

Hearing Transcript

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Hearing on President Obama's Fiscal 2017 Budget Request Concerning Western Hemisphere Priorities

April 27, 2016

DUNCAN:

OK. We'll go ahead and get started. A quorum being present, the Subcommittee will come to order. I'd like to now recognize myself for an opening statement.

We meet today to conduct oversight of the Obama Administration's Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Request for the Western Hemisphere, which aims to provide nearly \$2 billion to countries in the region with an increase over what the US gave in Fiscal Year 2015.

The administration has a plethora of initiatives in the region, all aiming to address economic citizen security and clean energy objectives. However, some have criticized the US approach to Latin America and the Caribbean as improvised and lacking a sense of strategic direction.

Today, when our nation stands at over \$19 trillion in debt, we have no business giving any foreign assistance unless the administration can show a compelling vision and a clear strategy for how that aid will advance US national interest in the region.

Changeable objectives that have measurable benchmarks for success and evident political will from our partners to tackle the hard issues of corruption and impunity that threaten the effectiveness of US assistance under economic growth of the hemisphere that we all hope to see.

As representatives of the American people, the US Congress the responsibility to ensure that every single taxpayer dollar is spent on foreign assistance furthers US national interest, not those of foreign governments or international organizations.

We must further work together to root out waste, fraud, abuse and inefficiencies within the US programs to prevent duplication and overlap and instead achieve success by outcomes. So with that in mind, I want to take a moment and highlight a few oversight areas that I believe require attention and adjustments.

According to congressional watchdogs, the Government Accountability Office or GAO, they currently have six reports with open recommendations of the US State Department or the US Agency for International Development, USAID have not fully implemented.

Moreover, according to USAID's Office of Inspector General as of April 25th, USAID had 157 open and unimplemented recommendations relating to programs in the Western Hemisphere.

And these include 59 recommendations that have a potential cost- savings of almost \$11 million. When we see such clear low hanging fruit for achieving efficiency and cost savings, I do not understand why these recommendations remain unimplemented.

That's our urge, state and USAID to act immediately to address the GAO and OIG recommendations in a satisfactory manner. Of the nearly \$2 billion requested for the Western Hemisphere in the Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Request, the administration has prioritized more than \$628 million for development assistance programs and over \$50 million for global climate change initiatives within the region.

Well, I'm encouraged to see that the administration reversed its cuts and security displayed in last year's budget request, the state department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement chose to request less from Mexico in order to first address the outstanding pipeline issues by spending what they still have from previous years before asking for more money.

And that's a good thing. That's a good sign showing smarter financial management decisions and sorting of American taxpayer dollars. But I'm concerned with the heavy emphasis on the development assistance rather than the economic support funds. Thus, I want to hear the administration's rationale for shifting the emphasis of US assistance and administration's plan on how to prevent country dependency on those funds.

Nearly \$744 million of the budget request would go to Central America. I believe it's critical for the American people to see tangible proof of US assistance in the region in achieving our objectives before we provide another large tranche of money.

However, I understand that the state and USAID have not yet spent the \$750 million appropriate by the US Congress last year. While I'm supportive of the need to address the root causes to address the migration issues to the US, I want to ensure that we are not simply throwing more money at the problem.

What analysis has the administration done to determine if previous US funding is yielding results? What commitments have Central American government has made to provide matching funds and to tackle the massive corruption problems plaguing the region?

And what safeguards does the US have in place to protect American investment in the region from abuse? The administration has also requested a major increase in funding for Colombia, the single largest recipient of US foreign assistance in the hemisphere.

Colombia is an important US ally in the Western Hemisphere and during the past 15 years, it has transformed into a respected leader in the region. Given US long term support for Colombia, the US maintains a considerable stake and outcome of the ongoing peace negotiations. I'm supportive of Colombia's efforts to achieve peace.

However, I want to note that the US is supporting a peace deal that's good for the Colombian people, (inaudible) hard one security gains of US Colombian forces and the US entrance in the region.

Given the request for \$391 million for Colombia, I would like to hear about how these funds will support the Colombian government's efforts to verify the demobilization and disarmament of the foreign terrorist members and address the growing drug eradication and interdiction challenges.

In addition, for most years since Fiscal Year 2009, US Congress has given \$20 million annually to support democracy and human rights in Cuba.

However, the administration's budget request proposes cuts to US efforts in these areas. At a time when the Castro government is demolishing churches, arresting pastors, imprisoning human rights dissidence and record numbers, I can't comprehend why the administration will seek to reduce US support for human rights and democracy by 25%.

I would also like to understand the rationale for the administration's request for \$218 million for Haiti given GAOs reporting of multiple cases of cost overruns and delays for reconstruction projects.

Similarly, I'm concerned to see the administration's request of an additional increase of funding for countries like Nicaragua while cutting US assistance to our friends like Argentina, Chile, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

Having recently led a congressional delegation to the region with the expressed intent of showing our partners in the region that the US is a reliable friend, I believe these cuts and assistance send the wrong message about the US interest in the region.

And at time when Iran, Russia and China continue to increase their activities in the Western Hemisphere, the US needs to continue to convince our friends to make the US their partner of choice.

Finally, I want to ensure the US assistance inter-American organizations to support US interest. I'm concerned about the outside share of US support for these organizations, the limited numbers of US personnel working in these organizations to support United States objectives and seemingly low level of influence the United States has given the amount of money that the American people provide.

So I look forward to hearing from witnesses today on all of these issues. And with that, I then turn to the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

SIRES:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing and thank you to our witnesses from the State Department and USAID for being here to talk about the Administration's Fiscal Year 2017 Funding Priorities in the Western Hemisphere.

Today's hearing occurs at a time of complex foreign policy challenges in the region. Yet, US assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean has declined over the last several years. Without

US leadership, regional challenges such as the flow of unaccompanied (inaudible) from the Northern triangle countries to the US, political violence in Haiti, the Zika outbreak, corruption scandals in Brazil and the polarized political situation in Venezuela could reach dangerous levels of instability.

I am pleased that the Administration's Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Requests include more than \$1.7 billion in aid for the region, representing a 10% increase in funding. It is critical that we assist our regional neighbors in their efforts to achieve peace and security, good governance and economic prosperity.

In Cuba, we continue to see the Castro regime brutalize its people and forcedly stamp out any attempt at free speech, a free economy and free expression. Drug trafficking, transnational criminal organizations plague Central America. It wreaked havoc in the region posing a direct security threat to the United States.

Every year, hundreds die trying to reach our southern border in a desperate attempt to escape the violence. Property and -- poverty and corruption rampant in several Latin American countries.

In Colombia, the Santos government is seeking to win this 52-year internal conflict and implement a sustainable and an elusive and an inclusive peace working together in a bipartisan force so we can ensure that this proposed Fiscal Year 2017 Budget is used efficiently and with proper oversight.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses as they lay out US priorities and the importance of American engagement in the Western Hemisphere. Thank you.

DUNCAN:

It's almost like you had a missing page there, wasn't it?

SIRES:

Yes, well, I missed it.

DUNCAN:

It happens. You've all testified before. I'm not going to have to explain the lights. You'll get five minutes to testify. I will look forward to hearing the testimony, Mr. Palmieri, you're recognized.

I enjoyed our meeting the other day, very insightful and very informative and thanks for being here today. You're recognized for five minutes.

PALMIERI:

Thank you, Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires and other members of the subcommittee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the Fiscal Year 2017 Foreign Assistance Request for the Western Hemisphere. And thank you for your ongoing support of our diplomatic assistance efforts in this hemisphere.

The administration's approach to the region seeks to improve security, strengthen the rule of law, promote democracy in human rights, advance partnerships and promote prosperity and inclusive growth for all citizens. US assistance is a critical tool that supports these goals.

In our request for Central America and Mexico, we seek to address the underlying conditions driving migration from Central America through Mexico and to the United States. The request also includes increases to support Colombia's implementation of an expected peace agreement marking the end of the hemisphere's longest running conflict. The request maintains support for key US partnerships with Peru, Haiti, and the Caribbean.

The FY 2017 foreign assistance request for our strategy in Central America, continues support for prosperity, governance, and security, particularly for Central America's Northern Triangle, in recognition of the acute challenges these countries face.

The US assistance through the strategy complements the investments Northern Triangle governments are making through their own development plan, the Alliance for Prosperity. The countries themselves plan to spend \$2.6 billion of their own money this year to support this own plan.

Continued US support will be vital to Colombia's success as it seeks to implement a piece of court. Our partnership with Mexico remains an important priority for the United States and includes a range of issues that benefit both countries, including trade and investment, energy and security.

The Merida Initiative continues to provide the framework for our bilateral security cooperation at both federal and state levels. Our request includes a central democracy assistance for Cuba and Venezuela, where the United States will continue to provide assistance that advances universal human rights and supports vibrant civil societies.

Promotion of democratic principles and human rights remains at the core of US assistance to Cuba. Our request for Haiti continues investments in the infrastructure, agriculture, economic growth, basic education and health, expanded governance, democracy activities and security. A sustained US commitment in Haiti is essential to build on the past gains of US efforts in Haiti and to build its capacity to respond to citizen's needs.

Improving security and development in the Caribbean directly benefits US interests. The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) complements the Caribbean's own efforts to reduce

crime and violence, strengthen the rule of law, and address the factors that put youth and marginalized communities at-risk of insecurity.

US counter-narcotics assistance complements investments made by the government of Peru and maintains our strong partnership in eradication and alternative development to coca cultivation.

I urge the US Congress to fully fund this request for the Western Hemisphere as it advances our national security interests. And wisely invest our limited resources where they can have the most significant impact. I look forward to your questions.

DUNCAN:

Thank you. And Dr. Arreaga, is that how you pronounced that?

ARREAGA:

Arreaga, yes, thank you. Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss our Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Request for the Western Hemisphere.

With your permission, I have a formal statement which I'd like to submit for the record. In 2017, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs or INL is requesting \$489 million to support some of America's most effective and important foreign assistance and partnership programs.

This includes the Central American Regional Security Initiative, the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, the Merida Initiative and programs in Colombia, Haiti and Peru. As this committee knows, our nation's prosperity is closely tied with our neighbors in the region. From the Rio Grande to the Andes Mountains, the hemisphere is in the midst of major change.

Countries are changing governments peacefully. People are standing up and fighting corruption and their voices are being heard. Some of the most notorious narco-trafficking bosses have been captured and in Colombia, peace talks holding a promise of expanding the rule of law and marginalizing the drug trade.

However, some changes have not been positive. Despite a recent folding homicide rates Central America's Northern Triangle still has one of the highest murder rates in the world. While Peru eradicated record breaking amounts of coca last year, cultivation remains high. Colombia has witnessed a nearly 100% increase in coca cultivation in the last couple of years.

And while Mexico has achieved many notable successes in fighting drug cartels, the amount of poppy being grown has increased 65% since 2014. INL programs are particularly important at this juncture because they are agents of change. They tackle the threats and leverage the positive changes I just described.

Investments we are making will benefit our country and the people of the region. In Central America, we are partnering with USAID and others to leverage our model police precinct programs. We are adding prevention and comprehensive assistance components which together comprise a place-based strategy that targets the areas most affected by violence.

This approach is already reducing homicides and increasing the public trust in law enforcement institutions. Many INL initiatives rely on sister federal agencies as well as many local, state and international partners. Among the most effective of these is our partnership with Colombia which has gone from being a consumer to being a supplier of security assistance in the region.

Today, this includes joint US-Colombian training and advising in many areas like border security, special operations, police reform and drug investigations. INL's program covered the entire range of the justice sector, in Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South America were strengthening justice systems and expanding their reach.

Many Latin America -- many nations in Latin America are moving towards an accusatory criminal justice system which is broadly similar to our own. We are training prosecutors and judges to function in this new environment and helping them make their judicial process more efficient and fair.

Equipment and training provided by INL also helps us by helping our neighbor secure their borders and by strengthening relationships with US border agencies. A more democratic and prosperous region is in the interest of our country and with your support for our programs, we can achieve the outcomes that we desire, which is nothing less than strengthening the security of our hemisphere and our country.

Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

DUNCAN:

Thank you so much for that testimony. Ms. Hogan, welcome back. You're recognized for five minutes.

HOGAN:

Thank you very much, Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to testify today.

I'm pleased to present the plans for USAID's work in Latin America and the Caribbean for Fiscal Year 2017. Our request of approximately \$970 million will promote the interests of the United States while also significantly improving the quality of life for those we help.

We have identified five priorities for our assistance, these are prosperity, good governance and security in Central America, promoting a sustainable and equitable peace in Colombia, long-term development in Haiti, advancing democracy and human rights across the Americas and addressing environmental threats to livelihoods.

One of the highest priorities is Central America, particularly the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. We see prosperity, improved governance and security, the objectives of our Central America's strategy as interdependent. We know that providing opportunity for marginalized, especially youth at risk of gang recruitment or migration will bolster our efforts in security and lead to freer, more prosperous societies.

Our efforts to grow prosperity are only sustainable in an environment where democratic values and institutions flourish, human rights are respected and civil society and the media can play their rightful roles. And ultimately, it will be difficult for our prosperity and governance efforts to take root in societies that are plagued by insecurity.

That's why our work in Central America addresses all three interrelated challenges. Our programs include efforts to create jobs, reform institutions to root out corruption, strengthen civil society's ability to hold governments accountable, foster a culture of respect for human rights and create safe community spaces. With sustained commitment on the part of the United States and host government institutions, we'll help the Northern Triangle develop into a safer more prosperous region for all those who live there.

Sustained commitment and strategic patience yield results, as we have seen with the notable strides made in Colombia. For FY17, USAID is requesting a \$187 million to expand upon current programming to help the Colombian government establish a stronger presence in former conflict zones, provide post conflict reconciliation and justice, promote inclusive rural economic growth and sustainably manage the country's vast natural resources.

These programs will build upon current successes especially for marginalized populations including Afro-Colombians and indigenous people. Along with Central America and Colombia, Haiti remains a high priority for USAID.

Our FY17 request will continue our efforts to help Haiti grow into a stable, economically viable country. We remained focus on promoting economic growth, job creation and sustainable agriculture providing holistic basic healthcare and education services and improving the transparency of government institutions.

While much remains to be done, we're committed to supporting the Haitian people as they build a more prosperous and secure future. Throughout the region, our democracy and human rights programs address fundamental issues including anti-corruption, promotion of press freedoms in the rule of law and support for civil society.

USAID works to assure that government institutions are open, accountable, use public funds responsibly and effectively and deliver critical services to citizens. Underpinning all of these efforts is support and protection of a strong and vibrant civil society that can hold governments

accountable. Another challenge facing the region is the negative impact of extreme weather events.

Our mitigation and adaptation efforts help reduce devastation to life, property and economic activity. We're also speeding the development and deployment of advanced clean energy technologies and helping to create a favorable, legal and regulatory environment to reduce the cost of energy.

We have one goal in mind with everything that we do, to empower countries, to assume responsibility for their own development and grow beyond the need for international assistance. We use science, technology, innovation and private sector partnerships to find new solutions and scale up what works. For every dollar we spent in this region in 2014, we mobilized five times that in private sector resources.

In conclusion, I want to assure this committee that USAID is committed to being good stewards of the funds you entrust to us. We take our responsibility to the United States taxpayers seriously and we are committed to accountability, transparency and oversight of our programs.

I thank the subcommittee for its interest and support of USAID's programs and I look forward to collaborating with you as we address long standing challenges and new opportunities for reform. I look forward to your question.

DUNCAN:

Thank you. I thank all the panelists for their testimony. I'll take a page out of Rob Bishop's playbook as a chairman and defer until the end. And I'll go first to Ron Desantis for five minutes.

DESANTIS:

Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Palmieri, in Fiscal Year 2009, Congress appropriated \$20 million in (inaudible) annually, we support democracy and human rights in Cuba.

The FY2017 request, \$3.8 million for the Embassy in Havana but cuts US efforts to support human rights to \$15 million and yet Cuba remains the only country in the Americas ranked as not free by Freedom House.

Of course, we've seen since the administration change policy in December of 2014, political oppression has increased. So what is the administration's rationale for the 25% reduction in Cuba democracy in human rights funding?

PALMIERI:

We remained very concerned about the human rights concessions inside Cuba. And in our most recent human right reports signaled that the arbitrary detentions have increased, that the Cuban people do not have the ability to elect their own leaders.

DESANTIS:

So why are you cutting the funds?

PALMIERI:

And we take that issue and that concern very seriously. However, as we are working toward a more normalized relationship in Cuba and expanding our engagement in the region, we have other tools that are available to us. We have more authorized travel to Cuba by American citizens who are engaging directly with the Cuban people. We have exchanges that are public...

DESANTIS:

Well, let me ask you that though. When you say engaging, so say there are Americans that go to Cuba, they stay in hotels, they pay, I mean, is that direct engagement with Cubans on an economic basis or is that a direct engagement with the regime in Cuba who controls the core sectors of the economy?

PALMIERI:

The 50% increase in authorized travel over the last year has enabled Americans to more directly engage in people to people activities with the Cuban people, which is the goal of our policy. Yes, sir.

DESANTIS:

So I think by that answer, you acknowledge though that the economic transactions are transactions with effectively the Cuban government, the military, the intelligence services?

PALMIERI:

The travellers have to follow strict accountability measures in pursuing their authorized travel. They may be staying at different types of accommodations including Airbnb activities that we think promote entrepreneurial activity inside Cuba as well, sir.

DESANTIS:

What -- so the human rights situation, you spoke to it initially in your answer but you acknowledged that the human rights situation is still very poor in Cuba, correct?

PALMIERI:

President Obama said so on his trip, Secretary Kerry has said so and our human rights report did not pull any punches, sir.

DESANTIS:

I just -- I wonder because they've been very honest, the Castro dictatorship about, we're not changing, I don't know what you guys -- we're going to take any concessions. We can get -- we need credit, we're going to get the credit and whatnot, but they've been very insistent that they're not changing.

So, I just wonder we're reducing the request to try to promote democracy, they're doing much more engagement now with the regime. I wonder whether we're going to see fruits of that because I think right now most of us who were skeptical of this predicted that the regime would be pocketing these concessions.

And I think, unfortunately, that's what happened. Let me ask you this, the regime has been harboring Joanne Chesimard who's already on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted Terrorists list. What's the status of that?

PALMIERI:

In November of last year, we had our first round of a bilateral law enforcement working group where we did raise as we have consistently raised our desire for the return of fugitives from US justice. We will continue to raise that case and other cases of fugitives and we hope to have another round of talks with the Cuban government in the months to come, sir.

DESANTIS:

The results of those talks, is it just been for Cuba to deny releasing anybody though, correct?

PALMIERI:

I'm sorry, I didn't...

DESANTIS:

The result of those talks while you guys may have been well-intentioned, the result of those talks has been the Cuba has simply denied releasing anybody, correct? No fugitives have been released up to this point, right?

PALMIERI:

No, sir.

DESANTIS:

OK. What about confiscated property because we've had a number of people come before this committee, some of the other committees who had property confiscated illegally by the Castro dictatorship in the early 1960s and they have certified claims.

We say that we're going to be changing these relationships and you would think that that would be one obvious way where the Castro regime could show, hey, you know, we're going to change by providing some recompense.

But to my knowledge, I have not seen any information come out that there's been anything done in that respect. So let me ask you, has the Cuban government made good on any claims that are existing out there regarding illegally confiscated property?

PALMIERI:

In December, as part of the process of the normalization of relationship, we had a team that went down and engaged in direct discussions about these claims and we continue to pursue another round of talks related to making progress on claims resolutions.

DESANTIS:

But no claims have been resolved favorably for American citizens or Cuban exiles in America, correct, at this point?

PALMIERI:

At this point, I'm not aware, sir.

DESANTIS:

Mr. Chairman, thank you for doing this. I just, you know, we've been in a situation where, you know, the Castro -- change policy, then change it to help the Cuban people but don't give an inch to the dictatorship. And I just fear that these changes have helped the Castro brothers solidify their power and I don't think we've seen it yet with freedom for the Cuban people.

DUNCAN:

No argument with me there. Mr. Sires, five minutes.

SIRES:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What type of assistance does the US government provide to the Venezuelan people to promote democracy?

PALMIERI:

Do you want to take it?

HOGAN:

USAID has a \$6.5 million program in Venezuela and the purpose of the program is to help document human rights abuses to strengthen civil society organizations and to promote the free flow of information within the country and between the country and outside world.

And so, this year, we've also helped with the training of domestic election observations that took place in the last legislative elections which as you know brought a new opposition to the majority in the parliament. We are poised to assist this new parliament if and as asked, but for right now we're assessing those needs because we know that there are other donors that are also interested in that space and we don't want to duplicate efforts.

SIRES:

And in terms of efforts to release some of the political prisoners, what are we doing with that?

PALMIERI:

The department continues to call for the immediate release of political prisoners in Venezuela. Just earlier this month, Assistant Secretary Jacobson met with Lilian Tintori, the wife of Leopoldo Lopez.

The department also renewed a statement calling on the government to enact the bill that was passed by the national assembly calling for the release of political prisoners. We will continue to push for that as a critical element of improving the internal political situation.

SIRES:

And Dr. Arreaga, what is the reason that there seems to be more production of drugs in places like Colombia and some of the other places? What -- how did this spike up?

ARREAGA:

There are a number of reasons, sir. First of all, I think a lot of the farmers and the narco-traffickers got smarter and realized that if they concentrate a lot of their cultivation in large areas, it'd be more susceptible to aerial eradication.

So, you see a dispersion of cultivation in areas where airplanes have more difficulty arriving and spraying and of course, the end of aerial eradication also played a role. So those are some of the major factors and we understand from the Colombian government that the FARC actually encourage farmers to plant more coca in preparation for the peace plant but we have no confirmation of that.

SIRES:

And is some of the other countries, the same reason?

ARREAGA:

Well, I think -- I think you've seen in Peru areas where coca cultivation has increased, our areas were very difficult to access by the government. The Rahem area in the south, so the government is planning very much to eradicate but it's a bit of a catch up for them because they need the resources and they need the mobilization which they did not yet have.

SIRES:

Mr. Palmieri, I know one of the reasons that we're engaging in Cuba is because we always have problems with all the other countries in the region. What are we doing for those countries to speak up about the abuses in Cuba, because there hasn't been one country that has said anything

about the conditions in Cuba and how they have become worse and how they have imprisoned more people and how they crack down.

And I would think that by now some of these countries that was so pushy on us just to have some sort of relationship with Cuba, they just clamped up and don't say anything.

PALMIERI:

I think we continue to encourage our partners in the hemisphere to engage on the human rights situation and conditions within Cuba and we urge them to speak out and to take a more definitive proactive stance to encourage the Cuban government to address these problems of arbitrary detention, the lack of freedom of association and assembly and we will continue to push those governments to be a more authoritative voice.

SIRES:

You know, the Chairman and I took a trip through five countries, we raised that very issue and quite frankly, we didn't get a reaction that any time soon, they're going to say anything about what's going on after some of these countries were one of the more vocal countries in terms of the United States reaching some sort of a quarrel with Cuba. So we didn't get any kind of response, basically, that they're going to do anything in the future.

PALMIERI:

I can assure you, Mr. Sires, that as part of our ongoing diplomacy in this hemisphere, we do engage countries from throughout South America, Central America and North America to speak more forcefully and more definitively about the abominable human rights conditions inside of Cuba.

SIRES:

The only country that spoke up about human rights abuses in Venezuela was Macri. He was just recently elected but nobody else has said a word. Thank you.

DUNCAN:

I thank the Ranking Member. I want to go now to Mr. Yoho from Florida.

YOHO:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I appreciate you three being here. I too was on that trip to South America and I did find it interesting that everybody said that we need to normalize relationships with Cuba, it was the right thing to do, you know, close Guantanamo because it was a mark on America that wasn't a good sign.

And my member -- my friend Albio Sires brought that up over and over again, you know, what about what's going on in Cuba, how come you're not denouncing that? And I just found it hypocritical and it just didn't bode well that here we are trying to help the Cuban people out and you were talking, I think, it was you, Dr. Arreaga, you were talking about the entrepreneurships, the entrepreneurs in Cuba that this was going to allow them to expand businesses.

Can you explain what an entrepreneur in Cuba is compared to America?

PALMIERI:

Yes. There are number of activities underway that through some regulatory changes that the administration has made that allows us to help Cuban entrepreneurs whether...

YOHO:

What administration, this one or the Cuban administration?

PALMIERI:

The -- President Obama's exec -- regulatory actions that have enabled Americans to more directly support Cuban entrepreneurs whether they are small restaurant owners, we now allow Americans to provide remittances to these entrepreneurs to help their private sector activities. We now permit micro-finance training activities and we also allow for the export of certain materials to the small but growing Cuban entrepreneurial class.

YOHO:

OK. So now, if I'm a Cuban business owner and I'm getting these micro-loans from an American counterpart and I'm going into business in the country of Cuba, what freedom do I have with these regulations and executive privileges that President Obama has extended to the people of Cuba?

What privileges do I have as a Cuban business owner that I don't have to worry about the Cuban government come and confiscating or how -- are they going to limit how much I can make?

PALMIERI:

There has been over the last five, six years, a growing number of licenses issued by the Cuban government to individual Cubans to pursue exactly this kind of private activities that we think our regulatory actions will allow Americans to more directly support. They range from activities in restaurants, as I mentioned the Airbnb activities, private transportation activities. The sector has grown over the last six or seven years.

YOHO:

Does the Cuban government dictate how you're going to make a day or an hour on the employees?

PALMIERI:

I believe that my understanding is that Cuban private sector entrepreneurs earned far, far above or much more I should say than the average public sector wage, Sir.

YOHO:

All right. We'll follow that. The reports I have say it's not true, you know, the Cuban government there, they have a heavy hand and they confiscate whatever they want because everything belongs to the Cuban government. Moving to Haiti real quick here, Ms. Hogan, how many homes have been built down there since the hurricane or the earthquake per USAID?

HOGAN:

US -- USAID built 750 homes, however we have turned our strategy toward housing finance rather construction. And so as a result, we're able to link residents with low income -- low income properties to microfinance institutions that will allow them to ...

YOHO:

Are we financing that through the American government and the America taxpayers?

HOGAN:

We are. We are helping ...

YOHO:

What is their failure rate?

HOGAN:

The failure rate of the what, Sir?

YOHO:

Of the loans.

HOGAN:

Zero, thus far.

YOHO:

Zero. What is the size -- the average size of the house that they're building down there, square foot?

HOGAN:

Well, again, we are not building houses anymore.

YOHO:

But we were previously?

HOGAN:

We were building houses (inaudible) ...

YOHO:

What was that size?

HOGAN:

I believe they're about 500 square feet.

YOHO:

Four hundred was what I have. What was the average cost of those homes?

HOGAN:

The average cost ...

YOHO:

Construction cost?

HOGAN:

Right. The average cost of those homes was about \$15,000, I believe. I have to double check those numbers.

YOHO:

That's a pretty high cost of construction, I would say.

HOGAN:

Which is why we changed the (inaudible).

YOHO:

About \$300 per square foot and you can -- they must have used the CFPB for their remodeling.

HOGAN:

Well, that is (inaudible) strategy, Sir.

YOHO:

I yield back. Thank you.

DUNCAN:

Mr. Meeks is recognized.

MEEKS:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm listening and I would think though that from what I'm hearing we must have regressed in Central and South America, but from what I understand for the last 10 (ph) -- there's been vast improvement in Central and South America in our investments and our commitments, especially post, you know, Cold War is over has tremendously helped the entire region, the entire hemisphere that when you look at what has taken place as far as democracy throughout the Central and South America, it is definitely going in a positive direction.

When you look at still far too much poverty, but poverty reduction in the area it is going in the right direction. When I look at the number of individuals or people who are, you know, as far as democratic institutions, not where we want to be yet, but we are moving in the right direction as -
- would you all agree with that statement?

Much better than it was 15, 20 years ago, for sure. Now, things don't change overnight, but we are doing much better than we had been doing. And before I ask my question, the other piece is because we all do want to make sure we do right by the Cuban people for -- I know that, but we've had one policy for 57 years and none of the things that I'm hearing has changed in 57 years.

So for 57 years, with one single policy that we've continued to have and nothing has changed, it would seem to be reasonable that we should have some kind of change to see if something else might work because we know for 57 years, it has not worked.

And I think, Mr. Palmieri, what you are telling me is that -- and I've had the opportunity, I was very happy to be with the president on his historic trip to Cuba where I heard him with Raul Castro present, being very critical about human rights, et cetera and said the United States will continue to insist that we move forward.

But I think that you were trying to articulate the interaction of American citizens so that when people, when business folks get to moving that they can determine for themselves those that live there how to make sure it move and change its government. Is that the policy that you were intimating?

PALMIERI:

Yes, Sir. I think we believe that by expanding people-to-people ties and business opportunities and access to information, we can more effectively support the Cuban people.

In addition, I think we believe that American citizens are some of the best ambassadors we have for our values and ideals and that level of people-to-people contact will also help us make progress.

Our enduring objective in Cuba remains that it be peaceful, prosperous and democratic and that the Cuban people have the ability to choose their leaders and their own future.

MEEKS:

Thank you.

I need to jump to Ms. Hogan for a second because you mentioned in your opening statement, something that is very important to me. You talked about Peace Colombia and the effects of African-Colombians, which is really important as we get to peace with many of the FARC, folks who will return back.

I know the president (inaudible). Will you tell us a little bit more about that? How that will work?

HOGAN:

Thank you very much for that question. In fact, Afro-Colombians is a very important target group for us. In fact, we have invested in the workforce development of over 9,000 African-Colombians who are now working in modern economy jobs.

More than 8,000 of them who have come through our training program have been hired for well-paying jobs in a variety of sectors. We continue to invest in Peace Columbia, which is a rebranding of Plan Colombia in order to help the government extend its presence into these ex-conflictive zones.

We're currently working in 40 municipalities with the peace agreement and with FY '17 funds, we'll be able to move out into another 20 communities to help the government establish its presence, but more than anything to -- in addition to help incentivize economic development and investment in those areas, to create jobs for the people who are going back there.

We have a great example of a partnership we have with Starbucks Coffee, which is working in these ex-conflictive zones to help these indigenous populations and others who are coffee growers increase the quality of their coffee and attract additional investment from other companies that see that those investments are having a good return on the money.

There are about 25,000 coffee growers who are benefiting from that one partnership. And, of course, we're also helping reconciliation and justice for victims of the conflict. And finally, looking to licit value chains like coffee for people who have been growing coca and try to get them into the other profitable areas of coffee, cacao, dairy and rubber.

MEEKS:

Thank you. I'm out of time.

DUNCAN:

And Raul Castro said, you can ask me about political dissidents, it's wrong and improper for you to ask me about political dissidents, so, anyway. The Chair will now recognize the gentlewoman from Florida, the former chairman of the committee and now chairwoman of the Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And dovetailing on the direction of Latin America, I wanted ask you how you see the direction of some countries in Latin America. Is it really going the right way as we would like?

When it comes to the rule of law, when it comes to press freedom, when it comes to individual freedom of expression, when it comes to separation of powers, leaders who get elected and then change the constitution to stay in power, would you say that Ecuador under Rafael Correa is moving in the right direction? Simple question. Rather simple, Ms. Hogan?

HOGAN:

We have a program in Ecuador ...

ROS-LEHTINEN:

Would you say that it's moving in that direction toward greater freedom?

HOGAN:

I think -- I think they -- I think people are feeling the suppression of human rights there.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

Yes. Thank you.

How about Bolivia under Evo Morales, moving more toward press freedom, freedom of expression, separation of powers, rule of law, would that be a direction that we think should be emulated and that we herald?

PALMIERI:

The referendum in February was a clear expression of how the Bolivian people feel about the situation there.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

But I'm talking about the Evo Morales government, would you say that they're moving toward, you know, the arc, the famous arc? Is it moving toward what we would consider democratic fundamental principles of democracy?

PALMIERI:

I would like to let the Bolivian people speak for themselves.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

OK. Thank you. How about Venezuela under Nicolas Maduro, would you say that that government is moving more toward the rule of law, freedom of expression, press freedom?

PALMIERI:

Those are all areas that we remain deeply concerned in Venezuela.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

Deeply concerned. How about Nicaragua under Daniel Ortega? How about Cuba under Raul Castro? I mean, we could put on our rose-colored glasses and say, everything is peachy keen in Latin America or we could look at it as the way it really is.

And it's a problem. It's a fixer-upper, a fixer-upper. And talking about Cuba, you know, we talked about 55 plus years of a policy that does not -- does not work. How about the changes in Cuba in these 55 years?

In those years, have the Cuban people been able to vote once in a free, fair and internationally supervised election that would pass any criteria by any human rights organization? Once?

PALMIERI:

No.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

No. How about have they been able to form political parties, by any stretch of the imagination, have they been able in these 55 years of a policy that hasn't worked in the United States? I know we have blame America first crowd, but how about let's look otherwise. Have they been able to form political parties?

PALMIERI:

I would never blame America first Mrs. Ros-Lehtinen.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

No. I'm not saying, no, I'm not ...

PALMIERI:

But what I can tell you is human rights ...

ROS-LEHTINEN:

But let me ask you, how many political parties are allowed to operate in Cuba? How many political parties?

PALMIERI:

There is only one political party.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

OK. Thank you. And how about freedom of the press, would you be able to start your own newspaper, your own TV network, your own Internet -- you know, what press freedoms are there in these 55 years?

PALMIERI:

Press freedom is a significant human rights concern.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

A fixer-upper. Yes. And by any stretch of the imagination, this policy that hasn't worked from the U.S. side, gee, when you look at the Cuba aspect of it, it hasn't gotten a whole lot better for the people of Cuba what Castro has been doing to them.

Now, what have we seen since the president's change in diplomatic relations? Has there been or has there not been a massive exodus of Cubans fleeing the island, not getting the memo that everything is great there?

Have there -- because I know I represent South Florida, so I know what's going on there. Has there been what you would call an exodus. We just got back from Guantanamo yesterday.

PALMIERI:

President Obama has said that the change in the relationship will not come overnight and that normalization will be a long-term process.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

But has there been -- has there been an increase because if not, we have other U.S. agencies like the Coast Guard and like the Red Cross who tell us that there's been an 80 percent increase in this past year since the president's diplomatic relations to now. Has there been an exodus of Cubans fleeing in the island?

PALMIERI:

We believe that the people-to-people exchanges that we are pursuing the policy will ...

ROS-LEHTINEN:

I don't know. But the answer is yes, for the people who count the bodies, they know that there's been massive exodus of people. And when I look around and I see, gosh, what has really changed in Cuba when -- since all of this has happened? The one way concessions, pleasing the dictator, getting very little out of it.

But let me just ask you one question about Venezuela. Since the -- since we passed the bill, I had the bill here, with all of my colleagues, Marco Rubio had it in the Senate, how many individuals has the Obama administration sanctioned in Venezuela for human rights violations? That means that they can't come to the United States. We freeze their accounts, they -- we've, you know, they can't do any commercial dealings, buy property. There have been massive human rights abuses in Venezuela. There were originally seven or eight. How many have been since cited on that list?

PALMIERI:

We did sanctioned individuals last year after the legislation was implemented.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

Last year, so since that time, when there have been such massive human rights abuses, Leopoldo Lopez, the mayor of Caracas, who's on house arrest. I mean, I can't even list how many political prisoners there have been.

Has any of those people in their -- involved in the persecutions and the prosecution of these human rights activists? Have they been sanctioned?

PALMIERI:

We did sanctioned people when the legislation was first implemented.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

Anyone related to the Leopoldo Lopez trial? Anybody sanctioned?

PALMIERI:

I would have to get back to you with the specifics on that.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

The answer is no. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

DUNCAN:

Thank you.

Next on line of questioning, I will now go to the gentlemen from California, Mr. Lowenthal.

LOWENTHAL:

Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank -- I want to thank the witnesses for being here and for your testimony. I want to follow up on some of these issues about -- I'm kind of interested in the relationship between our aid and our budget and human rights and rule of law.

I want to -- I want to focus on Mexico. Recently, a number of us submitted a letter to the Secretary of State regarding the disappearance of the 43 Mexican students and the investigation. And now, just recently the inter-American commission on human rights' group of experts has just returned and issued a report.

And that report in part, I think in large part said that there was no cooperation between the commission and there was a problem in the relationship between the commission and getting cooperation from the Mexican government.

How does that impact our aid when we are seeing kind of this commission report, talking about the lack, you know, the lack of cooperation? Does that impact at all the amount of aid that we give to Mexico? Or do we condition aid on at least cooperation?

PALMIERI:

We did take note of the April 24 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights report of their -- of the expert, of the independent experts.

LOWENTHAL:

Right.

PALMIERI:

We commended the commission's work and which was initially requested by the government of Mexico. Mexico should consider the report's recommendations and fully evaluate the suggested actions to address forced disappearances, to provide more support to the victims and to begin -- to bring proper -- the perpetrators of that tragedy to justice.

In the broader sense, we work closely with Mexico on a wide range of human rights issues and encourage it to improve its human rights performance.

LOWENTHAL:

Do you think, following up on Congresswoman from Florida, do you think that human rights are improving in Mexico?

PALMIERI:

The human rights situation in Mexico is a very complex issue. In some respects as Mexico moves to implement the constitutional reforms to reform its justice sector. They are making progress in improving the human rights conditions in the country, but at the same time, when you see a report like this that details with specific recommendations on how they could do better, it's clear that Mexico should be review those recommendations.

LOWENTHAL:

Should it have any impact upon our foreign aid, our aid? I'd like to hear from any of the witnesses? Ms. Hogan?

HOGAN:

Right. The assistance that we're providing Mexico is intended to help them develop -- a very strong human rights regime and response capability.

LOWENTHAL:

But I'm not seeing that happen when we've been giving this assistance. I'm seeing a report that just came out this week that really details the lack of cooperation between the investigators.

HOGAN:

Right.

LOWENTHAL:

How does that impact our aid?

HOGAN:

Well, one of the things that USAID is investing in is the human rights protection mechanism in Mexico, which has allowed the Mexican government to establish a rapid response capability to protect human rights of those who are threatened, an emergency response capability to support victims of human rights and to create networks of human right defenders and particularly journalists.

And I can say that two years ago, we had 40 people who used this system. Last year, we had 400 people who have used this system.

LOWENTHAL:

Are you not appalled by the investigation and the loss of those 43 students who have never been identified where they are?

HOGAN:

Terrible, terrible series of events there, and yes, absolutely.

LOWENTHAL:

Anybody else want to comment on that?

ARREAGA:

Yes, Sir. We, of course, recognize that there are challenges in Mexico and that is the reason we're there. And we are pouring quite a bit of resources in strengthening the justice sector system.

They are moving towards the accusatory system. You're moving the entire, not only the Federal system, but as well as the states. And it's a huge challenge. It's a huge challenge that's going to take very many years, but we have our best and brightest working with the Mexicans to build

that system and it's going to take some time. But we're there because they asked for our help and we're happy to give it to them.

LOWENTHAL:

I just also wonder. How -- I want to get back. How do we help these, an independent investigation like the Inter-American Commission who is having difficulty? How do we help them with the Mexican government or do we in terms of their getting cooperation and being able to have the Mexican government actually assist in this -- in this investigation rather than seem to stonewall the investigation by pointing their fingers at everyone else who has done it, but not really providing the support to the -- to the investigative team.

I mean, how do we help them? We give them a lot of money.

PALMIERI:

Through the merit initiative, we have expanded broadly U.S. law enforcement cooperation. We've helped professionalize their police and security forces.

LOWENTHAL:

Do what?

PALMIERI:

We have an ongoing bilateral human rights dialogue with them where we raise cases like this case.

LOWENTHAL:

I'm just saying, I hear you, all that you're doing, but I am terribly disappointed in this -- in what is taking place and our lack of response to that, to what's going on. I yield back.

DUNCAN:

Thank you, Mr. Lowenthal.

We'll go now down to Mr. Donovan from New York.

DONOVAN:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the witnesses for appearing today before us. Approximately -- and I'll make it short, Mr. Chairman, because I know the vote could be called any moment.

A couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of visiting the CDC and because of the attention now to Zika and coming from South America, particularly Brazil and the Olympics being performed there, this summer.

I was shocked about the amount of cases we have of malaria in the United States. There's over 1,200, I think it's the highest number last year that we've since -- in 40 years, so I just wondered about some of the efforts to combat mosquito borne viruses in South America, particularly malaria. The World Health Organization had said that they could probably eradicate malaria in about 20 countries in the world by 2020, I think eight of those countries are in South and Central America, so I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about the efforts that we're -- down there to eradicate malaria and to control the Zika virus.

HOGAN:

Certainly. Well, thank you for the question. In fact, we have graduated; all of our countries in South America now from health assistance because we've -- over the years investing in those systems. They are now standing up and able to take care of their own basic health needs.

However, we continue to help on infectious diseases and malaria. We currently have a cooperative agreement with the Pan America Health Foundation to -- excuse me, PAHO, Pan America Health Organization, right, to help countries develop systems to combat malaria.

We're also working now on Zika. Thanks to the approval of USAID's CN that will allow us to stand up Behavior Change Communication Programs, so the people will become aware of how they get the Zika virus and how to respond to it.

We're investing in vector control methodologies. We just issued a grand challenge last week for \$30 million, to try to incite innovative ways in which we could do more research and development in the development of diagnostic tools for Zika and, of course, we're prepared to help governments design programs that would provide the care and treatment for women -- pregnant women and infants who may be affected by the disease.

DONOVAN:

Anyone -- any other -- thank you very much.

DUNCAN:

I think the gentleman.

I know recognize myself for five minutes. You have answered a lot of questions that I had about Cuba, about Venezuela and some of the money there. So I'm going to shift gears a little bit.

We were in Paraguay and we had a conversation about -- I'll give an example Rio de Paraguay is a huge shipping channel from Bolivia all the way to Rio de Uruguay and then and on to the Atlantic Ocean for barges, shipping containers that make their way all around the world.

But in the capital city of Paraguay, they need to do some dredging and cost about, well, we heard about \$10 million estimated, you know, if you think about what a shot in the arm that would be, U.S. assistance to a country like Paraguay to help with that sort of thing, that really, I think is something that we ought to be considering when we talk about western hemisphere State Department budget and working with our friends allies.

We hear a lot about USAID programs, micro loans and that sort of thing, micro financing. Just give you one example where you get a lot of bang for the buck, I think maybe more so than \$2 million dropped in Nicaragua that's got a lot of money over the years and that sort of thing, so just throw that out there. Do we give any assistance to Uruguay because they are handling the -- or took the Gitmo prisoners, the Uruguay six? Do they receive any additional funding from us for that? That is a question I don't know the answer to.

PALMIERI:

I will have to talk to the coordinator's office. I believe there was some resettlement funding provided. I don't know if it's being done on an ongoing basis.

DUNCAN:

Right. You know, they are a strong human rights defender and there is another country that I consider we would get a lot of bang for the buck if we consider to help them in that area and they did take those prisoners.

So I had a meeting last week in the office with the members from the Dominican Republic and they shared with me some ongoing efforts between Haiti and the Dominican Republic along the border. One is an economic zone, one is energy zone and one is a shipping zone. Does the United States play any part of that? Because I do see a lot of benefit, at least for the Haitians as well as the Dominicans on those projects. Is that included -- is that USAID involvement? Is there any State Department dollars or U.S. dollars is going to help Dominican and Haiti with those type programs or projects?

HOGAN:

USAID is helping Haiti rehabilitate a port in Cap-Haitien that would allow for -- at the end port of container ships, so it will ultimately be an economic incentive in Haiti because it will increase the amount of trade that they're able to do along their northern border.

DUNCAN:

Yes. I appreciate that. I do -- when they were speaking last week the light bulb went off. What a great way to impact so many lives with consistent jobs, economic improvement and it's bilateral.

Is the U.S. -- my question, is the U.S. and should the U.S. be partners in that in some way because give a lot of money to Haiti to rebuild and there's hints of corruption and hints of money not getting to where the rubber meets the road, but I can point to these projects, going, "Hey, that's a pretty good idea."

Wasteful spending the fiscal year 2017 budget. So fiscal year 2017 request is for \$324,000, 57.6 percent of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History budget. Priorities listed in the fiscal 2016 budget request for the same amount of money included spending taxpayer dollars on creating in the atlas of climate change in the Americas. And publishing the history of America to further the concept of Americas as an interconnected unit.

This seemed to be waste of U.S. taxpayer dollars when we're over \$19 trillion in debt and when the region struggles with having such high rates of crime, violence, tepid economic growth and the list goes on because the questions have already been asked.

So was the U.S. taxpayer assistance used last year to create this atlas and this history?

Mr. Palmieri?

PALMIERI:

I will have to take that question back, Sir. I'm not familiar with that specific appropriation and that program, but we will get you a full answer on how that money was used.

DUNCAN:

OK. Because I personally think that money could be better spent fighting crime, narco trafficking, helping Colombia and the things we talked about instead of spending our taxpayer dollars creating a history it may or may not be accurate of the Americas and a climate change atlas.

I don't believe my constituents would want to see their dollars go into that when we have drug running coming out of Central America, Latin America to the U.S. We've got issues of judicial graft and corruption in a lot of countries. Do you see what I'm saying? We could better spend these dollars and it kind of reminds me of a -- the National Institutes of Health putting shrimp on a treadmill.

Don't spend our tax dollars putting shrimp on a treadmill for whatever your (inaudible) reason is. Just spend them where they're effective, OK? Do you want to say something?

PALMIERI:

Yes. I do, Sir. I agree that we need to maintain our investments in the security sector, but we also are seeing an enormous drought that is affecting Central America right now. And to the extent that we can better understand the patterns of that drought, we might be able to direct more effectively agricultural assistance and other forms of development assistance so that the conditions of people who are increased food security risk can be more quickly addressed thereby removing a push factor for them to leave the region in their home communities.

So there could be a reason why a better understanding of the impact of climate change in Central America could help us protect the U.S. interest and prevent undocumented irregular migration by more effectively directing our aid.

DUNCAN:

So what you're saying is an atlas of climate change would have predicted the El Nino effect that cause the drought in Central America that lead to the migration crisis, by having that atlas, we would have been able to foresee this climate change that is driving people north?

PALMIERI:

As I said, Sir. I'm not familiar with the particulars of the atlas, but I do think more effective understanding of climate change in Central America could help us better direct assist a drought (inaudible).

DUNCAN:

Yeah. I think taking that money to help with drought assistance by USAID going in after when the drought does impact the region and helping is a better use of taxpayer dollars and trying to predict the climate.

The weather man can't tell you what climate is going to be tomorrow. And we're trying to predict climate in a region. Nobody saw the drought coming. The climate scientist didn't see the drought coming.

So, anyway, my time is up. Gentlemen and Ms. Hogan, I do appreciate you all coming today. This is insightful. This is part of the oversight that's necessary. Members may have additional questions.

(UNKNOWN)

Got one more question.

DUNCAN:

Well, I'm going to defer to the former chairwoman who has a follow-up question for just a quick question.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

Just a -- just a question on democracy (inaudible).

DUNCAN:

Votes (ph) have been called so quickly.

ROS-LEHTINEN:

Thank you, but thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I know we have votes. Ms. Hogan, has USAID fallen back to its -- to the past when USAID was not committed to democracy funds in Cuba? And I ask this because we know the history of it. In 2013, USAID decided to cut itself out of the democracy funds and then in 2014, Congress followed by zeroing out USAID for Cuba as well.

So now, USAID has been allowed to access the Cuba funds for fiscal year '15 and in October of 2015, USAID sent their Congressional notifications to the hill for \$6.25 million for Cuba. And the notification was for two programs -- humanitarian and human rights.

In November 2015, the notification cleared Congress. In January, USAID issued publicly a request for proposals for the humanitarian assistance portion and we're almost at May already and yet this money has not been obligated.

If you could give us a picture of what's going to be happening and are you -- do you still have to request proposals for the human rights portion of the notification. Is that correct? And I wanted to know why there is a holdup in humanitarian and human rights program when they're so desperately needed in Cuba right now.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

DUNCAN:

And I think the chairwoman leadership on the Cuban issue. And again, I think you guys for coming, everyone. Have been very valuable insights. The questions have been, I think robust and spot on today.

Members may have additional questions. We will submit those and ask that you provide answers within a timely manner. And any member that has a statement they like to submit for the record will leave that open for 10 days.

Without objection, we'll stand adjourned.