

TESTIMONY

CONGRESSMAN ADRIANO ESPAILLAT (NY-13)

House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

February 27, 2020

Thank you for allowing me to testify today to lay out my priorities as they relate to the State Department and related agencies. As the first Dominican American to serve in Congress and as a member of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I know that maintaining our foreign aid and diplomatic commitments builds a strong hand for the U.S. in the region.

The United States too often overlooks our allies in South and Central America, and even more so our allies in the Caribbean, America's third border. My testimony will focus on key funding for the Caribbean, not only for the sake of helping our brothers and sisters in these nations, but also for our best interest to protect American security and improve our economic relations with these countries.

Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI)

As we have continued to emphasize the importance of funding counternarcotic activities in Central America through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and in Mexico through the Mérida Initiative, the 2018 National Drug Threat Assessment prepared by the Drug Enforcement Administration recognizes that trafficking patterns may continue to shift toward the Caribbean. While CARSI and Mérida are critical in reducing crime and combatting the drug trade, the lack of comparable investment in the Caribbean makes the already-susceptible

Espailat (NY-13) Testimony

region a flashpoint for the smuggling of Colombian cocaine, which has quadrupled in production since 2012. Just a few months ago, the infamous Dominican drug kingpin César “El Abusador” Peralta was apprehended in Colombia. His networks from Colombia, across the Caribbean, through the Dominican Republic and into the United States represent the type of threat that is in dire need of being addressed in the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) has been instrumental in helping to combat illicit trafficking, reduce crime and violence, promote good governance and provide resources to at-risk communities. At the currently funded level of \$60 million, though, there is a lack of resources to combat the increase in Colombian cocaine production and for vital undertakings, from cognitive and behavioral programs that provide services for at-risk youth, to cybersecurity training for journalists working to expose corruption, to procurement of high-speed patrol boats to intercept incoming illicit drugs.

Following a 2019 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that highlighted the need to improve data collection and management methods to better monitor the success of CBSI activities, the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs at the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development are working to create a new framework to provide cross-country monitoring and evaluation to ensure their programs are fully effective. To support this effort, I plan to introduce legislation that will help to develop vital reporting mechanisms and expand funding to this crucial initiative.

I thank the Committee for considering my request last year and increasing the funding by two-million dollars in Fiscal Year 2020. However, given the scope of the problem, I request that the Committee provide at least \$80 million in funding to the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative for FY21.

Investing in Energy Potential in the Caribbean

According to a study from the World Bank, the average cost of electricity in the Caribbean is four times higher than in wealthy nations such as the United States. High energy costs are a financial hardship for people in the Caribbean and are also a key factor in holding back economic growth and prosperity in the region.

Another report shows that the cost of generating electricity in the Caribbean is higher than much of the rest of the world, which can impede direct investment. In Jamaica, consumers pay 38 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity. In contrast, the average American household pays 10.13 cents per kilowatt hour, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Investing in new sources of energy, including renewable energy projects such as wind and solar projects in the Caribbean, would mean more clean energy jobs, updated infrastructure, and a more booming economy.

That is why I ask the Appropriations Committee to increase foreign direct investment in the Caribbean, and to invest in the Caribbean's energy needs.

Natural Disaster Resiliency and Response in the Caribbean

Another issue I would like to address is emergency preparedness in the Caribbean. As we have seen in recent years, natural disasters, including earthquakes and hurricanes, have become more common and more severe. The countries of the Caribbean are situated in a dangerous location and face annual threats from these disasters, causing increasing devastation to the communities affected by natural forces. As these events occur, I hope that we continue to send aid and assistance to these countries – providing rescue support, humanitarian relief, and help rebuilding.

Espaillet (NY-13) Testimony

While our aid has been critical in supporting our neighbors after disaster strikes, we must do more to preempt and prepare for natural disasters.

By increasing our support for resilient infrastructure, emergency preparedness and investing in building local capacity to respond to disasters, we can help to improve Caribbean resiliency and effectiveness in managing natural disasters. This aid can greatly improve the lives of those living in these countries and will also lessen the burden on us when responding to natural crises.

As such, I urge the Committee to increase funding for resilient development and disaster response.

The Green Climate Fund

Finally, I would like to turn to a more global issue, and one of the most pressing of our time: climate change. Without overstating my concern, I truly believe climate change is an existential threat, and we owe it to our grandchildren and generations to come to tackle the problem swiftly and with the seriousness that such a crisis deserves.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is an independent, multilateral fund established by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to help developing countries limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Many developing countries face the greatest threats of climate change as severe drought, flooding, and other natural disasters threaten their peoples. Furthermore, many countries have a greater potential to mitigate climate change than they have capacity to do so. The GCF provides funding for mitigation and adaptation activities that are locally led, and which provide protections for indigenous communities, communities of color, women, and other frontline communities. This is a form of global environmental justice.

Espaillet (NY-13) Testimony

Under the Obama Administration, the United States pledged \$3 billion to the GCF, though only contributed \$1 billion of that pledge. We are the only country to have substantially fallen short of its pledge. Just recently, during its first replenishment period, countries pledged over \$10 billion to the GCF, without the leadership of the United States. Now, I ask the Committee to the U.S. to its role of international leadership.

To truly address the magnitude of this problem could take billions of U.S. dollars. In November, introduced legislation on the Green Climate Fund, to authorize appropriations of such sums that as may be necessary to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions reductions required to keep the planet at or below 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming, consistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement, while acknowledging that the need is much greater than just that goal.

As such, I urge the Committee to provide \$750 million to the Green Climate Fund.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer my concerns and priorities to the Committee.