

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

November 13, 2017

CHRISTOPHER R. HIXON, STAFF DIRECTOR
MARGARET E. DAUM, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is examining border security and immigration enforcement in the United States. Each year, American taxpayers fund the Merida Initiative, a bilateral partnership designed to assist Mexico fight organized crime and sustain the rule of law.¹ In light of watchdog concerns about the Initiative, I respectfully request information about how the Initiative improves our homeland security.

The Bush Administration established the Initiative in 2007 with a focus on counter-narcotics, border security and counterterrorism.² In 2011, the Obama Administration revised the Initiative's focus to include community-based social programs.³ Since fiscal year 2008, Congress has appropriated \$2.5 billion for the Initiative.⁴

The State Department's Office of Inspector General (OIG) has raised concerns about the Department's lax oversight of Initiative funds.⁵ In 2015, the OIG found that the Department had conducted end-use inspections on only six percent of the U.S. property donated to Mexico under the Initiative.⁶

It is unclear what U.S. funding of the Initiative has achieved. Corruption is reportedly at a rate "never seen in Mexico," as drug cartels exert increased influence over government officials.⁷ A large number of Mexicans are defecting from law-enforcement units to join cartels, and Department officials acknowledged that the United States has likely trained some cartel members

¹ U.S. State Dep't, *Merida Initiative*, <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/merida/>.

² Clare Seelke, CRS, *U.S. – Mexico Security Cooperation: the Merida Initiative and Beyond*, 9, 2017.

³ *Id.*

⁴ U.S. State Dep't, *Merida Initiative*, <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/merida/>.

⁵ U.S. State Dep't OIG, *Report of Inspection, Embassy Mexico City, Mexico*, 14, 2015, <https://oig.state.gov/system/files/isp-i-15-28a.pdf>;

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Elisabeth Malkin, *Corruption at a level of audacity never seen in Mexico*, N.Y. Times, Apr. 19, 2017.

through the Initiative.⁸ Corruption also likely helped drug lord Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzman escape from a Mexican prison accredited by the State Department through the Initiative.⁹

Despite U.S. funding of the Merida Initiative, violent crime in Mexico is now at the highest rate in twenty years, and the amount of drug trafficking into the United States has doubled.¹⁰ The DEA assesses that “Mexican cartels remain the greatest criminal drug threat in the United States,” producing 80 percent of the heroin seized in the United States.¹¹

To assist the Committee in better understanding how the Merida Initiative is being administered and how the Department plans to oversee it in the future, I respectfully request the following information and materials:

1. Please provide a copy of the Merida Initiative 200 Indicator Efficacy Report.¹²
2. Please provide the most recent copy of the Leahy Human Rights Report relating to the funding for the Merida Initiative.
3. Please provide a detailed breakdown of funding provided pursuant to the Initiative, including the recipient, the amount of funding, and the purpose of the funding since 2007.
4. Please provide a copy of the records of training provided by the United States for Mexican military or law enforcement officials pursuant to the Initiative.
5. Please list all instances in which Merida Initiative funding has been diverted or received by corrupt officials or cartels, as well as the Department’s actions in response to these diversions.

Please respond as soon as possible but no later than 5:00 p.m. on November 27, 2017, so that the Committee may begin to receive responsive information.

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized by Rule XXV of the Standing Rules of the Senate to investigate “the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of all agencies and departments of the Government.”¹³ Additionally, S. Res. 62 (115th Congress) authorizes the Committee to examine “the efficiency and economy of all

⁸ Natasha Bertrand, *How 34 Commandos Created Mexico’s Most Brutal Drug Cartel*, Business Insider, Mar. 5, 2015; *Mexico Loses over 56,000 Soldiers to Desertion in Six Years*, Fox News, Apr. 17, 2012; Comm. staff briefing with State Dep’t Officials from the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) and Western Hem. Affairs, Oct. 13, 2017.

⁹ *Id.*; Catherine E. Shoichet, ‘El Chapo’ escape shines spotlight on corruption in Mexico, CNN, Jul. 16, 2015.

¹⁰ David Agren, *Cancun crime wave threatens tourist mecca*, USA Today, Aug. 2, 2017.

¹¹ Drug Enforcement Admin, *DEA National Drug Threat Assessment*, Oct. 2017; June S. Beittel, CRS, *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 9, 2017.

¹² U.S. State Dep’t, INL, *Merida Status Update for CRS*, Nov 2016.

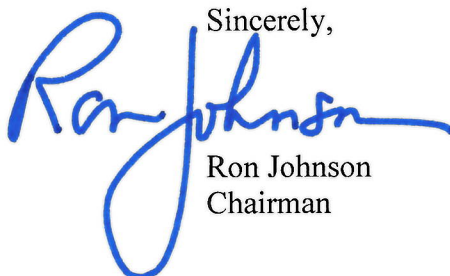
¹³ S. Rule XXV(k); *see also* S. Res. 445, 108th Cong., 2004.

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branches and functions of Government with particular references to the operations and management of Federal regulatory policies and programs.”¹⁴

If you have any questions about this request, please ask your staff to contact Amber Selig or Brian Downey of the Committee staff at (202) 224-4751. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member

The Honorable Steve A. Linick
Inspector General

Enclosure

¹⁴ S. Res. 62 § 12, 115th Cong. (2017).