. A year later it is undisputed that she is a kleptocrat. Why is the Biden State Department giving her a pass?

Mr. NICHOLS. We evaluate every case on its merits. We do not discuss specific cases before we take action. We have robust anti-corruption program—

Senator CRUZ. Should State have an obligation to comply with Congress' oversight?

Mr. NICHOLS. We absolutely—

Senator CRUZ. I am asking you why you are not following the law and your answer is, we do not answer that question.

Mr. NICHOLS. Our answer is we do not publicly discuss pending sanctions actions.

Senator CRUZ. Well, it is not pending. It has been sitting there for a long time. All right. Let us shift to another example, Brazil.

Bolsonaro, a pro-American leader, was replaced—to the Biden administration's cheering—with an anti-American radical, Lula, and there is corruption likewise in the Lula government.

In February, Lula allowed two of Iran's most advanced warships to dock in the port of Rio de Janeiro. The United States opposed that act, at least formally. In fact, the United States sanctioned

those ships with what are supposed to be powerful designations, and yet, it happened.

I believe the Lula government's corruption played a significant role in their decision to ignore the Biden administration and allow the docking.

Do you agree with that assessment and has the Biden administration enforced any sanctions related to that instance and in particular to the Brazilians providing material support to the Iranian ships?

Mr. NICHOLS. The Administration engaged our partners throughout the hemisphere and we are very pleased that the Iranian ships were not able to dock anywhere else.

We were deeply disappointed that they—one of the two ships was able to dock in Brazil. The other was offshore. I will refer you to OFAC for any additional information—

Senator CRUZ. Has the Biden administration sanctioned the Brazilian Government led by Joe Biden's self-described good friend, the anti-American leftist Lula? Have you sanctioned the Brazilian Government for violating U.S. law and allowing the Iranian ships to dock?

Mr. NICHOLS. I would refer you to OFAC as to whether or not they have made a determination that action violated—

Senator CRUZ. You do not know whether you have sanctioned Brazil?

Mr. NICHOLS. I would refer you to OFAC.

Senator CRUZ. Do you know?

Mr. NICHOLS. I would refer you to OFAC.

Senator CRUZ. Do you know the answer? That is a yes or no question. Do you know whether the Biden administration has sanctioned Brazil?

Mr. NICHOLS. I am not aware of any sanctions with regard to that specific situation.

Senator CRUZ. Nor am I and that is the problem.

Senator KAINE. I believe Senator Cardin was here at the top of the hearing. Is that correct?

Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and let me thank all of our witnesses.

Secretary Nichols, I want to start with Colombia, if I might. This is one of our longest partnerships in our hemisphere. Senator Hagerty and I co-chair Atlantic Council Task Force on Colombia. Senator Blunt had that position before. We have been partners with Colombia through Plan Colombia, Peace Colombia, the implementation of the peace agreements.

Colombia still has major challenges in counternarcotics, the peace accord implementation, Venezuelan migrants and their integration into Colombia, forest conservation, et cetera, so the Administration's budget requested in excess of \$400 million dollars to further that partnership.

Our Appropriations Committee has recommended, as I understand it, \$487 million, a robust amount, recognizing the importance of our partnership to continue this progress that has been made in that country.

The House Appropriations Committee, as I understand, zeroed out the Colombia budget, withheld all the funds. Can you tell me how much of a priority it is for the United States to continue its partnership with Colombia in the areas I just mentioned?

Mr. NICHOLS. Colombia is a vital partner across a whole host of areas, whether it is safeguarding the environment, dealing with climate change, obviously, the overarching threat of transnational organized crime, promoting respect for human rights.

We have worked with Colombia at an unprecedented level of integration for a generation now since the beginning of Plan Colombia. Our continued cooperation and assistance with Colombia is vital, Senator.

Senator CARDIN. My concern is that it is a robust democracy and their elections are not predictable, as we have seen in the last three elections where they really changed directions in each one of those elections, but it was the will of the people at the ballot that changed the direction of the country.

We should not be trying to micromanage the internal politics of Colombia, but rather establish a long-term partnership in the areas that I have mentioned. Do you have a strategy for dealing with the House on this issue?

Mr. NICHOLS. Our strategy is to explain why the work that we are doing is important and yields benefits for the American people.

Our assistance to other countries is not purely an altruistic exercise. We benefit from it, and in the case of Colombia, we benefit from a strong, stable, democratic, orderly Colombia and we need to work with Colombia's elected leaders to achieve that.

Senator CARDIN. I strongly support that. I just—we are not—we are going to always disagree with leaders of countries. We know there is different trends within our own hemisphere, but we do know that we need to have partners to deal with the anti-narcotics—counternarcotics issues that are plaguing our country and Colombia plays a key role.

I would just urge the Administration to be a little bit more vocal in recognizing the importance of that partnership as we go into these negotiations between the House and the Senate.

I want to ask you a second question about the OAS legislation that was authored in 2021 by Senator Wicker and myself to establish a parliamentary dimension within the OAS similar to the OSCE.

Can you tell me what steps you have taken to implement that law?

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you very much, and the meeting that you and Senator Wicker hosted with Secretary General Almagro I think was—and a number of permanent representatives of other OAS member states was important in helping them understand how this will work.

They have had a number of discussions around the idea of greater parliamentary engagement within the Americas. I think it is something that is gaining momentum in the institution.

We continue to engage not only with the secretariat, but within—but with individual member states to talk about the importance of the utility of strengthening our legislative cooperation across the hemisphere.

Senator CARDIN. I think it is gaining momentum, but I think it needs a push from the Administration in its participation at OAS. I would just urge you—we recognize at times the Administration is not going to be the strongest proponent for congressional involvement.

I would just urge that it is so critically important for the support of OAS to have more active parliamentary participation and the Administration at a key point can play a major role in not just seeing momentum, but progress on a parliamentary dimension.

Mr. NICHOLS. We engage and will continue to do so. We agree absolutely on the importance of this issue.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for being here.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, I want to begin by thanking you and the State Department for your efforts to secure the release of a constituent of mine and her child in New Hampshire last month who had been kidnapped in Haiti.

Your efforts were really very helpful, and I know the family is not totally reunited because they had to leave some of their Haitian-born children in Haiti, but I appreciate that you are working closely with our office to help reunite the family and get those children to—back to the United States. Thank you very much for that.

I want to echo the concerns that were expressed by both the chair and ranking member in their opening remarks about the missed opportunity that I think we have in the Western Hemisphere and Latin America.

I had the opportunity in April to join a number of my colleagues on a bipartisan CODEL. We went to Panama, Colombia, Argentina, and Brazil, and one of the things that we heard everywhere we went was how much they wanted to have a positive relationship with the United States.

They would like to see increased trade. They would like to see deeper relationships and felt like they had not gotten a reciprocal response from the United States.

I am pleased that legislation that Senators Durbin and Boozman and I have with—to try and encourage increased trade to Latin America is in the defense authorization bill. I hope that remains as the bill proceeds through Congress.

It just—it felt like such a missed opportunity. I know we could spend the next 3 hours talking about that, but can I ask you to address that, Secretary Nichols?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, thank you so much.

Engagement with this hemisphere is vital. Just last week Costa Rican President Chaves was here. This coming week we will have President Ali of Guyana here.

President Biden hosted all the leaders of our hemisphere—all the democratically-elected leaders of our hemisphere for the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles. We hosted some national leaders from our hemisphere and around the world in Denver, Colorado, at the Cities Summit of the Americas.

I accompanied Secretary Blinken to the 50th anniversary of CARICOM in Trinidad and Tobago. I was with Vice President Har-

ris to meet with CARICOM in the Bahamas. The President has been deeply engaged with our closest neighbors in Canada and Mexico at the North American Leaders Summit in Mexico City and also bilaterally in Ottawa.

This is a hemisphere that is vitally important and America's Partnership for Economic Prosperity is another area where we expect to deepen our relations through work on infrastructure, climate, education, sustainable growth. Those are all areas of progress, and then we have four countries in our hemisphere that are members of APEC, as well.

Senator SHAHEEN. I appreciate that. I think all of those efforts are important.

It still is not clear to me that we have a comprehensive strategy for how we are approaching Latin America. I hope that as events continue that that will be clearer to us on the committee.

One of the things that we visited on our trip was the Panama Canal, and as you know the Panama Canal is being affected by significant disruptions because of climate change and the impact on the drought there and that is having real disruptions in terms of increasing supply chain issues for consumers.

Can you tell us whether the State Department is engaged with Panama and doing anything to address this, if there is anything that we are working on that can help as they think about how to deal with the water shortage? Because this is clearly going to be a long-term issue.

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Senator. We are actively engaged with Panama on watershed management issues through USAID and State Department's Bureau for Oceans, Environment, and Science. Our Ambassador, Mari Carmen Aponte, is very active on these issues as well. It is vital to our commerce and our security.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. Robinson, last year the *FENTANYL Results Act* that I was proud to co-sponsor with a bipartisan group of senators was signed into law. Can you tell me if anything is happening to implement that?

I know the Senate Appropriations Committee has put in \$125 million to try and stop the flow of fentanyl, but is there any work being done to specifically implement the provisions in that bill?

Mr. ROBINSON. Senator, thank you for that question.

As you know, the fentanyl crisis has been front and center for this Administration. Secretary Blinken hosted a ministerial earlier this summer. Over 100 countries—up to 100 countries—almost 100 countries and international organizations participated.

We have working groups that are getting together to talk about implementing some of the things that came out of that ministerial.

We will introduce a resolution at the U.N. for—at the upcoming U.N. General Assembly to tackle this issue. All of this to say we are using every tool, including the tools that are provided by you all, by the Senate, to engage with our partners globally to fight this issue.

We understand every day how important this is, both on the supply side and working with our partners domestically—ONDCP, on the domestic side to make sure that communities in the United

States have what they need to address the addiction and overdose issues.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, sadly, in New Hampshire we are seeing overdose deaths tick back up again and so how do you define success?

Do you have identified goals for interdiction, for reduction in amount of fentanyl coming into the country, for what China is providing in terms of precursor chemicals? What is the plan long-term to deal with this issue?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, those things that you mentioned are how we identify success, and while I am saddened to hear that the numbers are ticking up in New Hampshire, my understanding is overall in the United States the numbers are actually flattening and in some areas going down.

Part of this is the Administration's attention—increased attention on the domestic side, again, making sure that communities are given the tools they need to give more access to treatment, but also part of this is our engagement globally with Mexico, with Colombia, with our European partners.

We have to remember that while in the United States the issue is fentanyl, synthetic drugs globally are an issue—in the Middle East it is ketamine, in Europe it is methamphetamine—and we are engaged in offering tools to both our friends and our friends and our allies and our partners in the region to do the operations and to increase their security at their ports to identify—and engage with—try to engage with the People's Republic of China on the issue of precursor chemicals.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

I am going to start a second round of questions that I have. I have been informed that it is unlikely that Senator Rubio will return. If he does, I will offer him the opportunity to ask questions. There is a vote on.

If I could, Secretary Robinson, talk about the counternarcotics cooperation level between the United States and Colombia under the new government. They are taking a somewhat different direction. I would like to hear your assessment of how we view the partnership on counternarcotics efforts.

Mr. ROBINSON. I think you are absolutely right. I will start out by saying traditionally the United States and Colombia have had an excellent security relationship. That relationship still continues.

It is changing with the new administration—the new Petro government. They obviously want to go in a different direction on things like eradication.

That said, they continue to work with us on interdiction. They continue to work with us on strategies for rural security. They continue to work with us on newer parts of our strategy that go after things like environmental crimes.

We are working with our partners in USAID on getting land titles to Colombians that have never owned the land that they are on before. We have a comprehensive—we continue to have a comprehensive security and development engagement with Colombia.

Colombia has become a provider of security not just in the region, but globally and we will continue to work on that—

Senator Kaine. That is helpful to hear that and that matches what I have heard from General Richardson, the head of SOUTHCOM, that the change in government has not affected the mil-to-mil cooperative relationship.

It is important for us to understand that this government is moving away from some of the eradication strategies and that could have some challenges, but the fact that they are continuing to be a strong partner on interdiction and other security strategies, that it is important to note.

Secretary Nichols, the—just a couple of months ago in April of 2023, the Administration announced the opening of safe mobility offices, also known as Movilidad Segura, in Colombia and Guatemala where migrants can be considered for humanitarian or other lawful pathways from the Americas to the U.S. or other countries. The idea would be to have them go to those offices rather than appear at the frontera aqui.

How does the funding for the safe mobility offices tie in to the overall budget? Even though it has been fairly recent since April, can you share how the strategy seems to be working?

Mr. Nichols. Thank you, Chairman.

I would just note that Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources Rich Verma is in Guatemala and Colombia this week precisely looking at the safe mobility offices. They are up and running there and in Costa Rica. We had the chance to talk to President Chaves about that during his visit.

They are processing applications for people. The idea is that this gives people access to lawful pathways for migration, reduces irregular migration, and has the opportunity for people to go not just to the United States, but other countries like Spain.

People also receive information about ways that they can integrate into the societies where they are should they wish to do so.

The request that we have will provide for training for the people who work at those centers, host nation officials in the migration management area, funding for our partners like the International Organization for Migration and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, and this is a huge priority as a way to reduce the numbers of people arriving at our Southwest border.

Senator Kaine. I think it is really an important strategy and we will want to continue to monitor its success.

The success of these safe mobility offices also can have a significant effect in reducing the cartel soaking people for all their money and essentially human trafficking them.

If there can be these offices near to where people are, where they can find information about lawful pathways and, potentially, receive permission to come, where they can buy an air ticket rather than pay a cartel thousands of dollars to traffic them on a dangerous journey to the border, where they may or may not receive what they hope to, it will also assure some safety and drain the cartels of some resources that they are now getting.

A question about Chinese influence. Congress has appropriated funds generally to the Department of State to counter the influence of China globally.

What do you do within your portfolio to make sure that those funds are being allocated appropriately to activities in the Amer-

icas? Because these are some global funds that could go everywhere, but I would like to ask particularly how you go to bat to make sure that the Western Hemisphere receives a sufficient allocation of those funds.

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Chairman.

Our focus in this hemisphere is making sure that countries have their eyes open about their engagements through China, particularly in areas like infrastructure investment. That means—in the United States we have CFIUS to evaluate foreign investment.

We want to build capacity in partner nations around the hemisphere so they can evaluate the quality of investments. We disseminate information about the opportunities through U.S. institutions like USAID, Development Finance Corporation, EXIM.

We look for ways to partner with regional institutions like the Inter-American Development Bank. Just today they announced a road show initiative to promote U.S. company investment in the hemisphere that would benefit from IDB financing, which I think is a great initiative.

We work with cultural institutions to talk about the realities of the relations with China that they have and to understand that if they have got a Confucius Institute in their country, what is that there for, what are they doing, what is the reality of the human rights situation in China.

Senator KAINE. If I could, Administrator Escobari, the—USAID in May announced more than about \$60 million in programming to Central America to combat gender-based violence and to advance human rights, HIV prevention.

What type of programs is USAID implementing to break the cycle of gender-based violence against women in Central America?

Ms. ESCOBARI. Thank you, Senator, for your question.

Yes, gender-based violence is—continues to be painfully prevalent in the region and far too normalized. It is a priority in most of the countries that we operate and our approach involves focusing on prosecution to increase the reporting and conviction of crimes, protection and victim assistance, and sometimes that involves going to the victims—we have mobile centers that go to the most isolated rural indigenous communities to provide services—and prevention, changing gender norms.

We have worked in some cases very successfully with our partner countries. In Guatemala, we set up the 24-hour courts and we piloted the first ones and then the government took over. We find that when you have the judicial centers that are specialized in these crimes, the impunity is reduced tremendously.

In El Salvador, we supported close to 40 victim assistance centers and the conviction rate in these cases was five times the average of the rest of the country.

Lastly, in changing norms, that is a long-term endeavor, but we are tackling it in creative ways. In Honduras, we recently launched a 4-month campaign partnering with a major media company for airing a telenovela that features four women that have gone through overcoming discrimination, harassment, stigma, and really inspiring the audience to break the cycle of violence.

We are approaching it from all angles and, again, collaborating with our partner countries to reduce these numbers.

Senator Kaine. Very important work.

My last question, Secretary Nichols, is for you. President Biden announced in June of 2022 the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity.

There has been criticism—and I have participated in the criticism—that the announced framework is still a little bit hollow in terms of accomplishment or achievement. I raised this at a recent hearing.

We were informed that the White House and State were looking at APEP and maybe going to take a slightly different direction with it. We have not heard anything since then. Is there anything to report now about APEP?

Mr. Nichols. Well, we are robustly engaged in working with our partners among the 12 APEP countries. We are focusing on regional competitiveness, sustainable infrastructure, climate and environment, shared prosperity and good government—governance and healthy communities, ensuring that people have access to health care in the region.

We have been focusing on making sure that this is something that is shared priorities among our partners in the region. Ambassador Lisa Kubiske has been leading our conversations and Senator Chris—former Senator Chris Dodd as well has been very active in outreach on these issues.

We expect to have leaders meet later this year to talk about these priorities and we will have a framework where ministers in key areas work together on concrete solutions. We expect to bring real concrete supportive resources to this exercise, but this is not the United States handing down a tablet from Heaven. This is working with our partners to find shared approaches and shared solutions.

Mr. Chairman, if I could just also note the importance for us, whether it is on engagement with our partners, APEP, competing with China. I want to thank you and this committee for everything that you can do to approve our and confirm our ambassadors in the region.

The ability to speak at the ambassadorial level in countries is vital to our ability to counter China and to advance our own interests.

Senator Kaine. Thank you for that.

I would like to appreciate the witnesses for being here today. We had, I think, eight senators, seven of whom or six of whom asked questions. That is positive. This is a really important priority.

I am going to ask that the record of this hearing be held open until the close of business Friday, so that if members of the committee whether they were here or not wish to direct questions in writing, they can do so by that date, and I would encourage you all to provide prompt and comprehensive responses should questions be directed in writing.

With that, the hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:09 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN NICHOLS TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Is it in the interest of the United States to sanction foreign entities enabling the People's Republic of China's installation, development, and/or operation of military or espionage facilities in Cuba?

Answer. When the Biden-Harris administration took office in January 2021, it received information on several sensitive PRC efforts to expand its overseas logistics, basing, and collection infrastructure globally to allow the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to project and sustain military power at greater distance. This effort included the presence of existing PRC intelligence collection facilities in Cuba that the PRC upgraded in 2019.

The President directed his team to develop an approach to counter the PRC's efforts across the region, including Cuba. We developed and began quietly executing a strategy to achieve concrete results. We engaged governments that considered hosting PRC bases at high levels and exchanged information with them.

We assess that our diplomatic outreach has slowed down the PRC's efforts to project and sustain its military power around the world. We will continue to consider all potential tools in the Administration's toolkit, including targeted sanctions, as appropriate, to address these challenges. We remain confident that we can meet our security commitments at home and in the region.

Question. Please provide an update on the 60-day campaign announced in April 2023 to deter illegal migration through the Darien Gap.

Answer. The Darien Surge, led by the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, initially contributed to a decrease in the number of migrants traversing the Darien. Panama's National Migration Service reported low numbers of arrivals in June at the end of the campaign, but in July and August it reported record high numbers. The Department continues to work with the interagency and international partners to address the challenges of irregular migration in the Western Hemisphere.

 RESPONSES OF MR. TODD ROBINSON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. President Gustavo Petro of Colombia recently designated Alexander Farfan Suarez, Alias "Gafas," a FARC terrorist infamous for keeping hostage three American citizens, as a "peace manager." Has the State Department issued a formal statement on this or asked the Petro administration to retract this decision?

Answer. The Department of State is aware the Colombian Government has appointed Alexander Farfan Suarez as a peace manager. Farfan Suarez is responsible for atrocious crimes and human rights abuses against Colombian and U.S. citizens. The United States believes it important to pursue accountability for human rights abuses and meaningful justice for victims and has shared this view with the Colombian Government. The U.S. Government is not involved in the Colombian Government's current dialogues with U.S.-designated terrorist or other criminal groups. The Department has not issued a formal statement on the Petro government's decision.

Question. Please confirm that none of the funds appropriated by Congress for programs and activities in Colombia support the work of "peace managers."

Answer. No funds appropriated by Congress support peace managers. While the Department supports full implementation of the 2016 Peace Accord with the FARC, the United States is not a participant in the Colombian Government's current dialogues with U.S.-designated terrorist or other criminal groups and does not provide any funds to those efforts.

 RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN NICHOLS TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. Organization for American States Parliamentary Assembly: I am concerned by the continuing delay in the implementation of the 2021 OAS *Legislative Engagement Act*, which calls for the creation of an OAS Parliamentary Assembly to increase regional good governance and anticorruption efforts in the region. I believe it is the case that you have not sent yet instruction to all our embassies in the

Hemisphere asking them to make this a priority—to persuade other governments to work with us to make this happen. As we know, going only to other countries' missions to the OAS is not the way to get other governments to align with us; engagement needs to happen in capitals. When do you plan to engage all our embassies in the region to seek support for this initiative, capital-by-capital?

Answer. Since adoption of the *Legislative Engagement Act*, the U.S. Permanent Mission to the Organization of American States (OAS) has remained engaged with your office, as well as the OAS Secretariat, to advance this effort and bring it to fruition. We have coordinated with our embassies and engaged various legislators throughout the region, and worked with your staff to identify potential parliamentarians well-suited to be part of this important initiative. In advance of the June 2023 OAS General Assembly, on May 18 and 19, we coordinated sessions both on the Hill and at the OAS Permanent Council that brought together legislators, diplomats, representatives of parliamentary bodies, and other regional stakeholders dedicated to fostering inter-parliamentary dialogue through the OAS. The United States successfully sponsored new parliamentary engagement texts adopted in 2022 and 2023 during two OAS General Assemblies. We will continue to work with your staff on advocacy in capitals and in Washington to promote implementation of the *Legislative Engagement Act*.

Question. Please describe the State Department's other efforts to engage with both Western Hemisphere governments and their delegations to the OAS to promote the creation of an OAS PA.

Answer. We remain committed to continue feasible and constructive efforts towards the creation of a Parliamentary Assembly in the OAS framework, consistent with the Charter of the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Democratic Charter. An effort perceived as a unilateral U.S. model for inter-American legislative engagement could generate resistance from OAS member states. ParlAmericas, based in Canada, maintains a long-standing memorandum of understanding with the OAS to implement inter-parliamentary engagement, and we continue to collaborate with them and your office to develop a mutually acceptable mechanism for cooperation. On May 19, 2023, the U.S. Permanent Mission to the Organization of American States sponsored a Special Permanent Council session in Washington to fully engage all member states on implementation of the *Legislative Engagement Act*, consistent with U.S.-proposed mandates adopted by the 2022 OAS General Assembly.

Question. Guatemala: The recent presidential elections have shone a disturbing spotlight on democratic backsliding in Guatemala. While I am glad that efforts by top government prosecutors to disqualify now President-elect Arevalo's Seed Movement were unsuccessful, it raises a red flag that the government will refuse to seat him this coming January. I was pleased to see Deputy Secretary Richard Verma visit Guatemala earlier this week to assess the situation on the ground.

Please describe efforts by Administration officials—including Deputy Secretary Verma—to encourage a peaceful transfer of power.

Answer. Deputy Secretary Verma and Deputy Assistant Secretary Jacobstein met in Guatemala on September 5–6 with President Giammattei, President-elect Arévalo, Organization of American States Secretary General Almagro, government officials, civil society, and media representatives to underscore the need for a peaceful transfer of power. D-MR Verma and DAS Jacobstein's September press interviews increased public scrutiny and pressure on anti-democratic actors to cease interference. For over a year, the Department's public and private messaging campaign supported free, fair, inclusive, and peaceful elections. The Guatemalan people expressed their democratic right to select their next leader. As a result of daily diplomatic and public interactions with likeminded multilateral and bilateral actors, the international community joined the United States in calling for a peaceful transfer of power and respect for the electoral will of the Guatemalan people.

Question. How has the State Department worked to support democratic governance in Guatemala more generally, given these electoral concerns?

Answer. During the electoral period, U.S. Embassy Guatemala City deployed teams to observe each round of elections. USAID supported civil society and press organizations carrying out electoral oversight, observation, and investigative reporting. The Department supported efforts to improve transparency and accountability, including countering electoral disinformation. Statements from Secretary Blinken, Ambassador Popp, and White House officials on the importance of good governance and free and fair democratic elections reached millions. The Department utilizes the Section 353 Report to highlight corrupt and undemocratic actions by some Guate-

malans, including Public Ministry and judicial officials involved in efforts to undermine the election and transition. The report sends a clear signal that the United States is watching and will call out those working against democracy in Guatemala.

Question. Surrogate Journalism in the Western Hemisphere: Given the magnitude of the regional challenges we are facing in addressing the nefarious and false narratives emanating from China, Russia, Iran, Cuba and elsewhere, I am concerned about the dearth of resources available for the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), other than the work of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting and Voice of America. The Senate's 2023 State Authorization bill includes a provision asking USAGM to analyze and report to Congress on the potential creation of a "Radio Free Latin America" modeled after existing surrogate journalism networks in Europe/Eurasia, the Middle East and Asia.

Do you see a need for additional surrogate journalism in the region?

Answer. The Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) supports increasing objective and credible reporting to Latin American populations on U.S. policies and priorities; however, we defer to USAGM on the feasibility of creating a Radio Free Latin America modeled on existing surrogate journalism networks.

Question. Do you believe that Radio Marti and Television Marti are achieving their goals of educating and informing the people of Cuba?

Answer. The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) serves a role in providing uncensored news for Cubans given the Cuban Government's repression of journalists and media. Under the independent U.S. Agency for Global Media, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting reports on political prisoners and the human rights situation, and combats disinformation and malign foreign influence in Cuba, affording Cubans an alternative to state-run media. The Cuban Government frequently disrupts access to broadcasts by OCB's radio medium, limiting penetration on the island.

U.S. Government-supported and independent outlets have proliferated in Cuba's media environment over the past 15 years, providing consumers with numerous options for information on human rights and governance. Radio Marti and Television Marti use social media to attract younger audiences in efforts to increase their competitiveness among media outlets. Currently, other U.S.-funded independent media sources maintain stronger social media footprints. OCB's future success depends on an expert panel's implementation of recommendations from a May 2019 independent report to the Chief Executive Officer and Director of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, as well as keeping up with the continually evolving demands of digital markets.

RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN NICHOLS TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. I understand that the U.S. Embassy is encouraging all Americans to leave as soon as possible, and the Embassy has also evacuated all non-emergency government personnel.

What changes to conditions on the ground will be needed to return the post to full operation and what is the way ahead for consular services in Haiti?

Answer. Notwithstanding the decision to move to ordered departure, the U.S. Embassy in Haiti remains open. We continue to assist U.S. citizens and perform other essential duties. The Department continually adjusts its posture at U.S. embassies and consulates throughout the world in line with its mission, the local security environment, and the health situation.

Consular Affairs follows the determinations made by the Under Secretary for Management and post Emergency Action Committees in determining the posture of consular services abroad.

Question. With limited visa processing, will applications be transferred to other posts in the region?

Answer. The Department is evaluating options for Haitian immigrant visa (IV) applicants, recognizing that Haitians have no easy options to travel to another IV processing post. Individual IV applicants who reside or are physically present in a consular district where IVs are processed and who expect to remain in legal status for the duration of the IV process may request transfer of their case to that Embassy or consulate. Nonimmigrant visa (NIV) cases are not transferable, but anyone may apply for an NIV wherever they reside or are physically present.

RESPONSES OF MR. TODD ROBINSON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. Please provide an update regarding the implementation of the *FENTANYL Results Act*, which was passed as part of the FY 2023 NDAA.

Answer. With the support of Congress, the Department is intensifying efforts to confront the illicit fentanyl supply chain as a top priority for public health and national security. The Secretary launched a Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats on July 7, working with the U.S. interagency on an initiative that has brought together over 100 foreign countries and international organizations to strengthen cooperation and promote concrete responses. The Department will continue to support activities outlined in the *FENTANYL Results Act*, including through leveraging the Coalition framework.

Question. Has the international exchange program been established to strengthen capacity of drug reduction experts? What countries will be considered within the international exchange program?

Answer. The Department strongly supports the continued use of people-to-people exchanges, managed by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, in both directions. Inbound exchanges, such as the International Visitor Leadership Program and the Humphrey Fellowship Program, and outbound exchanges, such as the U.S. Speaker Program and Fulbright Specialists, educate publics and decision-makers about the health and law enforcement aspects of the synthetic drug crisis. INL is strengthening international collaboration by supporting prevention, treatment, and recovery support-oriented programs that foster the exchange of best practices and training of professionals and expanding the international network of health care providers through the Global Coalition.

Question. To what extent is the Department depending on the Emergency Supplemental and/or the FY 2024 appropriation to fully implement this legislation?

Answer. INL relies on its annual appropriation to fulfill its obligations under the legislation, and fiscal year 2024 will be particularly important as INL looks to implement the *FENTANYL Results Act* to support the work of the Global Coalition and the initiatives that follow for the subsequent year.

**Section Language From Department of Homeland Security,
Titled "Reprogramming Authority for Facilities and
Support Services"**

Submitted by Senator Bill Hagerty

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

GENERAL PROVISIONS—THIS TITLE

Authority to Repatriate Individuals

Sec. . Notwithstanding sections 240B(a)(1) and 241(e)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1229c(a)(1), 1231(e)(3)(C)), amounts made available by this or any other Act for "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement—Operations and Support" and "U.S. Customs and Border Protection—Operations and Support" may be used for the transportation of any individual permitted to withdraw their application for admission under section 235(a)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1225(a)(4)).

This request would authorize the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to use appropriated funding to repatriate an individual who wishes to abandon credible fear claims voluntarily and return to the individual's home country.

Reprogramming Authority for Facilities and Support Services

Sec. . Amounts made available for "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement—Operations and Support" in this or any other Act may be used to fund community-based residential facilities, and to provide services and support to refugees, asylum seekers, or other migrants, including the provision of medical care and treatment, legal orientation programming and access to counsel, educational services, repatriation planning and counseling, referrals for social services, and other related programs: Provided, That, the activities authorized by this section may be funded through contracts or through the award of grants or cooperative agreements to non-governmental organizations: Provided further, That, subject to any conditions deemed necessary by the Secretary of Homeland Security, any noncitizen may be housed in the community-based residential facilities authorized by this section, from which they may be permitted to depart unsupervised during certain hours at the discretion of the Department of Homeland Security, in satisfaction of clause (ii) of section 235(b)(1)(B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act and subclause (IV) of clause (iii) of such section: Provided further, That any non-governmental organization that receives funding under this section shall, as a condition of receiving that funding, permit personnel of the Department of Homeland Security onsite for the purposes of conducting screenings and interviews of noncitizen residents with respect to any application for immigration relief or benefits, serving decisions on such applications to such noncitizens, and for any other reason deemed necessary by the Secretary of Homeland Security.

This request would authorize the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to use appropriated funding to allow for refugees, asylum seekers, or other migrants to be housed in community-based residential facilities, depart unsupervised during certain hours, and be provided medical care, legal programming, and other services through contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements with non-governmental organizations.