

Hearing Transcript

House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Hearing on Members' Day Priorities

Thursday, March 16, 2017

ROGERS:

The U.S. has a -- a vital role to play in advancing democracy, protecting the innocent, helping the displaced and vulnerable, and offering diplomatic solutions to crises, unrest, and other challenges abroad. For example, to protect our national interests we need an aggressive plan to fight ISIS, which requires a comprehensive approach, including not just military engagement but also the full and responsible use of all diplomatic tools at our disposal.

Today's release by the administration of a so-called skinny budget (inaudible) -- as we all know, under the Constitution when it comes to appropriations the president proposes but the Congress disposes. Once the full budget picture emerges in the weeks ahead, I look forward to working with Secretary Tillerson, Ms. Lowey, and other members of the House to ensure that the necessary resources are available to fulfill these goals.

In regard to the so-called skinny budget, there's an old saying: This, too, shall pass.

To that end, with the encouragement of the full committee chairman, we're holding this hearing so we may hear directly from our colleague and learn about their priorities for this subcommittee. The committee has an electronic system for collecting all fiscal year 2018 requests. That system opened on March the 1st and the deadline for this subcommittee is March 30.

But today we are pleased to be joined by around a dozen members who are making their requests in person. The involvement of all members is valued and will aid the subcommittee in preparing the 2018 bill and report.

We really appreciate everyone who is here today and look forward to the testimony that's to come.

First let me recognize Ms. Lowey, my working partner.

LOWEY:

Well, I want to thank our distinguished chair.

I think it's on.

And I want to join Chairman Rogers in welcoming our distinguished colleagues today. I am pleased that the chairman is holding this hearing and that you have all taken time away from your very busy schedules to be here and discuss the state and foreign operations budget for F.Y. 2018.

I believe -- and I know our chair is committed -- to diplomacy and development efforts. They are both critical to maintain U.S. global leadership, protect our national security, and promote economic growth.

Former President Bush's comments, which I have quoted many times, is as true as ever: Defense, diplomacy, and development are equal legs on the stool of American foreign policy.

Yet, dramatic reductions in the president's proposed budget for the function 150 account would undermine that delicate balance with damaging impacts from deep, ill-advised cuts. If we pursue this path we will gravely undermine our foreign policy goals and national security.

Therefore, it is now more important than ever to draw attention to the programs you are here to discuss. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished colleagues about their priorities in the state and foreign operations budget.

That's it. Thank you.

ROGERS:

Thank the gentlelady.

Without objection, the -- the full written statements of all members will be included in the record.

In order to keep (inaudible) we hope that you can limit your testimony to no more than five minutes.

Mr. Griffith is recognized.

GRIFFITH:

Thank you very much, Chairman Rogers and -- and Ranking Member Lowey. I do appreciate it.

I'm here today to talk about the Green Climate Fund. As you know, that was first announced at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference and then set up later with the headquarters in -- in South Korea by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

In terms of funding, the Copenhagen Accord state that the fund would have "a goal of mobilizing jointly \$1 (sic) billion U.S. a year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries." The Green Climate Fund's executive director stated in 2015, however, that the estimated funding needed by developing countries would increase to \$450 billion by 2020. And the United Nations' top climate change official described the current goal of \$100 billion as peanuts and envisions trillions of dollars in spending over the next 15 years.

Congress has never authorized nor appropriated funding for the Green Climate Fund. Yet, on November 15, 2014 President Obama pledged an initial \$3 billion from the United States during meetings of the G- 20. In fact, just three days before President Trump's inauguration President Obama's State Department cut a check for \$500 million as the second of two payments towards the Green Climate Fund.

This funding was drawn from the fiscal year '16 Economic Support Fund appropriation, which was also the -- the source of the first \$500 million payment in 2016. The payments are completely counter to congressional intent and direction in the appropriation process.

The United States government already supports significant climate change-related spending, including technical and financial assistance for climate change activities in the developing world through a variety of bilateral and multilateral programs. We cannot continue to fund yet another climate finance program. Congress must instead address the most pressing priorities for the American people amidst serious fiscal constraints.

In 2015 I led a letter, with 110 members signing on, opposing funding for President Obama's initial request for the Green Climate Fund and followed up with this committee to reiterate this request for fiscal year '17. The fiscal year '16 enacted appropriations legislation did not provide funding for the Green Climate Fund, despite President Obama's request. However, neither the fiscal year '16 appropriations bills nor the fiscal year '17 continuing resolutions contained a rider prohibiting funds from being used for the Green Climate Fund, leaving an opening for the president to shift funding from the Economic Support Fund appropriation.

I am appreciative of last year's fiscal year '17 House Appropriations Committee-passed Senate -- passed -- excuse me -- state and foreign appropriations bill did contain the rider language as follows: "Green Climate Fund prohibition. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this act or prior acts making appropriations for the Department of State, foreign operations, and related programs may made -- may be made available as a contribution, grant, or any other payment to the Green Climate Fund."

On the contrary, however, the F.Y. '17 Senate Appropriations Committee-passed state and foreign operations appropriations bill would have actually appropriated \$263 million for the Green Climate Fund. President Trump's budget blueprint for fiscal year '18, released this morning, does eliminate U.S. funding related to the Green Climate Fund and its two precursor climate investment funds.

I ask this subcommittee and the full Appropriations Committee to reflect the will of the House and the president not only by providing no funds for the Green Climate Fund, but also including language to specifically prohibit any -- any appropriated funds from being used for such payments. While I'm encouraged the president does not plan to make these payments particularly by circumventing the will of Congress and without specific appropriations, I believe it is important that Congress make this point clear.

I thank you all again for the opportunity to be here today and to present this to you all live, and appreciate you all taking your time to hear those of us that do wish to do a live presentation.

And with that, I yield back.

ROGERS:

Thank you, Mr. Griffith. Well presented (inaudible).

GRIFFITH:

I appreciate that. Thank you very much. I hope you all have a good day. Thank you.

ROGERS:

Ms. Lowey (inaudible) would you like to ask a question?

LOWEY:

No, that's fine. Thank you.

ROGERS:

Questions?

LOWEY:

I shouldn't say that's fine because I disagree with the gentleman (inaudible) I respectfully disagree with the gentleman, but I do want to move the hearing along.

ROGERS:

Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

Mr. McGovern, welcome.

MCGOVERN:

Thank you very much. And thank you, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey, Mr. Fortenberry. I'm happy to be here. It's kind of like the Rules Committee, all these members of Congress testifying. How lucky can you get?

But I appreciate the opportunity to testify on priorities for fiscal year 2018. Nobody understands better than -- than you that the programs under your jurisdiction are central to our national security and address critical and often urgent needs around the world. I know that I'm preaching to the choir

when I strongly encourage the committee to talk to their Budget Committee colleagues as you fight for robust funding for the 150 account in the F.Y. 2018 budget resolution.

I also want to express my support for all your efforts to move forward a final version of the F.Y. 2017 state and foreign operations appropriations bill. Too much thoughtful care and hard work has gone into the House and Senate versions of that bill to abandon it now to a C.R.

Mr. Chairman, there is a long history of bipartisan support for America's global health, food security, humanitarian, and development programs. They promote U.S. interests, save lives, improve livelihoods, and advance the very best American values and ideals.

And today I want to add my voice in support of our global food security and nutrition programs. I ask the committee to support, at a minimum, funding levels that match or exceed the F.Y. 2017 appropriations provided for Feed the Future and for nutrition programs, especially the nutrition sub-account under the Global Health Programs account in USAID.

I strongly believe that maintaining or expanding a U.S. commitment to global food security, agricultural development, and child nutrition must be high on the list of competing priorities. These programs are central to helping people and nations become more economically productive and prosperous. They are an investment in helping nations free themselves from dependency on international donor assistance.

But to be successful they require a long-term commitment. I'm disappointed by the continued flat funding of the nutrition sub-account under the Global Health Program. Funding for nutrition sub-account needs to increase in F.Y. 2018 and in F.Y. 2017, if that is still possible, in order not to reduce the scope of its work and the number of beneficiaries reached.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, Colombia, one of America's strongest and most important allies in the hemisphere, is in the midst of profound historic change. With over 50 years of conflict, nearly 5 million internally displaced people, hundreds of thousands of victims of unspeakable violence, and generations growing up knowing only war, the Colombian government has signed peace accords to bring armed conflict with the FARC guerrillas to an end.

While homicides and conflict are at their lowest levels in decades, the human rights situation remains perilous. Human rights defenders and local social leaders -- the very human capital Colombia needs to consolidate peace and promote lasting reconciliation -- are being targeted and murdered in increasing numbers. It is urgent that the committee signals America's unwavering support for Colombia and maintains strong and unequivocal funding to implement the peace agreement.

For both F.Y. 2018 and the pending F.Y. 2017 bill I urge the committee to be generous to Colombia to the maximum extent possible, placing the priority of advancing peace, development, human rights, reconciliation, and the rule of law. Congress should not, however, seek to impose conditions that undermine or are directly contrary to provisions of the signed accords.

One issue I want to highlight in particular is the need to specifically designate \$21 million in the F.Y. 2017 under the nonproliferation, anti-terrorism, and demining account for demining in Colombia, and if that isn't possible, to make up the shortfall in F.Y. 2018. After Afghanistan, Colombia has the second-highest number of anti-personnel landmine casualties in the world.

Norway, Colombia, and the U.S. are providing significant funding for expanding the -- expanded demining effort so that all Colombians may one day walk their land without fear of losing their lives and limbs to this indiscriminate weapon. It is urgent that these pledged funds of \$21 million be provided as quickly as possible.

Finally, I ask the committee to maintain robust funding for Central America. This is vital to U.S. national security.

There should be no doubt that the United States remains committed to helping our allies in -- in the Northern Triangle address the violence and lack of opportunity that plague the region and which drive so many families and young people to abandon their homes and flee.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, at the end of January I was in El Salvador. I joined an effort by Salvadoran and Salvadoran-American families to establish a national commission to account for the thousands of disappeared still missing from the civil war. The Salvadoran government agreed and is now getting input on the framework of such a commission.

I respectfully ask the committee to provide \$200,000 to \$300,000 from existing ESF funding in the -- in F.Y. 2017, if that's still possible, or in the F.Y. 2018 to support this humanitarian initiative.

I thank you very much for all your great work. And again, I believe that the -- the work that is done in this committee is essential for our national security all around the world and I thank you and your staff for all your efforts.

ROGERS:

Well, thank you very much (inaudible).

We're hoping, praying, that when the Senate gets our (inaudible) -- that they will consider attaching to that bill the balance of the other bills we've passed through committee, six I think we have on the floor, send that back to the House so that we can get 2017 behind us even as we're embarking on 2018 hearings and process.

General Mattis, Mad Dog, says that if we slash State Department funding he's going to have to order a lot more ammunition. And over 100 admirals and generals -- retired admirals and generals -- have said essentially the same thing.

So I am absolutely shocked at the administration's puny request for this worldwide effort to defeat ISIS -- maybe not necessarily on the battlefield as much as in soft warfare, if you will.

So I -- I share your frustration with the so-called skinny budget.

MCGOVERN:

Well, and as you know, I didn't comment directly on the -- on the budget because I'm confident that you're going to make sure that it's dead on arrival, so that's why.

(LAUGHTER)

I trust the -- the bipartisan leadership on this -- on this committee.

ROGERS:

Ms. Lowey?

LOWEY:

Well, first of all, I want to say I completely agree. I completely agree with the chair.

The budget was shocking, disappointing. I can think of many other adjectives, but I just want to use my minute to thank you for your lifelong commitment, your knowledge. You've been to these areas of the world, especially South America, Latin America, and you have shown by actions your great knowledge.

And I, frankly, am in awe of the work you have done, and so appreciative. And I know the chair and I want to continue to work with you as we turn this budget upside down. So thank you so much for being here today and thank you for your work and commitment.

ROGERS:

Questions? Comments?

Thank you, sir.

MCGOVERN:

Thank you.

LOWEY:

Thank you.

(LAUGHTER)

ROGERS:

We're glad to have the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Yoho, recognized for five minutes.

LOWEY:

I saw him on television. He looked pretty good. I'm glad he took...

YOHO:

Well, thank you.

LOWEY:

I'm glad he took time out from TV to be with us today.

YOHO:

I went to the dermatologist yesterday so I may not -- anyways, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Lowey, and members of the committee, thank you all for convening this hearing today. I submitted my full testimony for the record but I wanted to talk to you about some important aspects.

And I'm a guy that came up here to get rid of foreign aid. You know, I ran on that. We were going to get rid of it. But I've -- in my four years here I've become much more learned, and that's what I wanted to talk to you about today.

Today America is confronting unprecedented instability and growing humanitarian crises around the world. Completely slashing the 150 account will not address our debt crisis; it will only hinder America's foreign trade, security, and potentially increase the likelihood of future troubles -- trouble spots popping up that could require even more U.S. involvement.

Like many, I'm skeptical of how U.S. taxpayer dollars are spent overseas. I heard countless stories of America's generosity funding wasteful projects and enriching corrupt foreign bureaucrats at the expense of the U.S. taxpayers. I believe U.S. (inaudible) up to scrutiny.

As a member of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee and the chairman of the Asia Pacific Subcommittee I've developed a deeper understanding of how strategic investments in development can be an important tool in maintaining America leadership while creating strong allies and providing great economic opportunities for America's businesses here and at home.

The president has proposed cuts of 28 percent to state and USAID and a 35 percent cut to treasury and international programs. These proposed cuts certainly make a robust reform agenda for foreign assistance necessary.

However, I believe strongly that we can -- we cannot balance the federal budget on discretionary spending alone. If we are to control our debt we must be willing to tackle and take on our unsustainable mandatory spending.

Ninety-five percent of the world's customers live outside of our borders. The global economic leadership and foreign assistance that the U.S. generates significant returns on invest at home. Strategic investments in -- in diplomacy and development help to build and open up new markets by promoting rule of law, fighting corruption, and strengthening local institutions, and creating investments in export opportunities for American businesses.

To this point, 11 of America's top 15 export markets have been recipients of U.S. foreign assistance. This investment in foreign aid, when it's targeted and managed correctly, can yield great returns and can help increase trade -- trade that is vital not only to my state of Florida, where it supports over 2.5 million jobs, but to -- to the entire United States.

The small but cost-effective investments we make in the international affairs budget help advance U.S. national security interests at home and abroad and spur American economic job growth. For example, U.S. foreign assistance helped move South Korea from an economic collapse after the Korean War to our sixth-largest trading partner and a key ally today. The \$40 billion we now get back every year in trade in South Korea is more than what we provided in foreign assistance to that country over five decades.

My goal for U.S. aid is to achieve a level of effectiveness that every time we provide aid to a region or country it is with the final aim of transitioning them from trade to aid, like we have done in South Korea. I'm proud that there is a legacy of strong bipartisan support in Congress for the international affairs budget and the program it funds, including PEPFAR, the Millennial (sic) Challenge Corporation, OPIC, USTDA, and Power Africa.

The State Department and U.S. development agencies work around the country and the world to advance American economic interests by promoting exports that today make up almost 13 percent of America's \$18 trillion economy and support about one in five American jobs. The U.S. Trade and Development Agency, for instance, generates \$85 in exports of U.S.-manufactured good and service for every \$1 programmed for priority development projects in the emerging markets. The agency's programs have generated over \$56 billion in U.S. exports, supporting an estimated 300,000 U.S. jobs, since USTDA was established in 1992.

More astounding, OPIC -- which is an amazing corporation -- which has generated \$80 billion in U.S. exports, has supported more than 280,000 jobs since its creation. In Florida alone, OPIC currently supports over 2,200 jobs. OPIC's portfolio has a write-off rate of less than 1 percent and 38 consecutive years of federal deficit reduction, including more than \$2.6 billion returned to the U.S. treasury since 2008.

At a time when American leadership is needed more than ever, we must continue to invest in the international affairs budget. As such, I ask that you support for a strong 302(b) allocation in F.Y. '18 that is close to the levels approved in the F.Y. '17 continuing resolution.

This will allow for needed reforms in our international aid programs while not sacrificing our security or economy for splashing headlines that say we are cutting American foreign aid, which will ultimately do nothing to address our current debt crisis, and creating yet another vacuum by the lack of American leadership to be filled most likely by a foe to our country and ideals.

And I thank you.

ROGERS:

Thank you.

Well, we spend less than 1 percent (inaudible) and it's more or less like a fly on the back of the elephant, which is defense.

YOHO:

And he doesn't know it's there.

ROGERS:

And he doesn't know it's there. That's right.

As you say, if you erased every penny we spent on discretionary spending, you -- you erased everything -- National Park Service, agriculture, whatever -- you'd still be (inaudible) because we're not the problem. Discretionary is not the problem, as you well know. It's -- it's mandatory spending. It's just taking us over and will soon have us all.

YOHO:

Mr. Chairman, if I may interject, if you look at Electrify Africa and you look at this country back in the early 1900s, if it was not for the investment in -- in the rural coops we would not have electricity. Electrify Africa is bringing power to the African people, and when you empower the people the people will change the government the way they need to.

And that's why, you know, if we invest in those things it'll help the people of that country. Those people will help change those countries to where they become trading partners of our and we'll have to -- we'll be able to back off of some of the stuff we're spending a lot of money on, trying to prop up governments by empowering the people.

ROGERS:

We hear you.

Ms. Lowey?

LOWEY:

You've heard the expression "shock and awe." I cannot tell you how delighted I am because we haven't had a chance to really interact, and I think, frankly, the chair -- our distinguished chair --

could deputize you to speak to -- I won't mention -- to speak to some parts of the caucus of which you are a part, because your statement is so very critical.

And as I mentioned before, I don't remember, probably saw you on CNN or one of them, but maybe you'll give this speech on television, because in -- in all sincerity, your statement was eloquent, so very important, and I think there are too many people who don't take the time to talk about the importance of this account back home. And I understand everyone has to win their election, but you expressed my view and the view of many of us on this committee so eloquently, and I wanted to personally thank you.

YOHO:

Well, thank you. And, you know, when I took some of those votes, like Electrify Africa, we had a lot of conservatives got mad at me.

But when you explain why we do this, we can cut foreign aid and that vacuum's going to be filled and it'll be harder for us to continue what we do in -- in our own country. So when you explain to them that, yeah, I want to get away from foreign aid; I want to go to aid, not -- I want to go to trade, not aid. And if we go to that we'll be like Korea and have examples of that all over the world, where they become large trading partners of ours...

LOWEY:

Whatever parts of the budget you want to talk about to your colleagues...

YOHO:

Yes, ma'am.

LOWEY:

... is fine, but I do hope that you can build support, and it's a pleasure to have you testify today.

YOHO:

Thank you, ma'am.

ROGERS:

Questions?

Mr. Fortenberry?

FORTENBERRY:

I almost jumped up and applauded, as well (inaudible). Well said, as well as the previous member, Mr. McGovern. And I -- I think this growing sensitivity about the importance of foreign aid, foreign investment, and the reasons that we do it -- they're three fold: humanitarian benefit, economically hopefully (ph), and the military tells us, "Send us in last. Do whatever you can to build up good will and friendship and trust."

And I think you (inaudible)...

YOHO:

I've got a mentor across the aisle here.

FORTENBERRY:

Thank you.

ROGERS:

Questions?

Thank you, Mr. Yoho.

YOHO:

Thank you all.

ROGERS:

Now we are blessed with the presence of the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Mr. Engel.

ENGEL:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before Mr. Yoho leaves I -- I -- I want to also say on the Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Royce and I work very closely together. We -- we pride ourselves in saying we're the most bipartisan committee in -- in the Congress. And I think you just heard one of the reasons why, when we have our members who work closely together on both sides of the aisle travel and -- and -- and have a good knowledge of the budget and what it does. It makes us all proud, and I -- I told Ted that -- I've traveled with him many times, and I'm very proud, just -- I didn't hear his whole speech, but what I heard it's very proud of.

I also want to say I've been in this Congress 29 years. I never knew this room existed. All these little hiding places, it's wonderful. Just terrific. So it is worth it to be on the Appropriations...

(LAUGHTER)

LOWEY:

Not my room.

(LAUGHTER)

It's reserved for the chair.

ROGERS:

Well, we look -- we look at the foreign affairs hearing room and marvel (inaudible). We're down in the bowels of government knocking on the pipes (inaudible).

ENGEL:

Well, Ms. Lowey and I have adjoining districts and we've both served in Congress the exact same time. This is our 29th year, and we've always had adjoining districts.

LOWEY:

I started when I was 10.

ENGEL:

Right.

(LAUGHTER)

And I was five-and-a-half, so.

But, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

And -- and thank you, Ranking Member Lowey, and all the members of the subcommittee. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to talk about the need for continued strong investment in American security through our international affairs budget.

Congress, as we all say many times, is a coequal branch of government and, according to the Constitution, we appropriate funds (inaudible). We -- we just don't have to roll over because any White House says so.

This year we're going to have to put that idea to the test.

This morning we learned that the White House wants to cut nearly one-third of the international affairs budget next year. That obviously would be a disaster. In fact, slashing our international

engagement by even a fraction of that at a time when we are facing serious challenges around the world would be an absolute disaster.

What's worse, we know from earlier reporting that the administration wants to cut even more. Senior State Department officials have told me that rather than getting there in one stroke they want instead to put the department on a glide path to achieving greater reductions.

The way I see it, whether you nosedive into the side of a mountain or you're on a glide path into the side of a mountain, you still end up on the side of a mountain. And that's why more than 100 of our colleagues joined me in making the case to Secretary Tillerson that such cuts would be a catastrophic mistake.

I ask that this letter be included as part of the record. It's the same case I'm making here this morning.

I also spoke with -- with Secretary Tillerson on the phone last week and voiced my -- my objections, although we didn't know specifically how bad these cuts would be.

The world can be a dangerous place, and there will be times when the only option for keeping America safe is the use of military force. We have the greatest military in the world and I have always supported a strong national defense, even when people threaten me for doing so.

The men and women who wear our uniform put their lives on the line to protect our country, so we owe it to them to exhaust every possible option before we send them into harm's way. By cutting support for American diplomacy and development we're betraying that commitment. If we don't give these efforts their due, we are not exhausting every option and instead unnecessarily putting our troops at risk.

Because what the State Department does, what USAID and MCC and the Peace Corps does, and what our funding for the United Nations supports, we're stopping crises before they start.

And, Mr. Chairman, I brought with me a letter from the AJC (ph) underscoring the need for continued American engagement with the U.N., and I ask that it be included in the record.

Diplomats work out disagreements across a conference table or in quiet corners so they don't need to be resolved on the battlefield with bombs and bullets. Diplomacy makes old friendships stronger and builds new bridges to connect with new partners.

Development efforts aren't charity. They're investments in countries and communities to help them become more stable, healthy, and prosperous.

Poverty creates hotbeds for violence, crime, and corruption, and those problems inevitably spill over into neighboring countries. Development assistance, on the other hand, builds stronger partners on the world stage, partners who will share our values and priorities.

As you said before, Mr. Chairman, this kind of aid is less than 1 percent of the total budget. I know the consensus is that it's a whole bunch more, but it's less than 1 percent.

What's more, that means these efforts cost pennies on the dollar compared to military engagement. Look at the Peace Corps. It's staffed by volunteers who they've paid dollars a day but work full time to project American leadership and improve our relationships in some of the most challenging places in the world. That's a pretty good bang for our buck.

So if we slash investment in diplomacy and development we're telling our servicemembers and the American people, "We'll take our chances down the road, even if that may mean a much steeper cost in terms of American blood and American treasure."

When time comes, what will we say to constituents who want to know, "Could you have done more? Did you have the chance to put out this fire before it burned out of control?"

What will we say to mothers and fathers who ask, "Did my son or daughter really have to make the ultimate sacrifice, or could we have stopped the crisis before it started so that my child could have come home?"

There's another cost. If the United States draws back from the world stage, what signal does that send? What does it say to countries that look to our values and our leadership?

What does it say to other big powers, maybe those that don't share our values or our interests -- think of a country beginning with an R -- when they see the void we've left behind?

History has shown us what we can get by retreating into a defensive, isolationist crouch. If we aren't carrying the mantle of global leadership, make no mistake, someone else will pick it up and we may not like what we see.

Don't want Russia picking it up. Don't want China picking it up. Don't want any of these countries that don't share our values picking it up, and they will if we retreat.

The American people don't want to see that happen to our country. In fact, recent data shows that 72 percent of Americans believe our country should play a leading global role. Nearly six in 10 believe funding levels at the State Department should stay the same or increase.

AS for military experts, here's a letter signed by more than 120 retired generals and admirals. They write, quote, "We urge you to ensure that resources for the international affairs budget keep pace with the growing global threats and opportunities we face. Now is not the time to retreat," unquote.

I ask that this letter be included in the record in its entirety.

Secretary of Defense Mattis himself said in 2013, and I quote him, "If you don't fund the State Department fully then I need to buy more ammunition ultimately."

So I think it's a cost-benefit ratio. The more that we put into the State Department's diplomacy, hopefully the less we have to put into a military budget as we deal with the outcome of an apparent American withdrawal from the international scene.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lowey, I feel that following the administration's path forward for our international affairs budget is the equivalent of -- of retreat.

It's a retreat from our role as a global leader. It's a retreat from our alliances and our careful diplomatic efforts to curb proliferation, human rights abuses, and climate change. It's a retreat from the lifesaving work we do all over the world, whether that's fighting HIV/AIDS, combating tuberculosis, or battling modern slavery. And it's a retreat from our solemn commitment that military force must always remain a measure of last resort, not first.

Mr. Chairman, let me close with this question to think about: If you were an American diplomat or a development expert or a Peace Corps volunteer and you woke up this morning and heard the news, what would you think? How would you react to learning that your government only wants to pay seven cents on the dollar for your service and sacrifice for your country?

What would you think if you were an American ally relying on our continued leadership in the world promoting freedom and democracy and the rule of law?

I fear that this budget request is sending a chilling shockwave across the globe, and that shockwave will come back on us. The diseases we don't prevent will reach our shores. The conflicts we don't help resolve will grow into the wars we need to fight. The places where we fail to plant the seeds of friendship today may tomorrow become fertile ground for violence and hatred toward America.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lowey, you are both in a unique position to do something about it to guarantee America's role in the world going forward. I encourage this committee to support a strong international affairs budget, and I'm again grateful for the time today.

I yield back.

ROGERS:

Well, thank you, Mr. Engel, for your testimony.

Without objection, the committee will include the gentleman's letters in the record.

ENGEL:

Thank you.

ROGERS:

Thank you very much.

ENGEL:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

ROGERS:

Questions?

ENGEL:

Thank you, Madam.

LOWEY:

Thank you very much. We appreciate your eloquent statement.

ROGERS:

Now we recognize the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Babin.

BABIN:

Yes, sir.

Let me see if I can get this over here. Thank you.

Thank you very much. This really is a beautiful room, which I've never been in, as well. Great view out there.

(UNKNOWN)

(OFF-MIKE)

(LAUGHTER)

BABIN:

I was actually looking past you, Chris (ph). I'm sorry, but looking at the -- the (inaudible).

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Chairman Rogers, and Ranking Member Lowey, and members of the State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee -- Appropriations Subcommittee. Thank you for allowing me to come address you this morning.

At this critical time in our nation I believe it is very important that Congress does everything within its power to support the president and his administration's efforts to strengthen our national

security. He has taken strong and important steps to put the safety and security of the American people first, and I hope that this subcommittee will build on those efforts.

I would encourage the committee to provide funding for no more than 50,000 refugees in fiscal year 2018. This is consistent with the president's executive order on protecting the nation from foreign terrorist entry into the United States.

And as much as it is in the purview of the subcommittee, I ask that sufficient money be provided to improve screening, vetting protocols, and procedures associated with the U.S. Refugee Admission Program, USRAP. There are a number of troubling aspects about our current refugee admission program.

Among them is the glaring under-representation of religious minorities -- Christians in particular -- being admitted from the Middle East through our nation's refugee program. As they're currently performed, refugee admissions to the United States largely come from those being served in refugee camps run and administered by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

(UNKNOWN)

Your mike is off.

BABIN:

Is it? How do you turn it on then?

Can you all hear me? It's a small room. OK. Sorry about that.

As they're currently performed, refugee admissions to the United States largely come from those being served in refugee camps run and administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Many reports have demonstrated that Christians simply do not feel safe in UNHCR refugee camps.

There are fears among Christians that they will face terrible persecution, rape, extortion, exploitation, and even murder and death. These are very real and legitimate fears. Given this fact, it is little wonder that among the refugees entering the U.S. through this U.N.-run program there are very few Christians.

There is a way around this for some refugees, but the Obama -- the former Obama administration failed to utilize this priority two, or P-2 refugee recognition process. Given these shortcomings, I believe it is necessary that we consider other avenues by which we can ensure that persecuted Christians can gain access to the refugee programs to address the discriminatory nature that currently characterizes the admission of refugees from the Middle East region in particular.

Specifically, I ask that the committee consider language that would direct embassies to work closely with and consider prioritizing referrals from nongovernment organizations, or NGOs, that are working with persecuted Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle Eastern region.

This might help address the glaring under- representation of Christian refugees from Syria, where less than 0.5 percent have been Christian in the last year, and in the Middle East in general, and enable these extremely persecuted refugees to access the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program through an alternative route.

Embassies are already permitted to make referrals to the USRAP, but my understanding is that this channel is very rarely used. We should encourage U.S. embassies to collaborate with these NGOs working in disaster- or war-torn areas abroad to accept for review nongovernmental organization refugee recommendations so that religious minorities are not excluded due to discriminatory practices within these U.N. camps.

I want to thank you for your consideration of what I consider a very serious issue. Encouragement by this subcommittee along the lines that I have suggested may enable this subcommittee to have a significant impact on the lives of the most persecuted peoples on the face of the Earth.

I want to thank you for your attention to this issue, and I look forward to working with you and your staff to address this issue in the fiscal year 2018's State Foreign Operations Appropriations Act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

ROGERS:

Thank you, Mr. Babin. Appreciate your being here. Thank you.

BABIN:

Glad to be here. Be -- be glad to answer any question, Mr. Chairman.

ROGERS:

Questions?

LOWEY:

I just want to say, as far as I know, the U.S. has the most rigorous refugee screening process, including biometric tracks, medical screening, DNA testing. And if your information can be extended to us at the committee, I have never heard that religious minorities were excluded.

And I'm happy to certainly have others look into it, or if you have additional information it would be very helpful.

BABIN:

Well, can I -- can I interject...

LOWEY:

Sure.

BABIN:

... one thing here, Ms. Lowey?

Syria, for example: 10 percent of the Syrian population is Christian. Less than one-half of 1 percent of the refugees we have taken in in the last 12 months under the Obama administration have been Christians. Less than one-half of 1 percent.

LOWEY:

I certainly respect those numbers, but it may be for many other reasons. Maybe the Christians are staying there, not leaving.

So I would certainly -- and I know the chair and I would welcome that information.

BABIN:

Yes, ma'am.

LOWEY:

And I thank you.

BABIN:

You bet. Well, I -- I know that there is great fear. We -- we've got -- we've got very good information in our research -- very great fear by -- on the part of Christians to even enter these U.N. refugee camps because of discriminatory practices.

ROGERS:

Thank you, Mr. Babin. We appreciate...

LOWEY:

Thank you.

ROGERS:

We are running short on time.

Do you have a question?

FORTENBERRY:

All -- all I was going to do was say that's a noteworthy comment traced back to the reality of certain minority populations not being counted as part of the refugee population because they're not in the camps. They're dispersed into other areas because of fear or other concerns. I think it's a reasoned point.

Thank you for raising that, sir.

BABIN:

Thank you.

Thank you.

ROGERS:

We are -- we are running (inaudible), so...

(UNKNOWN)

I promise to talk fast if that's...

ROGERS:

I think Mr. Blumenauer was...

(UNKNOWN)

OK. He was -- OK, he was next.

BLUMENAUER:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will attempt to be brief.

I want to associate myself with the comments that you've heard about the need to protect the important programs that you've overseen over the years. And I would just focus my attention on one area, as I try every year to find my way down to this room to talk about what we're doing in the area of water and sanitation.

This subcommittee in the past -- I appreciate Ms. Lowey and your predecessor, Ms. Granger, helping us beef up these efforts. We still have two-thirds of a billion people around the globe that do not have access to safe drinking water. It is four times that number that do not have access to adequate sanitation.

It is not just a humanitarian crisis, although those illnesses actually pose a threat to broader populations, including Americans, but it's also -- has geopolitical -- water insecurity was part of what drove the implosion of civil society in Syria. Having the drought in the countryside, not having access to water, moving people to the cities created a situation.

We've had the strategic assessment from the Pentagon showing that water instability is a threat to our security, compromising cross- border conflicts, leading to famine. These areas that this subcommittee has supported a refined effort to improve water and sanitation programs.

And I would just hope that we would be able to -- to think strategically about how these modest investments have made a difference for millions of lives and strengthening our position.

Most recently I've focused attention on what's happening in Gaza, where we're -- have almost 2 million people who are rapidly approaching (ph) a situation where there is no potable water, and having disease and not having drinkable water in this flashpoint in the Middle East is going to be destabilizing for Israel and for the United States.

There has been some progress that has been made with Israelis moving forward in the international organizations, but the United States partnership and investment, even though it's not great in terms of all the things you look at, has helped leverage, has helped bring people to the table, forced cooperation, and made amazing progress. It's one of those few areas where we actually have broad bipartisan support in Congress.

My partner in the past, the last Henry Hyde, and more recently with Ted Poe, we've had support in the Senate. But you've been there with some essential funding to help make it happen, and I just hope the committee, with all the difficult things you're facing, will not have sanitation and water kind of slip away, because you've made a big impact and it's hard to think of any area that would affect more lives more profoundly for such a modest investment.

And I appreciate your courtesy.

ROGERS:

Well, thank you for that -- your testimony. I'm particularly sensitive to good water issues. I've spent my career back home in my district getting (ph) water to rural (inaudible). When I came to this job I think we had like 35 percent of people on city water; now it's at 92 percent (inaudible).

When I -- when I was growing up in rural -- really rural -- Kentucky we -- for water our family had a well in the yard, which I didn't realize at the time was just pure sulfur water. But that's what we grew up on.

So we moved to town when I was 9 (ph) years old, started drinking city water, which tasted awful.

(LAUGHTER)

I had been used to sulfur water.

Anybody have any questions or comments?

LOWEY:

Thank you.

When we see you coming we just say, "Water, water, water."

(LAUGHTER)

BLUMENAUER:

Thank you very much.

ROGERS:

Thank you very much.

Your statement will be in the record (inaudible). If you'd like to summarize for us we'd appreciate it (inaudible).

Mr. Foster?

FOSTER:

Thank you, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey, for having this Members' Day, and to all the members of the subcommittee for allowing me to testify.

And I'd like to thank you both for your advocacy of important programs funded through the state and foreign ops account. We spend money in a variety of ways to make our country safer, and the return on investment from -- in national security per dollar expended in the State Department I believe is higher than many other ways that we spend money.

And in that -- in that light, the proposed 28 percent cut to the State Department budget is a step backwards. Far better to look for cuts in weapon systems that the Pentagon does not want and bases that it wishes closed.

But I'm here for two specific reasons today: first, to urge robust funding for the accounts that support the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, which is the organization that is tasked with verifying that states comply with their commitments under both the nonproliferation treaty and other nuclear nonproliferation agreements, such as the Iran nuclear deal; and secondly, to urge a much smaller but symbolically important support for the Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Application in the Middle East, the so-called SESAME project, which is a collaboration of scientists from throughout the Middle East, including Israel and including Iran

and everyone in between, in building a world-class scientific facility about an hour drive from Amman and an hour drive from Jerusalem.

It is a -- a unique facility and -- and important to me because of my history in high-energy physics, where we've seen very often that when politicians and -- and even people can't get along often their scientists do, and that scientific facilities like SESAME can be an important bridge. This is a -- it's a facility that's been in construction for a long time. It's nearing completion but missing a lot of the scientific equipment it needs.

And so even a symbolic contribution from the U.S. would go a long way towards encouraging the Gulf States and others to -- to chip in a lot more money.

And now first, with respect to the IAEA, earlier last year world leaders from more than 50 countries convened in Washington and participated in a global dialogue to reinforce our commitment at the highest levels to securing nuclear materials. And in support of that initiative the Nuclear Security Summit released an action plan highlighting the IAEA's need for reliable and sufficient resources.

As you know, each member state of the IAEA is assessed annual contributions from the IAEA's regular budget. The budget covers the salaries of agency personnel, operating costs, and some of its work in the areas of safeguards, nuclear security, and peaceful uses of nuclear technologies.

However, the regular budget of the IAEA is woefully inadequate to cover all of the costs that are incurred by the agency's critical work. And with nuclear threats drawing, for good cause, increased global attention, members -- member states, including the United States, are expecting more from the IAEA.

This is for several reasons. There -- first, there's an increasing number of nuclear facilities and an increasing amount of nuclear material around the world that needs safeguarding and monitoring. And January 16, 2017 marked the one-year anniversary of the Iran deal's implementation, and as a critical part of this inspection regimen the IAEA inspectors have enhanced access to all declared Iranian nuclear sites, including uranium mines and mills, and continuous real-time surveillance of centrifuge manufacturing and storage locations.

Our ability to monitor and detect illicit nuclear activities in Iran, including illicit trafficking, is largely based upon the will and support of the international community and the capabilities of the IAEA. So -- and -- so that is a -- one of the -- one of the main reasons why we should, you know, treat very carefully the budget of the IAEA.

Secondly, since Fukushima the agency has expanded its work on nuclear safety, and that is a -- you know, it's obviously a very important thing, and a disaster like that costs hundreds of billions, wherever it happens.

And third, since September 11, 2001 the agency has increased its work to combat nuclear terrorism, including setting up a nuclear security fund, which is largely funded -- funded by voluntary contributions from member states like the United States. Virtually all the agency's technical assistance programs and projects are funded outside the regular budget.

As a result, the agency relies heavily on member states' voluntary or extra-budgetary contributions. In fact, much of what the agency does is in direct support of the U.S. nonproliferation and -- or other nuclear security objectives.

And so we can specify how our voluntary contributions are to be spent, thus ensuring that it goes to support our priority objectives. For example, we currently use the voluntary contribution to fund projects of specific U.S. interest in the safeguards and nuclear security programs.

Through the IAEA Peaceful Uses Initiative, our voluntary contributions promote the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in both power generation and other applications that include food security, water, cancer treatment, disease prevention, climate, and the oceans. The IAEA, for example, played a helpful role in the recent Ebola and Zika crises by helping use nuclear technology that enabled faster detection of both the viruses and quicker treatment. Their -- you know, their involvement there literally saved lives.

And finally, I'd like to draw your attention to an important opportunity to advance U.S. diplomatic goals in the Middle East through scientific engagement. The SESAME project, as I mentioned, is a major science facility under construction in Jordan that both promotes scientific excellence in the Middle East, an -- an area that historically has led the world and has been lagging in recent centuries -- and also in building scientific links that foster better understanding and culture of peace through collaboration.

The U.S. support for SESAME would provide encouragement to all those who are struggling to collaborate across political, religious, and cultural divides in the Mid-East and throughout the world. At this turbulent time in the Mid-East, rapid action -- even at a symbolic level -- in support of SESAME would be enormously valuable in ensuring its success and in furthering the diplomatic interests of the United States.

Thank you again. I yield back the balance of my time.

ROGERS:

Thank you very much for your statement.

Mr. Donovan, you're recognized. Your statement will be in the record -- permanent record.

LOWEY:

Thank you.

ROGERS:

We hope that you can keep your remarks under five minutes.

DONOVAN:

I certainly will, Chairman.

Thank you for the opportunity to -- to testify before you.

Ranking Member Lowey, my colleague from New York, thank you.

The United States is a leader in diplomacy and development, and that leadership helps keep Americans safe. I believe the commitment to global health, including our work to end preventable child and maternal deaths and combating wildlife trafficking, is critical not only to the survival of millions of mothers and children around the world but also to the safety of our nation.

It is to the thanks of the United States Congress, and in particular this subcommittee, that we have been a world leader in saving children's and mothers' lives for the past several decades. Since 1990 an estimated 100 million children have been saved due in no small part to the United States. In addition, maternal mortality rates have dropped 44 percent.

With simple, cost-saving interventions like improving access to skilled assisted deliveries of babies; growth monitoring; immunizations; treatment for diarrhea, pneumonia, and malaria; and clean water and sanitation, millions of children have survived and been saved from tragic death.

Vaccines are one of these key interventions where the United States' leadership has dramatically changed the landscape of child survival. Our support for measles and polio eradication efforts have rapidly reduced child -- child deaths in even the most report places on the planet.

Additionally, our support of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has helped to immunize over half a billion children, which will save over 6 million lives. It is important for the United States to uphold our 2015 commitment to Gavi to help immunize an additional 300 million children, which will save 5 million more lives.

This commitment includes getting vaccines to the poorest countries to drive down some of the leading killers of children globally: pneumonia and diarrhea. Truly, no child should die from something completely preventable like diarrhea.

I also believe that nutrition programs which are funded by the global health account, Food for Peace and Feed the Future, are also key to child survival. The global health programs support simple but effective interventions, such as vitamin A, iron, and other micronutrient supplementation; food fortification; promotion of good nutrition and hygiene practices for the first six months of life; and treatment for severe, acute malnutrition. This is particularly important for a child's first 1,000 days of life, where chronic malnutrition can lead to physical and cognitive stunting that has irreversible lifetime effects.

In 2015 alone 18 million children under five years of age had their nutritional intake improved thanks to the United States. We take pride in this work because children who get the right nutrition early are 10 times more likely to overcome life-threatening childhood diseases, such as diarrhea and pneumonia, and they are more likely to achieve higher levels of education.

Growing evidence has also suggested a strong positive correlation between nutrition and lifetime earnings. Think of the impact: for every dollar that we invest in nutrition we see about a \$16 return.

The good news is that we have a lot of success and have seen great improvements in child survival worldwide. Mortality for children under five years old has dropped by over 50 percent from where it was 30 years ago.

The bad news is that millions of children still bear the burden of poor developmental outcomes. An estimated 66 percent of children under five years old in sub-Saharan Africa and 43 percent of children in other low-income areas of the world are at risk of growing up with stunted bodies and brains.

I am confident that expanding existing maternal and child health and nutritional services to include interventions that promote nurturing care, known as early childhood development, could be an important way to ensure the best outcomes for young children. This integration of early childhood development into maternal and child health could be used as a resource for the United States Agency for International Development going forward, as do so would magnifying (sic) the already impressive impact of our U.S. maternal, child health, and nutrition programs, and ensure that children not only live to see their next birth (sic), but thrive.

In addition to that work and investment -- and investment shown in maternal and child health, the United States has been leading the effort to combat wildlife poaching and trafficking. The illegal trade of wildlife products like elephant tusks, ivory horns, and shark fins is worth \$8 billion to \$10 billion annually.

Big profits make it difficult to track the trade and has attracted criminal and terrorist groups as a way to fund their heinous activities. I believe it is imperative that we fully fund the wildlife trafficking program at the State Department and USAID.

Again, I thank you very much for this opportunity to testify. I sincerely and respectfully request that the committee fully fund the programs aimed at global maternal and child health and nutrition, along with combating wildlife trafficking.

Thank you so very, very much for your attention.

ROGERS:

Thank you for your statement (ph).

DONOVAN:

Thank you, sir.

LOWEY:

And thank you for your statement.

DONOVAN:

Thank you.

ROGERS:

Mr. Cartwright (inaudible) insert your written statement in the record, and we invite you to summarize it for us in less than five minutes.

CARTWRIGHT:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. It's a pleasure to be here with you today and it's an honor to join the House Committee on Appropriations. Look forward to serving with both of you.

Two broad policy issues I would like to discuss this morning: Number one, an unceasing chorus in this country continues to cast doubt on the well-documented and well-settled science of climate change. And secondly, many of our citizens and leaders dramatically overestimate how much our country spends on foreign aid and underestimate both the benefits and the cost savings from our overseas investments.

I'm -- I'm here to discuss both our pursuit of preserving the environment and the value of our international aid programs.

First, I urge this committee to support funding for international activities that seek to fight climate change. Outside of this country, no significant group doubts the science of climate change. The U.S. must take responsibility for our outsized historic emissions and take a leadership role internationally.

Our nation's top military leaders have long held that climate change is a threat multiplier, making the work our military carries out around the world much more difficult. When more frequent and severe storms devastate other countries, when droughts and resource shortages destabilize already-fragile states, when mass migration spurred by the effects of climate change causes rapid urbanization and economic displacement that benefits extremist groups, the U.S. military is affected, and they have to be. They're there to respond.

Given these realities, nearly the entire international community is rising to the challenge of combating climate change. Countries around the world are taking steps to curb their emissions and shift to green energy alternatives: 132 nations and counting ratified their Paris Agreements, including the U.S., and we need to honor our commitment.

It's in that spirit that I urge you fully to fund the -- the Green Climate Fund, which supports the efforts of developing countries in curbing their emissions. The U.S. has pledge \$3 billion of the fund's current \$100 billion budget. I request that we honor that pledge -- a pledge that was

instrumental in leading many other countries to pledge. And I think we need to take our natural leadership role in that fight.

I'm also here today to urge you fully to fund U.S. international development efforts, which have long enjoyed strong bipartisan support. It's our moral imperative and it is representative of our American values to help our neighbors.

Just last week the U.N. reported the world is currently experiencing, quote, "the largest humanitarian crisis in the history of the United Nations," unquote, with 20 million people in Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia, and Nigeria facing starvation and famine. This is not the time to cut international aid.

Furthermore, U.S. foreign aid is not merely philanthropic. It's smart strategy. It keeps our nation safe and stimulates the U.S. economy.

As globalization continues to expand, our nation is increasingly affected by the activities of other countries. We saw this when American citizens were infected with Ebola and Zika, showing how our health is intertwined with the health of other nations.

We see time and again our own economy improving as the markets of other nations improve, creating more and stronger customers for our exports. We also know that terrorist organizations often target the impoverished for new recruits to their cause, and foreign aid can build good will and reduce the need for military intervention.

U.S. foreign aid helps the U.S. as much as it helps the nation it serves. And it is the right thing to do.

I therefore request that the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the MCC, and the U.S. Agency for International Development, the USAID, are given full funding in F.Y. '18 to enable them to continue their important development work in the name of the United States. And within USAID, but with its own budget authority, I specifically request that the Development Credit Authority be fully funded at \$10 million, which will not only allow it to continue leveraging private sector resources in record numbers, but also to increase its portfolio management and support banks in utilizing their guarantees at 100 percent.

I thank you again for your time today, the opportunity to share my requests, and I do submit my written testimony for the record. Thank you.

ROGERS:

It will be entered in the record. Thank you for your statement. Welcome to the committee.

CARTWRIGHT:

Thank you.

LOWEY:

And I thank you. Good to see you.

CARTWRIGHT:

Good to see you. I like your view here.

ROGERS:

Thank you very much.

Mr. Espailat?

ESPAILLAT:

Thank you.

ROGERS:

Is that the correct pronunciation?

ESPAILLAT:

Espailat.

ROGERS:

Espailat.

ESPAILLAT:

She's an expert. She introduced me before lots of people.

ROGERS:

Your written statement will be entered in the record.

ESPAILLAT:

Thank you.

ROGERS:

We advise you to summarize it for us in less than five minutes.

ESPAILLAT:

Thank you so much.

Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey, thank you for allowing me to testify during today's subcommittee hearing to lay out my priorities as they relate to state and foreign operations. It is specifically crucial that I raise my voice, given President Donald Trump's release of the skinny budget, as they call it, which will cut the State Department by \$10.8 billion, or 29 percent.

This heartless budget prioritizes building a border wall over diplomacy and housing the poor. As I hope you agree, making an investment abroad is not about charity; it's about keeping violence and hatred from America's shores.

As the first Dominican-American to serve in Congress and as a member of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee on the Foreign Affairs Committee, I have firsthand exposure and insight into the importance of maintaining our foreign aid commitments in the region. This is in the interest of helping our brothers and sisters in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in our best interest to protect our security and improve our economic relations with these countries.

Trump's budget request is cold. It's a cold-hearted budget, stripping funding from longstanding federal programs that assist the poor, working families; funding for scientific research; and aid to America's allies abroad.

I hope the committee rejects this budget and will instead prioritize our commitments abroad, including investment in emergency preparedness in the Caribbean, the U.S. strategy for engagement in Central America, funding for the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, and investing in energy potential in the Caribbean, and increasing funding for the United States Agency for International Development, the USAID.

The U.S. strategic -- strategy for engagement in Central America is an important program. Security assistance to these countries in Central America, particularly in the Northern Triangle, which includes El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, is specifically important.

These countries make up a group of countries that constitute the deadliest region in the world. El Salvador had over 100 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015, more than 24 times higher than here in the United States.

This sort of extreme violence is at the root of women and children risking everything for the prospect of safety. These immigrants are refugees. Women and children from the Northern Triangle are coming to the United States for safety.

This is a matter of human rights and dignity.

Our continued assistance would support the U.S. strategy of engagement in Central America, a program that promotes good governance, economic advancement, and improved regional security.

This is essential aid, which would help address the root causes that force too many unaccompanied children to flee their homes to find refuge in the United States.

I urge the committee to increase funding to support the U.S. strategy for engagement in Central America to aid the Northern Triangle in addressing the underlying causes of migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Emergency preparedness in the Caribbean: As we have seen, natural disasters, including earthquakes and hurricanes, have become more common and more severe in Latin America, but specifically in the Caribbean. By increasing our support for emergency preparedness and investing in building local capacity to respond to these disasters we can help to improve the resiliency in managing (ph) 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 disasters. I urge the committee to increase funding for emergency preparedness and capacity-building in the Caribbean Basin Security.

The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative is particularly susceptible to drug trade, given its location between drug-producing countries in South America and the United States. The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative has been instrumental in providing the funding needed to help combat crime and violence.

Per the Congressional Research Service, crime and violence is on the rise in the Caribbean. CRS reports that homicide rates in several Caribbean countries have increased in recent years because of gangs and organized crime, competition between drug trafficking organizations, and the availability of firearms.

I urge the committee to provide the same level of funding for CBSI that was included in the 2016 budget through the omnibus appropriation bills.

Investing in energy potential in the Caribbean: According to a study from the World Bank, an average cost of electricity in the Caribbean is four times higher than in rich nations such as the United States. High energy costs are a financial hardship for people in the Caribbean and are also one of the blockages from -- for unleashing economic growth and prosperity in the region.

Another report shows that the cost of generating electricity in the Caribbean is higher than -- than much of the rest of the world, which can impede direct investment. In Jamaica consumers pay 30 cents per kilowatt an hour for electricity; in Puerto Rico the figure stands at 25 to 30 cents per kilowatt-hours. In contrast, the -- the average American household pays 10.13 cents per kilowatt-hours, 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 urge the Appropriations Committee to increase our foreign direct investment in the Caribbean and to invest in Caribbean's energy needs.

The United States Agency of International Development, the USAID: Finally, I would like to discuss the importance of the United States Agency for International Development and the need to continue funding its vital programs. The USAID is a premier facet of our foreign diplomacy and its engagement has brought us closer with our neighbors in Central and South America through increasing economic prosperity, promoting good governance, and engagement in clean energy development in the face of climate change.

Our assistance to and cooperating with these countries has proven to be a positive, demonstrable effects. For example, in the last few years Panama has changed from a country receiving development aid to a country that is now providing aid to other Central American countries.

Continued investment through USAID will help to make countries become more sustainable and prosperous, which will continue to improve the region in magnitudes beyond our current aid. That is why I am asking that you support USAID and increase its funding for programs in Central America.

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

ROGERS:

Mr. Espaillat, thank you very much.

ESPAILLAT:

Thank you so much.

LOWEY:

Thank you.

ROGERS:

Mr. Kennedy is now recognized. Your written statement will be inserted in the record. You're invited to summarize it for us in...

KENNEDY:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

ROGERS:

... in less than five minutes.

KENNEDY:

Less than five minutes. I'll be quick.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Madam Ranking Member, and members of the committee. I want to thank you for allowing me to testify in support of the Peace Corps, a program that is not only near and dear to my heart but that safeguards our nation's core values of democracy and human rights.

With 7,200 Peace Corps volunteers currently serving in 63 countries, their impact spans training communities in critical areas of need, combating HIV and AIDS, to facilitating girls' and women's empowerment through education and economic independence.

But more than that, those volunteers play a -- also play a critical role in our national security. As 121 retired three- and four-star generals recently wrote in congressional leadership, quote, "Peace Corps and other development agencies are critical to preventing conflict and reducing the need to put our men and women in uniform in harm's way."

Yet, despite the Peace Corps' success, overwhelming support from our military leaders, and strong, consistent support from Congress, the agency remains as underutilized as it is extremely effective. Nearly -- excuse me, nearly 24,000 Americans applied to the agency in fiscal year 2016, but funding only allowed for 3,800 volunteer openings. As retired General Stanley McChrystal has said, quote, "This gaps represents democratic -- democratic energy wasted and a generation of patriotism needlessly squandered."

Even with that broad support, the Peace Corps represents only 0.01 percent of our federal budget and 0.7 percent of our international affairs budget. Simply put, America increasingly turns down the opportunity to leverage this singular resource.

The number of currently serving Peace Corps volunteers has steadily declined for years. At a peak of 15,000 volunteers in 1967, the agency has failed to reach 10,000 volunteers since 1969.

That's not because the agency or its model doesn't work. It perhaps works better than any other.

The shortfall in volunteers is because funding allows the agency to offer just one in six applicants an opening. Every year we turn away the opportunity for a young American to develop -- to give a group of girls the gift of reading. Every year we turn away the opportunity of a retired American to build a maternity ward. Every year we turn away the opportunity of a small, remote village in the Ukraine the opportunity to meet a black American. Or we turn away the opportunity for a group of university students in China the opportunity to know a Muslim American.

Since we cannot hear their stories I will briefly summarize mine.

About a year into my own service in the Dominican Republic I was on my way back from visiting my host family into the Peace Corp office in Santo Domingo on a bus that was essentially a large van meant for about eight with about 20 people hanging out of it. And I was in the second-to-last row of a bench seat. There was a group behind me.

I had my backpack on my lap and I got tapped on my shoulder. And I turned around and this gentleman, Dominican, older Dominican, asked me, "Cuerpo de Paz," wondering if I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Spanish.

And I said, "Yeah. How'd you know?"

And he looked at me like, you don't blend in. You can't possibly think you blend in.

Fair enough.

He went on, Chairman, to thank me not for the work that I was doing but for the work that another volunteer had done decades before when he was a little boy in a village outside of Santo Domingo that didn't have access to running water. And that young American had come in and put in a water pipe to bring clean water to their village.

That older gentleman never asked my name, never asked where I was from, never asked what I was doing. He just said that he never got the chance to thank that other volunteer all those decades before.

A few moments later the bus stopped, he got off. I've never seen him again.

But that is what this organization does, and that's what service overseas or at home, I believe, is all about: not any one person's accomplishments, but the way even the smallest act of assistance, cooperation, and friendship reverberates across time, across distance, across language, generations, and, of course, borders.

And that's what Peace Corps does every single day. And that's why the only discussions about its funding should focus on increasing investment and support for its staff and its volunteers.

I thank you for your consideration.

ROGERS:

Powerful testimony.

KENNEDY:

Thank you, sir.

ROGERS:

Thank you very much. Thank you for you and your family's profound commitment to (inaudible).

KENNEDY:

Appreciate that, sir. Thank you.

LOWEY:

I also want to thank you. And as you know, Sam Farr used to tap me on the shoulder probably 10 times a day: Peace Corps, Peace Corps, Peace Corps. So I am very pleased that you are carrying the mantle, and we are great supporters and as best as we can fund it, sure we will. And we need to increase the overall account.

KENNEDY:

Grateful for that. I could never, despite my deepest attempts, never imitate Sam Farr's tireless advocacy for the Peace Corps. But by extension...

LOWEY:

You do a good job.

KENNEDY:

... I'll tap you 10 times on the floor (ph).

LOWEY:

You do a good job.

KENNEDY:

Thank you, Chairman.

ROGERS:

Mr. Schiff, your written statement will be inserted in the record. You're invited to summarize it for us in five minutes or less.

SCHIFF:

Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lowey. My first request is please never have me speak after Joe Kennedy again.

(LAUGHTER)

But I guess it'll be necessary today.

LOWEY:

We see you on CNN all the time, so you do just fine.

SCHIFF:

Madam Chair, you should do what my wife does: just hit "mute."

(LAUGHTER)

Having served on the subcommittee for eight years, though I'm now on leave, I know the importance of the work that you do very well. And now more than ever, American interests are at stake as we confront unprecedented instability and growing humanitarian crises around the world.

Congress must invest in our national security, which includes development and diplomacy programs, alongside a strong defense.

While I'll extend and expand on my requests to the subcommittee in written form, today I want to highlight just two matters that I hope the subcommittee will prioritize in the F.Y. '18 bill. The first involves support for Armenia and the people of Artsakh, or Nagorno-Karabakh; and the second involves the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the civilian arm of the U.S. international media.

First, with respect to Armenia and Artsakh, I urge the subcommittee to support economic development, military parity, and refugee settlement in our important regional partner, Armenia. I further ask the subcommittee prioritize security and development in Nagorno-Karabakh, which faces imminent threat from Azerbaijan.

Among the steps that I spell out in greater detail in my written testimony, I ask that the subcommittee provide humanitarian support for Artsakh in addition to demining activities currently underway with USAID's support. I would further request that the committee include support for the implementation of monitoring technologies along the line of contact, which I believe would help deter Azeri provocations that could easily spiral into a larger conflict.

I finally request the committee to support Armenia's continued development as an important regional partner who is taking on peacekeeping missions around the world and resettled thousands of refugees from Syria and Iraq.

Second, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which I was concerned to see zeroed out in the president's budget today: I want to highlight the importance of fully funding the Broadcasting Board of Governors and specifically prioritizing counter-propaganda broadcasting.

Russia, as you know, is waging a disinformation campaign to undermine Western democratic states and values and subvert the NATO alliance. In addition to invading Georgia and Ukraine and bombing civilians in Syria, Russia has pumped tens of millions of dollars into disinformation and propaganda targeting the United States and Europe.

Russia seeks to create chaos and division in the United States and E.U. through disinformation campaigns designed to distract us, divide us, and ultimately paralyze us so Russia can achieve its foreign policy goals of fracturing the U.S.-led security order. By providing an alternate to

disinformation and extremist propaganda, the Broadcasting Board of Governors is at the forefront of combating the weaponization of information and disinformation that we see on a global stage.

Through the Voice of America and Radio Liberty the BBG recently launched Current Time, a 24/7 Russian language digital television network. So Current Time will be a major determiner in the outcome of the ongoing struggle between liberal democracy and the autocratic model favored by Vladimir Putin.

I urge the committee to prioritize funding for BBG with these purposes and to provide resources to expand on the efforts already underway. For instance, Russia's highly successful propaganda efforts are built in large part on wrapping news content around entertainment. Our efforts will need a greater emphasis on providing content that can be competitive with slickly produced Russian broadcasts.

I appreciate your consideration of these requests and look to -- forward to following up to further spell out programs that I believe should be prioritized as we undertake the F.Y. '18 funding cycle, and I thank you very much.

ROGERS:

Well, thank you for the very good testimony.

Ms. Lowey?

LOWEY:

I want to thank you. And as a strong supporter of the BBG and other similar programs, many of us have had questions about their effectiveness, but we continue to fund it and we continue to try to send a message that we look forward to some changes so we can be more effective. And we welcome your support and your input.

SCHIFF:

I thank you, and I -- I think you're absolutely right to question how efficacious these efforts have been in the past. I think the answer is to figure out, if they haven't been, how do we retool in the modern information and propaganda age, rather than deciding that they haven't been successful and therefore we're not going to try. I think we really have to combat these efforts.

LOWEY:

I agree. We agree.

ROGERS:

We are working on visiting the board here in the next couple weeks. I don't think we've got a time set yet, but we want to go down there and soak up a lot of information and share some views.

But I agree with you, in this new age in which we find ourselves -- a communications age -- broadcasting is not the most effective way to get to someone. So the Internet, cable, cyberspace is the new battleground.

SCHIFF:

Exactly right.

ROGERS:

Thank you.

SCHIFF:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member.

LOWEY:

Thank you very much.

SCHIFF:

Thank you.

LOWEY:

What time are you on tonight?

SCHIFF:

Hopefully not at all.

(LAUGHTER)

ROGERS:

I think that is all of the scheduled witnesses that we have.

Is there anyone waiting to testify?

Anything further, Ms. Lowey?

LOWEY:

No. Now we just have to get our numbers out. We depend on your leadership, with your leadership and the White House, so thank you.

ROGERS:

Thank you.

Hearing is adjourned.