

**THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATIONS POLICY  
PRIORITIES FOR LATIN AMERICA  
AND THE CARIBBEAN**

---

---

**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON

WESTERN HEMISPHERE, CIVILIAN SECURITY,  
MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC  
POLICY

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

November 16, 2021

**Serial No. 117-90**

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



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

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

46-093PDF

WASHINGTON : 2022

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York, *Chairman*

BRAD SHERMAN, California	MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas, <i>Ranking Member</i>
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey	CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia	STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida	SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania
KAREN BASS, California	DARRELL ISSA, California
WILLIAM KEATING, Massachusetts	ADAM KINZINGER, Illinois
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island	LEE ZELDIN, New York
AMI BERA, California	ANN WAGNER, Missouri
JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas	BRIAN MAST, Florida
DINA TITUS, Nevada	BRIAN FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania
TED LIEU, California	KEN BUCK, Colorado
SUSAN WILD, Pennsylvania	TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee
DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota	MARK GREEN, Tennessee
ILHAN OMAR, Minnesota	ANDY BARR, Kentucky
COLIN ALLRED, Texas	GREG STEUBE, Florida
ANDY LEVIN, Michigan	DAN MEUSER, Pennsylvania
ABIGAIL SPANBERGER, Virginia	AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas
CHRISSEY HOULAHAN, Pennsylvania	PETER MEIJER, Michigan
TOM MALINOWSKI, New Jersey	NICOLE MALLIOTAKIS, New York
ANDY KIM, New Jersey	RONNY JACKSON, Texas
SARA JACOBS, California	YOUNG KIM, California
KATHY MANNING, North Carolina	MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR, Florida
JIM COSTA, California	JOE WILSON, South Carolina
JUAN VARGAS, California	
VICENTE GONZALEZ, Texas	
BRAD SCHNEIDER, Illinois	

SOPHIA LAFARGUE, *Staff Director*

BRENDAN SHIELDS, *Republican Staff Director*

---

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE, CIVILIAN SECURITY, MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY

ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey, *Chairman*

JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas	MARK GREEN, Tennessee, <i>Ranking Member</i>
ANDY LEVIN, Michigan	AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas
VICENTE GONZALEZ, Texas	MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR, Florida
JUAN VARGAS, California	

# CONTENTS

---

	Page
WITNESS	
Nichols, The Honorable Brian, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State .....	8
APPENDIX	
Hearing Notice .....	25
Hearing Minutes .....	26
Hearing Attendance .....	27
OPENING STATEMENT	
Opening statement submitted for the record from Chairman Sires .....	28
RESEPNSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD	
Responses to questions submitted for the record .....	31



**THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATIONS POLICY  
PRIORITIES FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE  
CARIBBEAN**

**Tuesday, November 16, 2021**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE, CIVILIAN  
SECURITY,  
MIGRATION, AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:03 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Albio Sires (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SIRES. Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you to our witness for being here today.

This hearing, entitled “the Biden Administration’s Policy Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean,” will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any point, and all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous materials, and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules. To insert something in the record, please have your staff email the previously mentioned address and contact subcommittee staff.

As a reminder to members joining remotely, please keep your video function on at all times, even when you are not recognized by the chair.

Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves, and please remember to mute yourself after you finish speaking. Consistent with H. Res. 8 and accompanying regulations, staff will only mute members and witnesses as appropriate when they are not under recognition to eliminate background noise.

I see that we have a quorum, and I now recognize myself for opening remarks.

I want to begin by congratulating you, Assistant Secretary Nichols, on your confirmation. I know you come to this role with a great deal of experience in the region and an impressive depth of knowledge about the challenges we face. I am confident that our policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean is in good hands.

As we all know, it is a turbulent time for the Western Hemisphere. This region has been hit harder by the COVID-19 pandemic than anywhere else in the world. With Daniel Ortega’s coronation ceremony last week, there is no doubt that we are dealing with three fully consolidated dictatorships in Latin America and the Caribbean. While these regimes in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua tighten their grip on power, in other countries, like Guate-

mala and El Salvador, we are seeing major setbacks to judicial independence, the fight against corruption, and the rule of law.

In my view, the Biden Administration came into office with the right approach, to elevate Central America as a strategic priority and renew our focus on addressing the root causes of migrations. Unfortunately, we have seen in the last 10 months that there are limitations to what we can achieve when we lack reliable government partners. For this reason, the newly announced effort of the Administration to focus on assistance and supporting local organizations in Central America is a positive and important step.

Despite the serious challenges confronting the region, I also see many opportunities for greater engagement. In this sense, I applaud the Biden Administration's budget request, which would increase our funding for Latin America and the Caribbean by over 15 percent to the highest level in more than a decade.

I also commend this Administration for donating over 50 million vaccine doses to the region. While I was frustrated that we could not take action sooner to deliver the vaccine, this is still a major accomplishment that demonstrates our collective commitment to our friends in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The next step will be supporting the region's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. I traveled to the Dominican Republic with my ranking member, Member Green, in September. The government there is making progress in reforming the police and fighting corruption. Like most countries in the region, they want our support for their economic recovery. I hope we can discuss today how we can spur greater investment and strengthen supply chains in the Western Hemisphere.

As we think about how to compete effectively with China, we need to use our competitive advantage. This means tapping into our innovative private sector and deepening our network of alliances. Simply criticizing countries for doing business with China will not get us very far. We need to be at the table, offering credible solutions and providing serious alternatives.

We should also use our convening power to bring governments together to address challenges that transcend borders, such as the impact of climate change and increased migration from South America through the Darien Gap.

Ultimately, our commitment to democracy and human rights should be the backbone of everything we do. We must be consistent in standing up for these values across the region.

In Honduras' upcoming elections, we should work closely with our partners to ensure the international community speaks with one voice that is informed by the assessment of the OAS and the EU election observers. I am deeply concerned by the pre-election violence we are seeing there.

In Haiti, we are witnessing the complete deterioration of the State. The U.S. must engage Haitian civil society and support Haitian-led efforts to restore peace, security, and human dignity.

In Cuba, the Biden Administration and bipartisan Members of Congress have taken a firm stand in defense of universal human rights, but, as we saw again yesterday, the regime is doubling down on its repression. We need to do more to expand internet access, end the exploitation of Cuban medical workers, and unite

international allies behind Cubans' demand for freedom and self-determination.

As for Nicaragua, I look forward to seeing how we can work with the Administration to implement the recently passed RENACER Act and coordinate our action with allies in Latin America and the European Union to further restrict international financing to the Ortega regime.

We must never lose sight of the continued political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and the impact it is having on Colombia and other allies throughout the region. Maduro's crimes against humanity should never be normalized.

The landscape across the region is challenging, but if we want to advance a more prosperous, sustainable, and democratic future for this hemisphere, we must begin by establishing Latin America and the Caribbean as a priority for U.S. foreign policy.

Thank you.

And I now turn to the ranking member, Mark Green, for his opening statement.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Chairman Sires, for holding the hearing, and it is great to see you again.

Thank you, Assistant Secretary Nichols, for testifying today, and it is great to meet you as well.

For too long, Congress has overlooked the Western Hemisphere, a region critical to the economic growth and national security of the United States. As ranking member, and I think I can say on behalf of the chairman as well, of this subcommittee, it is our top priority to refocus U.S. public policy on this important region.

America faces many challenges in the Western Hemisphere that have to be addressed. Illegal migration is one particular problem. Recently released data shows that the U.S. Customs and Border Protection detained more than 1.7 million migrants along our southern border in Fiscal Year 2021, a record high.

There is no easy fix to this challenge. On the one hand, we have to reduce the pull factors—for example, President Biden's egregious proposal to pay certain illegal immigrants \$450,000 each, which will only further encourage migrants to make the dangerous journey north. But we also need to address the root causes of migration, such as a lack of economic opportunity, rampant corruption, and significant levels of crime.

Mexico is a key ally with whom we must work to address these issues. And I would like to hear more from the Administration about the status of our security cooperation between the United States and Mexico, considering the recent record levels of illegal migration as well as a record level of fentanyl coming into the United States.

I understand the Administration is trying to find new ways to stop the criminal cartels that are trafficking in fentanyl, cocaine, and other drugs. The status quo, though, is not acceptable to the committee and likely not to you either. I believe one of the solutions is not more handouts or foreign aid but trade.

Assistant Secretary, I look forward to working with you on improving the business environment and finding near-shoring opportunities to reduce the flow of illegal migrants into the United States. I have spoken with many businessmen who are dying to in-

vest in Latin America but are hesitant due to crime and corruption as well as a patchwork of confusing trade regulations.

Another challenge the United States faces in the region is despotic regimes that trample on the rights of their own people. Cuba, Venezuela, and now Nicaragua are particularly egregious offenders.

For over 60 years, Cubans have been held hostage by a tyrannical dictatorship. The Communists have bankrupted a beautiful country, condemning three generations to misery and separating countless families. I have been encouraged to see Cubans rise up in protest against the regime in recent months, and I was proud to support a bipartisan resolution 2 weeks ago in support of the Cuban people.

I am also deeply concerned about the nine Americans unlawfully detained by the Maduro regime, one of them being from Tennessee, Matthew Heath. I recently met with the relatives of Tomeu Vadell, one of the CITGO Six oil executives also unlawfully detained by the Maduro regime. My heart breaks for his wife and daughters, who later this month will mark 4 years separated from their husband and their father. We need to know more about what the Administration is doing to bring home Mr. Vadell and the other Americans unlawfully incarcerated.

Additionally, Nicaragua is now Latin America's third Socialist dictatorship. The recent so-called elections were a farce. Make no mistake, Daniel Ortega is a dictator and an illegitimate President. My colleagues and I were proud to support the bipartisan RENACER Act to hold the Ortega regime accountable and increase pressure on corrupt regime officials who dismantled their country's democracy.

The U.S. also faces the growing challenge of malign Chinese influence in the region. The Chinese Communist Party has been working furiously to buy off our neighbors in Latin America through its Belt and Road Initiative. However, partnering with Beijing always comes with strings attached.

Over the past decade, countries in the Western Hemisphere have outsourced much of their manufacturing to China. While Latin American currencies increased in value because of the China commodities boom, many of these same countries chose to purchase relatively cheaper Chinese goods, leading to less demand for and a drying up of their own manufacturing base. This has led to an increase in unemployment and an over-reliance on Chinese-manufactured goods.

I am working on a bill that will prioritize moving critical parts of our supply chain out of China and back to the Western Hemisphere, among our allies and partners. Not only will this bill help confront the rise of China in the region, but it will also increase economic opportunities and reduce some of the push factors leading to illegal migration. It is a win for the United States, and it is a win for Latin America.

Thank you again, Chairman Sires, for holding this hearing, and I look forward to hearing from our witness.

I yield back.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you very much, Ranking Member Green.

I will now introduce the Honorable Brian A. Nichols, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. Mr. Nichols is



a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, with over 30 years of experience in the State Department.

Assistant Secretary Nichols has served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Zimbabwe from 2018 to 2021 and as U.S. Ambassador to Peru from 2014 to 2017. He has also held high-level positions in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the Office of Caribbean Affairs, and the U.S. Embassy in Colombia.

Assistant Secretary Nichols has earned 24 awards during his diplomatic career, including 2 Presidential Meritorious Service Awards and the 2016 Charles E. Cobb, Jr. Award for Initiative and Success in Trade Development.

Mr. Nichols, we thank you for your distinguished service, and we welcome you to the hearing.

I ask the witness to please limit your testimony to 5 minutes, and, without objection, your prepared written statement will be made part of the record.

Mr. Nichols, you are recognized for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE BRIAN NICHOLS, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Mr. NICHOLS. Chairman Sires, Ranking Member Green, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding our efforts to advance the President's and the Secretary's agenda in the Western Hemisphere.

The President and the Secretary deeply value the Western Hemisphere's central role in the welfare of the United States and understand that we cannot separate our country's fortunes from that of our closest neighbors. This Administration seeks to promote a more inclusive, green, secure, prosperous, and democratic hemisphere, aligned with U.S. values and interests.

In my first week in this job, I joined the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Under Secretary for Political Affairs, along with other principals, at the United Nations General Assembly for over 20 engagements with Western Hemisphere leaders.

During my first two months as Assistant Secretary, I visited Haiti, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, and Canada and met with diaspora communities in Miami and New York to advance these priorities.

Today, I want to share with you our efforts to help the Haitian people with the ongoing crisis in their country; address irregular migration and its root causes; bolster the hemisphere's commitment to inclusive democracy; promote public health and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including through the Administration's Build Back Better World initiative; and work with partners to promote democracy in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela.

Haiti struggles with political, humanitarian, and stabilization turmoil, compounded by the July 7th assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and the August 14th earthquake.

NSC Senior Director Juan Gonzalez and I traveled to Miami and Haiti September 30th to October 1st, Under Secretary for Civilian Security Uzra Zeya visited Haiti on October 12th and 13th, and Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement

Todd Robinson traveled to Haiti November 8th to 10th to underscore the Administration's commitment to the Haitian people.

In our meetings with the Haitian diaspora, civil society, political actors, and Prime Minister Ariel Henry, we encouraged the Haitian people to find their own solutions and chart a broad and inclusive resolution to the current political impasse. We expressed our concerns about Haiti's security situation, noting stakeholders' view that insecurity would not allow for democratic elections this year.

The Haitian people will determine a timeline for their elections, but we work now to support conditions for free and fair elections, including responding to the Haitian Government's requests to help restore security and address gang violence. In addition to our previously planned assistance, we will provide an additional \$15 million to help build Haitian National Police capacity to combat gangs, expand community policing efforts, upgrade corrections facilities, and provide necessary security equipment.

The kidnapping by a Haitian gang of 16 Americans and 1 Canadian serving with Christian Aid Ministries tragically illustrated Haiti's problematic security situation. The Department has no greater priority than the safety and welfare of U.S. citizens abroad. We sent additional personnel and resources to Haiti to support efforts to return these U.S. citizens to safety.

Haiti's crises contributed to the complex dynamic of migratory flows in the Americas. We have broadened our efforts to address irregular migration throughout the hemisphere.

The President's February 2nd executive order directed a new and comprehensive approach to address regional migration. As part of that approach, the State Department implements aspects of the Administration's Root Causes Strategy and the Collaborative Migration Management Strategy. We impress upon countries the region's shared responsibility to address the issue collaboratively.

The Secretary and Administrator Power met on September 24th with Mexican and Central American Foreign Ministers in New York to discuss regional migration.

The Secretary and I, on October 20th, joined Ministers and counterparts from more than a dozen hemispheric partners in Bogota. We explored coordinated regional approaches to address irregular migration challenges and specific steps countries can take to address its root causes. Our partners concurred we need a regional response and stressed their contributions would differ depending on their circumstances as a source, transit, or destination country.

We appreciate the efforts of countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Chile in accepting large numbers of migrants. We continue to work with Brazil and Chile to accept the return of Haitians with prior status in those countries.

We will work together to expand legal pathways for workers within the region to create inclusive economic opportunities in their countries of origin or long-term residence. We will strengthen law enforcement to dismantle trafficking networks and build on efforts to make it easier for migrants to return to their countries of prior residence and encourage removals for those ineligible for protection.

Each partner will concentrate on immediate efforts, with the long-term objective of crafting a stable, prosperous, and democratic future for their citizens and residents.

As the Secretary said in his October 20th remarks in Ecuador, we find ourselves in a moment of democratic reckoning in the hemisphere and around the world. All of us who believe our shared future depends on the survival of democracy must ask, as the Secretary put it: What can we do to make democracies deliver on the issues that matter most to our people?

In a region where 70 percent of citizens express dissatisfaction about how democracy works, we must combat corruption, enhance civilian security, and address the economic and social challenges facing the region's citizens to close the gap between democracy's promise and the reality.

We work with partners to hold corrupt individuals and groups accountable, including through the new tool Congress created to fight corruption in northern Central America—the Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors List. We named over 50 corrupt actors in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to the list in a public display of accountability.

As host of the Ninth Summit of the Americas, we will uphold and expand upon our commitment to fight corruption; focus government, civil society, and the private sector on working together to increase inclusion, transparency, and accountability in government; and bolster and defend our democratic institutions.

To enhance civilian security, the United States invests billions of dollars globally to reduce violence and combat transnational criminal organizations. However, as the Secretary noted in his October 20th remarks in Quito, we need to pay more attention to addressing root causes of insecurity in our hemisphere.

I joined Secretary Blinken, DHS Secretary Mayorkas, and Attorney General Garland at the October 8th High-Level Security Dialogue with Mexico, where our two governments adopted a new Bicentennial Framework based on partnership and shared responsibility for the safety and security of our two countries.

The Secretary took a similar comprehensive and integrated approach at the October 21st U.S.-Colombia High-Level Dialogue.

In the interest of time, I will conclude my remarks there but submit the rest for the record, and I look forward to answering you and your colleagues' questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Nichols follows:]

**Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols**  
**The Biden Administration's Policy Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean**  
**House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere**  
**November 16, 2021, 2:00 p.m.**

**Introduction**

Chairman Sires, Ranking Member Green, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding our efforts to advance the President's and Secretary's agenda for the Western Hemisphere. The President and the Secretary deeply value the Western Hemisphere's central role in the welfare of the United States and understand that we cannot separate our country's fortunes from those of our closest neighbors.

This Administration seeks to promote a more inclusive, green, secure, prosperous, and democratic hemisphere aligned with U.S. values and interests. In my first week in this job, I joined the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Under Secretary for Political Affairs, along with other principals, at the United Nations General Assembly for over 20 engagements with Western Hemisphere leaders. During my first two months as Assistant Secretary, I have visited Haiti, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, and Canada – and met with diaspora communities in Miami and New York – to advance these priorities.

Today, I want to share with you our efforts to help the Haitian people with the ongoing crisis in their country; address irregular migration and its root causes; bolster the Hemisphere's commitment to inclusive democracy; promote public health and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the Americas, including through the Administration's Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative; and work with partners to promote democracy in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela.

**The Haiti Crisis**

Haiti struggles with political, humanitarian and stabilization turmoil compounded by the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moise and the August 14 earthquake. NSC Senior Director Juan Gonzalez and I traveled to Miami and Haiti September 30 to October 1, Under Secretary for Civilian Security Uzra Zeya visited Haiti on October 12 and 13, and Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Todd Robinson traveled to Haiti November 8 to 10 to underscore the Administration's commitment to the Haitian people.

In our meetings with the Haitian diaspora, civil society, political actors, and Prime Minister Ariel Henry, we encouraged the Haitian people to find their own solutions and chart a broad and inclusive resolution to the current political impasse. We expressed our concerns about Haiti's security, noting stakeholders view that insecurity would not allow for democratic elections this year.

The Haitian people will determine a timeline for their elections, but we work now to support conditions for free and fair elections, including responding to the Haitian government's requests to help restore security and address gang violence.

We will provide an additional \$15 million, for a total of \$33 million, to help build Haitian National Police (HNP) capacity to combat gangs, expand community policing efforts, upgrade corrections facilities, and provide necessary security equipment. The kidnapping by a Haitian gang of 16 Americans and one Canadian serving with Christian Aid Ministries tragically illustrated Haiti's problematic security situation. The Department has no greater priority than the safety and welfare of U.S. citizens abroad. We sent additional personnel and resources to Haiti to support efforts to return these U.S. citizens to safety.

#### **Irregular Migration**

Haiti's crises contributed to the complex dynamic of migratory flows in the Americas. We have broadened our efforts to address irregular migration throughout the Hemisphere. The President's February 2 Executive Order directed a new and comprehensive approach to address regional migration. As part of that approach, the State Department implements aspects of the Administration's Root Causes Strategy and the Collaborative Migration Management Strategy, and we impress upon countries in the region the shared responsibility the region has to address the issue collaboratively. The Secretary and Administrator Power met on September 24 with the Mexican and Central American foreign ministers in New York City to discuss regional migration. The Secretary and I on October 20 joined ministers and counterparts from more than a dozen hemispheric partners in Bogotá. We explored coordinated regional approaches to address irregular migration challenges and specific steps countries can take to address its root causes. Our partners concurred we need a regional response and stressed their contributions would differ depending on their circumstance as source, transit, or destination country.

We appreciate the efforts of countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Chile in accepting large numbers of migrants. We continue to work with Brazil and Chile to accept the return of Haitians with prior status in those countries. We will work together to expand legal pathways for workers within the region, and to create inclusive economic opportunities in their countries of origin or long-term residence. We will strengthen law enforcement to dismantle trafficking networks and build on efforts to make it easier for migrants to return to their countries of prior residence and encourage removals for those ineligible for protection. Each partner will concentrate on immediate efforts with the long-term objective of crafting a stable, prosperous, and democratic future for their citizens and residents.

#### **Reinforcing Democracy and Civilian Security**

As the Secretary said in his October 20 remarks in Ecuador "we find ourselves in a moment of democratic reckoning." In the Hemisphere and around the world, all of us who believe our shared future depends on the survival of democracy must ask, as the Secretary put it, "what can we do to make democracies deliver on the issues that matter most to our people." In a region where 70 percent of citizens expressed dissatisfaction with how democracy works, we must combat corruption, enhance civilian security, and address the economic and social challenges facing the region's citizens to close the gap between democracy's promise and the reality.

President Biden designated fighting corruption as a core U.S. national security interest. Corruption costs an estimated five percent of global GDP each year, impeding growth, increasing inequality, and undercutting citizens' trust in government. We work with partners to hold corrupt individuals and groups accountable, including through the new tool Congress

created to fight corruption in Northern Central America - the Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors list. We named over 50 corrupt actors in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to the list in a public display of accountability. As host of the Ninth Summit of the Americas, we will uphold and expand upon our commitment to fight corruption, and focus governments, civil society, and the private sector on working together to increase inclusion, transparency and accountability in government and bolster and defend our democratic institutions.

To enhance civilian security the United States invests billions of dollars globally to reduce violence and combat transnational criminal organizations, but as the Secretary noted in his October 20 remarks in Quito, we need to pay more attention to addressing root causes of insecurity in our hemisphere. I joined Secretary Blinken, DHS Secretary Mayorkas, and Attorney General Garland at the October 8 High-Level Security Dialogue (HLSD) with Mexico where our two governments adopted a new Bicentennial Framework, based on partnership, and shared responsibility for the safety and security of our two countries. The Secretary took a similar comprehensive and integrated approach at the October 21 U.S.-Colombia High-Level Dialogue.

#### **COVID-19 Recovery**

In addition to curbing corruption and strengthening civilian security, we and our partners must address the economic and social challenges facing our citizens as together we recover from the pandemic. We must ensure that opportunity and access to basic services extends to all citizens with intersectional approaches, particularly marginalized and underserved populations, including African Descendant, Indigenous, and LGBTQI+ communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic struck Latin America and the Caribbean with unrivaled lethality, especially marginalized communities. The region represents only eight percent of the global population but approximately 30 percent of COVID-19 related deaths. We remain committed to bringing the same urgency to international vaccination efforts that we demonstrated at home. We have donated more than 47 million doses to 29 partners in the Western Hemisphere. We contributed \$4 billion to GAVI for COVAX to support vaccine procurement, readiness, and in-country vaccination efforts, including in the region. The Department and USAID also provided the region more than \$614 million in COVID-19 supplemental assistance and American Rescue Plan Act funding – including technical assistance to support vaccine roll-out, case management, and oxygen access. All COVAX participant countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have received shipments. This is the right thing to do and in our national interests.

#### **Inclusive Economic Development**

The IMF estimated Latin America and Caribbean's GDP contracted by seven percent in 2020, the largest contraction of any region. We must help the region restart its economy. The United States has invested more than \$10 billion in Latin America and the Caribbean through the International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to grow economies and create jobs. The United States also recognizes the tremendous infrastructure needs, which some estimate at more than \$40 trillion by 2035, across low- and middle-income countries. Done the right way, with transparent, sustainable investment in projects that respond to a country's needs and engages its

local workers to maintain high labor and environmental standards, infrastructure can provide a strong foundation that allows societies to grow and to prosper.

To address these challenges, President Biden committed to an affirmative and comprehensive initiative with G7 leaders: the Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative. The values-driven, high-standard, and transparent infrastructure partnership offers recipient communities the long-run benefits, protections, and transparency they deserve. Through B3W, the United States and its G7 partners will offer local communities in low- and middle-income countries help in building infrastructure, including sustainable and resilient projects that focus on climate, health and health security, technology, and gender equity and equality.

Our delegation to Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama in September – with Deputy National Security Advisor Singh, DFC COO Marchick, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Zúniga highlighted the B3W Initiative’s commitment to work with our partners to narrow the gaps in physical, digital, and human resources infrastructure exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The delegation met with government officials, the private sector, and environmental, labor, and civil society leaders to solicit their views as to how we can best support local communities in a way that responds to infrastructure needs and advances the highest standards for transparency and anticorruption, financial sustainability, labor protections, and environmental preservation.

Carrying forward this positive agenda for the hemisphere advances U.S. interests and increases our partners’ resilience to engagements and investments of concern, particularly by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Russia, Iran, and other actors who do not share our values.

To advance our positive agenda, Secretary Blinken underscored our commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, security, and development in the Western Hemisphere at the OAS General Assembly on November 11. The leaders of North America will also meet in Washington on November 18 to chart a path for our partnership at a time of complex global challenges, including focusing on pandemic recovery, increasing North America competitiveness, and addressing migration through a regional approach.

**Supporting Democratic Reform in Non-Democratic Regimes:**

We work to help to ensure that democracy delivers for all the region’s citizens, and we must continue working to support democracy where undemocratic regimes prevail.

We support the Venezuelan-led negotiations between the Unity Platform and the Maduro regime. We hope that these talks lead to the peaceful restoration of the democracy that Venezuelans deserve, an end to human rights abuses, and the alleviation of Venezuela’s dire humanitarian crisis. We will only review sanctions policies if the parties make meaningful progress. Nicolás Maduro must release wrongfully detained American citizens immediately so they can return to their families in the United States. Along with the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, we remain in frequent touch with these families.

We will continue to work with our Venezuelan and international partners to help address the Venezuelan crisis. We announced on September 22 an additional \$336 million humanitarian,

economic, and development assistance for Venezuelans, bringing total U.S. assistance for Venezuela since 2017 to \$1.9 billion. We call on the international community to redouble its support to the Venezuelan people as they work peacefully to restore democracy to their country.

In Nicaragua, the Ortega-Murillo government launched an unprecedented crackdown against political opposition leaders and independent journalists. Following the ersatz elections on November 7, Ortega and Murillo no longer have a democratic mandate. We urge the Ortega-Murillo government to take concrete actions now to return to democratic norms; cease repression against Nicaraguans calling for democracy; and immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners.

The United States and over 70 international partners passed two OAS resolutions, each supported by 26 countries, and a 59-country joint statement at the UN Human Rights Council. The Administration sanctioned 31 individuals and eight entities under our Nicaragua-specific and Global Magnitsky sanctions programs. We imposed visa restrictions on 169 individuals linked to the Ortega-Murillo government and their immediate family members. We welcome concrete actions taken by our partners, including Canada's decision to apply sanctions on 15 individuals who undermined human rights in Nicaragua and the EU's decision to apply targeted sanctions on eight individuals, including Vice President Murillo.

We continue to work with Nicaragua's neighbors, Canada, the EU, and the UK, among others, to apply economic and diplomatic measures to raise the costs for those who support the Ortega-Murillo government. We will continue to rally the international community and use our diplomatic and economic tools to condemn Ortega and Murillo's actions and the Russian-inspired laws they use to justify them.

Our Cuba policy focuses on support for the political and economic wellbeing of the Cuban people and accountability for Cuban government officials involved in human rights abuses. Collectively with the international community, we condemn the violence and repression perpetrated by the Cuban regime upon the Cuban people for demanding their fundamental freedoms. The Cuban government's attempts to quash demonstrations on November 15 further proves its malice toward the Cuban people.

Events in Cuba, especially since July 11, weigh heavily on our approach. Treasury since July has imposed four rounds of targeted financial sanctions against Cuban officials and military and security services in connection with violence, repression, and human rights violations against peaceful protestors. Through these Global Magnitsky sanctions, the Administration seeks to impose tangible and significant consequences against repressors and to promote accountability for serious human rights abuse.

We will also continue to support increased exports of humanitarian goods to the Cuban people and to continue to work with the private sector and other stakeholders to identify viable options to ensure greater internet access for the Cuban people.

As we work to support democratic reform and ensure democracies deliver for all the peoples of the Americas, President Biden's words continue to guide us: "Democracy holds the key to



freedom, prosperity, peace, and dignity. If we work together with our democratic partners, with strength and confidence, we will meet every challenge and outpace every challenger.”

Mr. SIRES. Thank you.

We will now turn to questions.

Secretary Nichols, let's talk a little bit about human rights in Cuba. Yesterday, we saw the Cuban regime once again stifle free expression and association by prohibiting peaceful protests and blocking activists and journalists from leaving their homes.

How will the U.S. respond to the latest repressive action taken by the Cuban regime? And what more do you need and what more can we do to defend human rights for the Cuban people?

And the second part of that question is, what progress has the Administration made since July in expanding internet access on the island and supporting efforts to circumvent the restrictions imposed by the regime?

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just to review events around what happened yesterday, it is a clear sign of the Cuban regime's fear of its own people's voice and its attempts to repress their legitimate desires for democracy and to set their own future. Cuban authorities arrested, blockaded, hospitalized, and detained activists from around the island, and they attempted to block internet access for certain individuals as well as networks in specific areas.

Since the events in July, we have had four rounds of sanctions on those Cuban authorities who were responsible for the repression and abuse of their citizens, and we continue to look for opportunities to send concrete demonstrations of support for the Cuban people.

I think, as we look to the future, we need to continue to engage and support the Cuban people in their efforts to achieve democracy and freedom.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you.

You know, I was very upset last month when I saw that Nicaragua received \$340 million. I just wonder—the International Monetary Fund gave them this money. Do we have any way of tracking what they do and just having a little say on some of this money?

I mean, obviously, they said that the money was going to vaccinate the people of Nicaragua. Well, the vaccination rate in Nicaragua is only 12 percent.

So how do we influence the Monetary Fund to open their eyes and say, listen, \$340 million is a lot of money and these people are not using it for the right thing? So how do we do that?

Mr. NICHOLS. So, Mr. Chairman, the special drawing rights have to be converted into a usable currency. I have not seen any indication that the Nicaraguan authorities have yet converted the special drawing rights that they received from the IMF into an actual currency they can use to spend on something.

I think, as part of the RENACER Act, we should be looking for opportunities to prevent Nicaragua from obtaining resources from international financial institutions, when those funds would inevitably go to their corrupt government.

So I think we need to be very vigilant in that area, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Treasury Department who oversee our relations with the international financial institutions to achieve that goal.

Mr. SIRES. And my last question is, how can we help Colombia deal with the 2 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees that are in Colombia now?

Mr. NICHOLS. So, through our Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, as well as the U.S. Agency for International Development, we have provided over \$740 million in assistance since 2017 to support Colombia's integration of the Venezuelan migrants.

We were in Colombia in October, and President Duque talked about his extension of temporary protected status to Venezuelan migrants there.

We continue to work through organizations like the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR to ensure that the international community responds in support of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia as well as other parts of South America where there are also large communities of Venezuelan migrants, like Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Brazil, are also receiving the assistance they need. We coordinate throughout our hemisphere to support the necessary structures to help migration flow in a better and more regulated way.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you.

Now I will turn over the questions to Ranking Member Green.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, on the kidnapped missionaries in Haiti, State has not given us an update in over 3 weeks. And that includes the offices who represent those individuals.

Could you get us an update on the missionaries, the status, what is going on, delivered either to HFAC or, at a minimum, to the offices that represent those people?

Mr. NICHOLS. Yes, Ranking Member Green. We have held several briefings in the past, and we are happy to brief again.

Mr. GREEN. Well, just a status update is what we need. You know, if we know where they are being held, et cetera, things like that, that would be very—we have to go back and reassure these people that we are doing something, you know, the families in these areas. So, if you could do that, that would be great.

My next question: You know, Fiscal Year 2021 ended with an all-time high, 1.7 million apprehensions at the U.S. southern border. Our regional partners are also seeing massive levels of migration.

Can you provide a concrete example, just one, a single concrete example, where the Biden Administration's strategy to address the root causes of migration has actually decreased migrant flows?

Mr. NICHOLS. I believe we have been successful in decreasing migrant flows—

Mr. GREEN. Can you give me one example?

Mr. NICHOLS. So, for example, in Guatemala, the centers that we have that address concerns of people thinking to migrate, I think that has diverted people out of—

Mr. GREEN. So it would be worse than it is had you not done that? Is that what you are saying?

Mr. NICHOLS. Yes.

Mr. GREEN. Because it has not decreased, right? So I was just looking for maybe an example of where it had decreased, the number, you had seen a decrease in migration. You do not have—you have one?

Mr. NICHOLS. So there are programs throughout the hemisphere. Mexico, for example, has been very cooperative and responsive in trying to manage the migration—

Mr. GREEN. But I guess I am looking—and I hate to keep interrupting you, but I do not need—I am just looking for an example where—can you cite a difference that has been made of where there has been a decrease? Has there anywhere in the region been a decrease in migration since you guys have taken control?

Mr. NICHOLS. Migration levels are at elevated levels throughout the hemisphere—

Mr. GREEN. So the answer would be no, I guess.

Let me move on to another question, if I could.

I was recently in Brazil with President Bolsonaro and continue to be impressed by how the Brazilian Government wants to align agendas with the United States. We have not seen this sense of like-mindedness in a Brazilian Administration for some time. Congress and the Administration need to support U.S. investors' ability to invest in Brazil and do more to support Brazil's entrance into the OECD.

Also while I was there, we got a briefing on their Navy. The opportunities for cooperation between our two countries in that regard, particularly as it relates to the South Atlantic, are great opportunities.

How are you capitalizing on our joint priorities to advance strategic and U.S. interests with Brazil?

Mr. NICHOLS. We have a close and broad relationship with Brazil. While I was at the U.N. General Assembly, I accompanied Secretary Blinken for a meeting with Foreign Secretary Franca. Also, Jake Sullivan, the National Security Advisor, met with his counterpart, Admiral Rocha.

Actually, on Friday, I will be having lunch with the Brazilian ambassador, and we are going to talk about these issues. We look forward to continued high-level exchanges with Brazil on a—

Mr. GREEN. Do you think—

Mr. NICHOLS [continuing]. Full range of issues.

Mr. GREEN. Again, I hate to interrupt you, but we have such little time. Will we support their entrance into OECD?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, we are certainly working on that. There are a number of factors in play. But we believe that Brazil plays an important role, both regionally and globally, and we want to encourage them to continue to play a positive role—for example, what they did at COP26.

Mr. GREEN. Would you do me a favor and just, in writing, send those factors that are in play so that we can better understand it?

Mr. GREEN. I have just a little bit of time left, so one more question.

The ongoing pandemic has obviously exposed fault lines in our supply chain for essential equipment, life-saving drugs, et cetera. I am working on the bill that you and I spoke about on the phone and would love to provide you a copy of the legislation as it is, you know, being worked on.

The special appointee to the Northern Triangle, Mr. Zuniga at the time—I think he has since been promoted; congratulations to

him, but—looked at it and reviewed it. I would like to get your eyes on it and get the promise of some assistance.

I really want this to be a bipartisan effort. I know many of the Democrats have reached out to me to be a part of this, so I would just like to get your assurance that we can work together on that.

Mr. NICHOLS. Absolutely.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Congressman Green.

We now turn to Congressman Castro for questions.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Chairman.

And thank you, Assistant Secretary, for being here and for your testimony. Congratulations on your confirmation. We are glad that you got through despite the holdup on many confirmations in the Senate.

the Biden Administration has prioritized addressing the root causes of migration, particularly in Central American countries.

And there have been multiple reports of groups of migrants, largely composed of young women and children, being threatened, beaten, dragged, and chased by Mexican security forces. And I fear that the Mexican Government is undertaking these actions because our government has put pressure on Mexico to stop migration and stop migrants, whatever the cost, and they may resort to these heavy-handed actions because of that.

And so I wanted to see if you can assure us that the United States has not and will not ask the Mexican Government to use force, violence, or intimidation against migrants.

Mr. NICHOLS. Absolutely not. We work with the Mexican Government to promote respect for the human rights and dignity of migrants. And the Mexican Government has actually been reinforcing their structures building better shelters, providing better training, and working with the International Organization for Migration, to that end.

Mr. CASTRO. And what will we do, the U.S. Government, to hold Mexican security units that commit such abuses accountable? And will we cut security assistance to those units, as required by law?

Mr. NICHOLS. We will absolutely follow the law. And human rights are a crucial aspect of our foreign assistance engagement with all countries, and that is certainly the case with Mexico. But I would note that President Lopez Obrador and Mexican authorities broadly also stress the importance of respect for human rights in their public and private remarks.

Mr. CASTRO. A key threat to democracy, stability, and human rights in Mexico is gang-and drug-related violence, as you know. And a recent GAO report found that 70 to 90 percent of guns recovered in Mexico are from the United States, almost all illegally smuggled into the country.

Will the State Department prioritize combating firearms trafficking from the United States to Mexico in our security cooperation with Mexico, especially under the new Bicentennial Framework?

Mr. NICHOLS. Yes. That was something that was discussed during our meetings in Mexico City in October.

Mexican authorities already have access to eTrace to help them trace the guns that they find. U.S. law enforcement agencies co-

ordinate closely with their Mexican counterparts, and we continue to promote those engagements and interactions.

I hope that—not to preview too much, but I hope that we will have an announcement along those lines in connection with the North American Leaders Summit later this week.

Mr. CASTRO. Great.

I have one more question, and then I want to make a statement about the confirmations being held up in the Senate.

But a question about Honduras: With Honduras' elections only weeks away and given the United States' premature declaration of Juan Orlando Hernandez's win in 2017, what will the State Department do to monitor the November 28th elections?

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Congressman.

Well, I will be traveling to Honduras on Sunday. I will be meeting with candidates as well as the elections council and government officials to discuss the importance of a free, fair, transparent, and peaceful electoral process.

There is also an OAS electoral observation mission in Honduras, and we will be following events closely. And we want to make sure that we analyze the vote and any outcomes carefully, and we will be judicious in our remarks.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you.

And, in closing, I want to draw attention to a number of senior positions at the State Department and USAID that are still vacant yet are critical for our leadership in the Western Hemisphere.

These positions include the Assistant Secretaries for International Organization Affairs, for Conflict and Stabilization Operations, for International Security and Proliferation, and for Population, Refugees, and Migration; and Ambassadors to NATO, Costa Rica, and Paraguay.

Each of these individuals has had their hearing at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and received a vote in the committee. They are unable to start their jobs because Senator Ted Cruz and Senator Josh Hawley are jeopardizing our national security by refusing to allow a vote on the Senate floor for their nominations.

I hope these Senators drop their unreasonable demands soon and you have a fully staffed State Department to advance our priorities in the Western Hemisphere and around the world.

Thank you for your testimony today.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Congressman Castro.

Now we will turn it over to Representative Salazar.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you.

And wonderful to be able to talk to you, Mr. Nichols, and congratulations on your new position.

I believe, sir, that Latin America is not a priority for this Administration, and, unfortunately, the empirical evidence proves it. As a result, we are losing our influence in the Americas, and China and Russia are pillaging Latin America while we are asleep.

Let me just talk to you about three different countries that I am interested in, so please make your answers not too long.

Cuba. For 4 months, sir, I have been asking your Administration, the Biden Administration, the State Department, for one thing: internet connectivity to the island. Your deputy promised to brief me personally on the progress the State Department has been mak-

ing on bringing connectivity to Cuba, and that meeting has not occurred.

So my question to you is, sir, have you done the due diligence with the companies that can provide that technology to Cuba? There are two companies that we can talk to. Have you done that due diligence?

Mr. NICHOLS. Our technical experts have been in touch with the private sector as well as U.S. Government experts to discuss ways to improve internet access on the island—

Ms. SALAZAR. I am talking about two specific companies that have the technology ready to go so you can do the due diligence and the White House can give the final approval and we can put those balloons up in the air.

Are you aware who those two companies are?

Mr. NICHOLS. So there is no magic bullet to solve the internet—

Ms. SALAZAR. Sure there is. The technology is out there, and we can at least try it.

And that is my frustration. This Administration does not even want to do the due diligence. There is no willingness to bring connectivity to the island of Cuba.

Are you aware of that, sir?

Mr. NICHOLS. We are working to increase access to the internet. I would note that during yesterday's protest there was not a broad switch-off of internet access. There was—

Ms. SALAZAR. Yes, there is. And I am so sorry. You keep on telling me the same thing that everyone tells me, and that is not true. But, if you want, I can have a private conversation with you and tell you where that technology is.

Now let's go to Mexico. On Thursday, sir, President AMLO, Lopez Obrador, is going to be welcomed to Washington. And I am sure you remember that Lopez Obrador received Diaz-Canel as a king. Not even Fidel Castro was received like that on Mexican soil.

And there is a report from your State Department that says that Mexico is profiting from the human trafficking and forced labor of Cuban doctors on Mexican soil. That violates USMCA, the free-trade agreement between Mexico and the United States.

Are you going to confront, are you going to ask the Biden Administration to ask AMLO about these two atrocities?

Mr. NICHOLS. We discuss human rights around the hemisphere with our counterparts in Mexico, and we continue to advocate for the key values of—

Ms. SALAZAR. But, specifically, is it on the agenda now when Lopez Obrador is coming to Washington to address specifically these two things that I just pointed out?

Mr. NICHOLS. We are going to have a robust dialog about a range of issues, including the human rights situation in the hemisphere.

Ms. SALAZAR. And specifically in Cuba. Thank you.

Now let's go to Colombia. President Biden's top advisor—his name is Juan Gonzalez—said that Mr. Biden has “no tiene de quien es Gustavo Petro,” he has no idea who Gustavo Petro is.

I am going to tell you who he is. He is a thief, he is a Socialist, he is a Marxist, he is a terrorist, and he is leading the poll for President of Colombia.

Do you share my opinion about Petro?

Mr. NICHOLS. I served as Deputy Chief of Mission in our Embassy in Bogota. I have met him. And I will just note that the election is a decision for the people of Colombia—

Ms. SALAZAR. I am asking you what the State Department thinks about Mr. Petro.

Mr. NICHOLS. I do not want—

Ms. SALAZAR. What is your opinion of him?

Mr. NICHOLS. I am not going to characterize the candidates in Colombia. I note that it is a decision for the Colombian people, and we hope for a free, fair, and transparent process.

Ms. SALAZAR. Well, you want the best for the people of Colombia, and you do not want a Marxist in power, do you, someone that is undermining the Colombian democracy?

I am asking you.

Mr. NICHOLS. We look forward to a free, fair, and transparent process in Colombia that reflects the will of the Colombian people. We have a longstanding alliance—

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you.

Mr. NICHOLS [continuing]. And relationship—

Ms. SALAZAR. Let's go to Venezuela. the Biden Administration, sir, has eliminated the role of a special envoy. It has not nominated a single political appointee for Venezuela and has not met with Juan Guaido.

And my question to you, sir, is: Are you planning, the Biden Administration, the State Department, planning to throw the legitimate President of Venezuela under the bus?

Mr. NICHOLS. We recognize Interim President Guaido and his government. We continue to work with them closely. And I do not expect any change in that regard.

Ms. SALAZAR. So you are telling me that you are not planning to recognize the Maduro regime?

Mr. SIRE. Congresswoman, we are going to do a second round of questioning.

Ms. SALAZAR. I want to see if he can get that on the record.

You are not planning to recognize the Maduro regime?

Mr. NICHOLS. I do not see any change in our position.

Ms. SALAZAR. Good for you.

Mr. SIRE. Mr. Pfluger.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you.

Mr. PFLUGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here.

I have a couple of questions on Venezuela. When it comes to the influence of China, Russia, Iran, I think there is a very disturbing trend of influence, not just in Venezuela but all throughout the Western Hemisphere, specifically in South America.

Can you characterize to me your thoughts on this influence as it relates to energy inside Venezuela?

Mr. NICHOLS. So the nations that you mention provide a lifeline to the Maduro regime. They facilitate the evasion of sanctions imposed by not just the United States but countries around the world against the Maduro regime. It is a very problematic relationship.

In addition to direct sanctions evasion, they also provide a financial lifeline to the Maduro regime that is deeply worrisome. And it



is reflective of their lack of respect for the Venezuelan people that they would support this regime.

Mr. PFLUGER. So, if there are ways to counter this with, like you just said, free, fair, transparency, whether it is in elections or business dealings or all of the above, I mean, is that something that the Administration would be willing to look at, you know, in Venezuela?

I mean, there are American companies that have been there that provide that stability that actually do quite a bit of good inside the country. Unfortunately, they are going through a very tough time right now.

And I think that the question for you is, would the Administration support looking at ways to counter the influence, malign influence, of those three countries, to the benefit of the people of Venezuela?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, that certainly, absolutely is something that we look at and we talk about regularly.

I will just note that we support the negotiation process between the Unitary Platform and the Maduro regime, and we believe that it is, you know, the interim government that should be determining who gets to invest in Venezuela and what the roles are there. And that is something that we look to them to help orient us.

Mr. PFLUGER. Can you talk to me about any concerns with regards to energy and the people of Venezuela either suffering or not having access to affordable, reliable energy?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, certainly, the suffering of the people of Venezuela is the responsibility of the Maduro regime, which has imposed—and Chavez before it—has imposed decades of poor economic policies, massive corruption and graft. So that is what causes the suffering of their people.

But I would note that we hope that on the negotiating table in Mexico City, if the Maduro regime returns, they will address humanitarian issues, including access to healthcare, education, food, and secure, reliable energy.

Mr. PFLUGER. Moving on to the second topic—and I appreciate that. You know, I think that it is important for us to work very closely. You know, these are complex issues. But, at the end of the day, we want the people to be able to have access to food, to energy, to all the basic human needs. And there are American companies who I think are positioned very well to counter the influence, the malign influence, of countries like Iran, Russia, and China.

I would like to ask you some questions about what Panama is doing with regards to their use of biometrics and the identification of people who may end up on the Known or Suspected Terrorist List or be criminal actors that are migrants that are traveling from South America through Central America and how the Administration is working with countries like Panama to then expand that throughout the region. And are you looking to make some sort of effort to standardize this?

Because, you know, the Panamanian Government has recently told us that they have identified 52 people that have qualified for the Known or Suspected Terrorist List that have been migrants. So what efforts is the Administration making to this end?

Mr. NICHOLS. So this is a big priority for us, to coordinate with countries throughout the migrant routes. And Panama is a crucial one because there is a big migrant movement that goes from the Darien on the Colombian side to the Darien on the Panamanian side.

I think I have met with Foreign Minister Mouynes of Panama more than any other Foreign Minister. I think I have had five meetings with her. We talk about migration issues regularly. The meeting in Bogota, chaired by Secretary Blinken, coordinated on those issues. Under Secretary Zeya visited Panama and reviewed these issues on the ground with them. So it is a very close relationship, and we want to keep doing more.

Mr. PFLÜGER. Well, thank you. I will wait for the second round to follow up.

I yield back.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Congressman. It looks like we are not going to make the second round since the votes have been called, but I want to make sure that I ask for unanimous consent that my friend Chris Smith participate in today's hearing.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW JERSEY. Thank you so very much, Mr. Chairman. And I thank you for that courtesy, and to the ranking member as well. I will be very brief.

You know, I first met Daniel Ortega in my second term in 1984, and he was then a serial abuser of human rights. It was a very contentious meeting. We met with Tomas Borge and all the others that were a part of that dictatorship. And nothing has changed. If not, it has gotten worse.

In July, I chaired a hearing of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. We heard from Victoria Cardenas and also with Berta Valle. As you know, both their husbands are in prison and would have stood for election, probably would have won, at least one of them, or one of the others who have been put into prison.

I know and you said in your testimony, Secretary Nichols, that, you know, a number of sanctions have gone out against individuals. We deeply appreciate that.

But I am asking if you would consider—I remember working with Armando Valladares when he got the first group to visit the Cuban prisons under Ronald Reagan. It was an amazing 7 weeks at the Human Rights Commission then, not the Council, and he got that resolution passed.

And I know you point out that there is a Human Rights Council resolution, as well as OAS as well. If there could be added or a new one that would say a visit to those individuals, because we are not sure—you know, one of those men has lost 30 pounds, is in dire straits. He could pass away.

And, again, I want to thank the chairman and the ranking member for their leadership on the RENACER legislation, which is a tremendous boost, I think, to try to promote democracy and freedom there.

But, again, to get a visit. The ICRC would be another group that could be encouraged to go and visit them, hopefully with the thought of getting them out. They are unjustly imprisoned, as you know, as we all know. But it might work to do it at the Human

Rights Council, because it has been done before. There is precedent for it.

Mr. NICHOLS. Representative Smith, I agree wholeheartedly. I also met with Vicki Cardenas and Berta Valle last week.

And I would just note that the OAS General Assembly resolution on Nicaragua calls for the immediate release of political prisoners. I talked to Secretary General Almagro about the importance of him taking action to implement that resolution. But the additional ideas that you put forward are absolutely well-taken. I agree 100 percent.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW JERSEY. About visits. That is great. Thank you.

I yield back and thank you.

Mr. GREEN. Mr. Chairman, could I have Representative Pfluger consume the remaining time for Ranking Member Smith?

Mr. SIRES. Sure.

Mr. PFLUGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Assistant Secretary, in talking about USMCA, I have some serious concerns about—and I know it has been discussed already, but on the upholding of the trade agreement, there are a variety of issues. The reason that we go down these paths of either bilateral or preferential trade agreements is because the other frameworks do not seem to be doing it.

So it is very important that the Administration communicate our needs. In discussions with the USTR, we have also brought this up. Can you please tell me which items are going to be discussed tomorrow with regards to USMCA?

Mr. NICHOLS. So I do not want to totally preview the President's meeting, but I will say that there will be a broad discussion of integrating North American supply chains. Labor issues and ensuring that we continue to make progress in North American energy integration are some examples of the issues in USMCA.

Mr. PFLUGER. I would just urge that—the members of the Texas delegation, in a bipartisan manner, have sent letters concerning our concerns with regards to energy and especially U.S. companies doing business in Mexico, and would urge the Administration to take a look at this to make sure that what we signed up to within the framework of USMCA is actually upheld and that the Mexican Government looks at this and takes it very, very seriously to continue to have free trade. Because, right now, the trend is away from that and not in line with the agreement.

And, with that, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the time. I yield back.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you.

Well, thank you, Assistant Secretary Nichols, for joining us today. You have a big job, with all the problems that we have in the Western Hemisphere, and we only touched on a few of the issues that are important.

I look forward to working with you and my colleagues in Congress on a bipartisan basis to ensure we engage more closely with our partners and allies in the Western Hemisphere. As this region emerges from the pandemic and contends with serious threats to democratic values and fundamental human rights, our support has never been more important.

With that, the hearing is adjourned.

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIRE. They just called votes. Otherwise, we would have had you here a little longer.

[Whereupon, at 2:57 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

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

**Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security,  
Migration and International Economic Policy**

**Albio Sires (D-NJ), Chair**

November 16, 2021

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International Economic Policy, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. Members who wish to participate remotely may do so via Cisco WebEx. The hearing will be available via live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>:

**DATE:** Tuesday, November 16, 2021  
**TIME:** 2:00 p.m., EDT  
**SUBJECT:** The Biden Administration's Policy Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean  
**WITNESSES:** The Honorable Brian Nichols  
Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs  
U.S. Department of State

**By Direction of the Chair**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*

To fill out this form online: Either use the tab key to travel through each field or mouse click each line or within blue box. Type in information.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Note: Red boxes with red type will NOT print.

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International Economic Policy HEARING

Day Tuesday Date November 16, 2021 Room 2172 and Webex

Starting Time 2:02 pm Ending Time 2:57 pm

Recesses 0 (\_\_\_\_to \_\_\_\_)(\_\_\_\_to \_\_\_\_)(\_\_\_\_to \_\_\_\_)(\_\_\_\_to \_\_\_\_)(\_\_\_\_to \_\_\_\_)(\_\_\_\_to \_\_\_\_)

Presiding Member(s)

*Chair Sires*

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Executive (closed) Session

Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Stenographic Record

To select a box, mouse click it, or tab to it and use the enter key to select. Another click on the same box will deselect it.

TITLE OF HEARING:

*The Biden Administration's Policy Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean*

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

*See attached.*

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)

*Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)*

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes  No

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

*QFR, Sires  
QFR, Salazar  
QFR, Castro  
QFR, Levin  
QFR, Gonzalez  
QFR, McCaul*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_

or TIME ADJOURNED 2:57 pm

Subcommittee Staff Associate

WHEN COMPLETED: Please print for subcommittee staff director's signature and make at least one copy of the signed form. A signed copy is to be included with the hearing/markup transcript when ready for printing along with a copy of the final meeting notice (both will go into the appendix). The signed original, with a copy of the final meeting notice attached, goes to full committee. An electronic copy of this PDF file may be saved to your hearing folder, if desired.

Clear Form

Note: If listing additional witnesses not included on hearing notice, be sure to include title, agency, etc.



OPENING STATEMENT SIRES

House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Western Hemisphere Subcommittee

Chairman Albio Sires (D-NJ)

Opening Statement  
“The Biden Administration’s Policy Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean”  
Tuesday, November 16, 2021

---

- I want to begin by congratulating you, Assistant Secretary Nichols, on your confirmation.
- I know you come to this role with a great deal of experience in the region and an impressive depth of knowledge about the challenges we face.
- I am confident that our policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean is in good hands.
- As we all know, it is a turbulent time for the Western Hemisphere.
- This region has been hit harder by the COVID-19 pandemic than anywhere else in the world.
- With Daniel Ortega’s coronation ceremony last week, there is no doubt that we are dealing with three fully consolidated dictatorships in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- While these regimes in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua tighten their grip on power, in other countries like Guatemala and El Salvador we are seeing major setbacks to judicial independence, the fight against corruption, and the rule of law.
- In my view, the Biden Administration came into office with the right approach to elevate Central America as a strategic priority and renew our focus on addressing the root causes of migration.
- Unfortunately, we have seen in the last ten months that there are limitations to what we can achieve when we lack reliable government partners.
- For this reason, the newly announced effort by the administration to focus our assistance on supporting local organizations in Central America is a positive and important step.
- Despite the serious challenges confronting the region, I also see many opportunities for greater engagement.
- In this sense, I applaud President Biden’s budget request, which would increase our funding for Latin America and the Caribbean by over fifteen percent to the highest level in more than a decade.
- I also commend this administration for donating over fifty million vaccine doses to this region.



- While I was frustrated that we could not take action sooner to deliver vaccines, this is still a major accomplishment that demonstrates our collective commitment to our friends in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The next step will be supporting the region's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- I traveled to the Dominican Republic with Ranking Member Green in September.
- The government there is making progress in reforming the police and fighting corruption.
- Like most countries in the region, they want our support for their economic recovery.
- I hope we can discuss today how we can spur greater investment and strengthen supply chains in the Western Hemisphere.
- As we think about how to compete effectively with China, we need to use our comparative advantages.
- This means tapping into our innovative private sector and deepening our network of alliances.
- Simply criticizing countries for doing business with China will not get us very far.
- We need to be at the table offering credible solutions and providing a serious alternative.
- We should also use our convening power to bring governments together to address challenges that transcend borders, such as the impacts of climate change and increased migration from South America through the Darien Gap.
- Ultimately, our commitment to democracy and human rights should be the backbone of everything we do.
- We must be consistent in standing up for these values across the region.
- In Honduras' upcoming elections, we should work closely with our partners to ensure the international community speaks with one voice that is informed by the assessments of the O-A-S and E-U election observers.
- I am deeply concerned by the pre-election violence we are seeing there.
- In Haiti, where we are witnessing the complete deterioration of the state, the U.S. must engage Haitian civil society and support Haitian-led efforts to restore peace, security, and human dignity.

- In Cuba, the Biden Administration and bipartisan members of Congress have taken a firm stand in defense of universal human rights, but as we saw again yesterday, the regime is doubling down on its repression.
- We need to do more to expand internet access, end the exploitation of Cuban medical workers, and unite international allies behind Cubans' demands for freedom and self-determination.
- As for Nicaragua, I look forward to seeing how we can work with the administration to implement the recently passed RENACER Act and coordinate our actions with allies in Latin America and the European Union to further restrict international financing to the Ortega regime.
- We must never lose sight of the continued political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and the impacts it is having on Colombia and our allies throughout the region.
- Maduro's crimes against humanity should never be normalized.
- The landscape across the region is challenging, but if we want to advance a more prosperous, sustainable, and democratic future for this hemisphere, we must begin by establishing Latin America and the Caribbean as a priority for U.S. foreign policy
- Thank you, and I now turn to the Ranking Member, Mark Green, for his opening statement.

## RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**Questions for the Record from Chairman Sires to Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols  
“The Biden Administration’s Policy Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean”  
Tuesday, November 16, 2021**

**I. The Administration’s Regional Policy Goals:** The President’s Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Request prioritized revitalizing collaborative U.S. leadership in the Western Hemisphere.

- What are the Biden Administration’s main policy goals in the Western Hemisphere?

The Biden Administration seeks to build upon the deep U.S. ties and strong relationships in the region and to improve our mutual security and economic prosperity. The United States remains committed to strengthening partnerships with diverse stakeholders in the Western Hemisphere and globally to advance the interests of the American people – including their safety and economic prosperity – by fostering strong democracies that deliver for their people, honoring the dignity and rights of all persons, and promoting inclusive, safe, prosperous, and climate-resilient societies. In the near term, we focus on helping partners across the Americas respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting improved governance and combating corruption, defending democratic institutions in the face of increased threats, and collaborative responses to combat irregular migration affecting much of the region.

- The Biden Administration has promised to expand its multilateral diplomacy to achieve many of its foreign policy goals. How do you plan to work with international and multilateral institutions like the Organization of American States, the United Nations, and multilateral development banks to achieve these goals?

President Biden reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to values-based global leadership and re-engagement with international institutions. We work with regional institutions, including the OAS and CARICOM, to build support for U.S. priorities, such as promoting democracy, human rights, security, and sustainable development. We also strengthen the institutions themselves by encouraging like-minded states to share the financial burdens and take leadership roles. We use the Summit of the Americas and its process to secure the highest-level commitments to support U.S. priorities, as exemplified in April 2018 by the Lima Commitment on countering corruption.

Within UN bodies, we continue to seek collaboration with like-minded Western Hemisphere countries and other allies and partners. Our election to the Human Rights Council, for instance, advances core U.S. foreign policy priorities centered on democracy, human rights, and equality, as well as the rules-based international order. We also work with our partners and within multilateral institutions to advance cyber security, nuclear arms control, climate goals, trade standards, global health, and a range of other priorities.

We engage multilateral banks as well to advance shared priorities. The Latin America and Caribbean region’s economy contracted by seven percent in 2020, the largest contraction of any region. The IMF estimates the region’s economy will grow by 6.3 percent in 2021 but will not catch up with pre-pandemic trends in the medium term. We remain committed to helping the region restart its economy. In addition to the U.S. investment of more than \$10 billion in Latin America and the Caribbean through the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), we support transparent, sustainable investment in projects that respond to a country’s needs, engage its local workers, and maintain high labor and environmental standards.

- How does the President's budget request reflect a shift from the previous administration in terms of how you plan to engage diplomatically with our partners and the extent to which Latin America and the Caribbean will be prioritized in U.S. foreign policy?

The President and the Secretary deeply value the Western Hemisphere's central role in the welfare of the United States and understand that we cannot separate our country's fortunes from those of our closest neighbors. Our FY 2022 foreign assistance request reflects our prioritization of Latin America and the Caribbean in our foreign policy and helps advance our strategic goals in the region with a 15.2 percent increase over the 2021 enacted level.

Our FY 2022 foreign assistance request of \$2.073 billion supports our efforts to strengthen democracy, civil society, human rights, the rule of law, and security in a key regional foreign policy priority. Our assistance also advances countries' adaptation and mitigation of climate change effects, addresses the secondary economic impacts of COVID-19, counters violence and crime from transnational criminal organizations, and fights corruption and foreign malign influence.

I am a strong supporter of the role that foreign assistance plays in advancing U.S. priorities and an advocate for assistance for the region. Our assistance complements sustained U.S. diplomatic engagement to achieve the gains we seek in democracy, human rights, anti-corruption, inclusive economic growth, and climate adaptation

**2. COVID-19 Response:** The COVID-19 pandemic hit Latin America and the Caribbean particularly hard and the region unfortunately became the global epicenter of the pandemic in the summer of 2020. The U.S. government has provided \$217.6 million in assistance and donated a total of almost 50 million vaccines to nearly every country in the region. I was a strong advocate for vaccine donations as soon as they were available, and have heard from countries in the region that we took too long in that regard.

- How do you assess U.S. assistance and engagement with the region during the COVID-19 pandemic? Where did the U.S. do well and in which areas could we have done more or acted more quickly?

COVID-19 hit the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean hard. The virus has swept through the region, infecting more than 46 million people and killing more than 1.5 million. Although home to only eight percent of the world's population, the region has seen 20 percent of all reported cases and just over 30 percent of all global deaths. The pandemic has reverberated through all sectors of society and jeopardized important development gains made in recent decades. The International Labor Organization estimates that the region lost 31 million jobs in 2020 due to the pandemic, and its economies contracted by seven percent in 2020, according to International Monetary Fund estimates.

Conditions in the region have started to improve, with infection and death rates due to COVID-19 down by 84 percent over the past five months and a projected 2021 rebound in economic growth of 6.3 percent. U.S. assistance was pivotal to that progress. Since March 2020, USAID provided over \$500 million to support COVID-19 response and recovery in the region. Increased deliveries of U.S.-produced vaccines to region proved effective in boosting vaccination rates, improving health outcomes, and facilitating economic growth. In the last five months, the United States – bilaterally or in partnership with COVAX – has provided more than 47 million vaccine doses to 29 countries throughout the region, enabling millions of people to be fully vaccinated against the deadly virus. These vaccines, provided safely and equitably, have no political strings attached.

U.S. government donations to upper-middle income countries in the region, such as Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia, have proven especially impactful. Countries in this income group contain over 80 percent of the region's poor but remain ineligible for low-cost vaccines through COVAX. These countries experienced high overall COVID-19 case and mortality rates in 2020 and early 2021 but nearly all have recently surpassed 50 percent full vaccination while seeing case and mortality rates drop dramatically. In other countries, the U.S. government donation contributed to a significant portion of a country's vaccine supply and encouraged uptake. U.S. government donations to Honduras – which constitute about 40 percent of the country's total available vaccine doses -- played a significant role in helping Honduras achieve a full vaccination rate of over 34 percent, thereby supporting the reactivation of the economy and safe return to school. In Paraguay, the U.S. government donated 2 million Pfizer doses, which represents nearly 30 percent of the vaccine supply received by the country to date. The region has a fully vaccinated rate of 50.3 percent.

While United States vaccine donations have helped many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean achieve vaccination rates rivaling our own, challenges remain. Supply limitations have been the largest challenge to global vaccine efforts to date. We anticipate that on-the-ground vaccine readiness and delivery challenges will become a bigger obstacle as the supply outlook improves. The region's lack of COVID vaccine manufacturing also increases its long-term vulnerability. We continue to partner with countries in the region to build their capabilities in this area.

- In your engagement with countries throughout the region, what have you found will be the most effective type of support that the U.S. could provide going forward to help countries recover from the pandemic?

We must remain vigilant to ensure that progress in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic continue. While conditions in the region have improved, the pandemic has taught us that we cannot become complacent and must guard against future variants and surges.

We support country systems to accelerate equitable access to quality-assured, safe, and effective products and to promote their appropriate use. USAID provide technical assistance to support the deployment and administration of COVID-19 vaccines across Latin American and the Caribbean, including with cold chain equipment and logistics, training of vaccinators, helping to establish vaccination sites, developing communication strategies and messages to address vaccine uptake and hesitancy, and strengthening information systems for vaccine data tracking.

Current U.S. investments in vaccine delivery remain crucial in supporting vaccine rollouts, and additional resources would likely help to fully meet all country-readiness needs as supply increases.

**3. Climate Change:** Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most susceptible regions in the world to the impacts of climate change. During the COP26 summit, Brazil, one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases in the region, promised to end illegal deforestation entirely by 2030, but this commitment drew skeptical reactions, given the Bolsonaro Administration's abysmal track record on deforestation. Climate change is also causing a humanitarian crisis in the Northern Triangle, contributing to instability and exacerbating root causes of migration.

- How is the State Department engaging with Brazil to push for policies that would actually cut emissions and meaningfully invest in environmental protection, rather than mere verbal commitments?

At COP26, Brazil committed to ambitious environmental goals, including an end to illegal deforestation by 2028. Brazil further joined the ‘Global Methane Pledge,’ committing to take actions to reduce worldwide methane emissions by a collective 30 percent from 2020 levels by 2030. Overall, Brazil committed to a 50 percent greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction by 2030 (up from 43 percent) and to formalizing its nationally determined contribution (NDC) to achieve net zero GHG emissions by 2050 (moved up from 2060). Our diplomatic engagement with Brazil will focus on increasing ambition and following through on COP26 commitments.

- Building resilience to address climate change is one of the four strategic objectives under the first pillar on addressing economic insecurity and inequality of the Biden administration’s root causes strategy. How does climate change feature in the administration’s efforts to stem migration from the Northern Triangle?

On November 1, the President announced the President’s Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE) and his commitment to work with Congress to provide \$3 billion in adaptation finance annually by FY 2024. PREPARE will serve as the cornerstone of U.S. government support for developing countries, including those in WHA, as they adapt to and manage the impacts of climate change. The impacts of climate change exacerbate existing stressors, including low social and economic development and insecurity, and contribute to internal and international migration. By helping northern Central American countries adapt to the challenges posed by climate change, we will reduce pressures which drive many Central Americans to consider migrating irregularly to the United States.

- How will the Administration’s climate change agenda be inclusive of the needs of indigenous peoples, African descendants and island nations in the Western Hemisphere, which are often most vulnerable to extreme weather events, rising seas, and other climate challenges? In which ways are you engaging with historically marginalized communities to find innovative solutions and resilience models in the wake of these more frequently occurring events? What will be your message to Caribbean island nations when you travel throughout the region?

In addition to PREPARE, the Administration has committed \$9 million to the UN’s Local 2030 Islands Network to assist small islands in combating the climate crisis and in building resilience, as well as support to the Adaptation Fund, the National Adaptation Plan Global Network, and efforts to mobilize private capital for adaptation. Caribbean small island states have emphasized their need for increased adaptation funding. Through the U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership (USCRP), which focuses on strengthening Caribbean partner resilience to the impacts of climate change and severe weather-related events, and our support on adaptation, we will champion the importance of working in partnership with historically marginalized communities to find innovative adaptation solutions to strengthen climate resilience. USAID has released its new climate change strategy for public review. This strategy underscores the importance of locally led development, including locally led adaptation, and the critical value of supporting indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities. Further, the Administration’s Root Causes Strategy to address irregular migration also outlines how we will work with indigenous and Afro-descendent communities to adopt sustainable and climate resilient agriculture methods.

- What other tools does the State Department have to address climate change concerns in the region?

President Biden reconvened the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF) earlier this year. Participants included MEF members Brazil, Mexico and Argentina. The MEF played a major role

in helping to strengthen climate ambition among the major economies heading into COP 26 in Glasgow. We plan further convenings of the MEF next year, at both the ministerial and leader level, to build on the Glasgow outcomes and to continue strengthening climate ambition and action among the major economies. Further, the State Department is facilitating the growth of the Renewable Energy for Latin America and the Caribbean (RELAC) initiative, a Colombia-based initiative committed to a regional goal of 70 percent renewable electricity production by 2030. Additionally, the State Department is co-hosting with Palau the Our Ocean Conference on February 16 and 17, 2022, in Koror, which will focus on protecting the ocean and combatting the climate crisis. At COP26, the United States and the United Arab Emirates launched the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate, a pioneering public-private initiative which aims to substantially increase investment in climate-smart agriculture and food systems innovation over the next five years; eight WHA countries are among the 35 nations which have already joined. Finally, at next year's Summit of the Americas, the United States will propose a political commitment to protect critical carbon sinks and advance the clean energy transition.

**4. Human Rights, Indigenous, and Environmental Defenders:** According to Frontline Defenders, at least 331 human rights defenders were killed globally in 2020, and more than three-quarters of the total murders were in Latin America. The region includes 7 of the 10 deadliest countries for environmental activists, including Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, and Honduras. At the onset of the pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean, Amnesty International urged governments to ensure that human rights defenders were included in their responses to address the pandemic and protected from retaliation.

- What is the U.S. doing now to engage with these high-risk countries to investigate the killings of indigenous, African descendant, land rights, and human rights activists?

The Administration remains committed to engaging with countries to prevent and investigate violence against activists. We regularly raise human rights cases with interlocutors, including pressing for transparency in court cases for human rights defenders.

We engage broadly with the Honduran government, for example, regarding the case of the Guapinol water defenders (the "Guapinol 12"). In addition to attending court hearings, Embassy officials raise concerns about judicial delays with the highest levels of government and coordinate with the international diplomatic community, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the Honduran Human Rights Commissioner. In Brazil as well we continue to encourage the government to promote and defend social inclusion and rights of activists, including Afro-Brazilians, Indigenous peoples, and other diaspora groups.

Our foreign assistance also bolsters a regional culture of human rights, justice, rule of law, and protection of populations in vulnerable situations. In Colombia, we support a wide variety of programs that help the Colombians protect human rights, including strengthening the capacity of the national police and Attorney General's Office to investigate and prosecute threats and violence against social leaders. We implemented projects in Mexico to address violence against human rights defenders and journalists, including supporting Mexico's National Protection Mechanism for Journalists and Human Rights Defender, which works with state-level counterparts to expand the protection measures, and the Specialized Prosecutor's Office for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression, which investigates and sanctions aggressions against journalists and human rights defenders.

- What more can the U.S. do to put additional pressure on these countries to protect and defend their indigenous, African descendant, land rights, and human rights leaders?

The protection of excluded or vulnerable communities is a U.S. priority throughout the Americas. The United States and Brazil will restart the U.S.-Brazil Human Rights Dialogue in 2022 to work bilaterally to address racial discrimination, racial justice, and to protect and defend the rights of Indigenous peoples, people of African descent, environmentalists, and human rights defenders. We also routinely raise with the Mexican government the importance of protecting indigenous, African descendant, and human rights leaders and collaborate with like-minded missions to host public events to increase visibility on the need to protect vulnerable groups and human rights defenders.

In addition, U.S. government funding assistance and training strengthens partner nations' competence in education about human rights, passing legislation protecting minority communities and human rights leaders, investigating human rights abuses, and prosecuting human rights violators. The U.S. government continues to work with the international community, civil society, local populations, and host government partners to raise awareness, encourage protections of vulnerable populations, and improve partner nation capacity to implement protections and investigate and prosecute human rights crimes when they occur.

We will also leverage our Human Rights Council membership to advance actions to promote greater respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls, LGBTQI+ persons, indigenous persons, members of ethnic and religious minority groups, older persons, and other marginalized and vulnerable groups.

- What obstacles exist in providing adequate protection to human rights defenders and what role can the U.S. play in improving protection mechanisms in countries like Mexico and Honduras, where so far these mechanisms have seemed woefully inadequate?

Across the hemisphere, the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic downturns further complicated partner nations' capacity to push forward with legislative reforms and institution building necessary to make progress on human rights protections. Budget shortfalls also caused reductions in the number of investigators and human rights protectors. Many countries face challenges balancing land rights with pressures from private investors and the need for economic development – particularly in the extractive and energy sectors – as well as pressure from organized crime groups. Through our diplomatic engagement, public messaging and foreign assistance, we seek to improve protection mechanisms for human rights defenders.

We engage the Honduras government, for instance, to respond to the forced disappearance of members of the Garifuna (African-Descendant and Indigenous) community and narco-traffickers' seizure of large tracts of indigenous lands for use in laundering illicit funds through timber sales and ranching. In Mexico, we launched new protection tools for journalists and human rights defenders, supported expanded judicial capacity, and partnered with Mexico's Specialized Prosecutor for Crimes Against the Freedom of Expression and Attorneys General Offices to more expeditiously investigate and sanction crimes against them. We remain committed to improving protections for defenders and ensuring investigations into violence against them.

**5. Gender-Based Violence:** When stay-at-home orders began to be implemented in Latin America, many analysts warned of the exacerbation of another epidemic—that of gender-based violence.



According to data collected by the United Nations, domestic violence against women increased between 30% and 50% last year.

- How is the State Department working with countries to call attention to and address this crisis? How is the State Department signaling that combating gender-based violence is a priority?

Preventing and responding to all forms of gender-based violence (GBV) remains a cornerstone of the U.S. government's commitment to promoting democracy, advancing human rights, and furthering gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The Department remains deeply concerned about GBV in Latin America and the Caribbean. In addressing GBV, we work to alleviate the multiple factors that contribute to it, including impunity for perpetrators, corruption in the judicial system, lack of resources for survivors, lack of reproductive health care, and cultural norms that normalize GBV. We also recognize that COVID-19 and efforts to stem the spread left women more economically vulnerable, increased rates of GBV, and often further limited resources for survivors. We seek to address GBV through our diplomacy — speaking directly to governments on improving the underlying causes and changing laws — as well as through public relations campaigns, and programming.

- What interventions and messaging are being crafted specifically for the Western Hemisphere context?

The Department focuses on assisting the victims of gender-based violence (GBV) throughout the region. Grants provide training to civil society organizations on GBV preventive measures, offer support services for GBV survivors, and improve the capacity of local civil society organizations, healthcare providers, and municipal governments, including in the Caribbean, Brazil, Paraguay, and Ecuador. Our foreign assistance in Central America prioritizes support for programs to reduce violence against women and girls.

U.S. embassies throughout the Western Hemisphere also amplify messaging on combating GBV, including in November through December 2021 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV Campaign.

We also include GBV in our bilateral dialogues, including the partnership with Colombia on Women, Peace, and Security and its focus on addressing gender-based violence and women's economic empowerment.

**6. Mexico and the Bicentennial Framework:** I have been a strong supporter of the Mérida Initiative for a long time, but the lack of progress on violence in Mexico has made me question whether our investment was being used effectively. On September 27, 2021, the Biden Administration announced the U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities, establishing a comprehensive, long-term approach for binational actions to pursue the safety and security of our societies. The Bicentennial Framework is supposed to take the place of the Mérida Initiative. New efforts for coordination are promising, following months of growing tensions in late 2020 and early 2021, due to the prior administration's poor handling of the Cienfuegos case and the Mexican attorney general's office refusing to prosecute him, as well as the passage of a new foreign agents law aimed at restricting U.S. security cooperation.

- What are the main pillars of the new Bicentennial Framework and in what ways does it differ from the Mérida Initiative? What lessons has the State Department learned from the Mérida Initiative and how will those be applied to the new Framework?

The new U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities establishes a comprehensive, long-term approach for binational actions in three main areas: to protect the health and safety of our citizens, to prevent transnational organized crime, and to pursue and bring transnational criminals to justice. Through this framework, we are recommitted to respecting human rights and working together to diminish the capacity of transnational criminal organizations by disrupting their illicit financial networks; disrupting the trafficking of drugs, arms, and bulk cash; and preventing the production of synthetic drugs. Both countries committed to focus on developing measurable goals and indicators to demonstrate the impact of the security partnership.

The new framework builds upon progress under the Merida Initiative to support Mexico's transition to an accusatory justice system, professionalize law enforcement institutions, and strengthen rule of law and counternarcotics capacity. We learned as the Merida Initiative matured that we needed to provide more targeted training, assessments, mentoring, and professionalization initiatives coupled with measurable outcomes and desired end states, and to include in our bilateral framework a commitment to evidence-based public health and public safety initiatives. The new framework incorporates these lessons and modernizes our approach to better address new security challenges, including illicit fentanyl. We also incorporated some of the Mexican government's key interests, such as arms trafficking and addressing the public health aspect of substance abuse, underscoring the collaborative nature of this initiative.

- How will the State Department prioritize human rights in this new iteration of cooperation with Mexico?

In the new U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities, the United States and Mexico committed to respect human rights according to our respective international obligations, support efforts to investigate and prosecute abuses, and strengthen protection for vulnerable populations. The U.S. Department of State will continue to prioritize human rights in partnership with the Government of Mexico. Coordination efforts will include targeting migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks, as well as strengthening legal regimes related to the prevention and prosecution of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. We will also work together to build stronger communities and address drivers of crime through providing education and economic opportunity and addressing the root causes of violence and crime.

- In the Government Accountability Office (GAO)'s 2010 report on Merida Initiative performance indicators, the GAO found that the U.S. Government's monitoring of progress was uneven and inconsistent at best. Under the new framework, how will you ensure that the State Department and USAID are able to consistently measure where we are succeeding and where we are falling short and can provide more substantive updates to Congress to inform our decision-making?

The Department is committed to ensuring our foreign policy and foreign assistance delivers for the American people. On October 8, I joined Secretary Blinken and other U.S. officials to deepen security cooperation through the High-Level Security Dialogue. At that dialogue, the United States and Mexico announced the Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities. The framework builds on our cooperation under the Merida Initiative and both countries committed to a series of goals to protect the health and safety of our citizens, to prevent transnational organized crime, and to pursue and bring transnational criminals to justice. The United States and Mexico committed to work together to regularly and transparently evaluate the impact of our efforts. The Department prioritizes working with key Mexican partners that demonstrate the political will and long-term ...

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols by  
Representative Salazar #1  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
November 16, 2021**

I note that the Administration's Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Migration From Central America identifies using "place-based strategies to disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal organizations and other criminal actors in key corridors." Whether aided or encouraged by narco-traffickers, illegal roadblocks, land invasions and other political conflict in these areas creates an enabling environment for criminal organizations - not legitimate businesses - and undermines U.S. objectives of expanding economic opportunity to counter migration.

**Question 1:**

Earlier this year, I specifically asked Special Envoy Zúniga what we are doing to disrupt criminal activity that undermines the legitimate private sector's ability to create and expand economic opportunity, particularly along known trafficking corridors and other rural areas. The problems persist. It allows narcos to operate freely in these areas, and thereby poses a direct threat to our national security. Better and quicker law enforcement response is needed if legitimate businesses are expected to create jobs to counter migration. What specific actions will the U.S. take to intervene in these situations - directly and with its law enforcement partners?

**Answer 1:**

The Biden Administration's Root Causes Strategy recognizes corruption and criminality as threats to expanding economic opportunity, which is why our Strategy focuses on economic insecurity, combating corruption, and countering criminal trafficking networks, while working to improve the business climate and promote investment-enabling reforms. We are working with the private sector to identify key reforms needed to expand economic opportunity and partnering with governments to promote reforms to address structural impediments to investment, to include fostering rule of law and judicial certainty for investors. A portion of the Administration's pledge to the region will go to the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and its support to FBI, CBP, DEA, and HSI-vetted and specialized units that facilitate U.S. law enforcement intelligence-led efforts to disrupt transnational criminal organizations as well as specifically to counter narcotics trafficking in known corridors.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Joaquin Castro (#1-2)  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International  
Economic Policy  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

Following up on my earlier question regarding the Honduran elections, has State Department asked the current Honduran government to refrain from any fraud and voter manipulation or crackdowns on political dissent and civil society ahead of this election? In your testimony, you indicated that you will be traveling to Honduras the weekend of November 20th to meet with government officials and civil society leaders ahead of the elections.

**Question 1:**

What recommendations did civil society and business leaders have for the United States on how it should respond to the elections?

**Answer 1:**

The United States has consistently called for a free, fair, transparent, and peaceful electoral process and transmitted this message to all sectors of Honduran society – government officials, political parties and candidates, civil society, international community, and the private sector. We have engaged regularly and constructively with civil society and business leaders throughout the electoral process. I will meet with both civil society and business leaders during my November 21-23 visit to Tegucigalpa. Contacts and implementing partners appreciate our response to their requests for impartiality and our focus on the process rather than the outcome. Our Embassy also met with the military and police to transmit the importance that they uphold their constitutional responsibilities while respecting the right to protest and assemble.

**Question 2:**

What factors will the United States use to determine whether the elections were free and fair, given the previous administration's declaration of Juan Orlando Hernandez as President while many others questioned the validity of the results?

**Answer 2:**

The Organization of American States and the European Union deployed electoral observation missions to improve the National Electoral Council's logistics preparations and management, and we will remain in contact with them regarding their impressions. USAID provided technical assistance to the electoral management bodies focused on communication strategies to increase transparency in the process. Embassy Tegucigalpa will send electoral observation teams into Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, and La Ceiba, Honduras' three largest cities, as well to observe the voting process.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Joaquin Castro (#3)  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International  
Economic Policy  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 3:**

Last month, the Treasury Department released their sanctions review that said that U.S. sanctions should be calibrated “to mitigate unintended economic, political, and humanitarian impact.” The Trump administration placed 240 sanctions on Cuba and the Cuban people, most notably limiting travel, humanitarian spending, and remittances. This policy has seriously hurt the Cuban people, driving up costs, lowering incomes, and contributing to the humanitarian disaster. These restrictions are particularly harmful in light of the global pandemic.

Will the State Department commit to reviewing the Trump administration’s sanctions on Cuba and the Cuban people with an eye towards the humanitarian impacts of these policies, consistent with the Treasury Department’s 2021 Sanctions Review?

**Answer 3:**

In its policy towards Cuba, the Biden-Harris Administration will continue to focus on support for the political and economic wellbeing of the Cuban people, including when making sanctions decisions. The Administration committed to facilitating U.S.-based humanitarian support that flows directly to the Cuban people, in light of Cuba’s dire humanitarian situation. The Administration actively works to explore all options to increase shipments of humanitarian goods to the people of Cuba while avoiding benefits to the regime.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Joaquin Castro (#4-5)  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International  
Economic Policy  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 4:**

The Biden administration indicated that the U.S. State Department would investigate potential phases of sanction relief for Venezuela should progress be made in political negotiations. Is this something the State Department is still considering should the negotiations re-start?

**Answer 4:**

As noted in our joint statements with the European Union and Canada, we will review sanctions policies if the Venezuelan-led negotiations between the Unitary Platform and the Maduro regime make meaningful progress toward a democratic solution.

**Question 5:**

What are key actions by the Maduro government that would encourage the State Department to provide sanctions relief?

**Answer 5:**

We want substantive, verifiable and credible advances towards restoring democratic institutions and processes in Venezuela, including the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners; the promotion and protection of freedom of expression, including for members of the press; the promotion and protection of freedom of peaceful assembly; rehabilitation of all political parties and politicians so that Venezuelans can choose their leaders for themselves; and a cessation of attacks, intimidation, and repression against Venezuela's civil society and democratic opposition. Maduro and his allies need to allow unfettered and transparent access to humanitarian assistance, to include food, medicine, vaccines, and other critical COVID-19 relief supplies.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Joaquin Castro (#6)  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International  
Economic Policy  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 6:**

How is the State Department working with the Colombian government to ensure that security forces respect human rights and are held accountable for violations, especially given this year's crackdown on protestors?

**Answer 6:**

Both the United States and Colombia make improving respect for human rights a top priority. In addition to building the capacity of the Colombian National Police (CNP) to investigate and adjudicate these cases, the Department supports the CNP to review use-of-force policies, strengthen violence de-escalation techniques, innovate community policing programs, and better integrate human rights principles into its police academy curriculum. There is more work to be done as the Colombian government seeks to incorporate human rights principles into policing. The United States remains committed to expanding citizen security, protecting human rights and supporting the government of Colombia's police reform efforts.



**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Joaquin Castro (#7)  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International  
Economic Policy  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 7:**

What efforts will the State Department take to ensure that those seeking asylum in the US, MX, or Canada could have their cases heard, especially in light of Title 42 and the possible reintroduction of MPP?

**Answer 7:**

The Administration is committed to ensuring safe, orderly, and humane migration in the region. The Department actively engages with the governments of Canada and Mexico on a bilateral and regional scale, most recently at the North American Leaders' Summit on November 18, to promote respect for human rights, including the rights of migrants. We continue to support Mexico's asylum agency COMAR as it faces unprecedented levels of asylum claims.

As the United States enforces the CDC Order under its Title 42 public health authority, the U.S. government is working to streamline the system for identifying and lawfully processing particularly vulnerable individuals who warrant humanitarian exception under the order. In February 2021, the CDC issued a Notice of Temporary Exception, exempting unaccompanied noncitizen children from expulsion under the Order. For any additional details on Title 42, we refer you to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

While the Administration re-implemented the Migrant Protection Protocols as required by the court order, DHS's plan remains to terminate the program after the court injunction is lifted. Meanwhile, it is our understanding that individuals subject to this policy will be affirmatively asked questions by DHS personnel about their potential fear of return to Mexico, and that no individual who demonstrates reasonable fear of either persecution on account of a protected basis or torture in Mexico will be involuntarily returned to Mexico. For further questions regarding the asylum process, I refer you to the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Joaquin Castro (#8)  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International  
Economic Policy  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 8:**

The United States has been a leader in the region and in multi-lateral bodies on condemning the Ortega-Murillo regime's crackdown on democracy, calling November 7<sup>th</sup> a "pantomime election that was neither free nor fair." How will the State Department work with regional partners to continue to apply pressure on the regime and implement tools to encourage the release of political prisoners and a return to democratic practices?

**Answer 8:**

We will continue to work in close consultation with a broad coalition of OAS member states to urge the Ortega-Murillo regime to change course, immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners, and take concrete action to restore democracy. The OAS member states on November 30 collectively assessed the situation in Nicaragua and will work under the framework of the OAS Charter and Inter-American Democratic Charter to formulate next steps. Twenty-five member states voted in favor of a resolution on December 8 that calls on the Nicaraguan government to immediately release political prisoners, to allow the immediate return of international human rights bodies, and to accept a high-level good offices mission. We will continue to work in coordination with our international allies and partners, like Canada, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, to take concrete actions to respond to the Ortega-Murillo government's attacks on civil liberties. We will leverage new tools such as the Presidential Proclamation on Nicaragua, which President Biden signed on November 16, and the Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors List, which the RENACER Act expanded to include Nicaragua, to impose visa restrictions on those individuals determined, among other things, to have knowingly engaged in actions that undermine democratic processes or institutions in Nicaragua. We will continue to use diplomatic, economic, and other tools at our disposal to promote accountability for those who support the Ortega-Murillo regime's human rights abuses and attacks on Nicaraguan democracy, and to support those committed to restoring democratic governance in Nicaragua.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary of State Brian A Nichols by  
Representative Andy Levin #1  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 1:**

**Can you explain why this administration feels Prime Minister Henry, despite his constitutional and democratic illegitimacy, is deserving of recognition and support from the U.S. government? What is the Biden administration doing to foster long-term democratic governance, anti-corruption, and accountability mechanisms in Haiti? And how does it reconcile those efforts with ongoing support for the Henry regime?**

**Answer 1:**

We continue to encourage all sectors of Haitian society, including Haitian civil society, political stakeholders, diaspora leaders, religious leaders, and the private sector to come together to identify a Haitian-led solution for a path to free and fair elections when conditions on the ground allow. Those stakeholders include Prime Minister Henry, as he leads the current government, but we do not support one particular political accord over another. We will continue to use all available, appropriate tools at our disposal to help Haiti in its fight against perpetrators of crime, violence, and corruption in Haiti.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary of State Brian A Nichols by  
Representative Andy Levin #2  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 2:**

How is the administration engaging with Haitian civil society to support Haitian-led efforts to bring about real democracy in the country? How does the State Department plan to engage with the Commission for a Haitian Solution to the Crisis moving forward?

**Answer 2:**

The U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince has regular and ongoing engagement with many sectors of Haitian civil society. Senior State Department officials traveled to Port-au-Prince three times in the past two months and met with Haitian civil society groups to make clear that the U.S. government seeks a broad and inclusive, and most importantly, Haitian solution for the way ahead. Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols and Charge d'Affaires Ken Merten, as well as other State Department personnel in Haiti and in Washington, met with the members of the Commission for a Haitian Solution to the Crisis and will continue to do so. We have also increased our outreach with Haitian diaspora stakeholders to discuss how the diaspora can contribute its energy and experiences to elevating civil society and supporting Haiti's grassroots.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary of State Brian A Nichols by  
Representative Andy Levin #3  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 3:**

What is the State Department doing to alleviate security conditions on the ground? How is the administration working to address the humanitarian crisis, and what capabilities it is prepared to deploy in order to fix the fuel, food, and water shortages?

**Answer 3:**

The United States shares your deep concerns over the effects of Haiti's security issues and recurring fuel shortages on all people in Haiti. The U.S. Embassy in Haiti is in frequent contact with the Haitian government, including the Haitian National Police, the Haitian government fuel task force, as well as private sector fuel importers and retailers, to encourage adequate HNP support to secure fuel terminals, deliveries, and routes. The United States government, through the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), provides institutional support to the Haitian National Police who take the lead on security matters in Haiti. In November, INL increased its support to the Haitian National Police (HNP) by \$15 million to help improve security and reduce the influence of gangs. USAID has a long history of responding to humanitarian needs and supporting health, education, and economic growth in Haiti. For example, USAID's assistance increased access to basic healthcare in 164 clinics across Haiti, including services to improve children's' nutrition and health, improve access to maternal healthcare, control the spread of HIV/AIDS, and COVID-19 case management.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Gonzalez (#1)  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 1:**

In January 2019, the State and Treasury Departments sanctioned the Venezuelan oil sector in an attempt to cut off oil revenue to the Maduro regime. At the same time, the Treasury Department issued General License 8 to safeguard U.S. oil and gas companies in Venezuela from expropriation. In April 2020, the State Department changed the policy guidance and Treasury amended the conditions of the license, restricting U.S. companies' operations. Over the past 19 months, all the oil that should have gone to U.S. companies has instead gone to the national oil company PDVSA, resulting in a significant influx of cash to the Maduro regime. Can you please explain how the Administration plans to recalibrate the policy to protect the few remaining U.S. interests in the country? What is the Administration's plan to better align its foreign policy objectives with its Venezuelan sanctions regime?

**Answer 1:**

U.S. sanctions deny Maduro revenue streams that finance repression and line the pockets of regime officials and protect the U.S. financial system from exposure to corrupt and illicit financial flows. Venezuela's production output and PDVSA's corresponding revenue dropped about 50 percent in 2020 due to the imposition of U.S. sanctions and production remains at historically low levels. While General License 8H includes provisions authorizing some companies to wind down certain operations, contracts, or other agreements, it also authorizes certain transactions and activities for the limited maintenance of essential operations, contracts, or other agreements that are for safety or the preservation of assets in Venezuela. We continuously calibrate our sanctions policy to account for the political and economic dynamics at play and to help address the complex humanitarian emergency in Venezuela.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Gonzalez (#2)  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 2:**

The Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Migration in Central America, released by the Biden Administration in July identifies, prioritizes, and coordinates actions to improve the stability in the region including an investment of \$4 billion. One of the pillars of the strategy is the importance of the private sector in creating favorable economic conditions that result in employment opportunities and economic growth for communities in the Northern Triangle. How can the private sector play a role in the creation of more jobs in the formal economy while helping build a culture of compliance and rule of law?

**Answer 2:**

The United States' comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of irregular migration involves significant commitments of U.S. government resources to support the long-term development of the region — including efforts to foster inclusive economic opportunity, strengthen governance, combat corruption, and improve security. Supporting the long-term development of the region will require more than just the resources of the U.S. government, however. As part of her role addressing the root causes of migration from Central America, on December 13, Vice President Kamala Harris announced seven new commitments as part of the Call to Action she launched on May 27 for businesses and social enterprises to make new, significant commitments to sustainably address the root causes of migration by promoting economic opportunity. Commitments announced include those from: CARE International, Cargill, Grupo Mariposa, Parkdale Mills, PepsiCo, JDE Peet's, and PriceSmart. In addition, Mastercard, Microsoft, and Nespresso—who announced initial commitments in May—announced further action in the region. As a result, businesses and social enterprises have invested more than \$1.2 billion.

The private sector can use their strong voice for reform by calling for fair revenue collection, resisting corruption, transparent public procurement, and for digitalization of government services to improve government efficiency and reduce the burden on companies as they seek to comply with local regulations and laws.



**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Gonzalez (#3)  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 3:**

The US- Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health and Safe Communities is supposed to replace the Merida Initiative in the coming years. One of the goals of the new framework is the need to secure modes of travel and transportation. How does the administration plan on working with Mexico to secure our travel routes to ensure individuals and cargo can travel safely within Mexico and to the United States?

**Answer 3:**

As part of the U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities, the United States and Mexico committed to coordinate secure modes of travel and commerce. Both countries committed to strengthen oversight and coordination at air, land, sea, and rail ports of entry, as well as mail and package facilities, through efforts that include information-sharing; joint screening, targeting, and inspections (northbound and southbound); and coordinated operations on both sides of the border. The United States and Mexico will work together to disrupt the flow of goods facilitated by criminal activities in cyberspace; improve container control and detection of chemical precursors, bulk cash, and counterfeit goods; and improve control of arms, ammunition, and explosive devices. Both countries will expand regulatory and law enforcement capacity to combat the trafficking of synthetic drugs and precursors; for example, the United States will support the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's implementation of the Container Control Programme in Mexico, a Framework deliverable that will strengthen Mexico's ability to interdict illicit precursor chemicals at ports.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Gonzalez (#4)  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 4:**

Is the U.S. committed to advocating for the enactment of implementing legislation by the Government of Guatemala that will allow renewable energy projects like these to be completed?

**Answer 4:**

U.S. officials are committed and continue to advocate for the establishment of clear guidelines under ILO 169, which will help provide clarity for private investors in Guatemala while respecting the rights of local communities. We continue to work with the Guatemalan government to implement a successful consultation process.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Gonzalez (#5)  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 5:**

The Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Migration from Central America states that "The United States will support improved agriculture production and income generation to reduce food insecurity while supporting sustainable food systems." It also discusses partnering with the private sector to facilitate the development of agricultural practices to ensure farmers can better respond to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events. Past U.S. efforts have relied on NGOs as implementers of programs to address food insecurity, but programs often focused interventions on individual farmers. The organized private sector is better positioned to identify and implement programs with a broader scope, expanding economic opportunities for a greater number of individuals and generating lasting results. Are you able to speak to particular sectors or regions in which the U.S. hopes to partner with the private sector on such projects? What steps have you taken to enlist the private sector in these efforts?

**Answer 5:**

We recognize the force multiplying nature of private investment that can help to increase incomes, strengthen food security, and advocate for key governance reforms. As part of the U.S. government's Call to Action, which Vice President Harris launched in May 2021, we identified food security and climate-smart agriculture as one of six core focus areas to advance economic opportunity in a sustainable, equitable manner.

Under the Call to Action, companies make investments to help smallholder farms improve crop yields and improve the quality of their products. Nespresso works with over 1,200 farms in Guatemala to improve livelihoods in the region. PepsiCo directly operates its food business with a regional manufacturing hub in Guatemala, employing over 4,000 people directly, and generating at least an additional 6,800 indirect jobs through its supply chain. Cargill will also contribute at least \$10 million over three years to partnerships that directly support farmers

and farm communities and improve food security through community nutrition and school meal programs.

This not only increases incomes for farmers in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, but also abundant supplies of high-quality products to export around the world. Companies also invest in Central American communities, helping families access quality childcare while parents work and increasing food security in communities.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary Brian A. Nichols by  
Representative Michael McCaul (#1 and #2)  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 1:**

Can you clarify the administration's rationale for initially excluding the legitimate government of Venezuela, recognized by the United States and allies, from the Summit for Democracy? Should this be interpreted as the Biden Administration signaling a lack of faith or plans to reconsider recognition for Venezuela's interim government?

**Answer 1:**

The United States recognizes Interim President Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's head of state. President Biden included him among a select number of world leaders invited speak at the December 9-10 Summit for Democracy. The United States continues to support him, the 2015 National Assembly, and the Venezuelan people as they work to secure a stable, democratic, and prosperous Venezuela.

**Question 2:**

What was the criteria used to exclude the remaining countries in Latin America and the Caribbean?

**Answer 2:**

The Biden-Harris Administration invited a representative group of well-established and emerging democracies to the Summit for Democracy, both regionally and socioeconomically diverse slate. The Administration worked to make the meeting as inclusive as possible, within logistical constraints. We will work to ensure that all relevant voices and viewpoints feed into the Summit process and we seek to engage any and all countries that show a genuine willingness in making commitments that support the Summit's goals.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols by  
Representative Michael McCaul (#3)  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 3:**

3. What is the State Department's view on China's growing footprint and influence in Latin America and the Caribbean? How can the U.S. counter this trend and show that it is the region's preferred partner?

**Answer 3:**

The Secretary called our relationship with the PRC a defining challenge for the 21st century. Problematic PRC activities represent a serious challenge to U.S. interests in the region, with growing PRC security ties and opaque infrastructure investments that undermine transparency and sovereignty.

The U.S. government – through our sustained commitment to the Western Hemisphere – bolsters the region's coalition of resilient democracies that champion our shared values. We work closely with our allies and partners to lend expertise and resources toward the region's pandemic recovery, including support for greater vaccine availability, high-standard infrastructure investment, and transparent economic development. We use our range of tools – from diplomatic engagement to technical exchanges, public diplomacy to targeted foreign assistance, and partnership with the private sector to civil society cooperation – to pursue deeper regional democracy, prosperity, and security.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols by  
Representative Michael McCaul (#4)  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 4:**

4. Throughout the pandemic, China has come close to successfully convincing countries to drop diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Should this occur during the next few years, how is the administration preparing for the potential spillover effect onto Taiwan's regional diplomatic allies?

**Answer 4:**

Taiwan's relationships reinforce the hemisphere's democratic values and support sustainable development. Taiwan is a strong partner to the region throughout the pandemic, makes donations of ventilators and protective equipment to its diplomatic partners and other regional countries. Taiwan promoted the region's economic recovery through financial support to the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI). Our embassies support Taiwan in its official and unofficial bilateral relationships and its participation in international fora, consistent with our "one China" policy. The Taiwan Relations Act, the three Joint Communiques, and the Six Assurances guide this policy.

This Administration has made clear that our commitment to Taiwan will remain rock-solid. The future of Taiwan, a leading democracy and a critical economic and security partner, matters to the United States for all these reasons.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols by  
Representative Michael McCaul (#5)  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 5:**

5. What is the administration's policy towards supporting and defending Taiwan's diplomatic allies in Latin America and the Caribbean?

**Answer 5:**

The Administration continues to support Taiwan and its ties with its diplomatic partners. Taiwan is a committed development partner in the region, whether through direct bilateral assistance or through its long-standing support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Taiwan remains an essential democratic partner in a region where most countries share our values. We support Taiwan – a democratic success story, a reliable partner, and a force for good in the world.



**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols by  
Representative Michael McCaul (#6)  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 6:**

6. To what extent have countries in Latin America and the Caribbean bought into the United States' concerns about China's threatening activities and influence in the region?

**Answer 6:**

As Secretary Blinken made clear, the United States does not ask our partners to choose between the United States and the People's Republic of China. We offer a partnership that works in our interests and those of our partners, undergirded by our shared values that emphasize democratic governance, respect for human rights, entrepreneurship, transparency, inclusive economic growth, and diversity, equality, and inclusion. Our partners in the region have expressed their concerns about PRC actions in the region to us. We share our own experience with China with our partners and urge that they study the interactions of others in the region with China as they consider strategic decisions.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols by  
Representative Michael McCaul (#7)  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 7:**

7. Does the administration assess that our regional partners and allies are in alignment with the United States on the need to address the threats posed by China?

**Answer 7:**

We echo the long-standing calls from Latin American capitals that PRC representatives respect local laws and interests, particularly regarding the human rights of all, including workers, and protections for the environment. We recognize that countries engage with the PRC as a trade and investment partner - just as the United States does - but highlight national security and data privacy risks associated with granting access to untrusted vendors to critical infrastructure and sensitive sectors.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols by  
Representative Michael McCaul (#8)  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 8:**

8. The last administration's efforts to counter the Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei, including through the Clean Network Initiative, were quite successful. Is the Biden Administration building on these efforts to ensure the safety of telecommunications networks in Latin America and the Caribbean?

**Answer 8:**

The Biden Administration views network security as a high priority. We highlight the importance of trusted networks for governments, businesses, and citizens alike throughout the region. We make clear that countries should enjoy confidence that telecommunications equipment and software will not introduce risks that threaten national security, privacy, or human rights. Additionally, trust cannot exist where vendors, such as Huawei and ZTE, remain subject to an authoritarian government. We continue to encourage governments to exclude untrusted vendors from providing telecommunications equipment and services in any network, including 5G.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols by  
Representative Michael McCaul (#9)  
November 16, 2021**

**Question 9:**

9. Earlier this year in June, Iranian warships attempted to deliver an unknown number of weapons and fast-attack boats to Venezuela. This marked the Iranian Navy's furthest voyage into the Atlantic. Do you believe that Iran is supplying weapons and offensive weapon technology to the dictator in Venezuela and if so, what concrete steps are you taking to address it?

**Answer 9:**

We remain highly concerned about the relationship between Iran and Venezuela. We judge that the Iranian naval vessel carried weapons that likely intended for delivery to the Maduro regime in Venezuela. We consider such activities unacceptable. We continue to coordinate with partners to monitor the Iran-Venezuela relationship closely.