

THE IMPORTANCE OF U.S. ASSISTANCE TO CENTRAL AMERICA

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

April 10, 2019

Serial No. 116-27

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/>, <http://docs.house.gov/>,
or <http://www.govinfo.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

35-969PDF

WASHINGTON : 2019

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF U.S. ASSISTANCE TO
CENTRAL AMERICA**

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

House of Representatives

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Washington, DC

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:39 a.m., in Room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Eliot Engel (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ENGEL. The committee will come to order. Without objection, all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous material, and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules.

To our witnesses, welcome to the Foreign Affairs Committee. Thank you for your time and expertise this morning, and welcome to the members of the public and the press as well.

We are holding this hearing today for one reason, because President Trump cut the very funding that would reduce the flow of immigrants from Central America which he says concerns him so much.

We need to shine a light on this unwise decision and I look forward to our witness testimony. Because we are short on time with the upcoming vote series, I am going to enter my full statement into the record.

But first I want to thank our ranking member, Mr. McCaul of Texas. His urgency and leadership on this issue helped put it at the top of the committee's agenda including this very timely hearing.

So before I introduce our witnesses I would like to yield to him for his opening comments.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Engel follows:]



Chairman Eliot L. Engel
Opening Statement on the Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America
Washington, DC
Wednesday, April 10, 2019

We convene this morning on an urgent matter: the Trump Administration's decision to choke off American assistance to our partners in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

I was in El Salvador a couple of weeks ago, along with Ranking Member McCaul, Mr. Espallat, and Mr. Curtis.

For me, this visit was a real mix of emotions.

On the one hand, we saw up close the direct, meaningful impact of our USAID investments. We're helping to build a better future for the people of El Salvador, so children and families have opportunities to build prosperous lives for themselves, so they aren't forced to make the dangerous journey to our southern border. We met with a group of young people training to be software engineers. You could see the excitement on their faces—their vision of a brighter future was so inspiring.

And then the news landed like a ton of bricks: the Trump Administration planned to cut off foreign assistance. It was heartbreaking. I thought about what reality those children would face if this misguided decision went forward.

Now, I can't say I'm surprised that an administration that breaks apart families and puts children in cages would make such a cruel policy decision. But if the President's goal is to stop illegal immigration, this decision just makes no sense.

Instead of a real shot at a prosperous life in their own country, all too many of the students we met instead face poverty and violence—the root causes that push people in Central America to leave their homes in search of a better life.

And with the Administration's decision, we're not just talking about development assistance.

In San Salvador, we also met with FBI agents leading our Transnational Anti-Gang Task Force. With State Department funding, the FBI established these teams over the past decade to counter the growth of MS-13, the 18th Street Gang, and other violent criminals. These units train Salvadoran police officers and work closely with them to take down gang leadership structures in the United States and Central America. They literally make our communities and constituents safer.

Guess what happens to the funding for this initiative if the President gets his way? It disappears. We should all remember that the next time the President rails about MS-13, the next time he stokes fear by saying these brutal criminals are taking over neighborhoods. Talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face.

And as the United States exits stage right from Central America, there's no doubt who's waiting in the wings.

Last year, El Salvador dropped recognition of Taiwan in favor of China. The Salvadoran President-elect has kept the door open to reversing this decision. But I can only imagine what he's thinking now. And while Guatemala and Honduras still recognize Taiwan and resisted China's pressure so far, President Trump has cleared the way for China to move in and put down deeper roots.

What an unforced error.

The little bit of good news I've seen since this decision was announced is the complete, bipartisan rejection of this misguided and counterproductive decision. I have no doubt that Congress will use every tool at his disposal to push back.

I'm grateful to Ranking Member McCaul for raising the alarm on this issue and working with me to pull this hearing together so quickly. I look forward to working with the Ranking Member on legislation I am developing on the Northern Triangle. I've also worked with other members across the aisle on these issues. Mr. Smith and I have championed the Inter-American Foundation and its grassroots approach to development in places like the Western Highlands in Guatemala. And I was pleased to see Representative Granger, the top Republican on the Appropriations Committee, say that she does not support a suspension of aid to Central America.

Even members of the President's own Administration have fought for aid to the Northern Triangle. Just last month, the soon-to-be Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan said, "We need to continue to support the governments in Central America to improve economic opportunities to address poverty and hunger and to improve governance and security."

I couldn't agree more. I only hope the President will listen to Secretary McAleenan and rethink his ill-considered decision to suspend aid to the region.

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Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Northern Triangle countries of Central America continue to face serious economic and security challenges that are threatening the region's stability and driving illegal immigration to the United States.

This migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras is exacerbating the crisis on our southern border and straining the capacity of DHS's Customs and Border Protection.

As a former chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, I understand the unique challenges we face at our border and am committed to using all tools at our disposal to address this crisis.

One of the most effective tools we have for responding to this is targeted foreign assistance to Central America. This assistance supports the Northern Triangle countries' efforts to combat transnational criminal organizations like MS-13 that are involved in the trafficking of persons and drugs.

U.S. assistance also promotes economic prosperity and strengthens democratic institutions and rule of law. This assistance merges as security and economic support to create stability in the region and address the root causes of illegal immigration.

The Northern Triangle countries have also responded with their own initiative called the Alliance for Prosperity to complement U.S. assistance, demonstrating their commitment to addressing their own challenges.

Our assistance is having positive results. The chairman and I went down there to El Salvador. We saw it throughout the region. USAID programs are increasing, agriculture production is increasing household incomes, creating jobs—78,000 jobs in Guatemala alone.

Other U.S. assistance programs funded through State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement directly support police enforcement operations including those by vetted units like the FBI's transnational anti-gang tag units and DHS's transnational criminal investigation units.

Both have contributed to the indictment of hundreds of MS-13 gang members, the prosecution of criminal organizations, and collection of biometric data in individuals suspected of terrorism, violent crime, and tracking through BITMAP.

Last month, I traveled again with Chairman Engel to El Salvador and we witnessed firsthand how our assistance is driving at-risk youths away from criminal gangs like MS-13 by providing technical skills and employment opportunities.

During our visit, we had the pleasure of meeting with the president-elect of El Salvador, who expressed his unwavering commitment to working with the United States in every way possible to address the migration crisis.

He also explained China's efforts to increase its presence in his country but he favors closer engagement with the United States. Cutting this aid, in my judgment, would create a void that China is prepared to fill, and we heard that from the president of El Salvador.

As a representative from Texas, this crisis on the border is taking place in my back yard and I share the president's frustration.

However, I acknowledge that more work and time is needed to fully address Central America's challenges and the continued migration flows to the United States.

I believe that the decision to cut funding will make the economic and security situations in Central America worse, not better, triggering more migration, not less, to the United States.

I also recognize that Congress has an oversight role and I made this clear by establishing a process which clarifies that we have the criteria to address 16 congressional concerns related to improving border security, anti-corruption, and human rights.

In short, our trip to Latin America was significant, meeting with the president of Colombia, meeting with the president of El Salvador.

I think the chairman and I came back realizing these programs are highly effective and that cutting these programs would be counterproductive and make the situation worse, not better.

And so I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. I want to thank the chairman for holding this hearing at my request after we came back.

And I will just anecdotally just share the story of the president of El Salvador. We were there the day the president decided to cut the foreign aid and it was quite a shock to an ally, someone who is pro-United States, wants to be our ally.

I think it is the wrong message at the wrong time and I think this is ill-advised, it is reckless, and I look forward to the testimony.

And I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. The gentleman yields back. Thank you, Mr. McCaul, and thank you for your leadership.

We are largely holding this hearing this morning because of you, because we were so shocked sitting there in El Salvador at a time when the edicts came down to cut foreign aid.

It is just so illogical that it was the opposite thing that we should do, not cut aid. We should improve aid. If we want to make situations where people do not come to the United States then we need to help them in their own country.

It does not do anything except make the problem worse by cutting aid. More people will wind up coming to this country and the President says that is not what he wants. Well, something you have to figure out is if the cure is worse than the problem, and I certainly think it is.

So I want to thank you, Mr. McCaul, and we said we would do a hearing as soon as we could, and I think this is record time here. But it is largely because of you, and I thank you for it.

This morning, we are joined by a distinguished panel. I am pleased first to welcome my friend, Ambassador Roberta Jacobson. Roberta and I have worked together for many years, and she is truly one of the best diplomats of our time.

Roberta, it is great to have you back. The Ambassador is a career State Department official, most recently serving as U.S. Ambassador to Mexico from 2016 to 2018.

Ambassador Jacobson previously served as assistant secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. So welcome, Roberta.

Mr. Gil Kerlikowske is a distinguished visiting fellow and professor from Northeastern University. From 2014 to 2017, Mr. Kerlikowske served as commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Prior to his appointment to CBP, he served as the director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy from 2009 to 2014 and before that was the chief of police of Seattle, Washington.

Ambassador Roger Noriega is a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Ambassador Noriega previously served as assistant secretary of State for Western Hemisphere affairs as well as U.S. Ambassador to the OAS from 2001 to 2005. He has been testifying for many, many years at this committee and we thank you for it, Ambassador.

And what I am going to do now is I will recognize our witnesses for 5 minutes each to summarize your testimony and we will start with Ambassador Jacobson.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MS. ROBERTA JACOBSON,
FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO MEXICO AND ASSISTANT
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WESTERN HEMISPHERE AF-
FAIRS**

Ms. JACOBSON. Thank you, Chairman Engel and Ranking Member McCaul and members of the this committee. It is a pleasure to appear before you today for the first time as a private citizen. It is a different feeling.

But mostly I would like to thank you all for the interest that you have shown in the subject that we are going to discuss today and to which I have devoted my professional career.

I have a long paragraph about some of the issues that drive migration in Central America but I think most of you know those, and I will let my written testimony stand on that.

But I will say that because of both economic and security issues in the Northern Triangle countries, decisions by Central American migrants to leave their countries and attempt to reach the United States often to join family members who are already here, even when they are taken by family units with young children, can be seen as a rational decision when they are confronted with extreme poverty and violence.

Unfortunately, migration policy by this administration appears based on the assumption that if one makes things difficult enough for migrants they will not come.

Whether zero tolerance, family separation, threats to cutoff aid or close the U.S.-Mexican border, such policies are wrong headed, needlessly cruel, and, frankly, all but useless as long as the root causes of migration remain unaddressed.

There is often a misunderstanding of the purpose of U.S. aid, not by this committee but by our public. It has always been intended to advance U.S. interests and objectives.

Indeed, within the assistance that the administration intends to stop are programs carried out by the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, Treasury, and on many issues directly relevant to our national security and safety.

It is also important to recognize that the vast majority of our assistance to the Northern Triangle and Mexico does not go directly to governments.

It is projectized, as we say, or destined for nongovernmental organizations or very specific projects or equipments if within government and designed in coordination with the United States and only for the purpose intended.

Thus, any threat to cut assistance can be seen as reducing support for our own objectives, and the ranking member mentioned both the TAG program, the FBI's anti-gang program, and our biometric programs which do just that.

So the fact is, as a former colleague of mine has said, if you like the current migration crisis you ain't seen nothing yet, because if aid is cutoff to the Northern Triangle it is almost guaranteed that we will see more, not fewer, migrants attempting to enter the U.S. and they will be poorer, more desperate, and victims of greater violence than they are with our aid.

All of the programs that are pending cuts right now have basically just gotten underway in missions where we had downsized or eliminated our aid mission.

So if you cut aid for Fiscal Year 2017 or 2018, you would never really have given an aggressive aid program, as was developed at the end of the last administration, a chance to be implemented.

And foreign officials in these countries are confused and frustrated with the fickle and inconsistent nature of our policy. The Honduran government expressed irritation with the announced cutoff and Mexico's national migration commissioner called it schizophrenic.

But there are other reasons it is in our interest to continue and improve our assistance. It gives us a seat at the table to leverage decisions taken by those governments on issues of direct relevance to national security and because if others become the partner of choice for these hemispheric countries, they will do so without any of the conditions or policy goals that we require of aid recipients.

So, in closing, I would just say that humane policies that uphold American values do not mean letting in every petitioner. Economic migrants do not qualify for asylum and they should understand that for them the perilous journey north will ultimately be fruitful.

But returning migrants to their home countries more quickly, while usually one of the most effective ways to transmit that the journey is for naught requires the cooperation of those governments.

Here, too, our constantly changing policy and blame game makes that cooperation more difficult. So I look forward to answering any questions the committee may have about the importance of maintaining this assistance because it is in our own national interest.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Jacobson follows:]

Testimony of Ambassador Roberta S. Jacobson (ret.)
Former U.S. ambassador to Mexico (2016-2018) and Assistant Secretary for
Western Hemisphere Affairs (2012-2016)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
“The Importance of U.S. Aid to Central America”
April 10, 2019

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, members of the Committee, it’s a great pleasure to appear before you today—for this first time as a private citizen. I’d like to start by thanking you all for the interest and commitment so many of you have shown to issues of the Americas to which I’ve dedicated my professional life. After thirty-one years at the State Department, all of them working on advancing U.S. interests and cooperation in the Western Hemisphere, I hope you will forgive my thinking they are the most important issues affecting Americans on a daily basis.

I greatly appreciate being asked here today to speak about the importance of U.S. assistance to Central America—and the implications of cutting aid to the Northern Triangle of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

The countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America have long suffered from violence, corruption, and slow economic growth. These countries, unlike Mexico,

which has an aging population, still have a demographic “youth boom” for at least a few years more. In practical terms, what this means is that the economies of these countries are not producing sufficient jobs for the young men and women who should be entering the work force—even if those young people had the skills for employment, which in large measure they do not. In addition, drought in the region, as well as the blight known as “coffee rust”, have resulted in severe economic privation in rural areas. Transnational organized crime, specifically gangs and drug traffickers, have wreaked havoc on communities and social structures, leaving those young men and women vulnerable to forced recruitment for those criminal organizations or to face extreme violence, with among the highest homicide rates in the world in countries not at war. Many families find themselves risking violence if they are unable or unwilling to pay extortion by gangs and traffickers. Finally, although it is very early days in a new presidency in El Salvador, corruption by government officials in all three countries has reached levels that compound the desperation and helplessness felt by citizens who seek protection or economic opportunity.

Thus, the decisions by Central American migrants to leave their countries and attempt to reach the United States, often to join family members already here, even

when taken by “family units” with young children, can be seen as a rational decision when confronted with extreme poverty and violence.

Unfortunately, migration policy by this administration appears based on the assumption that if one makes things difficult enough for migrants, they will not come. Whether zero tolerance, family separation, or threats to cutoff aid or close of the US/Mexico border, such policies are wrong-headed, needlessly cruel, and all but useless as long as the root causes of migration remain unaddressed.

Those root causes – poverty, violence, corruption—cannot be overcome without partnerships with the governments of the Northern Triangle and Mexico. Such partnerships are exactly what U.S. foreign assistance is intended to advance. There is often a misunderstanding of the purpose of U.S. aid. It has always been intended to advance U.S. interests and objectives. Indeed, within the assistance that the Administration intends to stop are programs carried out by the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, Treasury and therefore directly relevant to our national security and safety.

Where we find partners in host governments on those objectives—such as poverty or violence reduction—then they may be of assistance to those governments as

well. But it's important to recognize that, especially in the Northern Triangle and Mexico, the vast majority of such funds do not go directly to governments. Our aid is "projectized"—that is, destined for non-governmental organizations or very specific projects or equipment if within governments, and designed in coordination with the USG and utilized only for the purpose intended.

Thus, any threat to cut assistance has to be seen as reducing support for our own objectives. Nearly all assistance in Central America is specifically designed to reduce the very root causes of migration that the Administration surely views as an objective. A good example is programs by U.S. law enforcement entities, such as the FBI's anti-gang "TAG" program which directly focuses on the very gangs, MS 13 and the 18th Street gang, that are often identified as among the drivers of violence in both Central America and the US. In 2015, such aid-funded cooperation resulted in the arrests of over 30 MS-13 members in Charlotte, North Carolina, and there have been many other prosecutions in the United States as a result of the professionalism of units we have trained and equipped in Central America. Operation Citadel, begun in 2013 and continuing, which works with Northern Triangle countries to pursue human smuggling and trafficking to the United States, resulted in over 70 criminal investigations being initiated, and more than 500 arrests in the United States. Biometric programs initiated with Mexico

and expanded to the Northern Triangle, enable U.S. law enforcement agencies, working in close cooperation with those governments, to gain valuable data on migrants who may have criminal records in the United States, or be identified as gang or Transnational Criminal Organization (TCO) members—enabling those countries and our authorities to ensure they don't reach the United States—unless it is for prosecution.

In my own experience with such assistance to Central America and Mexico as Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere for more than 4 years and ambassador to Mexico for two, I often saw that countries only created and maintained specialized police or military units that directly helped us prosecute TCOs when we provided the assistance and training for them to do so. Cutting such aid can only hurt those vulnerable to increased violence in the Northern Triangle AND the people of the United States as it has resulted in prosecutions of gang leaders and members in the U.S.

Former Commissioner Kerlikowske will speak about some of the “best practices” we learned in our assistance to the region during his tenure, and thus while constantly adapting, we know what works in these countries with sufficient

resources. Commissioner Kerlikowske was one of the finest public servants I've had the privilege to work with, and the credibility he had as a former city police chief was essential when he spoke with counterparts and designed programs that were implemented by DHS with the very foreign assistance at risk of being cut off.

So, the fact is, as former colleagues of mine have said, if you like the current migration crisis, you ain't seen nothing yet. Because if we cut aid to the Northern Triangle, it is almost guaranteed that we will see MORE, not fewer, migrants attempting to enter the U.S. They will be poorer, more desperate, victims of greater violence, than they are with our aid.

When we began the Merida Initiative with Mexico to counter transnational organized crime in 2008, we included a relatively small amount of funds for Central America, recognizing that many of the problems were throughout Meso America, not confined to Mexico and that we needed to re-engage in Central America. By 2015, it was clear that the scale of the problem in Central America required significantly greater investment over a sustained period. Thus, with the countries of Central America themselves working with the Inter-American Development Bank and others on the "Partnership for Prosperity", \$1bn a year was initially conceived for the region, and as then Vice President Biden said, would be

necessary for at least 3-5 years. Congress responded with a robust percentage of that \$1bn request. All such aid programs are slow to start—especially in countries where we had down-sized or eliminated USAID missions over the years. We also needed to find capable partners in both government and civil society to implement the programs so that they would be effective. Thus cutting aid right now— affecting FY’17 and FY’18 assistance—means we would never have given this more aggressive effort a chance. Indeed, assistance to these countries has been going down already in the past few years—from \$754M in FY ’16 to an FY ’20 request of \$445M.

These programs focus on such issues as: Reducing rural poverty and food insecurity, Strengthening the rule of law, improving security in the most violent communities, as well as transnational anti-gang units, and transnational criminal investigative units. These are precisely the reasons migrants give for attempting to come to the United States.

Foreign officials in these countries are confused and frustrated with the fickle and inconsistent nature of our migration policy. The Honduran government expressed irritation with the announced cutoff, noting the “contradictory” nature of our policy. Tonatiuh Guillen, Mexico’s national migration commissioner, called it

“schizophrenic”. One day DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen is signing a compact on migration and security with the Northern Triangle countries and Mexico, and the very next day, the President orders aid cut off. Even so, the Northern Triangle countries issued a statement warning their citizens of the dangers of illegal migration and confirming their commitment to combat trafficking and other offenses. But how likely is it that those foreign leaders will take political risks or do the difficult work of keeping up their end of such agreements once aid is truly cut? Slim at best.

There are other reasons it is in our interests to continue and improve our assistance: to give us the “seat at the table” or leverage to influence decisions taken by those governments on issues of direct national security to the United States, and because if others become the “partner of choice” for these hemispheric countries, they will do so without any of the conditions or policy goals that we require of aid recipients.

On the issue of leverage, assistance from the United States enables us to work with these countries on strategies for combatting violence, opening their economies to U.S. goods and investment, improving governance, transparency, and especially reducing corruption. Indeed, we required that Northern Triangle countries

establish an autonomous accountable entity to oversee the plan we were implementing together; investigate and prosecute government officials credibly alleged to be corrupt, target criminal gangs and other TCOs, and focus on preventing young people from joining gangs through community-based programs. That seat at the table also increases our influence on myriad foreign policy decisions by those governments, including at international organizations such as the United Nations, the OAS, and in helping to form a like-minded community that can help when combatting challenges in the Americas (such as Venezuela), and beyond.

Were others to enter into a space that has traditionally been occupied by the United States, such as China, there is little doubt that these values—of free markets and democratic practices, would not be part of such investment. And over time, that simply makes it less likely that any of these countries “graduate” from being aid recipients and continue to be allies in larger, transnational and security concerns.

As Dan Restrepo and I wrote in November, migration policies that focus on our southern border, and not more comprehensively have already failed—they need to be effective both earlier and in broader geographic scope. Humane policies that uphold American values do not mean letting in every petitioner. Economic

migrants do not qualify for asylum; they should understand that, for them, the perilous journey north will ultimately be a fruitless one. But in addition to increasing our assistance to Central America, we must also improve and accelerate our asylum process, as migration experts such as Doris Meissner and Andrew Selee of the Migration Policy Institute have outlined. The slow rate at which we allow migrants to present asylum claims and then process those claims means that other options will become more appealing. We need to focus on adjudicators, judges, and others who can separate out legitimate asylum claims from economic migrants more quickly and help reduce the absurd backlog.

Returning economic migrants to their home countries much more quickly, while protecting due process, is one of the only ways to effectively transmit the message that such journeys will be for naught. Yet despite the Administration's stated goal of returning migrants, they have failed to use resources to accelerate that process, and thus the system has become even more overloaded—and a crisis created where one might be avoided. To return non-refugee migrants to their home countries, we also need the cooperation of those home governments—for documentation and to ensure they get some support at home that will reduce the likelihood that they will attempt the trip north again. Here too, our arbitrary and constantly changing policy and blame game makes such cooperation more difficult and less likely.

As we wrote in November, instead of tough talk and empty gestures, it is time for the United States to provide leadership based on both our national interests and our values. If it is smart and open to working with others, the administration can manage the flow of migrants humanely and efficiently. If it is not, this crisis will only get worse.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you, Ambassador.
Mr. KERLIKOWSKE.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE R. GIL KERLIKOWSKE, DISTINGUISHED VISITING FELLOW, PROFESSOR OF THE PRACTICE IN CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE, NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY, FORMER COMMISSIONER OF U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY, AND CHIEF OF POLICE IN SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Mr. KERLIKOWSKE. Good morning, Chairman and Ranking Member McCaul and the distinguished. It is a pleasure also to be here for the first time as a citizen, although I certainly miss the government service and the work that was done.

When I became commissioner of CBP, I was the only confirmed commissioner for President Obama's 8 years in March 2014 within a week I became intimately familiar with what a surge looks like, and certainly, the ranking member was there many times with me in McAllen, Texas, which was the primary source of 68,000 unaccompanied children and family units coming into the United States.

I praise then and I praise now the work of the United States Border Patrol. The men and women and the Border Patrol really with very little assistance from other entities of the Federal Government were able to feed, to clothe, to hold people, and for all of us that have been in those Border Patrol stations you know they are designed for a very short period of time, and yet some of this went on for six and seven and 8 days with people being there.

I also recognize clearly that we did not have the resources to deal with this. The Border Patrol had recognized over the last 2 years that this surge was increased or that these numbers were increasing. But we did not have any of the support and backup.

So by the time that surge ended at the end of that summer, it was very helpful to have purchased a large warehouse, certainly not the best facility for holding people but, certainly, something that was needed.

It was important to secure contracts for food, for health care, for security so that Border Patrol agents could be returned back to the border rather than doing some of that work.

But I also saw the humanitarian efforts of those agents as they brought clothing in from their own children to help take care of some of these—of some of these kids.

Well, I have spent a career in law enforcement and I am intimately familiar with what are the important parts of safety and security, and when people feel safe and secure, if they have a trust in government just as in the United States, well, the people in Central America are not going to want to make the very dangerous trip.

And we worked hard with the State Department to do the advertisements in a variety of ways in those three Central American countries to say your chances of entering the United States without being detained are minimal but the route and the trek would be incredibly dangerous not only for assault, for robbery, for homicide, for sexual assault.

And we did a lot of advertising in a variety of ways and it had very little impact because, as Ambassador Jacobson had mentioned also, when you are facing economic problems of great importance to people there, you are facing the dangers, and you are also facing that inability to get your children a better quality of life, you are willing to make that dangerous trek.

That is why I am such a strong proponent of what we can do. We saw the Plan Colombia reduce cocaine. We saw Merida have significant impacts on the number of people leaving Mexico to come into the United States, and these new programs that are really just, in many ways, in their infancy and the three Central American countries need our support and they need our recognition.

There is no one single answer to the crisis that is now occurring on the southern border. But, certainly, eliminating foreign aid would be, in my opinion, huge mistake.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kerlikowske follows:]

Prepared Statement of:

R. Gil Kerlikowske

Professor of the Practice, Northeastern University, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Non-resident fellow, Rice University, James A. Baker Institute

Hearing before the:

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

“The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America”

April 10, 2019

Good morning Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and distinguished Members. I am honored to be with you today to discuss cooperation and support by the United States for primarily three Central American countries; El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. As the committee is well aware, these countries comprise the largest number of people appearing at our border with Mexico, generally to make a claim for asylum.

I was intimately familiar with the situation in the McAllen, Texas area along the Rio Grande river. I was sworn in as Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection in March, 2014. A week later I was in McAllen where I would spend many nights over the summer. During that summer of 2014, approximately 68,000 unaccompanied minors and family units entered the U.S., primarily in that area of the border. I repeatedly praised and continue to praise the efforts and work of the men and women of the U.S. Border Patrol during that period. With very little assistance, they processed, fed, clothed (often bringing clothing from their own children) and housed these children for days at a time. Their efforts extended far beyond what is expected for a Border Patrol Station which is meant for temporary or short-term detention. Those numbers of unaccompanied minors and family units increased in 2014 from the previous year and the previous two years had shown increases that the Border Patrol recognized.

The numbers in the summer of 2014 clearly demonstrated that existing facilities and the support available were insufficient to manage this volume. In a relatively short period of time, CBP purchased a large warehouse and converted it into a processing center; FEMA provided other facilities for detention, as did the U.S. Military and the Border Patrol Training Center in New Mexico. Contracts were

secured for food handling, health care, and security so Border Patrol Agents could resume duties on the border instead of performing these non-enforcement related functions. By the time this surge of youth and family units subsided CBP and DHS were far better equipped to deal with increases.

During the many days I spent along the border I had the opportunity to speak with many of the people entering. I was also able to read survey instruments prepared by the Border Patrol, CBP, DHS, and the Department of State. The reasons for attempting entry were not singular. They included: (1) an extreme fear of victimization of gang violence, including homicide or domestic violence; (2) reunification with a family member currently residing in the United States; or, (3) the quest for better economic security for one's family or a better education for one's child.

Before I entered federal service, other than my two years in the Army and with the Department of Justice, I served as a career law enforcement officer, including servicing as the Chief of Police of two large U.S. cities. The words I heard, from these refugee families, were no different, with the exception of reunification, then those I heard from people living in the communities I was sworn to protect and serve.

Just as the safety and security of a community in America rests primarily with the people who reside and work there, so too does that apply to the three Central American countries we are focused on today. Law enforcement and local government are responsible for providing the resources and support to improve community safety in America. That has also been the focus of a great deal of the funding provided to both U.S. interagency operations and these three countries; to improve their safety and security, and by improving the economy, and educational opportunities.

I saw the results of these efforts first hand in multiple trips to Central America. The law enforcement agencies received the benefit of U.S. resources in training and equipment. For example, in El Salvador we saw homicides decrease. The Placed Based Strategy, similar to what law enforcement does here in the U.S., implemented in 2015 showed results in 2017 with fewer people leaving that country for the U.S.

I know that without safety and security and the future for a better life in those countries that merely apprehending people entering the United States is not a solution to this problem. I know that our advertising campaigns, carefully thought out and widely circulated in Central America advising of the dangers and consequences of making a dangerous trek to the U.S. had little impact.

Other examples of support include training and technical assistance from experts in forensics, money laundering, and transnational organized crime. CBP provided guidance on border security and was able to assist in understanding the importance of customs regulations that can be of value when improving trade and the economy.

The relationship between CBP and our counterparts in Mexico also showed significant improvements. The infamous trains known as "La Bestia" with hundreds of individuals on the roof and hanging onto the sides were eliminated by Mexican authorities. Mexico's Federal Police and intelligence agencies shared critical information with CBP and other federal law enforcement agencies that was used to apprehend human traffickers. Mexico's immigration authority set up checkpoints on the border with Guatemala and the interior of Mexico and detained and returned thousands of people that had crossed into Mexico.

In summary, with over 40 years in law enforcement I recognize and appreciate that protecting a community is a long-term investment. I saw the beginnings of that investment in Central America with the aid and support of the United States and I saw the returns: significantly lower numbers of people attempting to enter the United States in FY 2015 and 2016 then in FY 2014 during the surge of UAC's and family units.

The support for a prolonged and focused effort in Central America is critical to not just those countries but to America's security and economy.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you very much.
Ambassador Noriega.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ROGER NORIEGA, VISITING
FELLOW, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE, FORMER U.S.
AMBASSADOR TO THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN
STATES AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WEST-
ERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS**

Mr. NORIEGA. Thank you very much. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member McCall, other distinguished members of the committee.

Mr. Chairman, President Trump's decision to cut U.S. aid to Central America's Northern Triangle countries apparently was a reaction to data showing over 90,000 inbound migrants in March, up dramatically from 70,000 in February.

The surge is coming from countries where the police are outgunned by gangs, where local authorities are bullied or bought off by narcotraffickers, and where the jobs are destroyed by flagging economies and costly 2-year drought.

It is not just about how many are arriving but who is arriving and that complicates enforcement measures.

For example, there is a 370 percent increase in the number of people arriving in family units in March 2019 compared to last year. The prevalence of unaccompanied minors or those applying for political asylum is higher, too.

There is also a great increase in the number arriving in larger groups. It is clear that criminal smugglers are gaming our system.

They know that if immigrants arrive in groups of 70 or more, border authorities are quickly overwhelmed. They know too that there is a backlog of 850,000 asylum claims that are pending so that those claims will take time and all of these factors increase the likelihood of would-be migrants being released into the United States.

So the surge is not just about the conditions back home. It has a lot to do with the system that they encounter when they reach our border.

Nevertheless, treating the root causes of illegal migration and attacking immigrant smuggling networks can make a difference in the challenge at the border more manageable.

Mr. Chairman, before President Trump's announcement, the United States planned to spend about \$450 million this year in the Northern Triangle countries. That sum is less than one-tenth of what taxpayers will spend this year to deploy border patrol and military units on the Southwest border.

But \$450 million is still a lot of money and since 2016 we spent about \$2.6 billion on programs in these countries. But the people keep coming.

So it is fair to ask if we are getting an adequate return on our investment or if we are improving the conditions of those people who are fleeing Central America. I believe we are.

In at-risk communities in Honduras, for example, policing and youth programs managed by USAID and the State Department's INL Bureau are credited with cutting homicide rates in half since

2011 in Honduras with dramatic improvements in the major city of San Pedro Sula.

In Guatemala, USAID has supported anti-extortion initiatives of local prosecutors. These efforts have led to dramatic increases in the number of successful prosecutions for extortion, jumping from 41 to 300 in a 3-year period.

USAID's partnership with INL supports El Salvador's security efforts including—I am sorry, leading to a 45 percent reduction in the number of homicides in targeted municipalities.

In neighbourhoods with USAID programs, 51 percent fewer residents reported incidents of extortion, blackmail, or murders. INL supports Operation Regional Shield, which has led to the arrests of nearly 4,000 gang members in the United States and in the region, produced charges against nearly 300 gang members in Guatemala, for example, and helped dismantle gang cliques in El Salvador.

USAID also addresses underlying economic instability due to USAID programs supporting agriculture and natural resources management. Impoverished rural areas in Guatemala and elsewhere have seen more jobs and higher salaries.

In El Salvador, USAID programs help micro, small, and medium enterprises create more jobs and increase productivity.

Mr. Chairman, the American people should know that these USAID dollars do not go to foreign governments. They support programs that are earmarked by this Congress, monitored by this committee, and designed and implemented by State Department and USAID professionals on the front lines in these countries.

Congress has a pivotal role playing—to play in ensuring robust funding for foreign assistance programs that serve our national security interests. It is also not just about aid.

Ten years ago, the United States advocated the CAFTA—the Central American Free Trade Agreement—to secure market access and fuel long-term economic growth.

The United States promoted this free trade agreement with the promise of growing market for American exports and mutually beneficial investment opportunities.

However, it is fair to say that the Northern Triangle countries are less competitive than they were before NAFTA. We have to do better. U.S. stakeholders should work to restore a broad bipartisan consensus behind free market policies, representative democracy, and the rule of law as the engines of growth in Central America.

Mr. Chairman, much of the damage that we see to the institutions in Central America is driven by narco-trafficking. It is fuelled by demand for illicit narcotics in this country.

I do not think there is a leader in the region who would not trade all of our aid dollars for a reduction in the demand for illicit drugs that decimates their institutions and undermines their ability to grow as good partners with the United States.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Noriega follows:]



Statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs
On "The Importance of US Assistance to Central America"

Treating the Root Causes of Illegal Immigration

US Programs and Partnerships in Central America

Ambassador Roger F. Noriega *(retired)*

Visiting Fellow, American Enterprise Institute

April 10, 2019

President Donald Trump has sounded the alarm about porous US borders since before his election in 2016. On February 15th he proclaimed a “national emergency” reportedly to apportion more funds to build a wall on the southwest border.¹ Nevertheless, in recent months, Central Americans continue to reach the border in increasing numbers, intent on crossing into the United States illegally and/or hoping to petition for political asylum here.

According to a senior State Department official I consulted last week, President Trump’s abrupt announcement regarding aid programs² apparently followed a briefing on data showing 100,000 in-bound migrants in March, increased dramatically from 70,000 in February. In a series of impromptu declarations in social media on April 6th, the President also threatened to close ports of entry on the US-Mexico border until Mexican authorities addressed this “surge of illegal migrants”:

We have redeployed 750 agents at the Southern Border’s specific Ports of Entry in order to help with the large scale surge of illegal migrants trying to make their way into the United States. This will cause traffic & commercial delays until such time as Mexico is able to use.... It’s powerful common sense Immigration Laws to stop illegals from coming through Mexico in the US, and removing them back to their country of origin.... Until Mexico cleans up this ridiculous & massive migration, we will be focusing on Border Security, not Ports of Entry.... (sic)³

The continuing influx of would-be immigrants comes despite five years of substantial increases in US aid, initiated under the Obama administration, to the so-called Northern Triangle countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras).

Since the Alliance for Prosperity was launched in 2015, US and Central American officials have intensified cooperation on broad-based development and enforcement programs aimed at abating the flow of illegal migrants from the Northern Triangle.⁴ Between 2015 and 2018, the United States invested about \$2.6 billion in related activities.⁵ Just last month, outgoing Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen M. Nielson signed a “memorandum of cooperation”—deemed “the first ever multilateral compact on border security”—to fortify these regional efforts.⁶

The Problem

Desperate conditions in these countries motivate thousands to put their lives in the hands of so-called coyotes to make the dangerous trek north. These conditions include the lack of personal security in countries where the police are outgunned by gangs, the lack of stability where local authorities are bullied or bought off by narcotraffickers, and the lack of hope where jobs are destroyed by flagging economies and a two-year drought.

Mix of Families, Minors, and Asylum Claims. Statistics released in early March by the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) noted a dramatic rise in the number of immigrants arriving as “Family Unit Aliens (FMUA)” as “a new and growing challenge.” “This fiscal year to date, CBP has seen a more than 300 percent increase in the number of family units

apprehended compared to the same time period in fiscal year 2018," an agency statement said. "Today, family units and unaccompanied alien children (UAC) make up 60 percent of apprehension." Moreover, CBP reported a fivefold increase compared to 2018 in the number of "large groups," of 100 persons or more, being interdicted along the border.

This combination of large groups, family units, unaccompanied minors, and asylum claims appears designed to overwhelm authorities' ability to process a large number of aliens with unique characteristics and legal requirements—necessitating the release of an increasing number of illegal crossers pending deportation or asylum hearings.

"Overall, apprehensions are still below prior peaks in late 1990s and early 2000s, but [they] have steeply increased in only a few months to levels not seen in years," according to April 4 Senate testimony of Andrew Selee, president of the Migration Policy Institute. "There were 66,450 Southwest border apprehensions in February—the highest monthly total in the past nine years—and they are expected to reach nearly 100,000 in March. . . . While the overall numbers are lower than they used to be at the height of previous migration waves, this mix presents a more complex picture to address in policy terms."⁷

Criminal Smugglers. It appears that criminal migrant-smuggling organizations are exploiting US border enforcement protocols and a backlog in processing 850,000 pending political asylum cases.⁸ Sophisticated smuggling groups know how US border authorities process families, unaccompanied minors, or asylum claimants. They know, too, that migrants who are encountered at the US border as part of a large group are more likely to be released into US territory pending processing.

US border enforcement authorities are confronting systemic problems that are going to get worse before they get better. To get ahead of this problem, the United States needs sound programs and reliable partnerships.

Solutions: Programs and Partnerships to Promote Economic Opportunity and Security

US Aid Programs. Treating the root causes of illegal migration and attacking immigrant smuggling networks make the challenge at the border more manageable. Before President Trump's announcement, the United States planned to spend about \$450 million this year on such programs in the Northern Triangle countries. *That sum is less than one-tenth what taxpayers will spend this year to deploy Border Patrol and military units on the southwest border.*⁹

US assistance programs to the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras address a wide range of "push factors" that lead individuals to migrate to the United States. These programs combat insecurity, governance issues, and economic drivers of illegal migration by leveraging best practices and public-private partnerships to ensure maximum impact.

On the issue of security, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the State Department support programs that address crime, violence, and the rule of law. These programs include training and support for police, which are vital to efforts to professionalize the police forces in these countries. Other programs work to support anti-crime initiatives and prevent at-risk youth from falling into the traps of gang membership by offering professional development and community services.

In at-risk communities in Honduras, policing and youth programs managed by USAID and the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) are credited with reducing homicide rates by as much as 73 percent between 2013 and 2016.¹⁰ In Guatemala, USAID has supported the critically important anti-extortion initiatives of local prosecutors. These efforts led to a dramatic increase in successful prosecutions for extortion, jumping from 41 to 293 from 2015 to 2017.¹¹

USAID's partnership with INL supports El Salvador's security efforts and "integrate[s] law enforcement efforts with community-level prevention programs and the creation of safe spaces within schools and public area." Such efforts led to a 45 percent reduction in homicides in the targeted municipalities.¹²

These and several other USAID programs have a dramatic impact on citizen security, a major factor in migration and regional stability. In neighborhoods with a USAID presence, 51 percent fewer residents reported being aware of incidents of extortion, blackmail, or murders compared to similar neighborhoods without such a presence.¹³

USAID also works to address underlying economic instability that leads many to decide to migrate. Due to USAID programs supporting agriculture and natural resources management, impoverished rural areas in Guatemala and elsewhere have seen more jobs and higher salaries.¹⁴ In El Salvador, USAID programs help provide business development services to help micro, small, and medium enterprises create more jobs and increase productivity.¹⁵

US assistance programs also have targeted the issue of governance and corruption throughout the region by working with attorneys general and civil society to increase transparency and citizen accountability.¹⁶ Such initiatives have helped bring about prosecutions against current and former officials responsible for graft, fraud, and other crimes that undermine political and economic stability in the Northern Triangle.

The American people should know that the tax dollars spent in Central America do not go to foreign governments. They support programs earmarked by this Congress, monitored by this committee, and designed and implemented by State Department and USAID teams tackling the problems they find on the front lines in these countries.

US assistance has produced tangible results. For example, in El Salvador, US funding bolsters the government's national security plan (*Plan El Salvador Seguro*) focusing on the country's 50 most dangerous communities, *which also are the source of significant migration*. Homicides and all other major violent crimes have dropped over three

consecutive years in these communities—amounting to a 55 percent decrease. These major crime statistics are projected to drop another 20 percent this year. Such “place-based” programs in El Salvador—designed to address the unique characteristics of a particular country—have significantly reduced illegal migration from that country.

The State Department’s INL Bureau helps fund an anti-gang unit led by the agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Salvadoran counterparts. According to a senior U.S. diplomat, virtually every case against MS-13 relies on the Salvadoran unit for leads or investigative help. INL-supported “Operation Regional Shield,” consisting of U.S. federal law enforcement officers and counterparts from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, coordinates regional efforts against gang members, leading to the arrest of 3,800 gang members in the United States and in the region, charges against nearly 300 gang members in Guatemala, and the dismantling of eight MS-13 and Barrio 18 “cliques” in El Salvador.¹⁷

USAID reports a 54 percent drop in homicide rates and a 70 percent reduction in kidnappings in communities served by its programs in Central America. At least before the recent surge, there were 68 percent fewer migration rates from urban areas in Central America targeted by US programs.

Arguably, addressing the root causes of illegal migration is a better investment than treating the symptoms at our border. And the diplomats and development professionals managing these programs are always looking to work better and smarter. (It is worth noting that, even before the president’s statement last week, US embassies in these countries were facing imminent staff cuts because of draconian spending reductions planned for fiscal year 2019.)

Congress has a pivotal role to play in ensuring *robust funding for foreign assistance programs that serve our national security interests*—particularly when such programs address the root causes of illegal immigration that the president agrees is a major concern.

Partnerships. The governments of the Northern Triangle are not perfect, but they are neighbors and partners on many issues. The United States needs them to be ready and willing to cooperate as the first line of defense against deadly threats on the US border—including a host of other issues that are US foreign policy priorities. That is why Congress and the president agreed to provide this funding in the first place. Furthermore, unilaterally terminating such programs—and doing so publicly and summarily—undermines the confidence among partners and exposes friendly foreign leaders to criticism at home.

Friends of Central America should use this recent debate over US aid as a reminder that *the subregion should be an economic partner that pulls its own weight*. Ten years ago, the United States advocated the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) to secure market access and fuel long-term economic growth. The United States promoted this trade arrangement with the promise of a growing market for American exports and mutually beneficial investment opportunities. Since then, statist policies, political instability, and crime have scuttled these plans—corrupting Central America’s institutions,

destabilizing their economies, and distracting the private sector from an agenda of liberalizing reforms. Arguably, the Northern Triangle countries are *less competitive* than they were before CAFTA.¹⁸

The track record of each Northern Triangle country, as measured by the Heritage Foundation's 2019 Index of Economic Freedom,¹⁹ leaves much room for improvement.

El Salvador. El Salvador's economic freedom score is 61.8, marking it as "moderately free" overall and the 84th freest economy in the world. This overall score represents a decrease of 1.4 points from 2018's rankings. Within the Americas, El Salvador is ranked 17th among the 32 countries. While El Salvador did register improvements in its labor freedom in 2019, the statism of leftist President Salvador Sánchez Cerén has curtailed its economic freedom. There are concerns that the need to reduce the fiscal deficit will lead to tax increases.

Property rights are inconsistently enforced in El Salvador, and the judicial system is slow and riddled with corruption. Impunity and narco-related corruption have undermined trust in political institutions. El Salvador lacks a skilled workforce and compounds the problem with inefficient labor market flexibility. The leftist FMLN governments have favored government-imposed price controls on many goods and services, driving up the fiscal deficit in 2018. Cronyism and corruption mean that monopolies control much of the economy. For instance, four private banks account for over 70 percent of El Salvador's total assets. One drawback for El Salvador continues to be the role that remittances play: They account for nearly one-fifth of the country's GDP.

El Salvador's GDP (PPP) in 2018 was \$57 billion. It had 2.4 percent annual growth in 2018 and 2.1 percent five-year compound annual growth. Roughly \$792 million in foreign direct investment flowed into El Salvador in 2018. According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), two-way trade in goods and services with El Salvador totaled \$5.5 billion in 2017 (the latest year for which data are available).

Guatemala. Guatemala's economic freedom score is 62.6, earning a designation as "moderately free" and making it the 77th freest economy in the world. This overall score represents a decrease of 0.8 points from 2018's rankings. Within the Americas, Guatemala is ranked 16 out of 32 countries. Although Guatemala did register improvements in 2019 in its fiscal health and government spending, it declined in both trade and business freedom, which dragged down its overall score. Generally, Guatemala suffers from a low-skilled workforce, violence related to narcotrafficking, and widespread corruption, all of which can hinder economic development. (Guatemala's president, Jimmy Morales, has questioned the effectiveness of the UN International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), and the country's civil society and international partners are pressing him for an accountable mechanism to fight corruption.)

According to the Heritage Foundation's 2019 *Index of Economic Freedom*, bureaucratic hurdles to starting a business and obtaining the necessary permits force many entrepreneurs to operate in the informal sector. Other problems related to capital and the availability of long-term financing also affect the scalability of Guatemala's small and

medium enterprises. Guatemala has few foreign banks; but domestic banks, too, face inefficient judicial and regulatory systems that discourage investment. Only 45 percent of adult Guatemalans have an account with a formal banking institution, for instance.

Guatemala's GDP (PPP) in 2018 was \$137.8 billion. It had 2.8 percent annual growth in 2018 and 3.6 percent five-year compound annual growth from 2013 to 2018. In 2018, \$1.1 billion dollars in foreign direct investment flowed into Guatemala. According to USTR, two-way trade in goods and services with Guatemala totaled \$10.9 billion in 2017 (the latest year for which data are available).

Honduras. Honduras' economic freedom score is 60.2, barely retaining a place in the "moderately free" category and the 93rd freest economy in the world.²⁰ This overall score represents a decrease of 0.4 points from 2018's rankings. Within the Americas, Honduras is ranked 20th out of 32 countries. Although Honduras did experience reductions in government spending and its fiscal health, downgrades in trade freedom, labor freedom, and its rule of law scores outweighed these modest gains. Domestic political instability and weak property rights continue to stymie economic growth.

Honduras has one of the world's highest murder rates, which, when paired with weak property rights enforcement, makes extortion by violent transnational gangs rampant. Many Hondurans choose to forgo burdensome regulations on entrepreneurship and business regulation—including the need to pay bribes—and elect to operate in informality. The government maintains price controls on basic goods—e.g., fuel, water, telecommunications, and ports—and has a habit of imposing temporary price controls on other goods on short notice.

Honduras' GDP (PPP) in 2018 was \$46.2 billion. It had 4.8 percent annual growth in 2018 and 3.6 percent five-year compound annual growth. Approximately \$1.2 billion in foreign direct investment flowed into Honduras in 2018. According to USTR, two-way trade in goods and services with Honduras totaled \$9.7 billion in 2017 (the latest year for which data are available).

Transnational Organized Crime. Combating transnational organized crime—including narcotrafficking and human smuggling—is a shared responsibility, because much of the violence and criminality destabilizing countries in the Northern Triangle and beyond are the direct result of the illicit drug trade fueled by US demand for cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and other illegal substances. The corruption and violence sown by transnational criminal organizations and affiliated street gangs have overwhelmed the relatively weak institutions of government in Central America and raised the obstacles to economic growth.

Nicaragua. The stability of Central America is impacted directly by deteriorating conditions in neighboring Nicaragua. The repressive and illegitimate Ortega-Murillo regime clings to power at a high cost to the Nicaraguan economy. Nicaraguans fleeing deadly repression and economic destruction have begun to join caravans toward the United States, as well as southward toward Costa Rica and Panama. By September 2018, Costa Rica, a country with a Nicaraguan emigré community of half-million, had already received around 25,000 new

asylum applications from Nicaraguans.²¹ The destabilizing conditions that have prompted citizens from the Northern Triangle to migrate have taken root in Nicaragua: poor economic growth, corruption, and violence.²²

Mexico. Mexico is not a direct topic of this hearing, but it is important to mention that partner because of the central role that it plays in stemming the rising tide of Central American immigration. Before the assumption of power by that country's new leftist president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known universally by his initials, AMLO), it was expected that President Trump's frequent criticism of Mexico would elicit a reciprocal response from his nationalist counterpart. However, since AMLO took office four months ago, his government has cooperated closely to allow claimants of political asylum to remain in Mexico while their cases are considered.²³

Beginning in late 2018, Mexico also has offered residency and work permits to tens of thousands of Central American "refugees."²⁴ In addition, Mexican authorities interdict and deport even more Central Americans than their US counterparts. Clearly, these are constructive measures that have helped manage the immigration challenge. President Trump appears to have recognized Mexico's helpful role, and perhaps took stock of the staggering costs to the U.S. economy, when he withdrew his threat to close the border.

An extremely important development that has been barely noticed is AMLO's declaration of an end to the unpopular and bloody "war on drugs" that was waged by his two predecessors.²⁵ Although he has spoken against corruption and taken some steps to modernize Mexico's security forces, drug seizures since his December 1 inauguration have plummeted dramatically. During the campaign AMLO spoke openly of considering an amnesty for drug traffickers. If AMLO succeeds in letting down his country's guard to drug traffickers, the cartels' ability to operate with impunity will allow them to grow more powerful and dangerous to the security of Mexico's southern and northern neighbors.

As marijuana is legalized or decriminalized in the United States, Mexican drug trafficking organizations are focusing on deadlier products. For example, since 2013, the production of heroin in Mexico has tripled, including the deadlier variety of white heroin. The availability of fentanyl, which is 30 to 50 times more potent than heroin, has increased dramatically in the past five years, with much of the supply originating in China and transiting Mexico. Such opioids are more available than ever, already causing about 70,000 deaths annually in the United States.

The threat posed by Mexico's drug traffickers is greater than ever—in the quality and quantity of the deadly products; the depth, breadth, and wealth of the networks that deliver them; and the inability or unwillingness of governments to confront the threat effectively.

Conclusion

US stakeholders should work to restore a broad bipartisan consensus behind free market policies, representative democracy, and the rule of law as the engines of growth in Central

America. The toughest task is defeating the deadly Ortega-Murillo regime in Nicaragua. And, fighting corruption and restoring public confidence in democratic institutions in Guatemala and Honduras will be challenging as well.

The United States should make it a foreign policy priority to rescue Central America from organized crime networks—using financial sanctions, law enforcement cooperation, security assistance, and, yes, development programs to defend democracy, the rule of law, and honest commerce. The challenges are daunting, but the potential benefits—for the United States and millions of Central American neighbors—are extraordinary.

Notes

¹ "Presidential Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Southern Border of the United States," The White House, February 15, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-declaring-national-emergency-concerning-southern-border-united-states/>.

² "Trump Plans to Cut US Aid to 3 Central American Countries in Fight Over US-bound Migrants," *The Washington Post*, by Mary Beth Sheridan and Kevin Sieff, March 30, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/trump-plans-us-aid-cut-to-3-central-american-countries-as-fight-widens-over-us-bound-migrants/2019/03/30/d6814b42-52ff-11e9-bdb7-44f948cc0605_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.373c97956fd2.

³ Quint Forgy, "Trump warns of 'traffic' and 'commercial' delays at U.S.-Mexico border," *Politico*, April 6, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/04/06/trump-mexico-border-immigration-1260171>.

⁴ "FACT SHEET: Support for the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle," White House Fact Sheet, March 3, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/03/fact-sheet-support-alliance-prosperity-northern-triangle>.

⁵ "US Strategy for Central America," US Department of State website, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/p/wha/rt/strat/>.

⁶ "Secretary Nielsen Signs Historic Regional Compact with Central America to Stem Irregular Migration at the Source, Confront US Border Crisis," US Department of Homeland Security News Release, March 28, 2019, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2019/03/28/secretary-nielsen-signs-historic-regional-compact-central-america-stem-irregular>.

⁷ Andrew Selee, "Policy Options for Responding to Changing Migration Flows at the Southwest Border," testimony before the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, April 4, 2019, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Testimony-Selee-2019-04-04.pdf>.

⁸ One possible solution to work around the asylum logjam, suggested by the Migration Policy Institute's Andrew Selee, is to empower US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) asylum officers to adjudicate asylum claims presented at the border. That procedural measure would honor the US commitment to hear asylum claims without adding to the workload of the immigration courts or having to release claimants into US territory pending an asylum decision.

⁹ The budget of the Border Patrol was approximately \$4.3 billion in fiscal year 2018. Christian Penichet-Paul, "Border Security Along the Southwest Border: Fact Sheet, National Immigration Forum," March 11, 2019, <https://immigrationforum.org/article/border-security-along-the-southwest-border-fact-sheet/>. The cost of deploying US troops on our southwest border between April 2018 and October 2019 is approximately \$1 billion. Paul Sonne, "Cost of Border Deployments Could Approach \$1 Billion by End of Fiscal Year," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/cost-of-border-deployments-could->

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¹⁰ US Global Leadership Coalition, "Central America and US Assistance," April 2019,

<https://www.usglc.org/media/2019/04/USGLC-Fact-Sheet-Central-America-04-19.pdf>.

¹¹ US Agency for International Development, "USAID/Guatemala Country Fact Sheet." February 2019,

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¹² US Agency for International Development, "Addressing the Drivers of Illegal Immigration: USAID Results in the Northern Triangle,"

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¹⁵ US Agency for International Development, "Addressing the Drivers of Illegal Immigration: USAID Results in the Northern Triangle."

¹⁶ US Agency for International Development, "Addressing the Drivers of Illegal Immigration: USAID Results in the Northern Triangle."

¹⁷ Richard H. Glenn, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, May 23, 2018,

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA07/20180523/108360/HHRG-115-FA07-Wstate-GlennR-20180523.pdf>

¹⁸ Kevin Casas-Zamora, "Central America's Triangle of Despair," Project Syndicate, November 10, 2015, www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/central-america-migration-crisis-by-kevin-casas-zamora-2015-11.

¹⁹ Summaries from the "2019 Index of Economic Freedom," by Terry Miller, Anthony B. Kim, and James M. Roberts, with Patrick Tyrrell.

²⁰ <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/honduras>

²¹ Kirk Semple, "Nicaraguan Migrants Fleeing Turmoil Test Costa Rica's Good Will," *The New York Times*, September 22, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/22/world/americas/nicaragua-migrants-costa-rica.html>.

²² Jose Miguel Cruz, "Bloody Uprising in Nicaragua Could Trigger the Next Central American Refugee Crisis," *The Conversation*, July 20, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/bloody-uprising-in-nicaragua-could-trigger-the-next-central-american-refugee-crisis-99924>.

²³ Joel Rose, "'Remain in Mexico' Immigration Policy Expands, But Slowly," National Public Radio, March 12, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/12/702597006/-remain-in-mexico-immigration-policy-expands-but-slowly>.

²⁴ Daniela Pastrana, "Mexico Opens Its Doors to Central American Migrants," Inter Press Service, January 24, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/mexico/mexico-opens-its-doors-central-american-migrants>.

²⁵ Casey Quackenbush, "'There Is Officially No More War.' Mexico's President Declares an End to the Drug War Amid Skepticism," *Time*, January 31, 2019, time.com/5517391/mexico-president-ends-drug-war/.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you. Thanks to all three of you. I will now recognize my members for 5 minutes each to ask questions, starting with myself. All time yielded is only for the purpose of questioning the witnesses.

So let me start. Ambassador Jacobson, I was struck when I read your testimony by your discussion of China and to the extent in which the Administration seems to be opening the door to the Chinese and other global powers who obviously do not share our values by cutting off U.S. assistance to the Northern Triangle countries.

As you know, Guatemala and Honduras are among the 17 countries in the world that maintain a formal diplomatic relationship with Taiwan over China.

Just last year, El Salvador broke relations with Taiwan and recognized China. I had an excellent meeting with Salvadoran President-Elect Bukele when I was in the region and, as you may know, he has suggested that he will take a fresh look at his country's policy toward China when he takes office.

I can only imagine what the president-elect and leaders in Guatemala and Honduras are thinking after President Trump announced that he would cutoff aid.

So how concerned are you that cutting off U.S. assistance to Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador will allow China to fill the void, and second, do you think Russia and other nefarious actors will also deepen their engagement with these countries as the Trump Administration disengages? And I hope it is not too late for the president to reverse his policy on this.

Ms. JACOBSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am quite concerned about the role that China plays in the hemisphere. I think what we have seen and what we saw in South America in particular during the commodities boom in an earlier decade was China was extremely engaged as a purchaser of those commodities and that fuelled growth in many of the countries in the region and there is nothing wrong with that.

So we need to distinguish between economic interaction and trade on a level playing field, which I think is critical, and involvement in infrastructure projects or the new Chinese Development Bank or other things that I think come with serious harm, potentially, to these countries and certainly could result in what our military calls becoming partners of choice, which is not something we want to see.

I am concerned about it because I think they do not bring the same values, obviously. But I am also concerned about it because I think we are leaving a vacuum through more than just our aid.

The Chinese have had the Confucius Centers to teach Chinese all over the hemisphere while we have, frankly, reduced engagement in our binational centers and in teaching English. That is a way of projecting power and gaining influence. The Chinese have also always made sure they have diplomatic representation in as many countries as possible.

You said—you talked about El Salvador changing from recognizing Taiwan. I think the recognition question is less important than do we make sure to have a robust presence diplomatically, economically, as well as in assistance and in financing so that the

countries will see us as the partner of choice, which is their preference, on the whole.

Most countries in the region would prefer to work with us. So I am concerned about that. And in general, China has been an economic partner, not a military partner. But that, too, could change.

In the case of Russia, I do have concerns they tend to focus more on places like Nicaragua and Venezuela than on the rest of Central America. But I do think that there are efforts by the Russians to, if you will, poke us in the eye in our own hemisphere that we need to be aware of.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. Kerlikowske, I think there is a misperception that U.S. assistance to the Northern Triangle only comes directly from the State Department and USAID.

And so I appreciate you outlining in your testimony the extent to which U.S. law enforcement agencies like the FBI and DEA receive funding from the State Department to operate in the region.

During our visit to El Salvador, I had the opportunity to be briefed, as did Mr. McCaul, by the FBI's transnational anti-gang task force, which trains local law enforcement and then works closely with them in investigating and taking down gang leadership structures in the U.S. and Central America.

We thought it was truly an impressive effort by the FBI and our local partners and their similar task forces in Guatemala and Honduras as well.

So these task forces are funded by the State Department and their work will come to an end if the Administration moves forward with its ill-advised plan to cutoff aid to the region.

Let me ask you this as a former police chief and head of CBP. Can you please give us a sense of what ending these anti-gang task forces will mean not only for Central America but also for communities in the United States and MS-13 in the United States as well?

So what will be the real-life impact on our constituents if we were to cutoff aid?

Mr. KERLIKOWSKE. Thank you, Chairman. I think there are several things that really come into play here. One is that people, you know, need to recognize that MS-13 has been around for well over 30 years and the beginnings of MS-13, of course, resulted—were a result of us bringing people that had been arrested, that were gang members, predominantly in Southern California to El Salvador without not even notification, let alone any assistance and, literally, dumping thousands of criminals into that country that did not have the capacity.

So it shouldn't come as a surprise that MS-13 grew rapidly there. Since that time, though, I think we have become a lot smarter. The FBI task force that you mentioned is just one component.

The ILEA—the International Law Enforcement Training Center—in El Salvador is another example where law enforcement professionals who have been vetted or approved attend that training to improve their forensics, their money laundering, their investigative skills—all of the things that help.

So it is not just that ability to identify gang members or criminals. It's also working hard to choke off the money that supplies

these gang members and when that happens we see some pretty positive results.

We also see a level of cooperation and integration of information being exchanged among law enforcement agencies at the Federal level but also that information that is communicated to us is also passed on to our counterparts at the State and local level, thereby making counties and cities especially along the border and the United States safer.

So it would be—disastrous is probably not too strong a word—to see those programs cut.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. McCaul?

Mr. McCaul. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for holding this hearing. Our trip to Latin America was very insightful at a very critical time. I mean, we do have a crisis at the border. A hundred thousand per month.

But I think it is kind of a two-front war approach, if you will. I mean, Administrator Kerlikowske, you and I worked on border patrol issues for a long time and Roberta—Ambassador—we dealt with the State Department—State and law enforcement working together. That is always kind of the key, I have always thought.

And, you know, the chairman and I had actually talked about before this trip and before the president's announcement sort of putting the Central American Regional Security Initiative on steroids.

Now, we saw Plan Colombia work. We saw Merida, you know, Ambassador Jacobson, have an impact and I do not think you can ignore the root causes of the problem.

You can be reactionary and build a wall and stop people from coming into the United States and we can have law enforcement and border patrol, which is essential.

But you also have to deal with the root cause of the problem. What is causing this phenomena? I mean, in my—when I was a Federal prosecutor and chairman of Homeland, I mean, it went from the 20-year-old male trying to smuggle drugs, maybe get a job, to these family units. What causes a family to want to leave their country and come up the long dangerous journey?

And I think a lot of it has to do with conditions—poverty, violence, gangs—causes this impact. And I think to the chairman's point, if we withdraw from the region, who's going to fill it?

China. We know El Salvador, the president said—the incoming president said the current president wanted to invite China to take two of their ports, bring their workers in, take over, and bring their 5G into El Salvador. That is a takeover.

I think this assistance, USAID—we saw at-risk youths that were targeted that could go to MS-13 get trained to find a job instead.

We saw the INL program, law enforcement. This is what—from a law enforcement guy, is most deeply disturbing is that we are going to cutoff our international law enforcement apparatus in Central America so FBI and DEA are going to be shut down.

They will not be able to conduct investigations where they have arrested and indicted MS-13. How does that make the situation better?

If we cut that—if we cut that program, cut it off at its knees, how does that make us safer as a nation? I think it makes it more dangerous as a Nation.

And I—maybe I am pontificating. But, you know, as Roberta knows, I am very passionate about Latin America. I think we ignored Latin America for a long time. We got a crisis in Venezuela. We also have a historic opportunity there as well. We got to play this one right.

But I think this decision, while it does sound appealing, you are sending all these people—just cutoff foreign assistance. I think as a policymaker we have to look at what the consequences will be. What is in reality going to happen if we cut all foreign assistance off to these countries?

So I leave that to—as a question, I guess, to the three of you, if you would not mind responding to that.

Ms. JACOBSON. Ranking Member McCaul, thank you, and I think you and I have worked together on this issue for quite a long time in Mexico, in Central America, and, frankly, Gil Kerlikowske was one of the finest public servants I have worked with. We really were a team when we worked on these issues.

And since I worked for Roger I know that we worked on these very same issues as well across the aisle as well as across administrations.

You have—one of the things that really worries me about reduction of aid is you have governments in these countries of varying qualities for partnership and I am the first to admit that.

There are deep and abiding corruption issues. But with our aid comes great pressure to improve transparency and make sure that government resources are spent on what they should be and go to the people and less gets siphoned off not of our aid money because we are careful with that, but of their own resources.

We also work with the private sector and one of the most successful things that we have done over the last couple of years is create matching programs where the local private sector puts in at least one dollar for every dollar the U.S. Government puts in.

What happens to those programs. They won't sustain them. The local private sectors will not sustain those programs without our government being part of them. Those have been critical as well.

So the multiplier effect of a cutoff of aid because of the local governments not doing what they should with the money and the local private sector not partnering with us is really quite dramatic.

Mr. NORIEGA. May I jump in for 30 seconds on this score and address several of the issues?

The Chinese could replace all of this aid with the stroke of a pen and they will send that message to the leaders in the region that they are—they are their partners.

The Chinese have a very mercantile vision of the world—how they do business. They will not, for example, when they are investing to the extent they do in a region have the same commitment we have in terms of environment or workers' rights—labor rights that are instilled in the CAFTA agreement.

They will not certainly share our interests and to inculcate a free market private sector-led economy, and we talk about these countries now as recipients of aid as if they were mendicant nations.

But in point of fact, 10 years ago we were talking about them as economic partners, a natural market for our goods—a place where our companies could invest and make a fair return on that investment, build a safer neighborhood as part of an economic community.

We have lost that in large measure because of the institutions of Central America being destroyed by transnational organized crime, caught in a vice between Mexico where they were making at a certain point effective efforts against drug trafficking, and Colombia in Plan Colombia, which pushed these transnational organized crime groups—these dark trafficking groups into fertile territory where these small—relatively small countries did not have the capacity to resist, do not have the strong democratic institutions, do not have the strong democratic institutions, do not have the accountability and the commitment to the rule of law to fend off this threat.

And so the demand for illegal drugs from this country has destroyed those countries and we have a moral responsibility, I believe, to help them pull out of the—pull out of the dive caused by that institutional destruction.

We should also think about the—what we can do to restore the idea of a productive economy. Not just deal with them as these poor desperate countries that need our help, but insist that they reform their economies, insist that they deal with corruption, insist that they deal with the ability of companies to invest or trade and do so as a good partner.

The announcement that we were summarily and arbitrarily cutting off aid does not help any to these leaders be a friend of the United States. It embarrasses them before their own people. It undermines the confidence that we need to have as partners.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Kerlikowske?

Mr. KERLIKOWSKE. Just one quick comment. I would also tell you that although our demand for drugs is certainly a driver, every one of these countries has a drug problem within the countries and they have recognized that, whether it is Mexico under the former first lady, Margarita Zavala, and many other countries.

So the problem of the drug trafficking does not exist just here and fund the narcotraffickers. They also have their own drug issues and they need to be addressed and we can help them because in many ways we have made some progress on our own demand.

Mr. MCCAUL. Can I just ask you, you as a CBP guy and we have known each other for a long time, what—if we cutoff INL—the International Law Enforcement—if we cutoff the FBI and DEA's operations in Central America to investigate, arrest, and indict MS-13, I mean, this is the—we can talk about USAID but the INL piece under State, what are the consequences of that?

Mr. KERLIKOWSKE. So all of these—all of these U.S. law enforcement boots on the ground in those countries and the liaisons are covered under, one, the auspices of the State Department and as a result of that funding.

I do not think there is any of the boots on the ground, those working law enforcement professionals that are in there and doing that work—I do not think a single one would tell you that it is not worthwhile, that they haven't seen progress made and that the

work they're doing there not only improves the safety and security in that country, it really makes our own cities and counties safer.

Mr. McCAUL. And the chairman and I met with them and saw it firsthand, and I yield back.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. McCaul.

Mr. Sires, the chairman of our Western Hemisphere Subcommittee.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, Mr. McCaul. First, let me say I commend the ranking member for recognizing the problem of the cutting of the funds.

I represent a district that is about 55 to 60 percent Hispanic. A lot of those Hispanics are from the Northern Triangle.

I get firsthand information on what is going on in these countries and what we have here today is the result of this country not paying attention to this region for many, many administrations.

I listened to you very closely, Mr. Kerlikowske, because you are the first one that has come to this committee and recognized the fact that for about 10 years or 11 years we were dumping these MS-13 members in these countries and we were not even notifying the countries that these people were members of a gang and the reason they were there—we were just dumping them.

So what we have today here is a result of our policies over so many years and now we have a situation where they want to cut the aid, in my view, for a political purpose to continue stirring this whole idea about immigrants.

Ambassador, I was happy to hear that you mentioned Russia in this area, how they want to stir up. I believe—and I told this to the secretary of State that part of the problem in Venezuela, part of the problem in Nicaragua, part of this problem is in an effort to destabilize our back yard. It is an effort to destabilize the Western Hemisphere, because this does not happen in a vacuum.

This is all well thought out, in my view, and this idea that we react by cutting some of the best programs that are most effective—I was there last year. I was there with Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who was a promoter of these programs, and we saw it first hand. We went from one program to the other and they were very effective.

But to have a situation now where you are going to just say, no more money—that this is going to solve this problem, it is just going to get worse, because I talk to people day in and day out in my district in my office about the children that are afraid—that they have a father or they have a mother taking care of a child in El Salvador or in Guatemala or in Honduras, and they have no option. No option whatsoever, because it is run by thugs.

These districts—these barrios are run by thugs. So when they take off—when somebody gives them some money to take off to come to America, they see a savings for their families.

So, you know, I do not understand where this policy is coming from. It is just myopic. It is just putting blinders on. And you know what? We are going to pay the price years down the line because we are paying the price now of our policies years ago where we did not focus on what's going on. And in terms of China, they just see an opportunity.

I just read an article where the Chinese bought a piece of property in Panama where they want to become the Amazon of the Western Hemisphere. I read another article on what they did to Ecuador. Eighty percent of the oil in Ecuador that is exported is taken by the Chinese at a lower price and they sell it in the market because of the deal that they cut to build all these dams and all these things.

They built a dam in Ecuador that has cracks in it. They built it next to a volcano. I mean, it is just incredible the things that go on there and we are letting the Chinese go in.

I had a dinner with one of the presidents of a university in Colombia. He tells me that in his university the second most foreign language that is studied is Mandarin. Obviously, English is still the first.

So we have to wake up because before it is over—before we know it, it is going to get worse, and these policies of, you know, beating up on these people, they are a victim, you know.

I came to America because it was the land of the free. I came at the age of 11, and it has always been in the mind of my parents, my relatives, everything else that we are still the country of the free and the country of opportunity.

So I do not know where this policy is going. I hated to see it being so politicized just because you want to buildup your base and you want you build your support and there's an election coming up.

We just better wake up, and I really do not have a question. I have another meeting. And I thank you for being here. Always nice to see a Jersey girl come before us, you know, and I apologize if I am, you know, too strong.

So do you want to say anything, Ambassador?

Ms. JACOBSON. Thank you. The only thing I would say is I do agree that one of the things we did, all of us that served in government or before, the wars ended in Central America and we all saw a peace dividend and we did not think as much as we needed to about young men with weapons in Central America and no jobs to replace that, and we closed down missions and we reduced programs.

And Roger is absolutely right. You know, just like the drug problem has supply and demand issues, so does migration. Yes, migrants are coming. They are also being manipulated by people who tell them they can get in even if they can't, and the smuggling has to be stopped.

But you got to work on both ends of this problem. It is not going to end unless we work on the root causes not sustainably.

Mr. SIRES. Ambassador?

Mr. NORIEGA. I know your time has gone over.

Mr. SIRES. That is all right.

Mr. NORIEGA. But just make one comment.

Mr. SIRES. The chairman is a friend of mine.

Mr. NORIEGA. Mr. Chairman, I am not surprised to see the—I am not surprised to see the remarkable bipartisan commitment to these programs, a recognition by people who understand these programs, who visit and see for themselves the benefits.

I would hope that you would work together to appeal to Secretary of State Pompeo and others—Vice President Pence, who has

paid some attention to the region—that the president needs to do—to reconsider.

We certainly can't just scrap these programs for the year and then start the next fiscal year. It is an absolutely unmanageable situation. Our diplomats there without the tools they need to do their job—it is an unmanageable situation.

So I would hope that you could communicate with these people directly in a bipartisan way, the highest levels, both House and Senate, with the president to, you know, press upon them the need to reconsider his decision.

Chairman ENGEL. Well, good advice. Thank you.

Mr. Chabot?

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This is a very interesting hearing and I agree, and I've listened closely to comments on both sides of the aisle here and I think—for what they're worth, I think you are all right. I think the witnesses are all right here, too. This is extremely frustrating. I think it is for the president as well—one of these on the one hand, on the other hand things.

I think the president realizes that we have sent a lot of foreign down to a number of these countries, particularly in Central America, and there is a—more or less supposed to be an agreement that the money goes down there, it goes to improve conditions there, help law enforcement actually enforce their laws.

It should assist us in reducing illegal immigration, which is one of the top promises that the president has made to actually do something about it. Others have talked about it.

He is really trying to do something about it and I think that—I think that is commendable that the president is trying to do something.

However, the money apparently either hasn't been effectively utilized. The caravans are still happening and I think the president thinks that we are being, you know, used as a sucker in this thing.

You know, it should be a cooperative effort. There should be good faith. When we send them money it should be being put to good use and I think the president's mind set is more—at this point, he's frustrated. It's kind of tough love, and I understand that.

I do tend to think that we ought to continue to work with these nations to assist them in improving the conditions that cause parents to want to send their young people up here to get away from the cartels and the drug gangs where it is my understanding that literally their lives are threatened and oftentimes they are physically harmed or killed if they do not cooperate with the drug gangs.

And so it is understandable that they would want to get their kids out of—away from that sort of thing. On the other hand, how long does this go on where these countries do not cooperate in, for example, stopping the cartels? There ought to be—excuse me, stopping the caravans?

There ought to be some mechanism that we can work on with them to at least cease these major caravans from continuing to come to our southern border and Mexico has been sometimes somewhat cooperative but mostly not cooperative. They could stop by

stopping the caravans from entering into their southern border. But they haven't been particularly helpful there.

But it is very frustrating. I have been to Guatemala and Honduras and talked to various groups there and in the very near future I am going to be in El Salvador and Nicaragua also and talk to people down there on the ground.

But it is frustrating and I—again, I completely understand the president's mind set here and I sympathize with it. I do not necessarily agree with it 100 percent. I do not think I would say, let us cut it off altogether right now. But I am getting closer and closer to that if these countries do not cooperate.

So in espousing that frustration, I see some nodding of heads on the panel there. So I will just open it up and ask you to comment in any way that you see fit.

Ambassador Noriega, do you want to go first?

Mr. NORIEGA. Yes. Before you came in, I made the point that, obviously, the president is reacting to the fact that the number had surged to, roughly, 100,000 in March on the Southwest border up from 70,000 and it is a fact that the smugglers are gaming our system.

And so but the decision to cutoff aid does not hit the smugglers. Matter of fact, some of our aid is to dismantle the smuggling operations. A lot of what we do in terms of law enforcement and anti-gang work is precisely to go after the smuggling organizations.

And so there's another issue and that is on the asylum claims. You know, every two or 3 months I, on a pro bono basis, do testimony before judges on asylum cases.

Some are better than others, quite frankly, but a good number of these people clearly do not have a well-founded fear of persecution and they are here for economic reasons.

But they understand that because we have such a backlog in the handling of the asylum cases that if they do an asylum claim by law we just sort of let them go and they're asked to call back.

Now, if you can reduce the amount of time for having a hearing, you have a better chance of them showing up and then you deport the people who are ineligible.

One of the recommendations that the Migration Policy Institute Andrew Selee has made is allowing CIS—Immigration Services— asylum officers to make those determinations so we would reduce the backlog and you get an immediate response and you start to turn these people back.

You know, we are not hard-hearted people by any means. But we have to be sort of hard-headed when you think of millions more Central Americans who are ready to pay \$5,000 a person. They are moving as a family unit to get on a bus to come here because the smugglers have commercialized the caravans.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, my time has expired. But if I could just say we absolutely have to in a bipartisan manner change this ridiculous asylum policy that we have now where people can come up.

They are told by the cartels the magic words to say. They say it, then they're cited to court, you know, a year, 2 years down the road. They disappear into the population, never come back for their

hearing and then they're just here. We have to do something about that.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Chabot.

Now I am going to call on Mr. Deutch. But we have had votes on the floor so we could either finish before or we could come back, whatever—

Mr. DEUTCH. I will be quick.

Chairman ENGEL. OK.

Mr. DEUTCH. I will dispense with the statement I was going to make and just ask—Mr. Chabot raises, I think, fairly succinctly the way this argument is playing out—that we are just—the president is just administering some tough love—that we are tired of being played the sucker.

To the points that you made earlier, what would your message be? What would leadership look like here that recognizes that we are not cutting off aid that's going to governments, as you have all pointed out.

We are cutting off aid that actually benefits us and our security and improves the lives of people on the ground. What should be done, aside from not cutting off the aid? What would leadership look like in the region?

What would it look like if the president said, I need everyone around the table who can make some commitment to help address this situation? Who would be at the table and what should be discussed?

Ms. JACOBSON. Well, Congressman, I think one of the most important things is they need to discuss governance and they need to make commitments to governance, which is one of the things we demand of those leaders in the region, right, and that means they need to focus on greater tax—income from tax evasion so they have funds to support their security forces.

They need to work with us on these specialized units which help both get rid of and dismantle the smuggling operations and help us fight gangs and narcotics trafficking.

We need to focus on the things that work best at both ends and we need to do it in such a way that it is transparent to the people in their countries and there is no graft, which we do well where we do it.

We also need to work with the private sectors in those countries, which have been lamentably slow in committing to being good citizens on security issues. When President Uribe in Colombia started with Plan Colombia, he told his private sector, you have to pay to make the country safe—you who have funds need to pay your taxes and be part of it.

We haven't seen that in Central America. There was one effort in Honduras.

The other thing I just want to mention is I am sorry to have to say this but these countries cannot stop people from leaving whether in caravans or not. What that looks like is a Berlin Wall and I do not think that is what we are asking them to do.

It is people's right to leave their country whether we like it or not. Mexico just recently announced they are going to put more people at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the narrowest point. Those are the kinds of things we need to see.

Mr. DEUTCH. And if—and if we—for our other panellists, if we want to have those kinds of discussions which would actually be fruitful and would help us address this, is it—is it easier or harder for us to convene those meetings when we are cutting off aid and when we are talking about ending assistance altogether and closing our border?

Mr. Kerlikowske?

Mr. KERLIKOWSKA. I would certainly tell you that during my time, we saw incredible success with Mexico. INAMI, which is their immigration system, and they do not have enforcement powers—they do not carry firearms, et cetera, yet they put huge numbers of resources on the border with Guatemala.

Every one of us I think can remember those pictures of the trains, la bestia, with thousands of people hanging on the sides and the roofs. They ended that. They stopped that.

They did a variety of important work in cooperation and they exchanged a lot of good information and, frankly, treating those individuals in the higher levels of government with the greatest courtesy and respect I think went a long way to doing diplomacy and then creating a better system.

Ms. JACOBSON. So the short answer is harder.

Mr. DEUTCH. Harder. And just the last thing I would say, I want to just—I can't let Mr. Chabot's comments about asylum seekers simply sent out there.

The idea that the people who are willing risk their lives to travel to our country, who have a right to claim asylum for fear of persecution in their own country is to suggest that somehow all of them are coming here because they have been—they have been tricked or because they are somehow being used is not only unfair to them and their families and the risks that they are taking to be here but it actually challenges the very nation of the kind of country that we have and want to have, and I am so grateful for the service that all three of you have provided and for your testimony today.

Chairman ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Deutch.

We are getting down to the bottom so I am going to call on Mr. Yoho for 2 minutes and then Mr. Cicilline for 2 minutes, and we'll try to make it before the votes are on.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ENGEL. We do not have to have them come back. We will have you come another time. Thank you.

Mr. YOHO. I would love for you to come back, but I understand.

Ambassador, Jacobson, you were saying how the root cause of migration—and I think we know this—lack of jobs, violence, and everything goes on.

I am a veterinarian and what we do is we look at a sick animal, we do a diagnostic and then we formulate a treatment plan. We treat it, but if the treatment does not work, we have got to change the treatment or reassess the situation.

And since 2008 to 2018, we have put \$5.75 billion into Central America—a minimum of that—and then we have put \$2 trillion on the War on Drugs since it started, \$2 billion in Mexico alone. Yet, Mexico is supplying 93 percent of the heroin coming into the United States. Mexico is.

You can't do that without government involvement and, of course, we saw the allegations that President Pena was bribed \$100 million by El Chapo.

You can't have legitimate—the narcotrafficking has become a legitimized business and it has been accepted and what they have done is they have run their money to legal businesses that is funnelled—they are funnelling this illegal money that is coming here.

And so I am not opposed to what President Trump is proposing because what we have done is not working. And so without being able to go into this further, I think we need to look at how we are dealing with this and it has to be dealt differently.

It is a decay on all societies and it is happening here and it is not benefiting the people of any of those countries and it is putting men at risk but it puts our country at risk and it weakens our economies.

I am not asking for a response. It is just something we need to look at.

And one last thing. Ninety plus percent of all Latin American countries are Christian nations, as we are. I do not think we are following the Christian doctrine of treat others as you would treat ourselves and I think we need to look at all that, and I yield my time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CICILLINE [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Yoho.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes. I want to thank the chairman of our committee for convening this and the ranking member, and thank the witnesses for their extraordinary testimony and for their service to our country.

We are here today to discuss the importance of U.S. assistance to Central America, an issue on which there is broad bipartisan support across this committee and across the Congress.

Through assistance and development programs the United States is able address the root causes of instability and the drivers of migration to the United States. These are programs that tackle corruption, promote education, foster democracy, and counter violence.

They represent an effective investment on the part of the United States to promote a more stable, more democratic, and more prosperous hemisphere.

In fact, the vice president himself noted their importance, and I quote, “To further stem the flow of illegal immigration and illegal drugs into the United States, President Trump knows, as do all of you, that we must confront these problems at their source. We must meet them and we must solve them in Central America and South America,” end quote.

Those are the words of the vice president. Yet, this administration or actually I can't even say the administration because this is really the president acting on a whim, yet this president rashly announced an end to all aid—and end to programs that help stem migration because he wants to end migration.

As is typical, this represents the president's penchant for making up policy on the fly, leaving his own administration, our diplomats, and other countries surprised, confused, and scrambling to undo the damage.

I would like now to enter into the record a statement from Plan International USA based in Rhode Island, which notes, and I quote, "The administration must begin to view foreign assistance for what it is—a way to improve conditions and strengthen institutions within foreign countries while also enhancing our own security," end quote.

Without objection, it is in the record.
[The information referred to follows:]



Policy Statements

Plan International USA Statement on Proposed Cuts in Aid to Central American Countries

Apr 4, 2019

Plan International USA (Plan) opposes the Trump Administration's recently announced decision to end up to \$450 million in life-saving assistance to the people of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Doing so would only undermine American policy, development, and humanitarian goals in these countries. Congressional leaders from both parties agree that U.S. assistance to the region is essential to addressing the root causes of the violence, poverty, and displacement that drive migration to the U.S. These cuts are counterproductive. Plan calls on Congress to exercise its prerogative to reverse the administration's decision.

Returning from a recent congressional delegation to El Salvador, Representative Mike McCaul (R-TX) defended assistance to the region, stating that "this aid has actually lowered the crime rate, helped the economy. If we don't address the root cause of the problem through the Central American security initiative, we're going to continue to have a problem." Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ) also released a statement denouncing the cut, asserting "U.S. foreign assistance is not charity; it advances our strategic interests and funds initiatives that protect American citizens."

The Administration must begin to view foreign assistance for what it is: a way to improve conditions and strengthen institutions within foreign countries, while also enhancing our own security. Plan's Participatory Youth Assessment for the USAID Bridges to Employment program in El Salvador found that, "among at-risk young people, 59 percent want to emigrate; most of them want to leave the country to improve financial opportunity and the rest for security reasons." Plan, along with several organizations in the Northern Triangle, has proven the effectiveness of foreign assistance in improving lives, supporting communities, and ending the violence that forces people to flee. Migration flows to the US will not slow down without investing in improving conditions on the ground. It is important that organizations are able to continue their programming with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State so that fewer people will be forced to leave their homes, resulting in reduced migration to the U.S. border.

We urge the Administration to preserve foreign assistance to this important region and Congress to act with bipartisan support to protect the much-needed aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Mr. CICILLINE. And also I would like to enter into the record an op-ed by Ambassador Jacobson from the New York Times in which she describes the disorder of the Trump administration as seen in her role as U.S. Ambassador to Mexico.

[The information referred to follows:]

The New York Times

My Year as a Trump Ambassador

Some disorder is normal at the start of an administration. But it was extreme under Mr. Trump.

By Roberta S. Jacobson

Ms. Jacobson was the United States ambassador to Mexico until May.

Oct. 20, 2018

President Trump has triumphantly declared his replacement for the North American Free Trade Agreement to be a major improvement over the original. I have my doubts, as do many experts, including some Republicans. But even the skeptics are relieved that the heart of the 25-year-old trade pact remains intact.

The back story of Mr. Trump's campaign to dismantle Nafta is not just about his obsession with one agreement. It is also a window into a chaotic decision-making style that has undermined America's diplomacy and national interests across the globe. I observed this disarray up close for more than a year as the ambassador to Mexico. It wasn't pretty.

The first time White House officials told reporters that the president intended to rip up Nafta, in the spring of 2017, I was about to attend the Mexican air show, one of the most important commercial events involving Mexico and the United States.

Billions of dollars in trade between the two countries are at stake during the show, where a host of American aerospace suppliers demonstrate their wares. As the ambassador to Mexico, I would have expected to have been told what the president intended to do about the most vital part of our relationship with Mexico.

But this is not how things work in the Trump era.

I learned about the draft one-page notification of our plan to exit Nafta from countless emails and phone calls from reporters and Mexican officials. Now I was going to spend a hot April afternoon with the Mexican president, Enrique Peña Nieto, without warning or instructions from Washington. What was I supposed to tell him?

I had been a diplomat for over 30 years, serving under five presidents, with stints in Argentina and Peru, and as assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs. I had visited nearly every country in the Americas, mastered the bureaucratic skills needed to get things done and served

4/10/2019

Opinion | My Year as a Trump Ambassador - The New York Times

on crisis task forces for hurricanes, earthquakes and coups. I had always relied on guidance from my State Department superiors, and the White House via the National Security Council. Such guidance was rare after Mr. Trump assumed office.

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Some chaos is normal at the start of an administration. But it has been extreme under Mr. Trump. About 30 ambassadorships remain vacant, including in vitally important countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Moreover, the disconnect between the State Department and the White House seems intentional, leaving ambassadors in impossible positions and our allies across the globe infuriated, alienated and bewildered.

Mexico is one of the countries most important to American interests. For 27 states, Mexico is the largest or second-largest destination for their exports, and \$1.7 billion in trade crosses our shared border every day. Many millions of good jobs in the United States, especially in the auto industry, depend on our highly integrated economies.

But the importance of competent diplomacy with Mexico is about more than jobs and trade. The opioid crisis makes cooperation on stemming the flow of illegal drugs across the border essential. More than 72,000 Americans died from overdoses in 2017, and nearly 30,000 of those deaths were most likely because of fentanyl or other synthetic opioids, much of them passing through Mexico. Mexican security forces have raided dozens of so-called methamphetamine superlabs and begun taking down critical drug networks, working with United States agencies and taking enormous risks by doing so.

Despite Mr. Trump's campaign rhetoric vilifying Mexicans and focusing on a border wall, embassy officials and our Mexican partners felt after his inauguration that we would be able to continue working well together. But it quickly became impossible to know how to influence the mess in Washington.

On that April afternoon in 2017, I knew that Rex Tillerson, the secretary of state, didn't want to get involved in Nafta talks and rarely took calls from even a senior ambassador. So I talked to senior career colleagues from the Office of the United States Trade Representative and the Commerce Department, but they knew little more than I did.

As President Peña Nieto joined diplomats and government and military officials on the reviewing stand, he paused to greet me and emphasized that it was imperative that we talk later. When we finally sat down alone, the president, unfailingly polite, was blunt: What the hell was going on? "Your president is going to pull out of Nafta before we've even had a chance to sit down and work on this?" he said to me. "This would be a disaster — economically, politically."

4/10/2019

Opinion | My Year as a Trump Ambassador - The New York Times

He was right. Nafta, while never a panacea, had helped trade nearly quadruple among the United States, Mexico and Canada; made countless American industries more competitive; and perhaps most important, cemented a shift in our relations with Mexico to the benefit of the United States. Mexicans opened up to the world with Nafta, not just in trade but also politically, with democracy advancing, albeit in fits and starts. Mexican governments became our partners on security, migration and foreign policy, including on terrorism. Pulling out would threaten more than just a productive trade relationship.

All I could tell him was that I was continuing to speak with the White House and hoped cooler heads would prevail. I noted that this was coming just after a spate of negative articles about the first 100 days of the Trump administration. I was learning that critical news reports almost inevitably led the president to fall back on his standard refrains: Build the wall, or Nafta is the worst deal ever.

The draft document to pull out of Nafta was never sent. Why? We're not really sure. Perhaps because the Mexican foreign minister, Luis Videgaray, engineered a phone call between Presidents Trump and Peña Nieto. Perhaps Mr. Trump's secretary of agriculture showed him evidence that his rural, agricultural base would be hurt. Or because powerful Republicans in Congress weighed in against ruining an important trading relationship.

More articles on Nafta:

[Opinion | The Editorial Board: A Bogus Deal on Nafta](#) Sept. 2, 2018

[Opinion | Gustavo A. Flores-Macías And Mariano SáNchez-Talanquer: Worse Than Nafta](#)

Oct. 1, 2018

[The Trump Trade Strategy Is Coming Into Focus. That Doesn't Necessarily Mean It Will Work.](#)

Oct. 6, 2018

We now have a new trade deal that actually keeps much of the original agreement intact. But it also includes provisions intended to keep more auto manufacturing jobs in the United States and to increase American dairy exports into Canada. The agreement seems to have dropped some of the most onerous demands on Mexico and Canada, and perhaps reflects the administration's realization that it needs to focus on China.

I can only hope that the president and his team are beginning to recognize that we need our allies, most importantly Canada and Mexico, if we are to tackle some of our most difficult domestic problems. But I am not confident of that.

4/10/2019

Opinion | My Year as a Trump Ambassador - The New York Times

I left Mexico on May 5 — Cinco de Mayo — exactly two years after I had been sworn in as ambassador, and retired from government service at the end of May. Believing deeply in the United States-Mexico relationship, I cannot pretend anything less than relief at no longer having to defend the indefensible. But I also feel glad to escape the disorder I witnessed for more than a year.

On July 1, Mexicans elected a new president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. There is little that all Mexicans agree on, but a steadfast rejection of President Trump's bashing of Mexico is one point of consensus. Mr. López Obrador's rise may have been mainly a rejection of corruption within the Peña Nieto government — but it was aided by the constant drumbeat of negativity from the White House. Public opinion polls in Mexico showed a drop of more than 30 points in positive views of the United States from 2015 to 2017.

Over the past three decades, successive American administrations have worked diligently to vanquish the anti-American DNA in Mexico. We were overcoming the suspicions that a history of invasion, territorial loss and imperial intent had bequeathed. That kind of trust is slow to build, and remarkably easy to destroy. It is being destroyed now.

Roberta S. Jacobson, a Pritzker Fellow at the Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago, resigned as the United States ambassador to Mexico in May after more than 30 years at the State Department.

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A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 21, 2018, on Page SR7 of the New York edition with the headline: My Year as a Trump Ambassador

[READ 362 COMMENTS](#)

Mr. CICILLINE. It highlights the alarming disorganization, lack of foresight, and baffling ignorance of the Trump administration, and the decision to end aid in Central America is, sadly, par for the course which is why, in my view, Congress must exercise oversight.

This country will never be able to address immigration if we do not address the root drivers of irregular migration. Those who immigrate to our great country have in many instances experienced unbearable hardships.

Our assistance programs help to address the underlying causes of these hardships. Cutting them would be cruel, shortsighted, and counterproductive and I believe that Congress must take clear bold action to ensure key assistance programs are not gutted just because of a Presidential mood swing.

So I want to begin my question, as I mentioned, development organization called Plan USA is based in my district and has worked in Central America for decades.

Their field work and their research demonstrate the value of U.S. assistance to the region for improving people's lives and preventing migration.

In fact, a Plan survey found that 59 percent of at-risk youth in El Salvador, as an example, planned to migrate because of violence and lack of opportunity.

So Plan runs a youth employment program that has trained thousands of youth for jobs with dozens of companies akin to the excellent programs run by USAID.

Isn't that fundamentally a better way to address this problem—a program like that, Ambassador Jacobson?

Ms. JACOBSON. It absolutely is. I mean, I think that those kinds of programs are critical. While, obviously, you still see migrants coming and, in fact, right now you are seeing larger numbers, so you can argue over how effective they are.

But the truth is over the last couple of years we do know what works. Plan USA knows what works. What we need to do is expand their reach and demand that those governments replicate those programs, and I would say to Representative Yoho who talked about things not working, it is true that the smugglers and the drug traffickers are always going to be more agile than governments.

So we are constantly going to have to adapt our programs and that is exactly what we have done over the past few years.

We know certain things work and others were abysmal failures. But the programs that we are looking at right now were only just getting started. And so to say that they have failed is really way too preliminary without a significant continuation of funding and talking with partners like those NGO's who know what works.

Mr. CICILLINE. You know, and I think in addition to that, just the very announcement of these proposed cuts has already damaged U.S. aid programs and really our credibility in Central America.

PEPFAR has canceled its annual planning meeting for the Western Hemisphere. USAID has frozen a number of activities and one person in the region even described it as government shutdown mode.

So the idea—the difficulties that come with restarting it when organizations have begun to, you know, make adjustments for this pronouncement is significant.

Two other quick questions, because I know my time has run out, but I am in charge so I can have a couple more minutes.

On March 28th, just before President Trump announced that he was cutting off aid to Central America, recently resigned Secretary of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen announced what she called a historic agreement with our partners in Central America to address the root causes of migration.

In other words, the U.S. Government got agreement from countries in the region to what the administration wanted and the president responded by trying to punish them. It is sort of baffling.

And my question really is what does the president's decision to cutoff aid to Central America, despite strong support from member of his own administration including his own vice president, say about his approach to foreign policy and our ability to kind of have a coherent repose to this crisis and what does it say to the leaders in the region who are trying to figure this out?

I do not know who might try to answer that.

Ambassador?

Mr. NORIEGA. I do not think anybody thinks that this was a well-reasoned decision or announcement. Roberta, as assistant secretary of State, and I in that same role did annual reviews of all of our projects with USAID, what is effective, what is working, what is not, are we prepared to defend them before the secretary of State, arm wrestle Members of Congress and their staff, accept the kind of oversight that really enriches the programs and we did this because we believe that we are absolutely convinced that this sort of investment is in our interest.

I will say one thing that I am concerned is we are sort of treating the symptoms of countries that are in very serious trouble because their basic institutions have been undermined by transnational organized criminal organizations that can bribe or bully or murder to get whatever they want, and this is—transnational organized crime is a \$2.2 trillion.

That is the equivalent of Mexico's GDP, and to suggest that the country of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala are on their own when they are to a certain extent victims of this demand or illicit drugs I think is not—is not reasonable.

We need the partnerships. We also need, as I said, to do more than treat symptoms. We need economies growing again. We need governments tackling corruption, adopting the right economic policies.

We saw a country of El Salvador, for example, go from civil war to investment grade in five or 6 years without turning to multilateral development banks for the resources.

It can be done with the right policies, with the political will. But we have to be good partners to accompany that process.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.

Mr. KERLIKOWSKE. During my 8 years in the administration we do planning and we did not do policy on the fly or on the whim. There was an incredible amount of cooperation and backup and support and work that was done.

And also I think all of us worked very hard to break down silos between the State Department and USAID and CBP or DHS and on and on, and it took a long time and it was important, and it was important also that we were not surprised or that we found out about new policy by reading it in the paper or hearing it.

I did not follow Twitter very well but—and so when I look at the success in Mexico and I look at those reductions, I look at the success in those three Central American countries which I wish I would have had a little time to explain to Member Yoho. But we have made great progress.

And as Roberta also mentioned, these programs are in their infancy. I mean, give them a chance to flourish. And then if they are not working, you know, let us say they are not working and we need to move on.

Mr. CICILLINE. Right. Thank you.

And my final question, you know, there has been a lot of discussion in this hearing about the level of assistance and us being taken for suckers and what we are spending.

I think it is important to note that our foreign assistance to the Northern Triangle makes up just .00035 percent of the U.S. Federal budget and provides a significant return on investment by improving security and economic opportunity in the region.

This small investment has had a catalytic effect. When the U.S. committed \$420 million to the region in Fiscal Year 2017, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador committed to more than ten times that amount—\$5.4 billion—to support investments in their people and to strengthen public safety.

Given the administration's focus on burden sharing, I would love to hear your views with respect to the proposal to cutoff U.S. assistance in the region and whether it would in fact end up undermining Northern Triangle countries' willingness to continue to make the kinds of investments they have made in light of the U.S. investment.

Ambassador Jacobson?

Ms. JACOBSON. Representative Cicilline, I think that is an extremely important point. What I mentioned earlier about multiplier effect of our assistance, there is no place that I know of in the Western Hemisphere where we have put in more money than the local government.

In Mexico, I think it was \$17 or \$18 for every one of ours. In Central America, you noted—in Colombia, certainly, the Colombians dedicated massive resources to this.

And what happens when we are unreliable, when we cut aid, is some of those programs do not continue, because what we are signalling is maybe it is not such a priority even through the president, obviously, is speaking out of frustration and wanting to do more.

These are hard programs. They are hard politically for these leaders. They are—they are working to get at entrenched interests both economic and political as well as security, if you will.

And so to take those risks without our support, without our backing, becomes harder and harder. It is—the chances grow slimmer that they will do things we want without our moral backing as well as financial backing.

But we have also seen that we get much weaker response from the local private sector—economic elites who can afford to contribute and who say, well, if the U.S. is not going to be supporting this we are not going to bother.

So yes, there is a multiplier effect in our cuts.

Mr. CICILLINE. Yes, which is why I hope this hearing communicates to the White House the urgency of reconsidering their position because these investments are not acts of charity.

They are investments in the safety and security of the world, which is in the national security interests of the American people. And this is about getting to the root of a problem, which is presenting challenges to our own country and there is bipartisan understanding that your testimony today helped reaffirm that, and I, again, will end where I began, by thanking you for your testimony today and for your extraordinary service to our country.

And with that, today's hearing is concluded and the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:57 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

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

Eliot L. Engel (D-NY), Chairman

April 10, 2019

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>):

DATE: Wednesday, April 10, 2019

TIME: 9:30 a.m.

SUBJECT: The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America

WITNESS: The Honorable Roberta Jacobson
(Former U.S. Ambassador to Mexico and Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs)

The Honorable R. Gil Kerlikowske
Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Professor of the Practice in Criminology and Criminal Justice
Northeastern University
(Former Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and Chief of Police of Seattle, Washington)

The Honorable Roger Noriega
Visiting Fellow
American Enterprise Institute
(Former U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States and Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs)

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-3021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 04/10/19 Room 2172 RHOB

Starting Time 9:39 a.m. Ending Time 10:57 a.m.

Recesses 0 (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)
Chairman Eliot L. Engel, Rep. David Cicilline

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session Electronically Recorded (taped)
Executive (closed) Session Stenographic Record
Televised

TITLE OF HEARING:
The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
See attached.

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
N/A

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*
SFR - Engel (I), Engel (II), Rooney, Sires, Cicilline

IFR - Cicilline

QFR - Sires, Smith, Spanberger, Wagner, Houlahan, Guest

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED 10:57 a.m.

Evan Bursey
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

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X	Michael Guest, MS

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD
FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS



CWS Statement to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, pertaining to its hearing "The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America" on Wednesday, April 10, 2019

As a 73-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox communions and 23 refugee resettlement offices in 17 states, Church World Service affirms the right of individuals to seek safety, enshrined in U.S. and international law. We urge the Committee to recognize the importance of access to protection and to ensure that our moral and legal obligations to asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, and others seeking protection are upheld.

Separating families will not cure the pervasive root causes of migration existing in the Northern Triangle of Central America today. Due to state-sanctioned violence and forcible gang recruitment, families are forced to take the enormous risks of migration in order to protect their children. Violence and internal displacement continue within El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras unabated, targeting vulnerable families and children who are forced to flee for safety. Many families initially seek safety in other areas within their home countries, and then if they cannot find safety, move to neighboring countries. Many asylum-seeking parents who make the dangerous journey with their children, speak to the desire to stay in their home countries, their efforts to relocate prior to migrating north, and their desire to find safety and protection for their children. Now, under the Trump administration's inhumane policies, these vulnerable children are also at risk of being separated from their parents at the hands of the U.S. government. Absent reasonable child protection or trafficking concerns, the U.S. government should not separate children from their parents.

CWS unequivocally opposes the administration's repeated attempts to block access to asylum and proposals that would weaken or eliminate provisions in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA). The TVPRA provides important procedural protections for unaccompanied children in order to accurately determine if they are eligible for relief as victims of trafficking or persecution. The United States can humanely process all of the families and individuals who arrive at our borders seeking protection. The search for protection is a legal right; the United States has moral and legal obligations under international and U.S. law to ensure that individuals seeking protection are not returned to those who seek to exploit them. Limiting access to asylum and other forms of protection, as well as legal representation and child-appropriate services only increases individuals' vulnerabilities to being trafficked for commercial sex or forced labor.

CWS strongly opposes rollbacks to Flores protections and remains equally troubled by family incarceration, which is plagued with systemic abuse and inadequate access to medical care. Similar policies of detaining asylum-seeking families to deter migration have been found to violate the law by a U.S. court. The American Association of Pediatrics has found that family detention facilities do not meet basic standards for the care of children and "no child should be in detention centers or separated from parents." Families should not be held in detention facilities but instead be allowed to pursue their asylum claims in a more humane and cost-effective manner. Proposed changes to *Flores* would erode existing protections for children, and would not stop asylum seekers from coming to the United States. Rather, it will ensure that more children experience the long-lasting consequences of prolonged detention.

Congress should reject the administration's inhumane immigration policies that are orchestrating a humanitarian crisis by illegally turning away asylum seekers and unaccompanied children, manufacturing unnecessary processing reductions at ports of entry, and forcibly stranding families in Mexico. Rather than responding to families at the southern border in an orderly manner by allowing them to seek asylum, the administration has instead chosen to implement punitive policies that have exacerbated the situation. The deaths of two children in CBP custody pointedly highlights the urgent need for a shift in policy. Immigration policies that repeatedly result in death do not make our country safe. The U.S. can humanely process all of the families and individuals who arrive at our borders seeking protection.

Families are the foundation of our communities. We implore the Trump administration to protect unaccompanied children and all asylum seekers, and we urge Congress to hold the administration accountable to meeting their legal obligations and to not inflicting more harm on these children and families.

Statement for the Record from Representative Francis Rooney
The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America
April 10, 2019

The Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are critical to solving hemispheric issues such as migration and the trafficking of drugs and people. These countries, along with their neighbors, face serious economic, security and civil society issues that threaten to destabilize Central America.

Unfortunately, these issues aren't limited to just Central America, but also affect us here in the United States, as demonstrated by the unprecedented crisis at our southern border. This puts an incredible strain on our resources, as well as those of our neighbors. Stated correctly, the issues facing Central America, and especially the Northern Triangle countries, has an impact on all of us in the Western Hemisphere.

Our best tool to respond to these issues and help our partners in the region is our foreign assistance. Whether it be economic- or security-related, our foreign assistance is absolutely critical to stability in the region and the rest of the Hemisphere.

Statement by Former Combatant Commanders of U.S. Southern Command

April 8, 2019

As former Commanders of U.S. Southern Command, we have seen firsthand that the challenges in the region cannot be solved by the military alone but require strengthening investments in development and diplomacy.

We know that if we invest at the scale of the problem, it works because we've seen it work in Colombia, where a sustained comprehensive civilian-military effort helped Colombians end the longest conflict in the Western Hemisphere and transform their country into a key security and trading partner.

Improving conditions in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador is a critical way to address the root causes of migration and prevent the humanitarian crisis at our border. This is a solution to many of the drivers that cause people to leave their country and move north. Cutting aid to the region will only increase the drivers and will be even more costly to deal with on our border.

General Bantz Craddock, USA (Ret.)

Commander, U.S. Southern Command (2004-2006)

General James Hill, USA (Ret.)

Commander, U.S. Southern Command (2002-2004)

General Barry McCaffrey, USA (Ret.)

Commander, U.S. Southern Command (1994-1996)

Admiral James Stavridis, USN (Ret.)

Commander, U.S. Southern Command (2006-2009)

General Charles Wilhelm, USMC (Ret.)

Commander, U.S. Southern Command (1997-2000)

Questions for the Record from Representative Albio Sires
The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America
April 10, 2019

Question:

Northern Triangle countries have committed \$8.6 billion of their own funds toward the Alliance for Prosperity, which the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America supports. While political will is still a major challenge, is it your assessment that the U.S. has willing partners in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador? How important is the role of these governments in working alongside the U.S. to advance security and prosperity and what message would it send for the U.S. government cut off aid to these countries?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: We have partners of varying degrees of willingness, and more importantly, capabilities in all three countries. While many U.S. government programs are not implemented by governments, security is fundamentally a government function, and thus effective cooperation on security usually requires that we work with government entities. There are courageous officials in all three Northern Triangle countries who work with us in law enforcement, anti-corruption and other programs who would be severely undermined were we to cut off aid. Such a cutoff would inevitably also negatively affect non-governmental programs which require improved security to succeed.

Question:

In Honduras, a Place-Based Strategy jointly carried out by USAID and the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics Law Enforcement has contributed to significant reductions in homicide rates, particularly in some of the most violent communities in San Pedro Sula. Can you discuss whether you believe the Place-Based Strategy can and should be scaled up in the region?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: I have always believed that the so-called "Place-based strategy" is essential, and during my tenure as Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, began development of this strategy, insisting that USAID, INL and others had to concentrate and co-locate their efforts to maximize the positive effects of U.S. government assistance. As mentioned previously, security assistance is essential to creating an environment in which community and economic assistance (such as anti-gang programs and job training programs) might take root and be expanded beyond our assistance.

Question:

While corruption is still a major problem in the Northern Triangle, many of these countries have made incremental progress and have achieved high-profile prosecutions in recent years that would not have been possible a decade ago. Do you think that cutting off aid would undermine

the fight against corruption and potentially cause further erosion of democracy in the Northern Triangle countries?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: Absolutely, in part because as noted above, there are courageous individuals and entities who fight for transparency and against corruption who might face increased threats and challenges without U.S. government support.

Question:

Congress has specified that certain U.S. assistance can only be obligated once the Secretary of State certifies that governments in the region are taking steps to deter migration to the U.S., combat corruption, and meet other progress thresholds. Do you believe these certification requirements have been helpful in contributing to policy changes in the target countries? Are these certification requirements a better tool for pressuring governments in the region to make reforms than the Trump administration's approach of repeatedly threatening drastic aid cuts?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: Certification requirements can be complicated as agencies of the US government seek to smoothly continue effective projects across fiscal years or wait too long to begin launching new programs, but they are a far better way to increase scrutiny and monitoring than threats of any kind.

Question:

As you know better than most, a key U.S. priority in Central America is fostering greater rule of law. Based on your experience in the region, can you speak about the role of the private sector in complementing the roles of the public sector and civil society in building a culture of compliance and rule of law? Do you think the private sector's role can be incorporated more fully into our foreign aid strategy in the region?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: I believe strongly that the private sector has an essential role in improving the rule of law as well as other challenges that drive migration. The private sector must be brought into discussions of overcoming security and economic challenges early in our efforts and with Northern Triangle governments, to ensure they give their perspective as well as to reinforce a culture of lawfulness in their own enterprises, as governments are trying to create nationwide. I also believe strongly in efforts the U.S. government has promoted in some of these countries to have private sector organizations (such as chambers of commerce) commit to contribute funds matching those of USAID or other providers. This technique can improve sustainability and reach beyond what is possible with foreign assistance.

**Questions for the Record from Representative Chris Smith
The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America
April 10, 2019**

Question:

I would like to state my appreciation for what Mark Green, who testified yesterday, and the Administration are trying to do to promote efficiencies in foreign assistance and to move countries away from dependency.

I do have a concern, however, with the attempt to fold Inter-American Foundation, as well as its counterpart the Africa Development Foundation, into USAID. I believe this is a penny-wise but pound-foolish approach, which would in fact reduce some of the efficiencies which IAF brings to our assistance to Central America.

IAF simply can do more with less, compared to USAID, in part because its model leverages investments from recipients and other benefactors. For example, IAF grantee-partners in FY 18 in Central America committed \$37.4 million, more than matching the IAF's total investment of \$33.7 million.

IAF also keeps overhead very low – some 14 per cent of its budget – compared with USAID.

Unlike USAID, IAF is truly grassroots focused. IAF has nearly 100 projects impacting more than 2,400 communities in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, the home countries of the largest number of family and unaccompanied child migrants to the United States, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Since FY 15, the IAF has nearly tripled its investment in the Northern Triangle of Central America with the funds it received via congressionally mandated transfers from USAID for the U.S. Strategy for Central America. This is something I advocated, along with the Committee Chairman Eliot Engel.

My question for those panelists who are familiar with IAF's work, is (a) whether you can comment on the work that it does specifically in Central America, and also (b) whether you can opine on its efficiency...

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: I'm afraid I cannot comment specifically on the IAF's work in Central America, but my experience with IAF in general is extremely positive and it has a distinct profile, history, and type of project from that done by USAID or other U.S. foreign assistance.

Mr. R. Gil Kerlikowske: I am not familiar with the work of the IAF.

Ambassador Roger Noriega: I was privileged to serve as an *ex officio* member of the Board of the Inter-American Foundation (IAF). I believe that the IAF plays a complementary role to traditional aid programs, providing relatively small but impactful financial support to worthy grassroots projects that improve the lives of beneficiaries and strengthen national organizations that can sustain their activities in the long-run.

Historically, the IAF has attracted a strong and committed professional management team. I appreciate the work the IAF staff did when I was a board member to cultivate partnerships with the private sector in order to increase the impact and reach of IAF projects. In my view, that team could easily handle three to four times the amount of assistance, if Congress were to make these funds available. I believe these smaller, grassroots projects are cost-effective, a worthy use of taxpayer dollars, and a credit to America's image in our neighborhood. And they would represent a worthwhile investment in communities that are the source of illegal immigration in Central America.

Questions for the Record from Representative Abigail Spanberger
The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America
April 10, 2019

Question:

A major challenge in the Northern Triangle countries is corruption. For example, in Guatemala, President Jimmy Morales chose to end the mandate of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala or CICIG and expelled its commissioner. Honduras scores only a 29 out of a 100 on Transparency International's corruption perception index. In El Salvador, the U.S. has funded a special anticorruption unit in the Attorney General's office to allow investigations outside of political interference.

Ambassador Jacobson, given these challenges:

How do we ensure that our development funding reaches organizations and people who will invest in these countries and their people and not enrich corrupt officials, wealthy individuals, or the criminal groups we are trying to uproot?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: In general, the executive branch during my time in government carefully monitored the end-users of U.S. assistance to ensure support was going to those intended—whether foreign government recipients or non-governmental organizations. Remember that no U.S. assistance is “given” to foreign governments or organizations as cash, and therefore cannot be easily used for other purposes. USAID and State also routinely work to ensure that non-governmental organizations who are aid recipients have proper accounting and audit capabilities so that oversight can be done.

Question:

What impact would the Administration's proposed cuts in foreign aid to Central American countries—like Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—have on current anti-corruption programs and what long-term effects could that have on the rule of law?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: I cannot speak to current specific programs that would be ended as I have not been in government for a year, but in general, withdrawing of U.S. assistance would almost guarantee that many anti-corruption programs would cease operating, as in general, it is our leadership and assistance on these subjects that is the most influential. While other countries or organizations (e.g. Nordic countries, the UN and E) do support some anti-corruption and rule of law programming, we are by far the largest donor in those areas and even where governments have the political will to support such efforts, they find it difficult to dedicate scarce resources to them and maintain them against criminal or corrupt actors, without U.S. support. Thus, I believe failure to continue such U.S. aid might well doom any progress on the rule of law over the long term.

Questions for the Record from Representative Ann Wagner
The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America
April 10, 2019

Question:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for organizing this timely hearing and thank you to our witnesses. U.S. investments in long-term solutions to poverty, violence, and corruption are essential to regional stability. U.S. development efforts targeting marginalized women and children help stem migration flows by providing more financial security and safety so that women can stay in their homes. I am traveling to Guatemala this month to learn more about how U.S. aid supports women and children, and I appreciate your insights.

Mr. Kerlikowske, with rates of migration spiking in the Northern Triangle, thousands are vulnerable to trafficking. Former Secretary Nielsen signed a border security Memorandum of Cooperation with Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador on March 28 that would synchronize efforts to combat trafficking. Can you talk about the patterns of sex and labor trafficking we are seeing and how our new agreement with these countries can protect vulnerable populations?

Answer:

Mr. R. Gil Kerlikowske: I am not familiar with the Memorandum of Cooperation signed by former Secretary of Homeland Security Nielsen. I know that in multiple meetings, between and among U.S. officials with representatives from the Central American countries over many years that information sharing among law enforcement to target those responsible for human trafficking has been a primary focus.

Question:

I understand that USAID and NGOs in the region are seeking to expand economic opportunities in poverty-stricken rural areas by helping farmers increase productivity and household incomes. Ambassador Noriega, what local policies represent barriers to healthy agricultural development, and how can the U.S. support effective reforms?

Answer:

Ambassador Roger Noriega did not submit a response in time for printing.

Question:

Guatemala has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world, with roughly 2 women murdered every day. Indigenous women—100,000 of whom fell victim to mass rape and sexual slavery between 1960 and 1996—are at an even higher risk of violence than their counterparts. Ambassador Jacobson, how do U.S. programs in Guatemala address the unique problems indigenous women face?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: During my last two positions in the executive branch, as Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs and U.S. ambassador to Mexico, some of our assistance in Guatemala was explicitly designed to reduce and prevent violence in some of the most violent communities in Guatemala. These programs concentrated on women and mothers in these communities, many of whom were victims of either domestic abuse or gang violence. Other programs sought to prevent young people (especially young men) from going into gangs in the first place, including with employment training. Such efforts directly benefit women by reducing the number of young people who are part of transnational criminal organizations or gangs as well as empowering women by providing independent incomes, and thereby reduce violence against women and increase their economic options.

Question:

Education and economic empowerment for women have positive ripple effects in developing countries. Ambassador Jacobson, how does U.S. programming in Central America empower women to build safe and secure futures for themselves and their children?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: I cannot comment directly on current programs as it has been a year since I left government, but the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement specifically focused a percentage of their programs in the Northern Triangle on empowering women in the community through income-generation and security forces better trained to recognize and reduce violence against women. In communities where female-headed households are a disproportionate number because of earlier out-migration by men, these efforts to improve the economic status of women frequently result in greater opportunities for their children and thus have a multiplier effect.

Questions for the Record from Representative Chrissy Houlahan
The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America
April 10, 2019

Question:

My home state of Pennsylvania is one of the top ten states in the country for exports, and in 2017, Pennsylvania exported \$4 billion in goods to Mexico. As you know, Mexico is a key trading partner and essential to managing the flow of immigrants from Central America.

- a) How will the Administration's termination of assistance to these countries impact our relationship with Mexico?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: President Lopez Obrador of Mexico has made clear that he believes a cooperative effort with the United States Government towards Central America, with both countries assisting the Northern Triangle countries with projects and technical assistance, is the best way to address the migration surge. Thus, termination of assistance is likely to have a negative impact on our relationship with President Lopez Obrador's government in Mexico.

Question:

- b) And given that we are in the process of finalizing a new trade deal with Mexico, how could this influence future cooperation beyond immigration policy?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: Such a hypothetical is impossible to predict with certainty but increasing tensions in one area of our bilateral relationship could impact other areas of importance to us, such as counternarcotics efforts and trade.

Question:

Sexual and gender-based violence is a primary factor forcing women and girls to migrate from the Northern Triangle countries. The Pan-American Health Organization reports that two out of three women killed in Central America are killed for reasons related to their gender. Furthermore, we have increasingly seen media reports of gender-based violence at our own southern border, even within U.S. territory.

- a) What impacts will cutting U.S. assistance to these countries have on women and girls, and members of the LGBTI community, in their home countries and at our border?

Answer:

Mr. R. Gil Kerlikowske: Many of the programs that with the funding, support, and technical assistance of the U.S. are focused on improving the safety and security of people within the

Central American countries, these programs work to improve the quality of policing. Focusing on improving law enforcement response to gang violence and community policing is certainly a step forward in protecting women, girls, and members of the LGBTI community.

Question:

U.S. Southern Command has long emphasized the importance of ensuring that the United States remains the “partner of choice” for countries in Latin America. Several Latin American countries, including El Salvador, have established diplomatic relations with China in recent years.

- a) How would ending foreign assistance affect the U.S. government’s ability to maintain close civil and military relations with the Northern Triangle countries?

Answer:

Ambassador Roger Noriega: The lack of adequately funded and equipped security forces in the Northern Triangle has lowered the guard of these countries to well-funded criminal organizations and ultraviolent gangs—which have local authorities literally outgunned. Although great care must be taken when asking the military to carry out policing functions, in some cases, the military sometimes is the last line of defense when communities are overrun by crime.

US programs and interaction with American forces strengthen the professionalism and capabilities of local securities forces. This can play a critical role in promoting security and stability that are essential to attracting investment that generates jobs in poor communities. The US military exercises positive influence with local counterparts, and this leverage is increased if the US agency has resources available to improve the professionalism of local forces.

Question:

- b) To what extent, if at all, would expanded Chinese involvement in the region affect U.S. interests?

Answer:

Ambassador Roger Noriega: For the last twenty years, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has applied a mercantile model in Latin America—focusing on harvesting natural resources and making investments that do not create local jobs or benefits to counterparts in the region. This sort of relationship is a new form of exploitation. By voraciously consuming raw materials (commodities including iron ore, petroleum products, and farm goods) the PRC provides a windfall of revenue to a state that becomes, therefore, more dependent on the PRC and less dependent on (and accountable to) citizen taxpayers.

Also, the cash windfall for raw materials makes a country’s national leaders less focused on integrated economic development and manufacturing, the value-added of which would create

local jobs, expertise, training, technology transfer, etc. that are essential to building wealthier and more stable economies that are less dependent on export markets. Even a national economy as massive and integrated as Brazil's fell into the commodities trap, so when China's economy slowed down, the loss of export revenue drove Brazil into a deep recession.

Breaking this cycle requires economic partners—including the United States, that share a commitment to integrated, mutually beneficial trade and investment relationships. US aid programs can prime the pump of that type of wholesome economic growth.

Questions for the Record from Representative Michael Guest
The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America
April 10, 2019

Question:

You all discussed, at lengths, the primary causes of the migration crisis out of the Northern Triangle. These causes included poverty, corruption, violence, fear from gangs, hope for reunification with family, economic opportunity, and fear from extortion. All of these are clear and understood reasons for fleeing one's home. However, some members of Congress have expressed views that the root cause of this migration crisis is found in the changing climate. I find it hard to believe that if this were the, or one of, the main causes of this crisis, three experts would not have failed to mention it. So, I ask:

Do you believe that that climate change, or adverse effects of climate change, is one of the root causes of the migration crisis in the Northern Triangle?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: Yes; among myriad and complicated causes of migration are severe difficulties in rural areas, some of which may well be related to climate change.

Mr. R. Gil Kerlikowske: I am really far beyond my expertise and experience to opine on climate change and its impacts on Northern Triangle migration. I do know that the problems in the agricultural economy, i.e. coffee rust, do contribute to people leaving.

Ambassador Roger Noriega: The World Bank has identified climate change as a phenomenon with a potential substantial impact on migration from Latin America. For many years the Central American subregion's climate has been characterized by extremes of drought and tropical storms, accompanied by heavy rainfall and high winds and impacting the availability of water and agricultural productivity. Those extreme climate patterns are growing in intensity and frequency.

Unless attention is paid to this phenomenon, the World Bank says that millions of "climate migrants" may be dislodged in Latin America. Central American economic policies and foreign aid must take this emerging climate challenge into consideration.

I had considered referring to the impact of a current drought in Central America on migration numbers. Rather than mention this phenomenon in superficial terms, I decided to focus on the acute impact of transnational organized crime, gangs, and people smuggling.

Question:

If yes, why did you fail to mention it in your written testimony?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: I mentioned drought and a coffee blight as among those economic challenges in rural areas; both have been mentioned by experts as exacerbated by climate change.

Mr. R. Gil Kerlikowske: Response not required.

Ambassador Roger Noriega: See previous response.

Question:

And, how exactly does climate change create a migration crisis of this scale, over the time period that we have seen people fleeing from the Northern Triangle?

Answer:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson: Migration surges are the result of complex and often-changing reasons and challenges which differ from country to country and even regions within countries at any particular time, and over time. No one reason is responsible for the most recent surge in migrants.

Mr. R. Gil Kerlikowske: Response not required.

Ambassador Roger Noriega: See previous response.