

**TESTIMONY OF MARCELA X. ESCOBARI  
NOMINEE FOR ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR  
THE BUREAU FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN  
UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

July 28, 2021

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination.

It is an honor to be nominated by President Biden to serve as Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean at USAID.

My passion for development was sparked during my childhood in Bolivia, one of the poorest countries on the continent, as the daughter of two pediatricians who practiced in the country's public hospitals.

They brought home a passion for making a difference one child at a time, but also the frustration of seeing children die more often from poverty than disease.

They wanted to prevent disease, not just treat it. My father started the first blood bank in our city, and my mother tried to change culture—with simple things like handwashing practices, or promoting the use of breast milk.

My parents inspired me to tackle the root causes—not simply the symptoms—of poverty.

I want to thank them (who are watching this today), my husband, Beran, our sons Nico and Lucas, and our friends and family, whose support and love are the reasons I can sit before you today.

When I had the honor to serve in this role for the last year of the Obama Administration, the region faced acute threats. Venezuela's economy had contracted by 60 percent, 300,000 people had fled the country. Hurricane Mathew had hit an already battered Haiti, and Colombia was embarking on a fragile peace process.

Now the stakes are even higher. 5.6 million people have fled Venezuela- a humanitarian crisis created by an oppressive and incompetent regime. The people of Cuba and Nicaragua are seeing renewed crackdowns on their most fundamental rights. And one of the strongest democracies in the region, Colombia, is being shaken by economic and social unrest. The pandemic has struck Latin America harder than any other region in the world.

Our ability to extend a hand—urgently and wholeheartedly—in partnership with our southern neighbors will largely determine the course of the region's recovery.

I believe that the stakes are profound—nothing less than the faith of the region's citizens that liberal democracy, rule of law, and market-based economies can deliver on their most basic needs.

Inequitable, and lackluster growth have left citizens frustrated and demanding better. And the inability or, in a few cases, unwillingness, of national governments to respond adequately has led to political instability that threatens the future of the region as well as the security of the United States.

I sit before you with a sense of urgency.

If confirmed, I will focus on these pressing issues: combating COVID-19, confronting the security and migration challenges in Central America, and strengthening governance across the region.

This means empowering civil society to stand up to authoritarian regimes, while also helping democratic governments improve their capacity to deliver basic goods and services—from water to electricity to health.

My passion and conviction come from my parents, but my optimism is grounded in a career studying and implementing international development.

My early experiences in the private sector taught me the importance of creating conditions for investment and growth. In academia, I learned the value of good ideas, and while there are no silver bullets, there is a lot we know about what works and what doesn't in development. If confirmed I will bring a focus on data and evidence, as well as the ability to iterate quickly on lessons learned.

During my time at USAID, I had the privilege to work with dedicated and knowledgeable professionals, who regularly go above and beyond the call of duty. If confirmed, I will empower their efforts and contribute to a culture where respect, equity, diversity and inclusion are part of our values and the way that we operate, both here and abroad.

Since leaving the Obama Administration, I've worked on the barriers to inclusion and opportunity faced by workers here in the United States.

We often draw lines between so-called developed and developing, between the Global North and Global South... But in truth, there is no bright line when it comes to the crippling effects of poverty.

The need for inclusive, sustainable growth is as real in Appalachia as it is in Antigua.

I hope to bring that humility to this job—the sense that every nation is a work in progress, and given the cross border nature of our challenges—climate change, pandemics, and cyber threats—our fates are linked, and our ability to work together, even more urgent.

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