

Testimony of  
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Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before this distinguished Committee. By way of background, I have dedicated most of my professional career to policy matters regarding Latin America and the Caribbean. For fifteen years, I served at the Inter-American Foundation, a U.S. government agency dedicated to promoting private grassroots development in the Western Hemisphere. I also served as Counsel to the House International Relations Committee where my responsibilities included oversight of U.S. government foreign assistance programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2001, President Bush nominated me to serve as Assistant Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and I was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in January 2002. In that position, I managed USAID's foreign assistance programs throughout Latin America and the Caribbean through 2007. Over several decades, I have traveled extensively throughout the hemisphere and have met with Latin American presidents, foreign and trade ministers, attorneys general, and private sector leaders in virtually every country. I know the region and its problems all too well.

I want to begin by commending Chairman Johnson for arranging this hearing on a complex and controversial subject that deserves a closer examination and calmer deliberation than it often receives. We cannot hope to reform our immigration laws and stem the tide of illegal immigration unless we understand its causes and the most effective means to end it and secure our borders. At the outset, let me dispel any notion that Americans of Hispanic heritage or descent have views different from those of the vast majority of non-Hispanic Americans when it comes to illegal immigration. Most Latinos, as other Americans, whether Democrat or Republican, favor orderly legal immigration to the United States at levels set by Congress, but are vehemently opposed to executive amnesty for those who have migrated here illegally. As other Americans, Latinos respect the rule of law and understand that a country that loses control of its border loses its sovereignty.

My purpose in testifying today is not to flood you with statistics on what our country has done to promote development and provide humanitarian assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean. I would be happy to provide those details, but Members of this Committee are fully aware of the billions of dollars that the United States generously provides in the Western Hemisphere annually through a variety of channels. In addition to USAID, many other departments and agencies have programs to support democracy, health, justice, environmental, and economic development programs. There is also considerable humanitarian and disaster assistance as well as indirect support that our government provides to the region through development banks and multinational organizations. Suffice it to say, Mr. Chairman, for several decades, the American taxpayer has been extraordinarily generous in helping our neighbors overcome the challenges they have faced.

Unfortunately, after many years of work in this field, I have learned the simple fact that America cannot solve our neighbors' problems nor can we spend our way to development any more than we can spend our way to prosperity at home. The fact is that government cannot create wealth or "develop" under-developed societies. Economic growth can only come from a vibrant private sector. The role of government is to create a free and secure environment that allows the private sector to create wealth. Without a commitment that can be made only by Latin Americans themselves, continuing to pour billions of American taxpayer dollars into these countries will not change this fact and may well make it worse by enabling governments to postpone unpopular reforms.

In that vein, Mr. Chairman, I can assure you that Vice President Biden's recent proposal to provide an additional \$1 billion in development assistance to Central American countries without a prior and demonstrable commitment to meaningful reforms will do nothing but reinforce bad habits and a dependence on foreign aid. Our resources would be more effectively spent on securing our borders and modernizing our immigration procedures in order to send a clear signal that we will enforce our immigration laws. Such an unambiguous message to smugglers and would-be illegal immigrants is a prerequisite to success and more important than anything else we can do in the short term.

Today's hearing is focused on the "pull factors" that have led Latin Americans, principally Mexicans and Central Americans, to immigrate illegally into the United States. At its core, the principal reason has been and continues to be the economic opportunity in our country and the lack of it in theirs. It is clear to anyone who has any knowledge of our decades of our efforts to promote prosperity in the region; foreign assistance has done little to change the plight of the region's poor. This situation has been made even worse by endemic corruption, drug trafficking, violent gangs, and a general lawlessness resulting from ineffective law enforcement that is often linked to criminal activity itself.

Unfortunately, an insecure border compounds the problem by providing opportunities for human smuggling operations that are often linked to gangs in Mexico and Central America. These smuggling operations are a multi-billion dollar business. According to a recent GAO report, 56 percent of the border is not under "operational control" and thus is open territory for the continued growth of these illegal smuggling operations. Rightly or wrongly, the Obama Administration's recent executive actions on immigration have been widely perceived throughout Latin America as an "executive amnesty" that will inevitably result in more illegal immigration and a strengthening of the human smuggling operations carried out by gangs and smuggling rings.

The reality, Mr. Chairman, is that since 2011, the number of illegal immigrants apprehended by the U.S. border patrol has increased by 43 percent from 340,000 to 487,000. But estimates are that at least half of those attempting to illegally enter the U.S. are ultimately successful. The recent increase is largely attributable to children and families, many of whom believe U.S. immigration laws have changed as a consequence of the President's statements and executive actions. In simple terms, the Administration's initiatives and the endorsement of and advocacy for a broad legalization of illegal aliens sends a message that, if only they can get themselves or their children across the border into the United States by any means, they will be able to stay as long as they want and even enjoy the full benefits of citizens and those who have come here legally.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would urge you and this Committee to consider the following actions that Congress could take to stem the tide of illegal smuggling and immigration:

- Restrict appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security so that no funds can be used to implement executive actions or policy directives that prevent enforcement officers from carrying out their responsibilities under current law and thereby enable large numbers of illegal aliens to avoid deportation and even to receive work permits.
- Prevent illegal employment with a universal E-verify mandate and other measures to boost employer compliance and address identify theft.
- Authorize the U.S. Border Patrol to keep illegal border crossers in custody in the immediate border region and ensure expedited removal.

By taking the actions I have described, Congress would send a clear signal that the United States is a nation of laws which cannot be simply set aside by President Obama – or for that matter any president – at his own convenience whenever he decides they are obstacles to his own preferences. By Congress reaffirming a commitment to the enforcement of the immigration laws of the United States, smugglers tied to drug cartels will diminish and our neighbors will understand that the rule of law is not only paramount but that there is indeed no “executive amnesty” for those who successfully breach our borders.

Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to answer any questions that you and Members of this Distinguished Committee may have for me.