



Statement before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

“Securing the Border: Understanding and
Addressing the Root Causes of Central
American Migration to the United States”

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The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the American Enterprise Institute.

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Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
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Mr. Chairman, I commend you and your Committee for organizing a series of hearings this week to focus attention on the fundamental responsibility of securing our borders. I also would like to begin my testimony by recognizing the service of the U.S. government officials who testify before you today. I know from experience that their jobs are critical to our security, and I thank them for their service to our nation.

No event in recent years has underscored the vulnerability of the United States’ southwest border as dramatically as the wave of illegal immigrants—many of them children—crossing our border in a five-month period beginning last March. Overall in FY 2014, 51,000 “unaccompanied alien children” (UACs) were detained by or surrendered to U.S. authorities after entering U.S. territory illegally. In addition to being two-and-a-half times the number during the prior year, 75 percent of these UACs are citizens of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras¹—a dramatic change from past years, when 80 percent were of Mexican origin.

This heart-wrenching flood of humanity demonstrated how quickly our resources on the border can be overwhelmed, creating a diversion of resources that could allow greater threats to evade detection. Moreover, it underscored the real-world consequences of our government sending mixed signals about border enforcement and a potential amnesty at the same time that it fails to engage effectively with neighbors that are facing rising insecurity and instability.

Principal Observations

Mr. Chairman, I have worked on these issues—including the very dramatic challenge of confronting mass migration flows from Cuba and Haiti—for decades. I rely on that experience in assessing the root causes of the 2014 border crisis and making some recommendations for addressing those factors to prevent a repeat of this phenomenon.

Ambassador Noriega was Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs and Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States during the George W. Bush administration; he is a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. José R. Cárdenas, who served as Acting Assistant Administrator for Latin American and Caribbean of the U.S. Agency for International Development and held other senior posts in the administration of George W. Bush, contributed to this testimony. Both are affiliated with Vision Americas LLC, a consulting firm that represents U.S. and foreign clients.

- *The surge of unaccompanied alien children from Central America's Northern Triangle actually began in FY 2012*, when CBP recorded the apprehension of 10,146 UACs from those three countries, compared to an average of 3,900 in each of the three prior fiscal years (see table below). Indeed, the annual total of UACs recorded in FY 2014 was five times the number recorded in FY 2012 and twelve times higher than FY 2011.
- This rising tide of illegal crossings from Central America's Northern Triangle (consisting of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) stemmed from the "pull factors" of perceived permissive U.S. border enforcement; an anticipated "amnesty;" economic opportunity; and family reunification, as well as the "push factors" of crime and violence; instability; sophisticated smuggling networks; and chronic poverty.
- U.S. authorities must address all of these factors simultaneously and in concert with our neighbors in order to discourage a dangerous and costly influx of illegal immigrants.
- Since last year, the U.S. and other governments have taken steps and adopted programs with the goal of discouraging illegal crossings. However, the persistent "push factors" continue, and continued signals of lax enforcement or expectations of a broad "amnesty" can easily overwhelm those efforts.
- The Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) reports *a 42 percent decline* in the number of UAC apprehensions so far this Fiscal Year (through February) compared to the same months in FY 2014. However, it is important to note that last year's apprehensions were twice as high as the first two quarters of FY 2012 and FY 2013. Although the UAC line may be trending downward, it remains high above where it was just two years ago. Moreover, the real spike in the numbers last year did not begin until March with the onset of milder weather. So, we will not be able to measure the effectiveness of current efforts to discourage UAC crossings until the end of the summer.
- To stay ahead of this problem, Congress and enforcement agencies should work together to ensure the clarity of U.S. law and to optimize border enforcement to discourage disorderly, illegal crossings.
- Governments of the Northern Triangle countries—El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala—and the Obama administration are seeking \$1 billion in FY 2016 aimed at treating the root causes that spur mass emigration. The Administration's efforts, led by Vice President Joseph Biden, appear to be serious and comprehensive. However, this effort will only succeed if Central Americans contribute substantial resources to this common effort and if the U.S. assistance is conditioned strictly on meeting specific benchmarks and accompanied with the accountability that will change the environment of corruption and impunity.
- Ours is a shared responsibility, because much of the violence and criminality destabilizing those countries are the direct result of the illicit drug trade fueled by U.S. demand for cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and other substances. The corruption and violence sown by transnational criminal organizations and affiliated street gangs have overwhelmed the relatively weak institutions of government in Central America and raised the obstacles to economic growth.

UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILDREN ENCOUNTERED BY FISCAL YEAR

Fiscal Years 2009-2014; FY 2015 to date (October 1, 2014 - February 28, 2015)

Country	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
El Salvador	1,221	1,910	1,394	3,314	5,990	16,404	2,209
Guatemala	1,115	1,517	1,565	3,835	8,068	17,057	4,381
Honduras	968	1,017	974	2,997	6,747	18,244	1,181
Totals	3,304	4,444	3,933	10,146	20,805	51,705	7,771

Source: Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

The 2014 'UAC' Crisis on the Southwest Border and Urgent Response

The numbers UACs swelled to 51,705 in FY 2014, with a flood of illegal crossings that began in March and peaked in May and June of last year.

Anecdotal information, interviews with detainees, and a study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released last month point to a variety of factors contributing the surge.² Representatives of the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, and Department of Homeland Security stationed in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras briefed the GAO on a host of motivations for people choosing to migrate illegally to the United States. "Crime and violence and economic concerns, poor education, family reunification, and smuggling networks" were among the causes commonly cited, according to the GAO report. The weak rule of law, gang activity, and violence undermined investment, economic growth, and job creation.

Although I believe that chronic poverty motivates most of these illegal crossing into the United States, widespread human rights concerns—particularly the threats of gang recruitment and retribution—are undeniable. After studying this matter for many months, I accept the proposition of human rights advocates who say that a growing number of the UACs arriving in recent years are making *bona fide* asylum claims, which should be adjudicated accordingly.

The conditions of a long trek from Central America, through Mexico, to reach the U.S. border is dangerous, resulting in injury, mistreatment, sexual abuse, robbery, assault, and death. My experience convinces me that it is imperative from a humanitarian standpoint to discourage such risky journeys through strict enforcement of U.S. law and regular voluntary deportation of detainees. Such expedited removal undercuts the "business model" of human smugglers who are exploiting a misperception of U.S. law to abet their criminal activities.

After the influx of unaccompanied minors garnered substantial U.S. and international media attention and sparked a political debate in the United States, the three Central American governments whose citizens were crossing in unprecedented numbers

took the matter seriously and accepted their responsibility for dealing with this humanitarian crisis. In cooperation with the United States and on their own, they adopted public campaigns to warn against attempting the illegal crossing, provided material assistance programs to returning migrants, and supported efforts to punish smugglers.

The U.S. embassies insisted on such a response from their respective countries and, according to the GAO report, adopted measures to discourage and suppress illegal crossings. For example, in El Salvador, U.S. agencies helped bolster border inspection programs. In Honduras, the embassy supported training for prosecutors and judges in a bid to crackdown on smuggling networks. In Guatemala, the aid program addressed the coffee rust problem that may have displaced rural workers. Throughout the subregion, the United States has supported public communications campaigns to warn against illegal emigration and assisted in the repatriation and reception of returned migrants. Existing aid programs also were modified to respond to the UAC phenomenon.

Of course, along with the urgent responsibility to secure the border, the United States must abide by its laws and international obligations with regard to valid claims for political asylum. However, thousands of individuals crossing illegally to claim asylum presents a unique challenge to U.S. authorities, because of the time required to process cases. Although the vast majority of such claims are ultimately denied, the immigrant reaches the United States and, in many cases, fails to appear for the scheduled asylum hearing. This process is open to widespread abuse by people gaming our laws.

For this reason, U.S. authorities have taken steps to accommodate applications and *in-country* processing for “refugee” status. Last November, the Administration initiated a program that will allow a parent who is in the United States lawfully to petition for refugee status for their minor child or children.³ Applicants must submit to tests to confirm their biological relationship. Applicants are screened in-country, under the auspices of the UN’s International Organization for Migration. The DHS will make individual determinations of admissibility and eligibility for refugee status based on “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” Children found ineligible for refugee status under U.S. law will be considered, on a case-by-case basis, for a parole into the United States for “urgent humanitarian reasons.”

The liberal use of this in-country refugee processing or humanitarian parole could send a signal to potential immigrants of lax enforcement. However, the primary message is that the United States is offering lawful and relatively convenient alternatives to the dangerous and illegal trek for families seeking reunification with minor children. According to a published report early this month, thus far about 200 persons, the vast majority of them Salvadorans, had taken advantage of this new program for in-country processing, which is an inconsequential number considering the nearly 52,000 UACs that were encountered in the last fiscal year.⁴

‘Pull Factors’: Perceived lax enforcement of U.S. law and family reunification

The GAO study also cites as contributing to last year’s surge “more aggressive and misleading marketing” by alien smugglers, commonly referred to as “coyotes.” My sources in several Central American countries cited brazen radio advertising campaigns by the “coyotes” explaining that a “*permiso*” would be issued to minors reaching U.S. territory, allowing them to remain in the country. These local sources also cite a common misperception—perhaps encouraged by the smugglers—that President Obama was pushing Congress to adopt a broad amnesty to persons living illegally in the United States and that anyone in U.S. territory could potentially benefit from such an initiative.

The June 2012 decision by President Obama to defer removal action of “childhood arrivals”⁵ and the increased number of persons being allowed to stay pending hearings under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2008 appear to have contributed to the impression of a more permissive treatment of illegal crossers.⁶

“Coyotes credit President Obama for giving them a new ‘business model’ that allows them to transport unaccompanied minors to the U.S. border with Mexico, then safely turn around and pocket big profits,” journalist Richard Pollock reported last August.⁷ Based on interviews with a smuggler as well as dozens of current and former Guatemalan officials, Pollock describes a network of 5,000 smugglers and recruiters who transport thousands of illegal immigrants to the United States each year. A smuggler told Pollock that Mexican and Guatemalan officials—including police at all levels, prosecutors, and immigration officials—cooperate with his activities.

“Coyotes may appear to be uninformed and unsophisticated smugglers, but ... they pay close attention to U.S. immigration laws,” Pollock wrote. He quoted one smuggler as saying, “Obama has helped us with the children because they’re able to stay in the United States. *That’s the reason so many children are coming.*” [Emphasis added]

Family reunification is often cited as a reason for the illegal crossings. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that, in many cases, the smuggling fees are paid by family members who already are in the United States. Certainly, members of this immigrant community in this country are acutely aware of the debate over immigration laws, the possibility of an amnesty, and presidential decisions regarding minor children.

‘Push Factors’: An Intensifying Cycle of Instability, Insecurity, and Poverty

The criminal threat that Central America is confronting today is every bit as dangerous to its peace and security as the Soviet- and Cuba-sponsored subversion of the 1970s and 1980s. The region is now considered the most violent non-war-zone in the world. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Central America has a rate more than four times the global average homicide rate, making it a subregion with one of the highest homicide rates on record.⁸ Reported incidents of robberies, extortion, kidnappings, and human trafficking are all up in recent years. As a result, poll after poll invariably finds the greatest concern among the people of the region is personal security.⁹

The increased crime and violence also has exacted a heavy economic cost. A UN Development Program report puts the financial costs of violence at a 2.5 percent loss of gross domestic product in Costa Rica, with a loss of more than 10 percent in Honduras.¹⁰ With the International Monetary Fund projecting overall Latin American economic growth at only 1.25 percent this year, the loss of domestic and foreign investment because of security concerns will have a drastic impact.¹¹ Productivity will be further hurt by the number of citizens who continue to seek refuge in other countries, principally the United States.

Most of the violence in the region can be attributed to the illicit drug trade. Central America finds itself literally caught between two larger countries—Mexico and Colombia—that have conducted their own major crackdowns on transnational criminal organizations, forcing the latter to find more permissive environments to ply their illegal trade. The State Department’s latest International Narcotics Control Strategy Report estimates that approximately 86 percent of the cocaine trafficked to the United States in the first half of 2013 first transited the Mexico–Central America corridor.¹² The three countries most responsible for the surge of immigrants attempting to enter the United States—El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala—are all designated as major transit countries.

In El Salvador, criminal networks and gangs provide protection for drug shipments, weapons, and human trafficking transiting the country. In Honduras, which has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, an estimated 75 percent of all cocaine-smuggling flights departing South America first land in its territory. In Guatemala, as much as 80 percent of the drugs bound for the U.S. market transit through the country, while Mexican cartels control as much as 40 percent of its territory.¹³

Local governments, plagued by weak institutions and poorly trained law enforcement, have proven no match for these well-financed international criminal organizations, which are aided and abetted by local gangs. As a result of this insecurity and its impact on economic opportunity, the number of Hondurans, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans attempting to cross the U.S. southwest border more than doubled in each of the last two years and may continue to grow.

Another relatively new complication is that some governments in Latin America (such as Venezuela) are either complicit with narcotrafficking and money laundering or (like Bolivia and Ecuador) refuse to cooperate with U.S. counterdrug efforts. Obviously, this defiance has hampered efforts to develop a comprehensive, multilateral response to transnational criminality. Instead, the complicity and safe haven offered to narcotrafficking groups by Venezuela and other countries have bolstered a thriving international criminal network in Latin America into which Central American gangsters have tapped.

The focal point of this transnational criminal conspiracy remains Colombia’s *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). According to former *Washington Post* investigative journalist Douglas Farah, “FARC, despite engaging in ongoing peace talks with the government of President Juan Manuel Santos, remains at the center of a multitude of criminal enterprises and terrorist activities that stretch from Colombia south to Argentina,

and northward to Central America and into direct ties to the Mexican drug cartels, primarily the Sinaloa organization.”¹⁴ It is estimated that FARC garners between \$500 and \$600 million annually from its illicit activities.¹⁵

A year ago, Salvador Sánchez Cerén of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) became president of El Salvador, in part with the support of the street gang *Mara Salvatrucha-13* (MS-13). Sánchez Cerén and his party have a long history of solidarity and support for the FARC. José Luis Merino, another former FMLN guerrilla whose criminal activities were exposed in captured FARC computers, is known as the FARC’s man in El Salvador; he has played a central role in a shadow government managing the flow of Venezuelan assistance to the FMLN through *Alba Petróleos*.¹⁶ Last year, the United States suspended some law enforcement information sharing because then FMLN president Mauricio Funes misused a U.S. government document as a pretext for persecuting a political rival; former president Francisco Flores, known as an ally of U.S. interests, remains detained to date on dubious charges.¹⁷

The explosion of drug trafficking through Honduras occurred during the presidency of Manuel Zelaya,¹⁸ whose links to drug trafficking are well-established. When Zelaya maneuvered to amend the country’s constitution so he could seek reelection, he was removed from office. Responding to pressure from leftist governments, the Obama administration suspended U.S. anti-drug aid, making the country more vulnerable to drug cartels. Although Zelaya never returned to power—and his wife failed in her bid for the presidency in 2013—his continued political activism from his position in the Honduran congress undermines the country’s fight against criminality.

This threat matrix extends beyond the FARC to include other transnational criminal organizations: the Mexican cartels, Hezbollah, Chinese gangs, the Russian and Italian mafias, to name just a few. All stand to gain from continued instability in Central America.

Addressing the Root Causes: Strengthening the Rule of Law & Citizen Security

Poverty and insecurity in Central America result primarily from the lack of strong, accountable institutions that can foster economic development and provide for public security. Weak institutions also breed public corruption and lawlessness—which discourage investment and economic growth. Central America’s poorest countries are caught in this vicious, self-destructive cycle. And because corruption even undermines the effectiveness of development assistance, it is impossible for foreign donors to break this cycle unless their local partners—seeing the light or feeling the heat—decide to change their pattern of behavior.

According to Transparency International, Honduras is ranked 126/175 in terms of perceived corruption; Guatemala stands at 115/175; and El Salvador at 80/175. Homicide figures also are devastating. According to official figures from Salvadoran authorities, homicides increased 50 percent in 2014. Honduras’ second largest city, San Pedro Sula, recorded 171 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, making it one of the most dangerous cities outside of a war zone in the world. Honduras currently has a total murder rate of 90.4

homicides per 100,000—the highest in the world. Guatemala stands at 39.9 per 100,000, making it the 6th most violent country in the world.¹⁹

Cutting crime and violence and strengthening the rule of law in Central America will require reform and institution-building—in the criminal justice system, police forces, and prisons. Only with a long-term program of state capacity-building and development will the organized crime be brought under control so that democratically elected authorities can serve the people effectively. The imperative is establishing order, and that means reducing the ability for criminals to challenge and subvert the state. This involves several actions:

- Improving the effectiveness of criminal justice procedures and practices by rooting out corrupt judges and turning around the extremely low conviction rates through more efficient and independent courts.²⁰
- Developing the capacity to dismantle the financial networks of criminal organizations by developing effective asset-forfeiture laws and exposing money laundering and also enforcing new campaign finance laws to break up political-criminal conspiracies.
- Reforming the prison systems to deter crime and rehabilitate inmates, rather than having them being used to perpetuate and, in some cases, increase criminal activity from virtual safe havens.
- Promoting the use of extraditions as a deterrent for crime and a means to reinforce national security.

The ‘Alliance for Prosperity’ Proposal and \$1 Billion U.S. Aid Request

To date, the signature U.S. program in response to the rising violence is the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). Based on lessons learned—CARSI takes a comprehensive approach to promoting security, including providing equipment, training, and technical assistance to support immediate law enforcement and interdiction operations, as well as strengthening government institutions. Since FY 2008, Congress has appropriated an estimated \$803.6 million for Central America through Mérida/CARSI—and the administration has requested an additional \$130 million for CARSI in FY 2015. Also, the Central American Citizen Security Partnership encompasses all U.S. federal efforts to help combat drug trafficking, gangs, and organized crime. A Group of Friends of Central America donors team works with Central American governments and the Central American Integration System to implement a Central American Security Strategy.²¹

If the recent U.S. border crisis is any indication, these policies to quell instability—which is compelling people to abandon their countries for safety in the United States—have to date proven to be insufficient. What is needed at this point is a fundamental overhaul of the Administration’s approach to Central American security. The problem is not that U.S. agencies are doing something wrong in the region; it is that they are not doing enough. Therefore, more resources are required to expand the effort and to press regional governments to commit to necessary and difficult reforms. Combating violence and

transnational crime requires nationwide sacrifice and a multidimensional strategy—and engagement at the international level.

Under the leadership of Vice President Joseph Biden—and in cooperation with the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)—the Obama Administration has helped develop the “Alliance for Prosperity,” for which it has requested \$1 billion in FY 2016, to address the root causes or “push factors” that contribute to the pressure of illegal emigration on the U.S. southwest border.

The “Alliance” plan appears to me to be a sound appraisal of the root causes of the emigration of Central Americans seeking opportunity and security outside their homeland. For example, a written summary of the plan cites a “constant and growing flow of emigration: about nine percent of the population [of the Northern Triangle countries, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras] has migrated.”²² Moreover, it contemplates a comprehensive, international strategy for jumpstarting economic development through responsible policies and measurable actions by the state to encourage private sector investment and facilitate robust trade.

Mr. Chairman, this is precisely the sort of plan that we expected the Central Americans to adopt to take full advantage of the free trade agreement that we ratified with these countries 10 years ago.²³ The “Alliance” plan prescribes internal reforms that are intended to do a better job of extending economic opportunity generated by trade and growth to people of all walks of life—with particular attention paid to marginalized youth who were at the heart of last year’s border crisis.

For example, under the rubric of “stimulating the productive sector,” the Plan focuses on promoting and attracting investment in textiles, agro-industry, light manufacturing, and tourism; it also proposes measures to reduce energy costs and to modernize infrastructure and nine specific logistics corridors (e.g. highways, seaports, airports, and railways) to accommodate trade.

To promote “opportunities for people,” the Alliance includes initiatives to create economic, educational, and social opportunities and jobs. The measures will include vocational training, apprenticeships, and internships to integrate youth, women, and returned migrants into the labor force; broadening access to and quality of secondary schools; improving housing and access to clean water and other basic services; and promoting health, nutrition, and early childhood development.

Among programs to improve “public safety and access to the justice system,” the Plan includes anti-violence and anti-street gang programs; counseling centers for at-risk youth; professionalization and properly equipped police forces; and measures to improve the efficiency and impartiality of the judicial system.

In the related area of “strengthening institutions” of the state, the Plan proposes simplifying the tax system and professionalizing public administration; improving the

governments' ability to plan, execute, monitor, and assess the effectiveness of government projects; and enhancing transparency of government "procurement, purchases, and tenders for public works projects...."

In a private meeting in Washington last week, the Foreign Ministers of these countries said that they already are investing their own resources in this integrated development plan, and they welcomed President Obama's proposal that the United States commit \$1 billion to this effort.²⁴ They also said that they were adopting a feature of the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) program that includes non-governmental stakeholders in the management and oversight of "Alliance" programs, to make them more transparent, accountable, and inclusive.

It is illuminating that the Central Americans, in their own plan, cite both the security concerns and economic motivations of emigrants, saying that "the level of economic growth ... is insufficient to reduce poverty, create job opportunities, and generate productive activities...." Although the Plan focuses on street gang activities, poor education, and other social problems that endanger at-risk youth, it is primarily focused on multifaceted, long-term plan with the central objective of "developing economic opportunities." In other words, the planners of the three source countries appear to be convinced that the emigration crisis is driven overwhelmingly by economic factors rather than by widespread persecution.

When drafting transformative blueprints such as the "Alliance for Prosperity," the policy architects walk a fine line between the ambitious and the unrealistic. Many of the promised reforms have been advocated for decades, only to have them founder due to a lack of resources, the absence of a national commitment, or the failure of political will from leaders. In this case, we can judge quickly whether the Plan is realistic (and worthy of U.S. support) by whether the Administration is willing to insist on dramatic steps that will test the commitment of our partners.

For example, it is not possible to expect groundbreaking transparency from the state if political leaders—including presidents and former presidents—their families, and cronies are allowed to take unfair advantage of their power for their personal material gain. It is not possible to impose the rule of law and to fight transnational crime if a president's inner circle includes persons involved in money laundering for narcotraffickers and terrorists. It is not possible to dismantle street gangs if the ruling political party employs gangs to mobilize its voters or to terrorize its opponents. It is not possible to attract foreign investment if companies have to deal with insecurity, bureaucracy, and corruption that is tolerated by the state.

In order to deal with the root causes of underdevelopment, corruption, poverty, and insecurity, U.S. diplomats must be empowered to speak and act boldly and U.S. law enforcement must be mobilized to investigate and prosecute corruption and lawlessness, which exact a heavy toll in Central America. Such bold action will encourage our partners in Central America to change their behavior for the good of their own people.

Based on nearly 30 years of assessing such plans, I regard the Alliance for Prosperity Plan to be well-conceived, comprehensive, and extraordinarily ambitious. I believe the President is justified in proposing a \$1 billion investment of U.S. taxpayer money in this effort in FY 2016. I also understand that the Administration intends to work with Congress to channel existing resources to help jumpstart this plan immediately.

However, before the U.S. Congress commits such resources, you are justified in asking the Central Americans to demonstrate how much of their own resources (including multilateral loans) they will invest in these activities; what other international donors (including multilateral organizations) will contribute; and whether these leaders are personally prepared to move boldly to change backward policies and reform corrupt practices that have stunted the growth of their countries for many decades.

It is not clear from the President's budget request that the Administration has identified a serious set of priorities within the Alliance for Prosperity that are worthy of U.S. assistance or whether the U.S. contribution is regarded as a slush fund to be divided equally among the three partners to spend as they choose. (That is certainly what the Central Americans expect, judging from my conversations with them.) If we expect to get meaningful results from a U.S. investment, Congress should work with the Administration to identify specific priorities that will be funded and executed by U.S. agencies. Congress also should ask the President to empower an official in the Executive Branch to coordinate the implementation of these projects, respond to Congressional oversight, and work with each Central American government to ensure that it is pulling its weight and executing programs effectively.

One of the most important factors in determining the success, failure, and sustainability of this type of "transformative" aid program is for Senators and Representatives to become directly involved in the effort and to work as a team with our government and those in the region.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman. It is not the responsibility of the United States to solve all of Central America's problems. However, when a symptom of those problems literally presents itself on our doorstep, we must respond in a way that secures our border, supports our partners, and addresses the root causes of instability.

Because of the devastating impact of U.S. demand for illicit drugs on our Latin American neighbors, we have an inescapable responsibility to help our partners address these problems. In that respect, our free trade agreement with these countries is the existing foundation for continued cooperation. And a well-executed aid program can have a lasting positive impact.

I know from personal experience that this country has been trying for decades to help Central America build stronger institutions and more just societies. More often than not, the missing ingredient has been the commitment of the people in power to denounce

and ferret out corruption and structural inefficiencies. Although I am generally sympathetic to proposed aid programs, I believe they must be used to leverage transformative change from Central American politicians so that their nations' children do not have to abandon their homes and wander in the desert in search of a future.

Notes

¹ From website of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security, table entitled, "Unaccompanied Alien Children Encountered by Fiscal Year, Fiscal Years 2009-2014; Fiscal Year 2015 to date (October 1, 2014 - February 8, 2015)) <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children>

² "Information on Migration of Unaccompanied Children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras," Report to Congressional Requesters, February 27, 2015, United States Government Accountability Office <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/668749.pdf>

³ "Fact Sheet: In-Country Refugee/Parole Program for Minors in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras With Parents Lawfully Present in the United States," Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Department of State, November 14, 2014 <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2014/234067.htm>

⁴ "EEUU recibe casi 200 solicitudes para dar refugio a niños de Centroamérica," ("US receives almost 200 requests for refuge for Central American children"), *Diario Las Americas*, March 6, 2015.

⁵ Remarks by the President on Immigration, June 15, 2012 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/remarks-president-immigration>

⁶ The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 authorizes immigration officials to remove aliens who they determine do not have a valid asylum claim; only if immigration authorities determine that such a valid claim may exist are the aliens entitled to a hearing before a judge. Although many commentators have cited the Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2008 as requiring judicial hearings for every case involving minors, that legislation dictates the treatment of apparent victims of "trafficking," not every person transported to U.S. territory by smugglers.

⁷ "Guatemala's human smuggling network is big business for 'coyotes,'" by Richard Pollock, Washington Examiner, August 21, 2014 <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/guatemalas-human-smuggling-network-is-big-business-for-coyotes/article/2552267>

⁸ Corey Kane, "Honduras, Central America Still Lead the World in Murder Rates," Tico Times, April 14, 2014, www.ticotimes.net/2014/04/14/honduras-central-america-still-lead-the-world-in-murder-rates.

⁹ "A Broken System," *Economist*, July 12, 2014, www.economist.com/news/americas/21606864-citizens-security-regions-biggest-problem-time-improve-criminal-justice-broken.

¹⁰ United Nations Development Program, *Regional Human Development Report 2013–2014, Citizen Security with a Human Face: Evidence and Proposals for Latin America*, November 2013, www.undp.org/content/dam/rblac/docs/Research%20and%20Publications/IDH/IDH-AL-ExecutiveSummary.pdf.

¹¹ Kieran Lonergan, "IMF Lowers Latin America Growth Forecast Despite Improved Global Outlook," BN Americas, January 22, 2014, www.bnamericas.com/news/banking/imf-lowers-latin-america-growth-forecast-despite-improved-global-outlook.

¹² United States State Department, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Volume 1: "Drug and Chemical Control," March 2014, www.state.gov/documents/organization/222881.pdf.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Douglas Farah, "Terrorist Groups in Latin America: The Changing Landscape," testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, February 2014, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20140204/101702/HHRG-113-FA18-Wstate-FarahD-20140204.pdf>.

¹⁵ Stephanie Hanson, *FARC, ELN: Colombia's Left-Wing Guerrillas*, Council on Foreign Relations, August 19, 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/colombia/farc-eln-colombias-left-wing-guerrillas/p9272>

¹⁶ José Luis Merino, a Marxist guerilla commander turned into a politician, has been responsible for managing *ALBA Petroleos in El Salvador* and laundering money from the company to fund guerillas and narco trafficking in that country.

¹⁷ “EUA no enviara mas informacion confidencial financier a El Salvador,” (“US will not send confidential financial information to El Salvador”), by Gloria Flores, *La Prensa Grafica*, December 5, 2014.

<http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2014/12/05/eua-no-enviara-mas-informacion-confidencial-financiera-a-el-salvador>

¹⁸ Roger F. Noriega and José Javier Lanza, “Honduras under Siege,” *AEI Latin American Outlook*, September 30, 2013, www.aei.org/outlook/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/latin-america/honduras-under-siege/.

¹⁹ Information retrieved from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

²⁰ Peter J. Meyer and Claire Ribando Seelke, *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, May 6, 2014, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41731.pdf>.

²¹ For more information see Clare Ribando Seelke’s Congressional Research Service Report, *Gangs in Central America*, published on February 20, 2014, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34112.pdf>

²² The “Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle: A Road Map,” was published in September 2014, at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC. The subsequent summary of the elements of this plan are based on this document and supporting material.

<http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=39224238>

²³ The U.S. free trade agreement with the Central American countries of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (along with the Dominican Republic), was ratified by the U.S. Senate in June 2005.

<https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/cafta-dr-dominican-republic-central-america-fta>

²⁴ I discussed the Alliance for Prosperity with the Foreign Ministers at a private luncheon at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C. on March 17, 2015.