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STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON ADDRESSING MIGRATION PUSH FACTORS

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

OF THE

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STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON ADDRESSING MIGRATION PUSH FACTORS

Thursday, May 6, 2021

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT,
AND ACCOUNTABILITY,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 p.m., via Webex, Hon. J. Luis Correa [Chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Correa, Titus, Torres, Meijer, Bishop, and Harshbarger.

Chairman CORREA. The Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability will now come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare the subcommittee in recess at any point. Let me start by thanking all of you for joining us today.

We're here to discuss what drives people in Central America to leave their homes and migrate north to the United States. In recent weeks, we have all had the chance to visit El Paso, Texas, and like many of you did, what I was saw was tragic. Unaccompanied children at our doorstep and we are doing everything we can. We are doing the best we can to take care of these children.

I had the chance to meet and speak with Yuri and Yareli, the 3- and 5-year old girls who many of you saw on TV were thrown over the 12-foot barrier by smugglers. They were traumatized but thank goodness, they were safe. The Border Patrol officers showed me the spot where the girls were thrown over the wall. If it were not for those alert Border Patrol officers, with their high-tech long-distance night vision equipment, those girls would surely have died a horrible death in the middle of the desert. I have heard many other stories of sexual assaults, rapes, and crimes inflicted upon these refugees, upon these children, as they travel north.

Separately, I also had the chance to visit a shelter in Tijuana, Mexico. A shelter for families, moms and dads with children. These were families deported summarily under Section 42 of the Health Code. I saw lots of pain. Families trying to figure out what they were going to do after spending their life savings on a smuggler and left stranded from home with no resources and nowhere to turn.

It is always painful to see refugees in this condition. Yet, this is not new. Back in 2008, I had to visit similar refugee camps for unaccompanied minors. I have to say the faces were different, yet the look of pain and despair was essentially the same.

As a Nation, we have a habit of focusing on the immediate challenges at our Southern Border and rarely do we take a step back to look at the bigger picture. So, today, we are going to talk about the long-standing causes of migration and the role our country can play as a regional partner.

For decades, the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have struggled to combat wide-spread violence, political instability, corruption, and food insecurity.

These long-standing problems have only been made worse by recent natural disasters and the COVID–19 pandemic. Both of these factors, of course, have crippled the local economies, caused more hunger, more unemployment, and more starvation. When you are starving, you have no choice but to head north.

At the moment, President Biden is sending over $400 million to Central America in humanitarian aid to address some of the most pressing needs of the region, including emergency food. Yet money for food and shelter will not address the systemic corruption, inequality, and violence that disrupts economic activity and social growth in that region. That is why the President has also outlined an ambitious 4-year, $4 billion plan to address these long-standing factors that drive migration from Central America to the United States.

This strategy will require collaboration with regional partners to best understand the individual problems in each country and to ensure that these regional governments also have skin in the game.

As you know, Vice President Harris is spearheading this diplomatic outreach. Just last week, she met with the Guatemalan president and committed resources from our own Department of Homeland Security. It is my understanding that DHS is working to develop partnerships with the Central American governments to develop a framework to manage migration in the region. DHS is also advising and working closely with local officials in Central America in those countries to strengthen custom enforcement and to prevent illegally obtained wealth from exiting the country as another way to combat local government corruption. DHS is also assisting these countries in improving security and helping them fight wide-spread violence from gangs and trans-national criminal organizations.

But this is just a start. There is so much more that needs to be done. This administration and future administrations can't do it alone. We need to activate the private sector, give them incentives to play a central role in creating good jobs, good paying jobs in Central America. We, Congress, that is us, need to oversee progress or lack thereof in Central America.

It is interesting because the only time we, as an institution, look in Central America is when we see smoke. The only time Congress really acts is when there is a fire.

As a Nation, we have been fighting endless wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and other parts of the world. Yet, we have overlooked our own backyard. Ignoring the ever-growing economical and political instability in our own hemisphere.

Congress needs to send a message to the Central American leaders. We will be watching you and we must actually watch what is going on, on a day-to-day basis. Understanding the failures and

successes of past programs implemented in Central America is key to creating effective and meaningful change. We have seen that with continued and targeted support, the United States can help Central American countries grow and be prosperous, more secure, and much more politically stable.

To that end, today I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the living conditions that push migration north from Central America and how the United States can most effectively help our regional partners build communities that provide hope to people without hope.

Again, I thank all of you today for joining us.

[The statement of Chairman Correa follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN J. LUIS CORREA

MAY 6, 2021

We're here to discuss what drives people in Central America to leave their homes and migrate north to the United States. Far too often we focus on the immediate challenges on our Southern Border and don't take a step back to look at the bigger picture. So today we are going to talk about the long-standing causes of migration and the role our country can play as a regional partner.

For decades, the Northern Triangle countries of Guatamala, Honduras, and El Salvador have struggled to combat wide-spread violence, political instability, corruption, and food insecurity. These long-standing problems have only been exacerbated by recent natural disasters and the COVID–19 pandemic, which have crippled economies and left thousands on the brink of starvation and homelessness. As people lose hope in a better future, they feel there is no other choice but to make the dangerous trip north. Efforts to reduce migration cannot succeed without addressing this overwhelming and pervasive feeling of hopelessness. Until they have a reason to stay, people will continue to leave their home countries and seek a better future for themselves and their children elsewhere.

In order to address some of the most pressing needs of the region, including emergency food services and disaster relief, President Biden plans to send over $400 million to Central America in humanitarian aid. Aid money for food and shelter alone will not address the systemic corruption, inequality, and violence that disrupts economic and social growth. Which is why the President has also outlined an ambitious 4-year, $4 billion plan to address these long-standing factors driving migration from Central America. This strategy will require close collaboration with regional partners to best understand the individual problems in each country and to ensure that there is buy-in on U.S. involvement.

Vice President Harris has spearheaded this diplomatic outreach, and just last week she met with the Guatamalan president and committed resources from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Working to develop partnerships with foreign governments is part of how DHS is contributing to the overall goal of developing a framework for managing migration in the region. Acting in an advisory capacity, the Department has worked closely with local officials in Central American countries to strengthen customs enforcement and prevent illegally obtained wealth from exiting the country, a key way to combat Government corruption.

Furthermore, DHS has assisted Northern Triangle countries with efforts to improve security and prevent wide-spread violence at the hands of gangs and transnational criminal organizations.

But there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done. I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how we can make sure that U.S. resources are utilized to the greatest extent possible.

Understanding the failures and success of past programs implemented in Central America is key to creating effective and meaningful change moving forward. That means making sure that our plans take into consideration the realities of the moment. For example, communities must be built back with an understanding of how climate change will continue to impact the region. And assistance to overworked and underfunded public health systems is particularly critical in the on-going fight against COVID–19. We have seen that with continued and targeted support, the United States can help Central American countries grow more prosperous, secure, and politically stable.

To that end, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the living conditions that push people to migrate from Central America and how the United States can most effectively help our regional partners build communities that provide people with hope.

Chairman CORREA. The Chair now recognizes our Ranking Member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. Meijer, for an opening statement. Mr. Meijer.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing today, the first of this Congress of the Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee on this important topic.

I am very excited to serve and honored to serve as the Ranking Member of this subcommittee. I am sure it will be one of many productive hearings we hold going forward to address this issue, especially relevant as we continue to deal with the fallout of the crisis at our Southern Border. I also want to say, Mr. Chairman, I strongly agree with your belief that we should not only be looking to regions when there is smoke. I firmly believe that we should be viewing the world not as a series of discrete problems to solve, but one in which we maintain focus, we maintain awareness, and address the challenges that we will be enduring in various forms.

Just a few weeks ago, I visited the border with several of our Homeland Security colleagues, including Congresswoman Harshbarger, who is here with us today. I also know that Congressman Bishop has been to the border with the Judiciary Committee. So, we have seen these issues and situations up close, as you, Mr. Chairman, have also seen in your recent trip to the border.

This crisis exemplifies many of the problems with our current system. While the need for comprehensive immigration reform, including more effective border security, is clear, it is also important that we understand why so many individuals and families continue to make the perilous journey to our Southern Border.

Although I believe that the current crisis has been unnecessarily caused or accelerated by misguided policies, I also understand that there are complex, interconnected sets of factors that play into the decision to leave one's country. For the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, where most migrants are coming from today who are coming across our border, these factors include systemic and entrenched corruption, poverty, food insecurity, violence, and a lack of economic opportunity that often precludes them from making a better life for themselves and their families in their home countries. If we recognize the humanity of each person making this journey, often coming from a place of desperation, the need to address this current crisis and find long-term solutions becomes ever clearer.

Before coming to Congress, I saw communities struggle with these kinds of crises around the world. I led disaster response operations to assist communities impacted by natural disasters. I spent 2 years in Afghanistan as a conflict analyst with the aid community there, working to protect aid workers and those delivering vital assistance to others in need.

To be clear, I do not fault those who seek a better life for their families, but the current administration's rhetoric and policies also encourage thousands of migrants to put themselves, and in many

cases, their family members and young children, in danger. The actions taken by the administration in the first days of office have helped accelerate the crisis we are seeing today. Specifically, halting border wall construction funded by Congress, implementing catch-and-release policies, eliminating the Remain in Mexico policy to deter non-meritorious claims, and canceling asylum and cooperation agreements with our Central American partners that would have allowed migrants to seek asylum closer to home as those claims were adjudicated.

Some of the statistics that we are seeing are heart-breaking. CBP is on track to encounter more than 2 million migrants crossing the border by the end of the year. More than 4 times the number from fiscal year 2020. Between February 19 and April 22 of this year, TSA assisted approximately 7,200 migrants at 10 border airports in document verification, bypassing standard photo ID requirements, boarding domestic flights, and with unsure and unclear COVID–19 results in addition.

According to Border Patrol agents, migrants are paying smugglers on average $4,000 to reach the Southern Border. That, again, just complicates and emphasizes the economic burden that is being placed on individuals and the horrific conditions that they are put in on this journey.

I am aware that the administration has recently announced $300 million in funding for Northern Triangle countries and has proposed a $4 billion aid package to address this instability and other issues in the region. A long-term engagement with our regional partners is important. I also note that foreign assistance must be carefully targeted, monitored, and transparent on both sides to ensure that these funds are not being wasted and are going to have maximum impacts to address this challenge.

Without real metrics and closer collaboration between the different Government agencies engaged in the region, there is no reason to believe that more money will lead to more progress. I look forward to us talking about how to most efficiently allocate funding during this hearing. This kind of long-term engagement will take sustained attention and focused effort. Something that we can struggle to produce at times.

I am honored to serve on this important subcommittee so that, again, we can bring that focus, we can bring that effort, that dedication to not just viewing the world as a series of problems to solve, but challenges that we must manage, that we must retain attention towards, and that we must be emphatic in ensuring that conditions improve.

One of the key frustrations with this issue coming to Congress is that while there are rhetoric and conversations at the National level, we are also seeing many impacts at the local level. I am honored to have Sheriff Hinkley from Calhoun County in my district joining us here today, where over 100 unaccompanied migrant children were recently relocated to a non-profit facility for care.

Michigan is always willing to help those who are vulnerable and in need. But we need to make sure that unaccompanied children, the policies surrounding that, have the most appropriate oversight to ensure that humane care, appropriate conditions, and other standards are met.

My witness today will be able to offer that needed local perspective, talk more about the local impacts of this crisis and immigration policies, in general, and what they have heard from States and localities. So, Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses today. I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Meijer follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER PETER MEIJER

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today—the first of this Congress for the Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee. I am very excited and honored to serve as the Ranking Member of this subcommittee and am sure that this is the first of many productive hearings we will hold.

The hearing today is especially relevant as we continue to deal with the fallout of the crisis at our Southern Border.

Mr. Chairman, I strongly agree with your belief that we should not only be looking to regions when there is smoke. I firmly believe that we should be viewing the world not as a series of discrete problems to solve but one in which we maintain focus, we maintain awareness, and we address challenges that will be enduring in various forms.

Just a few weeks ago, I visited the border with several of our Homeland Security colleagues, including Congresswoman Harshbarger who is with us today. I know that Congressman Bishop has also been to the border with the Judiciary Committee, so we have all seen the issues and situation up close, as you, Mr. Chairman, have also seen in your recent trip to the border.

This crisis exemplifies the problems with our current system. While the need for comprehensive immigration reform, including more effective border security, is clear, it is also important that we understand why so many individuals and families continue to make the perilous journey to our Southern Border. Although I believe that the current crisis has been unnecessarily caused or accelerated by misguided policies, I also understand that there are complex, interconnected sets of factors that play into the decision to leave one's country.

For the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, where most migrants are coming from today, these factors include systematic and entrenched corruption, poverty and food insecurity, violence, and a lack of economic opportunity that often precludes them from making a better life for themselves and their families in their home countries. If we recognize the humanity of each person making this journey, often coming from a place of desperation, the need to address this current crisis and find long-term solutions becomes even clearer.

Before coming to Congress, I saw communities struggle with these kinds of crises around the world. I led disaster response operations to assist communities impacted by natural disasters and spent 2 years in Afghanistan as a conflict analyst with the aid community, working to protect aid workers and those delivering vital assistance to others in need.

To be clear: I do not fault those who seek a better life for their families, but the current administration's reckless rhetoric and policies have encouraged hundreds of thousands of migrants to put themselves, and in many cases their family members and young children, in danger. Many actions taken by the administration in the first few days in office have helped accelerate the crisis we're seeing today. Specifically,

- Halting border wall system construction funded by Congress;
- Implementing "catch-and-release" policies;
- Eliminating the Remain in Mexico Policy to deter non-meritorious asylum claims;
- And canceling Asylum Cooperative Agreements with our Central American partners that would have allowed migrants to seek asylum closer to home.

And the statistics we're seeing are heartbreaking:

- CBP is on track to encounter more than 2 million migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border by the end of this fiscal year—more than 4 times the number encountered in fiscal year 2020.
- Between February 19—April 22, TSA assisted approximately 7,200 migrants at 10 border airports in document verification, allowing them to bypass standard government-issued photo ID requirements and board domestic flights.
- And according to Border Patrol agents, migrants are paying smugglers on average $4,000 to reach the Southern Border.

I am aware that the administration has recently announced $300 million in funding for Northern Triangle countries and has proposed a $4 billion aid package to address instability and other issues in the region. While long-term engagement with our regional partners is important, I also know that foreign assistance needs to be carefully targeted, monitored, and transparent on both sides, to ensure these funds are not being wasted.

Without real metrics and closer collaboration between the different U.S. Government agencies engaged in the region, there is little reason to believe that more money will lead to more progress. I look forward to talking about how to most efficiently allocate those resources during this hearing. This kind of long-term engagement will take sustained attention and focused effort, something that we can struggle to produce at times.

I'm honored to serve on this important subcommittee so that we can bring that focus, we can bring that attention, we can bring that effort, that dedication to not just viewing the world as a series of problems to be solved but challenges that we must manage and we must maintain attention toward, and we must be emphatic in ensuring that conditions improve.

One of the key frustrations with the issue of immigration since coming to Congress is that while the rhetoric and the conversation is happening at the National level, the impacts are felt most at the local level. I'm honored to have Sheriff Hinkley joining us here today from Calhoun County in my district, where over 100 unaccompanied migrant children were recently relocated to a non-profit facility for care. Michigan is always willing to help those who are vulnerable and in need, but we need to make sure the policies surrounding unaccompanied children have the most appropriate oversight to ensure humane care, appropriate conditions, and other standards are met. My witness today will be able to offer that needed local perspective and talk more about some of the local impacts this crisis, and immigration policies in general, have on States and localities.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

Chairman CORREA. Members are reminded that the committees will operate according to the guidelines laid out by the Chairman and Ranking Member in their February 3 colloquy regarding remote procedures. Now, I would like to welcome our panel of witnesses.

First, we have Ms. Shannon O'Neil. Ms. O'Neil is vice president, deputy director of studies and Nelson and David Rockefeller senior fellow for Latin American studies with the Council on Foreign Relations. She is an expert on Latin America, global trade, U.S.-Mexico relations, corruption, democracy, and immigration.

Our second witness is Mr. Dan Restrepo, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. Mr. Restrepo created and directed the American Project where at the center that focuses on Latin America and the role of Hispanics in the United States, their future, and the implications for public policy. For nearly 6 years, he served as a principal advisor to President Obama on issues related to Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada.

Our third witness, Mr. Ariel Ruiz Soto, is a policy analyst at the Migratory Policy Institute. His research focuses on the impact of U.S. immigration policies and procedures on immigrants and other populations and the interaction between United States, Mexican, and Central American migration policies.

Now, I will have our Ranking Member, Mr. Meijer, introduce our final witness.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Our final witness is Sheriff Hinkley of Calhoun County. Sheriff Hinkley has served in that role in law enforcement for 29 years. He has a distinguished background in law enforcement and has been a pivotal force in the west Michigan community to both deal with some of the local impacts of the migration crisis and of immigration in general, but also

ensuring that we have inclusive, comprehensive, and humane treatment of all. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CORREA. I thank the Ranking Member, Mr. Meijer. Without any objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted into the record. Member statements may also be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

MAY 6, 2021

As I mentioned during a hearing on unaccompanied children last week, the situation at the Southern Border is not a new challenge. Neither are the reasons people try to come to the United States. Instability in Central America, especially in the Northern Triangle, has been a key driver of migration to the Southern Border since 2014. High rates of poverty and violence have led thousands of families and children to leave in search of a better, safer life. Rather than continue efforts to improve living conditions in the region, the Trump administration repeatedly sought to scale back funding for Central America.

Following a surge of migrants from the Northern Triangle in 2019, President Trump cut $400 million in U.S. assistance to the region and suspended the remaining aid for more than a year. Similar to his other cruel immigration policies, this did little to deter migration. Instead, it made conditions in the Northern Triangle even worse. The COVID–19 pandemic and an especially bad hurricane season in 2020 caused further devastation—leading to greater poverty and economic inequality. It is no wonder why the flow of migrants began to increase over the last year. While Republicans insist on calling the situation at the Southern Border a crisis, the real crisis is the conditions in some Central American countries that are pushing people north.

I applaud the Biden administration for committing to addressing the root causes of migration as part of a broader plan to overhaul our broken immigration system and implement more humane policies. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will be a key partner in carrying out this plan and the committee stands ready to support its efforts. Reducing the flow of migration to more regular and manageable levels will allow DHS to focus on its other vital missions, such as strengthening cybersecurity and combatting domestic terrorism. But progress will not be made overnight.

As Vice President Harris—who is leading the administration's effort to engage with Central America—said: "If it were easy, it would have been solved a long time ago." Meaningful change will require long-term investments, effective partnerships, and cooperation from leaders who have benefited from systemic corruption. But it can be done. And the last 4 years has shown us, that doing nothing to address the push factors of migration will only make conditions worse.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on possible ways Congress and the administration can best address these push factors in the short- and long-term.

Chairman CORREA. Now, I'm going to ask each witness to summarize his or her statements for 5 minutes. We will start with Ms. O'Neil. Welcome, Ms. O'Neil.

STATEMENT OF SHANNON O'NEIL, VICE PRESIDENT, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF STUDIES, NELSON AND DAVID ROCKEFELLER SENIOR FELLOW FOR LATIN AMERICA STUDIES, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Ms. O'NEIL. Great, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member Meijer, and Members of the subcommittee. I am really grateful for the invitation to talk here with you today.

The number of Central Americans and Mexicans that are arriving at the U.S. Southern Border has been growing since April 2020. So, this is now over a year-long rise that reflects the exacerbations of long-term chronic conditions in these nations. These are condi-

tions that push people out of their homes, their communities, and ultimately, their countries, in search of safety and opportunity.

To change and to dissuade this movement, the United States and others need to address some immediate acute factors, as well as longer-term structural factors that are behind this migration. In these opening remarks, I am going to focus my time on the longer-term structural factors and I am going to leave the immediate ones to my colleague, Dan Restrepo.

So, these underlying issues driving so many people to the U.S. border, they include things like economic devastation and hunger. They include violence and the fear of violence. They include climate change and extreme weather events. They also result from the pull of deep family ties and community ties to what is increasingly an opening and growing and vibrant U.S. economy. Now, these are not new issues, these pull and push factors. They are not new issues for these nations, nor for their citizens. But they are vitally important in shaping the decisions of now hundreds of thousands of Central Americans and Mexicans when they are trying to decide whether or not to leave their homelands.

Creating economic opportunities, improving physical safety, and helping individuals adapt to climate changes, particularly in agriculture, these are all important for altering the migration calculations of individuals, of families, and communities. So, as we think about U.S. Government programs and U.S. Government assistance, they should focus on these long-term issues and try to do just that, change the calculations of these individuals.

Education is an important, and I would say the first, place to start. Most Central American and Mexican young people have not yet returned to in-person school. So, this leaves them on the streets, where they are vulnerable to gangs or other criminal networks. It limits their ties to their communities. It limits their access to after-school programs, to tutoring, or to other efforts to help them grow into self-assured and productive adults.

Longer-term, education provides different economic opportunities and different potential livelihoods for these young people. So, safely reopening schools and making sure as many children as possible return to those schools after having been away for over a year, this is vital for the next generation of Central Americans and Mexicans. Frankly, for the future trajectory of the economics, of the politics, and of the migration flows from these nations. So, I would focus on education.

You know, important too are programs that are outside the classroom that can change the mindsets and the direction for young people in these nations. So, this should include various initiatives to mentor young people, to help them build life skills, to give them a first initial work opportunity to start building a resume. To help them heal from trauma, because so many of them have experienced that in their nations.

Studies show that these kinds of efforts can make a difference in their lives. It can help embed them and tie them to their communities at home. It can lesson the power of the factors that drive them to migrate.

Rural agricultural communities, they need support too, and different kinds of support. For families to stay and continue farming,

many need the type of aid that will allow them to set up drainage systems or irrigation systems. They need assistance in moving from the crops they grow today to shifting to crops that are more weather resistant or facing the new kinds of climate changes that they now experience on a regular basis. Or they need help introducing them to new markets where they can sell their goods. Or thinking about other kinds of produce or other kinds of products that have higher-value margins so that they can actually earn more for each crop rotation that they are planting. Enabling these livelihoods in farming, and then letting them to continue, and in many places prosper, this too, can change the migration calculations for perhaps hundreds of thousands of people in these nations.

Now, complementing these programs, the U.S. Government should explicitly take on corruption that makes it so hard for so many of these people to stay in their countries. So, that means re-establishing internationally-funded anti-corruption bodies. It means bolstering the work of reformers in these countries. It means the United States should provide no harbor, either personally or financially, for political officials or business leaders that are engaged in corruption.

Let me just end on good news. The good news is the United States has real partners in the large numbers of businesses, nonprofit organizations, families, and citizens that want to make their communities in their nations better and fairer and more inclusive. They want to make their nations a place where people can stay. So, the United States should work with these allies to play an important role. It should work to bring hope, to bring opportunity, and to change the realities on the ground that today make it so necessary for people to leave. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. O'Neil follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SHANNON O'NEIL

MAY 6, 2021

MIGRANTS AT THE SOUTHWEST BORDER: PUSH FACTORS & POLICY SOLUTIONS

Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and Members of the subcommittee: Thank you for the invitation to testify today. I am grateful for the subcommittee's interest in Central American and Mexican migration and to have this opportunity to discuss U.S. policy options to address this chronic issue. As always, I am eager to hear your advice and answer any questions.

Between January and April 2021, CBP apprehended 570,000 people, a mix of individuals and families, at the southwest U.S. border.[1] If this pace continues, 2021 apprehensions will exceed previous recent peaks in 2019 and 2014–2015, though still remain below those of the late 1990's and early 2000's.

The migration spikes of the last decade have been largely driven by the rising movement of Central Americans. Today roughly half of the individuals, and 9 out of 10 of the families, that arrive at the southern U.S. border come from Central America's Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. This exodus results from a number of chronic push factors. It also results from the pull of a recovering U.S. economy and the deep familial and community ties between the United States and the sending nations.

Economic Insecurity, Violence, and Bad Governance Push Central Americans North

One of the biggest challenges is economic insecurity. These economies have expanded more slowly than many other emerging markets in recent years. Tepid

[1] U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "CBP Enforcement Statistics Fiscal Year 2021," April 2021. *https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics/*. Calculations based on Customs and Border Protection (U.S. Border Patrol and Office of Field Operations) data.

growth rates reflect the direct and indirect costs of violence, corruption, extortion, and poor governance, which has limited local and foreign investment and formal sector job opportunities.

COVID–19 hit the 3 economies hard, the IMF estimating declines of 2 percent in Guatemala, 9 percent in El Salvador, and nearly 7 percent in Honduras. Millions in the region have fallen into poverty, and hunger and malnutrition are on the rise.

Extreme weather and climate changes have exacerbated these economic difficulties, pushing more Central Americans to leave. Tropical Storm Eta and Hurricane Iota, both dubbed once-in-a-century storms that hit just 2 weeks apart in November 2020, directly displaced over 100,000 people and, according to the United Nations, affected over 7 million more as mudslides buried homes and fields, shut down hospitals, and cutoff access to clean water.[2]

Significant swathes of El Salvador and Honduras, along with portions of Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, make up what has come to be called the "Dry Corridor," an agricultural area hit hard by a years' long drought. The U.N. World Food Programme estimates that nearly 1 million farmers are now facing severe crises. Losing crops and often titles to land fuels migration.

Violence too pushes tens of thousands to leave. The Northern Triangle remains one of the most dangerous places in the world. Homicides rates in Guatemala and Honduras routinely top 20 and 44 per 100,000 citizens respectively. El Salvador's murder rate has declined in recently years, but still counted some 36 murders per 100,000 in 2019. Gangs, some of them transnational in nature, effectively control significant territory in many of these nations, robbing, kidnapping, extorting, and assaulting fellow citizens. The lack of legal options or protections for citizens if pressured or preyed upon spurs migration as well. Michael Clemens at the Center for Global Development has found that violence promotes child and unaccompanied minor migration in particular, calculating that 6 more homicides in Central America led to nearly 4 additional children to be apprehended at the U.S. border.[3] Gender-based violence is another driver, particularly for the women and children presenting themselves at the U.S. border. The 3 Central American nations have the highest rates of femicide in the hemisphere.

Corruption and poor governance more broadly drive migration. They lead to poorly-executed infrastructure that is more likely to crumble in the face of natural disasters, building codes ignored for a price. Funds to alleviate tragedies or provide benefits and opportunities to citizens are instead siphoned off. Corruption and impunity permit and enable violence, leaving individuals fearful for their or their loved ones' lives, and often without a choice except to flee. And the injustice and discrimination between those on the take or those not weaken the community ties that can keep individuals from leaving.

Family Ties and Economic Opportunities Pull Central Americans North

Two factors in particular pull migrants north. U.S. economic growth and the promise of job opportunities encourage people to come. Studies show that immigrants find jobs once here, and are more likely to be employed than U.S.-born workers.[4] And Central Americans have deep family roots in the United States. For unaccompanied minors arriving at the border, a strong majority have a parent or close relative that lives in the United States.[5]

Mexican Migration is on the Rise

While the main U.S. focus today is on Central America, we shouldn't overlook the rise in Mexican migration to the United States. For nearly a decade, net Mexican migration north has been flat or negative. According to data from the DHS and the

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[2] "Central America: Tropical Storm Eta & Hurricane Iota—Six Weeks Later (as of 22 December 2020)." OCHA, December 22, 2020. *https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2020-12-23%206W%20After%20%28ENG%29.pdf.*

[3] Clemens, Michael A. "Violence, Development, and Migration Waves: Evidence from Central American Child Migrant Apprehensions." CGD Working Paper 459. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. July 2017. *https://www.cgdev.org/publication/violence-development-and-migration-waves-evidence-central-american-child-migrant.*

[4] Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Foreign-Born Workers: Labor Force Characteristics—2019." News Release. U.S. Department of Labor, May 15, 2020. *https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/forbrn.pdf.*

[5] Zak, Danilo. "Fact Sheet: Unaccompanied Migrant Children (UACs)." National Immigration Forum, November 2, 2020. *https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-unaccompanied-migrant-children-uacs/.*

Migration Policy Institute, the number of unauthorized Mexicans living in the United States fell by nearly 800,000 during the 2010's.[6]

This trajectory has now changed. From April 2020 until February of this year, Mexicans, mostly single adults, outnumbered all other nationalities apprehended at the Southern Border. They continue to represent nearly half of those crossing the border irregularly. And the factors pushing the reversal of earlier trends show few signs of lessening.

Mexico's migrants are largely driven by the push of economic insecurity at home, and the pull of economic opportunity here. Mexico's economy was stagnating before the pandemic in 2019. It has become one of the hardest hit by COVID–19, its GDP falling 8.2 percent in 2020. The IMF estimates it will be one of the slowest to recover in Latin America: The combination of limited fiscal stimulus and falling investment mean the economy won't recoup its pre-pandemic size until 2023. Meanwhile, the United States is recovering: First quarter GDP surged more than 10 percent, and economists expect the economy to surpass its pre-COVID–19 size by the end of this year. Job openings are rising, particularly in food service, hospitality, construction, and other sectors traditionally open to migrants.

Violence too displaces Mexican individuals, families, and at times whole communities from their home towns. Homicide rates hover near record highs, and the geographic spread and fragmentation of organized crime and gangs has left Mexicans increasingly vulnerable as prey. The government's inability or unwillingness to stand up competent police and security forces and bolster effective justice systems to enforce the rule of law leaves criminal activity largely unchecked in parts of the Nation. This too drives Mexicans north.

Combined with continued corruption, decreasing transparency, and poor governance, many Mexican citizens are less hopeful that the difficulties they face at home will lessen or end, leading more to consider leaving.

What the United States Can Do

U.S. efforts can and should focus on the immediate challenges accelerating the exodus of people from Central America and Mexico. Food and shelter are critical concerns. The United States can and should provide immediate support for those displaced from their homes by natural disasters and other events, and help those suffering from rising hunger and malnutrition find basic necessities without having to leave their country.

Diminishing the devastating effects of COVID–19 for personal health and for the health of these economies is vital to change the migration calculations of individuals and families. Mexico and Central American nations should be given priority in U.S. vaccine diplomacy, protecting their citizens and enabling their economies to reopen faster.

Aid to safely reopen schools and extend educational opportunities in a COVID–19 world is vital. For over a year the vast majority of students in these nations have had no in-person schooling, and the quality and access to remote alternatives has been uneven. Getting the nations' young people back into the classroom will help staunch immediate migratory exits by getting children off the streets and providing them with renewed purpose and ties at home. It is also a path to address longer-term root causes of migration, helping build skills, knowledge, self-confidence, and community roots in the voters and workers of the future.

The United States has a track record of programs that have tackled some of the root causes of migration. Many of these have found success in helping improve local lives—often at the neighborhood or municipal level—of Central Americans. While many of these were halted under the previous administration, these types of efforts to better conditions on the ground can and should be restarted and expanded. Neighborhood and school-based programs that work to reduce gang violence through counseling, tutoring, and community service opportunities show promise in reducing violence and shifting the calculations of young people as to what their future can hold at home. So too do efforts to train young people in professional and life skills, and to connect them to their communities through local projects, cultural events, and economic opportunities.

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[6] Migration Policy Institute Data Hub. "U.S. Immigration Trends," 2019. *https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends.* See: "Mexican-Born Population Over Time, 1850–Present."

Baker, Bryan. "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2015–January 2018." Population Estimates. U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, January 2021. *https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/Pop_Estimate/UnauthImmigrant/unauthorized_immigrant_population_estimates_2015_2018.pdf.*

Programs to help farmers adjust to drought conditions, such as introducing irrigation systems or rust-resistant coffee seedlings, can help them keep their living and land at home, making it less necessary to leave. Programs designed to connect them directly to markets or to upgrade the profitability of the crops they grow can also ensure a more sustainable future at home. Other programs providing seed money and training for entrepreneurs have at times succeeded in creating economic opportunities, improving people's prospects at home and shifting their mindset about moving.

As the United States invests in these local community programs, it needs to focus on and push for fundamental changes in the ways these nations are governed. Without significant shifts in governance, the push for citizens to leave will remain strong. This can and should start with reinstating anti-corruption efforts, including backing internationally supported investigatory bodies similar to those shuttered in recent years in Guatemala and Honduras. It means pushing for transparency in the use of international and taxpayer funds. And it means turning directly to local civil society and non-governmental organizations as partners for U.S.-backed programs, particularly in countries where the national government is an unreliable partner. It can also mean searching out and supporting subnational government administrations and/or national level reformers in the quest to improve governance. And more broadly, it means defending democratic checks and balances and democracy in these nations.

The United States can play an important role in denying corrupt leaders the ability to visit the United States or to use its financial system to hold ill-gotten gains. And it can help prosecutors in these countries build cases against corrupt elites.

The hundreds of thousands of Central Americans and Mexicans crossing the southwestern U.S. border result from a similar number of wrenching decisions: Individuals and families being forced to choose to leave their homes, friends, and communities. While no single program or approach will quickly change these calculations, a combination of immediate and long-term investments, of national political reforms and micro-level neighborhood interventions, and of multi-pronged programs to address the myriad reasons for leaving is the best way to alter these choices.

Migration from Mexico and Central America to the United States has been going on for decades. Whatever the United States does, it will not end either the deep inequalities or the deep familial ties between the nations. But concerted efforts and investments at home can give more Mexicans and Central Americans a choice when they consider migration, rather than making it a necessity for them and their families to survive.

Chairman CORREA. Señor.

STATEMENT OF DANIEL A. RESTREPO, SENIOR FELLOW, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

Mr. RESTREPO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Meijer, and Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for your invitation to participate in today's hearing. Disruption, there is one idea I want you to take away from my testimony today, is that to break a decades-long cycle of crisis response to migration in the Americas, we need to disrupt our approach. Disruption means appreciating that migration cannot be prevented and deterred, at least not over time in a manner consistent with our vast laws, values, and interests. Instead, it must be mitigated, managed, and ordered. Disruption requires us to look at today's topic, migration push factors, to do what Shannon just did, to distinguish between the acute causes and root causes of migration from northern Central America, and for that matter, southern Mexico.

Making this distinction helps us understand what we can do if we want people to be able to stay in their home communities now and to relieve pressure from the U.S.-Mexico border in the short-term and over the long-term to the greatest extent possible. On acute causes, we need to start by addressing the effects of hurricanes Eta and Iota. Two once-a-century storms that made landfall

in northern Central America 2 weeks and 15 miles apart in November 2020. Directly impacted 11 million people across the region, displacing nearly 1 million and contributing to growing food insecurity for 5½ million people. We need to do so now.

After an anemic initial effort by the Trump administration, the Biden administration has ramped up humanitarian assistance with Vice President Harris, as has been mentioned, last month announcing nearly $200 million for the on-going humanitarian response. Together with Congress, the administration should invest even greater resources in emergency food assistance and in programs that put folks across the region to work rebuilding their own community. Tapping into the desire of Central Americans to build a better future would be far more cost-effective than simply ramping up enforcement at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The other acute cause of migration from Central America has been COVID–19. That has led to significant pain among some of the most economically vulnerable populations in the Western Hemisphere, while claiming 15,000 lives in the course of the last year. When it comes to a COVID response, the United States is now, thankfully, in the position to help on something the region desperately needs, and that is vaccines. Guatemala, the region's larges population has vaccinated only 0.01 percent of Guatemalans. Honduras hasn't done any better. They are at 0.03 percent. El Salvador, which is kind-of leading the way, is at 1.1 percent of the population vaccinated.

As the Biden administration begins to share surplus, high-quality U.S. manufactured vaccines internationally, it should prioritize our near abroad. Not simply as a good neighbor, but as a smart neighbor who understands that what happens in these countries, in effect, is happening in the United States, given the deep interconnections we share.

People, of course, aren't on the move solely in response to acute causes. They are, as Shannon pointed out, on the move because of poverty and lack of economic opportunity, violence and insecurity, weak governance and corruption, adverse effects of the climate crisis, and the desire for family reunification, among other reasons.

Effective migration management must address all these reasons. But when it comes to root causes, we need to understand that many are themselves symptoms of a deeper challenge. The uncomfortable truth is that the economies and societies of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are in effect, designed to fail broad swaths of their populations in the service of economic and political elite and increasingly organized crime. Far too many of the people across the region are treated, in essence, as export commodities by the powers that be. Unless and until we can confront that reality head-on, we will simply lurch from one emergency response to the next.

That leads to my last point about disruption. We must intentionally seek to disrupt the failed status quo, to empower good governance and market economics, to create conditions so people can exercise the right not to have to migrate. The good news, and there is good news, as outlined in my prepared testimony and that of my colleague, is that the U.S. Government, the Executive and Congress, working together and in partnership with local civil society,

including constructive private-sector players, can disrupt the failed status quo by focusing on governance, anti-corruption, transparency, and other key approaches.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify this afternoon. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Restrepo follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DANIEL A. RESTREPO

THURSDAY, MAY 6, 2021

The topic of today's hearing—addressing migration push factors—is of vital importance as the United States once again finds itself grappling with an increased number of migrants seeking entry between ports along the U.S.-Mexico border.

As is implicit in today's topic, effective migration policy that serves core U.S. National interests neither begins nor ends at our Nation's physical borders. The reason for that is simple as the border is just one point in a complex migratory system that stretches thousands of miles in both direction from the line of demarcation between the United States and Mexico set by the Treaty of Guadelupe-Hidalgo in 1848.

Yet for the past 30 years, not just the past 4 years, the United States has gotten migration policy wrong in no small part because we have thought we could address migration exclusively at the U.S. border and that we could enforce our way out of any challenge. We cannot, at least not in a sustainable manner that is consistent with our laws and our values.

To stand up a safe, orderly, and humane migration system work certainly needs to be done at the border but also on both sides thereof. Work that must be in service of a coherent strategy that guides an interlocking set of domestic, border, and international policies to bring order to migration in the Americas.

We must, for example, restore the rule of law and values to our immigration system, enact changes to detention, enforcement, and deportation policies and practices as well as address the status of DACA and TPS recipients and undocumented "essential workers" as President Biden has proposed doing in the Citizenship Act legislation currently pending before Congress.

To promote order in migratory flows and restore U.S. humanitarian and human rights leadership, we must also reform migrant processing and protection mechanisms at the U.S.-Mexico border; ensure vulnerable individuals who urgently need protection are afforded access thereto as close to home as possible; and create and expand legal work pathways to restore circularity to migration.

We must also work on the topic of today's hearing—migration push factors—to help create conditions so individuals and families throughout northern Central America can safely exercise their right to live out their lives in their communities and countries of origin as so many clearly wish to do.

UNDERSTANDING THE PUSH FACTORS

As Members of this subcommittee and other policy makers look to build a sustained, integrated approach to migration in the Americas and as you look to address migration push factors it is vital to have a sophisticated understanding of what leads people to migrate to the United States in the first place.

Individuals from northern Central America are on move today for myriad reasons, including poverty and lack of economic opportunity, violence and insecurity, weak governance, corruption, natural disasters, and a desire for family reunification. Any effective migration management system must, at least, begin to address each of those reasons.

But before delving into how, it is important to realize that many of those "push factors" or "root causes," like migration itself, are symptoms of a deeper challenge. The uncomfortable truth is that the economies and societies in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are, in effect, designed to fail broad swaths of their populations in service of the region's economic and political elites. Far too many people across the region are treated, in essence, as export commodities by the powers that be. Unless and until we confront that reality head-on, we will simply lurch from crisis to crisis.

Being clear-eyed about the role of these entrenched, corrupt power structures is critical to any successful U.S. policy approach that will require a level of intrusiveness—on behalf of good governance and market economics—that may be uncomfortable but is necessary to instill hope among the people of northern Central America

and to empower change agents inside and outside of governments throughout the region.

Effectively addressing push factors also requires differentiating between kinds of push factors as that differentiation helps think about the most effective policy tools the U.S. Government has at its disposal to address them. Fundamentally there are 2 kinds of push factors—acute causes and root causes. And the U.S. policy tool kit for each is quite distinct.

ADDRESSING THE ACUTE CAUSES OF MIGRATION

The most acute reasons forcing individuals to flee northern Central America today are the still devastating effects of Hurricanes Eta and Iota—two "once-a-century storms" that made landfall 15 miles and 2 weeks apart in November 2020—and the impact of COVID 19.

Eta and Iota adversely affected more than 11 million people across a region already reeling from the economic impacts of the pandemic. The storms displaced nearly 1 million people, many of whom have still not been able to return home and devasted crops across the region.

The initial U.S. response to the hurricanes was, at best, anemic with the Trump administration making available $42 million in disaster relief, only $21 million of which was utilized. In comparison, in response to Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the administration of then-President Bill Clinton, working together with a Republican-led Congress, provided nearly $1 billion in disaster relief and reconstruction funding.

Although the Biden administration has taken steps to significantly increase the disaster response, with Vice President Harris announcing nearly $200 million in new humanitarian assistance for the region in late April 2021 (USAID), the United Nations has warned that 5.5 million people across the region are in urgent need of food assistance out of a total of 10 million who are in need of humanitarian assistance in general. Working together with the U.S. Congress, the Biden administration can and should do more, in particular, to head off the acute food crisis already unfolding across the region's rural sector.

Meeting the needs of those suffering from the impacts of Eta and Iota also means helping address both the need for community-level reconstruction and the need for immediate employment opportunities. Fast-disbursing, cash-based programs can and should be stood up to do just that.

It is vital U.S. policy recognize that the people of Central America have agency; that the vast majority desperately want to build better societies for themselves and their families. We should be seeking to leverage that agency in every way possible to help them achieve that desire.

The U.S. Government also has perhaps an unparalleled opportunity to address the other acute cause of migration—the on-going devastating effects of COVID–19 on the countries of northern Central America. In the past 14 months, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have experienced at least 15,000 deaths from COVID–19. They have also seen their economies contract by -8.6, -1.5, and -.8.0 percent (IMF) respectively. And they are expected to bounce back less quickly than most other parts of the Americas with projected economic growth in 2021 coming in at a 4.2–4.5 percent (IMF).

Although these countries need international support to address these realities, what they need most acutely—especially Guatemala (0.01 percent vaccinated) and Honduras (0.03 percent vaccinated)—are vaccines. The United States, of course, has an increasing supply of highly effective, U.S.-manufactured COVID–19 vaccines. As the Biden administration begins to share vaccines broadly around the world, it should ensure that it focus first on the countries that constitute our "near abroad," that is the countries of Central America and the Caribbean.

Doing so is not just about being a good neighbor, it is about being a smart neighbor who understands that what happens in these countries is, in effect, happening in the United States given the deep interconnection we share with our geographically closest neighbors.

There is another cause of migration that is both acute and root that the Biden administration and Congress can and should address—corruption.

To understand why and how, consider the following: When a migrant caravan formed on January 15, 2021 in San Pedro Sula, Honduras and its members set out on their journey many did so chanting "Fuera, Juan Orlando, Fuera!" or "Out, Juan Orlando, Out!" directed at Honduras' notoriously corrupt president Juan Orlando Hernandez, a man has been repeatedly identified by U.S. Federal prosecutors as an unindicted co-conspirator in the successful drug prosecutions of his brother.

For many in Honduras today, migration is, at least in part, an act of political protest. A clean break with Hernandez—by, at a bare minimum, publicly sanctioning

him—would send an unmistakable signal that the U.S. approach this time is different. Sanctioning a sitting president—a step that has only been used on very few occasions—is not something to be done lightly, but it would make clear that the United States is standing with the people of Central America and not the corrupt keepers of the region's failed status quo. That in turn could affect the decisional criteria of potential migrants in Honduras who may see in that disruption the beginnings of a better future.

ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Addressing the root cause of migration requires disrupting the status quo across northern Central America in multiple ways. Such disruption is not just, or even primarily, a question of U.S. assistance resources and conditionality. Rather it is a question of the Biden administration and those that will follow it, consistent with demands from the U.S. Congress, being willing to use the United States' outsized political influence to openly confront those who stand in the way of structural reform and to back and foster champions of change—inside and outside of government—across northern Central America.

As part of these efforts, the U.S. Government must aim to alter its partner of choice in working on the root causes of migration. It must, together with partners from across the international community, also focus its efforts in new ways, beginning by placing a premium on bolstering good governance. Finally, it must seek to alter—through sticks and carrots—the incentives of elites across the region.

Partners of Choice.—In words and actions, the U.S. Government must openly embrace and empower local civil society across the region as its partners of choice and treat the governments of the region as limited partners almost certain to disappoint over time until they prove otherwise. This embrace must be manifest not only in the symbolic, but also in the programmatic. Local civil society organizations should be seen as a wellspring of ideas on how to positively enhance conditions on the ground and promote rootedness among the people of northern Central America, as well as implementing partners.

When it comes to the treatment of its partners, the United States must also make clear that those—in civil society and in government—who stand up in the anti-corruption fight will find protection in the United States if, and when, they and their families need it. Recent history has seen too many instances of the U.S. Government turning its back on these champions. That must never be allowed to be repeated.

Another, potential disruptive U.S. partner could be large U.S. companies with a significant on-the-ground presence across the region. These companies, governed by the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and every day implored by their investors, employees, and customers to account for the interests of a greater number of stakeholders, have a vested interest in improving the business and societal environment in northern Central America. Together with reform-minded entrepreneurs who wish to disrupt the stranglehold on competition held by a small number of actors in these countries, large U.S. companies can help advance reforms in the seemingly mundane, yet critical, areas of electronic invoicing, mandatory tax withholding, and similar practical reforms.

Such reforms improve the business environment for U.S. companies, disrupt the stasis holding back competition, and help build governing institutions across the region. Similarly, large multinational companies can be change agents by promoting local philanthropy across northern Central America to reduce the reliance on large foreign donors.

Changing Emphasis.—In the past, U.S. assistance to the countries of northern Central America has either ignored governance, put it in a back seat, or, at best, sought to advance it simultaneous to efforts to address prosperity and security. When it comes to expending U.S. taxpayer dollars to effectively address root causes of migration the lessons of the recent past are clear—every effort should be made to put governance first.

A governance first approach to assistance in northern Central America should include:

- *Renewing or strengthening anti-corruption bodies*.—Multilateral support missions for anticorruption efforts in Guatemala and Honduras proved so effective in recent years that corrupt elements in each country—with the Trump administration's quiet acquiescence—successfully pushed back and ended those missions. Going forward, every effort should be made to reestablish anticorruption and transparency mechanisms both at a national and regional level.
- *Deploying Multilateral Support Mechanisms for Tax, Customs, and Procurement Authorities*.—Much like international investigators and prosecutors worked side-by-side to build and prosecute cases with Central American counterparts

through multilateral-backed anti-corruption mechanisms, international experts should be systematically deployed to work side-by-side with tax, customs, and procurement officials across northern Central America to further root out corruption where it is most corrosive.

- *Embedding advisors to bolster key ministries*.—U.S. civilian experts and/or experienced partner-nation personnel should be embedded in government agencies across northern Central America, including ministries of defense, *Ministerios Publicos,* and across the judicial sector in a systematic way to bolster professionalism and political will.
- *Promoting robust Inspector Generals throughout civil administration*.—Condition whatever limited U.S. assistance that passes through governments of the countries of northern Central America on a proliferation of IGs inside key ministries with autonomy and investigative capacity to safeguard accountability, respect for the rule of law, and anti-corruption.

As we begin to experience more direct migration from the region's rural sectors, stabilizing those regions should be given greater priority than has been the case before. Efforts should focus on stimulating economic growth by enhancing the finance and market access possibilities open to small farmers. Such steps should include:

- Expanding access to weather-based crop insurance by encouraging Central American government agencies and the private banking sector to partner to provide large-scale, low-premium, weather-based crop insurance to smallholder farmers.
- Creating a jointly-financed, public-private commercializing entity, supported by the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, to provide a phased-out-over-time price guarantee to farmers and cooperatives who make the transition to specialty or hybrid coffee plants, vegetables, or other non-traditional crops to empower these farmers to compete against existing cartels.
- Developing innovative financing for small farmers in rural areas, by working with partner governments, banking sectors and fintech to create credit guarantees, risk-sharing facilities, mobile banking, and joint credit product design for small and medium farmers.
- Prioritizing rural infrastructure investment that benefits all forms of economic development, including roads (not just highways but secondary and tertiary roads), water purification plants, waste management, renewable energy sources like wind and water, and investments in the coffee value chain.

A change in focus is also necessary when it comes to addressing security throughout the region. It is vital that the U.S. Government expand measures/definitions of "insecurity" to better formulate U.S. policy responses and messaging. U.S. policy and policy makers have focused too much on homicide rates as the definitive measure of insecurity. Other crimes—particularly extortion and gender-based/domestic violence—need to be more effectively tracked and factored into policy responses to insecurity as homicide rates alone do not appear to significantly affect perceptions of insecurity.

In the short-term, the United States must also surge resources and capabilities to school- and family-based programs for at-risk youth in communities most likely to be tipped toward remaining in their home countries. To show results as quickly as possible and thus affect public perceptions of hope, a surge of resources should focus on communities and programs that have shown results in the past. Crucially, to move the needle on migration mitigation, efforts should not be concentrated initially in communities where gang activities are most prevalent, though long-term progress will very much depend on addressing these besieged areas. Instead, efforts should be focused on migrant-sending communities where conditions are closest to being safe for residents to choose to stay. Past efforts by U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the State Department's Bureau of International Law Enforcement (INL) to integrate prevention and law enforcement programs at the community level fell short and must be significantly enhanced. Making "place-based" more than a slogan needs to be a priority task for each U.S. Ambassador in northern Central America and performance-assessment criteria for USAID and INL personnel.

Alter Elite Incentives.—The deep interconnection between the countries of northern Central America and the United States provides the U.S. Government with considerable leverage when it comes to altering behavior in those countries. In short, access—physical, financial, and commercial—to the United States is a privilege. It should be treated as such and denied to those who actively undermine U.S. interests in northern Central America.

To that end, the U.S. Government should not be shy in using its diplomatic and political leverage to condition and coerce political and economic elites to implement intrusive and far-reaching reforms that both foster space for free-market competi-

tion and provide sufficient social safety nets to protect the most vulnerable. This means naming and shaming individuals who seek to subvert reform efforts; sanctioning those who are engaged in corruption, subversion of democratic norms, and human rights abuses; and being public about a willingness to seek extradition in high-profile corruption cases with sufficient nexus to the United States.

To channel the interest of those members of the private sector who seek to be part of the solution in northern Central America and to expand the resources available to scale effective programs, the U.S. Government should work with governments across the region to create a Northern Triangle Public-Private Partnership Enterprise Fund. Such a $500M enterprise fund could be funded through the purchase of zero-interest government bonds by individuals from across the region. The Enterprise Fund could then back public-private partnership projects carefully designed to promote competition rather than to harden existing economic disparities and structures.

CONCLUSION

The challenge of mitigating and managing migration from northern Central America and relieving pressure on the U.S.-Mexico border is real. But it is not insurmountable.

An integrated strategy that advances simultaneously at home, at the border, and in the region can usher in an era of safe, orderly, and humane migration management that advances core U.S. National interests. In the region, that requires addressing the reasons people are on the move today; creating legal avenues for migration; and intentionally disrupting the failed status across the region in such a way to give hope and opportunity for those countless Central Americans who simply want to exercise the right not have to migrate.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Restrepo. Now, I would like to recognize Mr. Ruiz Soto to summarize his statement in 5 minutes. Welcome, sir.

STATEMENT OF ARIEL G. RUIZ SOTO, POLICY ANALYSIS, MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. Thank you. Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today before you. My name is Ariel Ruiz Soto, and I am a policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, a non-partisan, independent research institution focused on practical and effective policy options for managing immigration.

Heightened levels of migrant families and children arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border are a symptom of a long-standing regional crisis in Central America, and no past U.S. policies, whether tougher or more humane, have effectively addressed the underlying root causes of migration. Thus, the Biden administration's resolve to engage with our regional partners to address the causes of irregular migration is encouraging.

Economic stagnation, persistent violence, insecurity, corruption, and a multitude of other factors intersect to influence migrants' decisions to leave Central America for the United States. While some of the factors are wide-spread across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, others manifest differently across and within these countries.

Meeting the challenges of this crisis requires establishing a flexible, resilient, regional immigration management system that spans from Canada to Panama. Laying out the foundation for this type of system now can reduce the boom-and-bust cycles of migration and help manage overlapping crises thousands of miles south of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Addressing the root push factors of migration from Central America through investment and development is an essential pillar

of this regional migration strategy and will be the focus of my remarks. But equally as important to this strategy is creating temporary labor migration pathways, building humanitarian protection, and ensuring transparent and rule-based border enforcement.

Notably, the relationship between migration and development assistance is complex. Literature suggests that the reductions in outward migration take years of consistent and elevated assistance that develops broader economic and governance structures simultaneously with investment in community livelihood opportunities. As such, development is more efficient at shaping how migration occurs, promoting legal over illegal migration, rather than deterring migration altogether.

Evidence from previous iterations of the U.S. Strategy on Engagement in Central America points to some promising initiatives already under way in the region. In the short term, tailored community-based assistance and development programs that focus on violence prevention and security for at-risk populations have the most potential in addressing the root causes in the region and reduce irregular migration for some groups. Examples include job training and education programs for youth in Guatemala's Western Highlands, improving watershed management and nutrition in farms across Honduras, and community-based crime and violence prevention programs in the urban hubs in El Salvador.

Through the U.S. strategy, we have also learned about on-going challenges, from program design to political will, in Central America. Therefore, as the U.S. Government considers increasing assistance in development programs to address the root causes of migration, governments, policy makers, and program implementers should consider the next 4 vetting principles: 1. Assistance programs that provide financial support or skill training while simultaneously strengthening local opportunities are best positioned to lessen irregular migration flows; 2. Building in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the design of programs promotes sustainability and flexibility to focus on the programs that do work; 3. Adjusting country-specific withholding requirements by the State Department to disburse key types of assistance can quickly strengthen continuity and build on program results; and finally, 4. Incorporating actors of civil society and private sector in the design of these programs fosters a sense of co-responsibility and raises government accountability.

Through a combination of smart development assistance and investments that support governance measures in the region, the United States can help alleviate deep-rooted economic stagnation, violence, crime, and promote local resilience to climate change in Central America. But even in the best-case scenario, development assistance alone is not enough to reduce irregular migration. Assistance programs should be considered complementary to other pillars of an effective regional migration strategy. Laying a foundation that promotes efficient and fair protection systems, legal employment pathways, and immigration enforcement-based rule of law is the best combination to promote safe, legal, and orderly migration. Finally, under this regional migration, migration management is the responsibility of every country, and as institutional ca-

pacity improves, the region will be better equipped to respond to future changes in migration flows.

With that, I conclude my testimony and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Soto follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT ARIEL G. RUIZ SOTO

THURSDAY, MAY 6, 2021

Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and Members of the subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability. My name is Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, and I am a policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, a non-partisan, independent research institution focused on practical and effective policy options for managing immigration.

Heightened levels of migrant families and children arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border are a symptom of a long-standing regional crisis in Central America, and no past U.S. policies—whether tougher or more humane—have effectively addressed the underlying root causes of migration. Thus, the Biden administration's resolve to engage with our regional partners to address these causes of irregular migration in Central America is encouraging. Particularly, the recent announcement by Vice President Harris to provide $310 million in increased U.S. assistance to Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador prioritizes much-needed immediate humanitarian concerns resulting from the devastation of 2 hurricane landings in November and the persistent effects of the COVID–19 pandemic, both of which exacerbated the already-difficult conditions in these countries.[1]

Meeting the challenges of this crisis requires establishing a flexible, resilient, regional migration management system spanning from Canada to Panama. And laying the foundation for this type of system now can reduce boom-and-bust cycles of migration and help manage overlapping crises thousands of miles south of the U.S.-Mexico border.[2]

Addressing the root push factors of migration from Central America through investment and development is an essential pillar of this regional migration system and will be the focus on my remarks. Equally as important, however, to this regional strategy is creating temporary labor migration pathways, rebuilding humanitarian protection systems, and ensuring transparent and rule-based border enforcement.[3]

Notably, the relationship between migration and development assistance is complex. And literature suggests that reductions in outward migration take years of consistent and elevated assistance that develops broader economic and governance structures simultaneously with investment in community livelihood opportunities.[4] As such, development is more efficient at shaping how migration occurs—promoting legal over illegal migration—rather than deterring migration altogether.

At a moment of great interest in addressing the root causes of migration and with the possibility of harmonizing regional investment efforts, I underscore the importance of leveraging existing research evidence and previous efforts under the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America to identify promising assistance and development programs that can shape irregular migration in the short term—grounded in the idea of instilling hope in the near term. To overcome design and implementation challenges, my remarks outline recommendations that can increase

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[1] U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), "United States Announces Increased Assistance for the People of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras," updated May 3, 2021.

[2] Andrew Selee and Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, "The Regional Migration Crisis Is in Central America: To Stem the Flow, the United States Needs to Invest in the Region," *Foreign Affairs,* April 13, 2021.

[3] Andrew Selee and Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, *Building a New Regional Migration System: Redefining U.S. Cooperation with Mexico and Central America* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, November 2020).

[4] Susan Fratzke and Brian Salant, "Moving Beyond 'Root Causes:' The Complicated Relationship between Development and Migration," (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, January 2018); Michael A. Clemens, "The Emigration Life Cycle: How Development Shapes Emigration from Poor Countries," (Center for Global Development, Working Paper 540, August 2020); Richard H. Adams and John Page, "International Migration, Remittances, and Poverty in Developing Countries" (policy research working paper 3179, Poverty Reduction Group, World Bank Group, Washington, DC, December 2003); Robert E.B. Lucas, "Migration and Economic Development in Africa: A Review of Evidence," *Journal of African Economies 15,* no. 2 (2006): 337–95.

the success of these programs and contextualize how assistance and development fit within a more sustainable regional migration system.

THE DRIVERS OF MIGRATION FROM CENTRAL AMERICA

Economic stagnation, persistent violence and insecurity, corruption, and a multitude of other factors intersect and influence migrants' decision to leave Central America for the United States. While some of these factors are wide-spread across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, others manifest differently across and within these countries.

Lack of employment opportunities in the formal market suppress economic growth in all 3 countries and propel workers to head northward. For instance, each year nearly 362,000 youth (ages 15–29) across the 3 countries enter a labor market that creates only approximately 127,000 new jobs.[5] This mismatch between labor supply and demand is particularly acute in Guatemala and Honduras, with younger populations and faster growth than in El Salvador. Furthermore, high poverty levels prevail in the 3 countries with more than half of Guatemalans and Hondurans and 40 percent of Salvadorans living in poverty, according to projections by the U.N. Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).[6]

The COVID–19 pandemic magnified these regional economic pressures in 2020 as GDP contracted by 3 percent in Guatemala and between 8 and 9 percent in Honduras and El Salvador.[7] And with large shares of workers employed in the informal labor sector, these economic pressures have especially affected already-vulnerable workers lacking access to benefits.[8] After falling in early 2020, migrant remittances bounced back midyear, providing a lifeline to insulate some of the pandemic's economic shock.[9]

In addition, persistent violence fuels real and perceived levels of insecurity in Central America. Despite dramatic decreases in the homicide rates in El Salvador and Honduras (36 and 43 per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively), these remained among the highest in the world as of 2019.[10] Violence against women is particularly rampant in Honduras where the femicide rate is 6 per 100,000 women, compared to the world average of 2 per 100,000 women.[11] Violence in the forms of crime and extortion, moreover, is less visible but ever present in the 3 countries. Furthermore, annually 1 in 5 residents in the 3 countries report being victims of a crime, and 1 in 10 residents in Honduras and El Salvador report experiencing extortion every year.[12]

The nature of violence varies from country to country, but it includes violence driven by international organized crime tied to drug trafficking (primarily in Honduras and parts of Guatemala), the consolidation of powerful gangs (especially in El Salvador and Honduras), and political conflict (especially in Honduras and parts

[5] Alicia Bárcena, "Diagnóstico, Áreas de oportunidad y recomendaciones de la CEPAL" (presentation, Mexico City, May 20, 2019).

[6] El Economista, "Mayor impacto de la pobreza en El Salvador que resto de Centroamérica, Cepal," El Economista, July 16, 2020.

[7] CEPAL, "América Latina y el Caribe: proyecciones de crecimiento, 2020–2021," updated December 2020.

[8] The average share of workers employed in the informal sector in the 2010–2017 period were: 74 percent in Honduras; 65 percent in El Salvador; and 63 percent in Guatemala. See Organización Internacional del Trabajo, Diagnóstico sobre economía informal: énfasis en el sector comercio de los países del norte de Centroamérica: El Salvador, Honduras y Guatemala (Oficina de la OIT para América Central, Haití, Panamá y República Dominicana, 2020).

[9] Luis Noe-Bustamante, "Amid COVID–19, remittances to some Latin American nations fell sharply in April, then rebounded," updated August 31, 2020.

[10] The World Health Organization (WHO) considers a rate of 10 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants to be characteristic of endemic violence. According to preliminary data compiled by InSight Crime, homicide rates continued to fall in 2020: 37.6 per 100,000 residents in Honduras; 19.7 per 100,000 in El Salvador; and 15.3 per 100,000 in Guatemala. See Peter J. Meyer, "U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: An Overview," (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 2021); Selee and Ruiz Soto, Building a New Regional Migration System, pg. 6.

[11] For femicide rates in Latin America, see Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Femicide or feminicide," accessed May 2, 2021; for world average, see The World Bank, "Intentional homicides, female (per 100,000 female)," accessed May 2, 2021.

[12] Figures reflect latest Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey year publicly available in each country. See, Dinorah Azpuru, "Estudio de la cultura política de la democracia en Guatemala, 2019," Presentation for LAPOP Americas Barometer, revised August 2019; Daniel Montalvo, "Resultados preliminares 2019: Barómetro de las Américas en Honduras," Presentation for LAPOP Americas Barometer, September 2019; Vanderbilt University, "Análisis preliminar del Barómetro de las Américas de LAPOP: El Salvador 2018," Presentation for LAPOP Americas Barometer, updated September 2019.

of Guatemala). Domestic violence is also present within the region and is a common push factor among Guatemalan women.

Corruption is another important driving force behind migration. All 3 of the Central American countries rate among the most corrupt in the world on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, with Honduras and Guatemala ranking in the top 30 least trustworthy after expelling their international anti-corruption commissions in 2020 and 2019, respectively.[13] High-level corruption undermines people's faith in government, encouraging people to migrate. So does more mundane corruption among criminals, the police, and low-level public officials that makes life difficult on a day-to-day basis and contributes to the decisions of many to seek better lives elsewhere.[14] In Guatemala, for example, intention to migrate is 83 percent higher among victims of corruption than non-victims.[15]

The 2 storms that devastated Central America in November 2020 were harbingers of a final problem driving people away from the region: Climate change. Longer periods of drought combined with more frequent hurricanes seem to be hitting farmers in the "Dry Corridor" particularly hard and changing their way of life. Especially in Guatemala and Honduras, which have predominantly rural economies, these climate changes have augmented food insecurity among farmers. A recent study finds that decreases in precipitation are associated with increased emigration at department level, magnified further by higher homicide rates.[16]

PROMISING U.S. ASSISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

As aforementioned, for assistance and development efforts to reduce migration flows requires years of continuous investment. But by targeting violence prevention and food security programs in communities with high emigration rates and focusing on at-risk youth, these efforts have the potential to reshape illegal migration flows in the short-term.[17] Therefore, as the U.S. Government considers increasing assistance and development programs to address the root causes of migration in the region, identifying and expanding promising programs can mediate some migration flows.

Evaluation of U.S. assistance programs is limited, but the latest results from fiscal year 2019 broadly demonstrate that community-oriented programs focused on job creation and workforce development, especially among youth, may have promising effects in the short-term. That year, USAID programs contributed to the creation of nearly 30,000 jobs and 17,000 at-risk youth completed work force development programs, the majority in Guatemala. Approximately 39,000 youth (ages 10–29) at risk of violence, primarily in Honduras, trained in social and leadership skills through governance-oriented programs. These programs are associated with an increase in local public confidence to prosecute and convict homicide perpetrators in Guatemala and Honduras, though confidence levels fell in El Salvador. Trust in police also increased to nearly 30 percent in Guatemala and Honduras but decreased in El Salvador.[18] Other exogenous factors may account for the difference in results in El Salvador.

Another example of promising programs are Model Police Precincts (MPP) sites targeting high-crime geographic areas, which employ a community-oriented and problem-solving approach to policing with the aim to reduce crime and improve citizen relations with the police. In these sites, the number of homicides decreased between fiscal year 2018 and fiscal year 2019 in El Salvador (29 percent) and Guatemala (8 percent), though homicides increased slightly (4 percent) in Honduras during the same period.[19] Other research notes that U.S. support for expanded application of trauma-informed interventions for communities reduced violence indicators.[20]

More specifically, existing USAID programs in each country point to promising practices. In Guatemala, a Puentes Project supports 25,000 youth in 25 municipali-

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[13] Transparency International, "Corruption Perception Index, 2020," accessed May 3, 2021.

[14] Selee and Ruiz Soto, "The Regional Migration Crisis Is in Central America."

[15] USAID, "Irregular Migration," updated May 4, 2021.

[16] Sarah Bermeo and David Leblang, "Honduras Migration: Climate Change, Violence, and Assistance," (Policy Brief, Center for International Development, March 2021).

[17] Peter J. Meyer, *Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 2020), pg. 19; Michael A. Clemens, "Violence, Development, and Migration Waves: Evidence from Central American Child Migrant Apprehensions," (Center for Global Development, Working Paper 459, July 2017).

[18] U.S. Department of State and USAID, "Progress Report for the United States Strategy for Central America's Plan for Monitoring and Evaluation," accessed May 2, 2021.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Jeff Ernst, Kelly Josh, Eric L. Olson, Kristen Sample, and Ricardo Zúñiga, *U.S. Foreign Aid to the Northern Triangle 2014–2019: Promoting Success by Learning from the Past,* (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, Latin American Program, December 2020).

ties in the Western Highlands with high migration rates to complete their education and find new or better employment, partially by helping private-sector employers expand their businesses and hire trained youth. Another program, Feed the Future, seeks to improve agricultural incomes, improve resilience, and enhance nutritional outcomes for small farmers and their families by providing technical assistance and training on best practices and supporting diversification of income-generating value chains, while working with Government to implement rural development, agricultural, and food security policies.[21]

In Honduras, Empleando Futuros seeks to provide vocational training to at least 7,500 at-risk youth in urban neighborhoods, linking them to jobs with the expectation that at least half of them obtain a job or improve their current employment. A former violence prevention program, Proponte Más, invested in providing family intervention therapy and risk-reduction services to a minimum of 2,000 youth and their families in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, Choloma, Tela, and La Ceiba to prevent them from engaging in crime. To strengthen communities' resilience to economic shocks, a U.S. and Honduran government initiative seeks to generate employment in rural areas and improve watershed management and nutrition to decrease poverty and undernutrition in western Honduras, moving 10,000 families out of extreme poverty and reducing stunting of children below age 5 by 20 percent in targeted communities.[22]

Largely focused on prevention, protection, and prosecution, U.S. assistance in El Salvador generally targets the urban hubs of San Salvador, San Miguel, and Santa Ana which account for most of the irregular migration and insecurity in the country.[23] Aligned with government efforts to establish 55 municipal prevention councils, a former program aimed to expand municipal-led, community-based crime and violence prevention to 114 communities in 20 high-risk municipalities, supporting youth centers and municipal prevention centers nation-wide. Like capacity training programs in Guatemala and Honduras, Bridges for Employment sought to improve technical and soft skills of Salvadoran youth to obtain new jobs and promote linkages between private-sector needs and training centers to reduce youth vulnerability to gang recruitment. Additionally, a Justice Sector Strengthening program aided the Supreme Court, Prosecutor's Office, Public Defender's Office, and the National Police to improve investigation techniques and inter-institutional coordination and establish efficient systems and procedures to facilitate access to justice.[24]

CHALLENGES TO SUCCESSFULLY ADDRESSING THE REGION'S MIGRATION FACTORS

Orienting targeted, community-based assistance and development programs to address the root causes of migration is not enough on its own to produce short- and long-term results. Under Democratic and Republican administrations, the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America has confronted significant challenges both in its design and implementation that have limited its efficacy and presented an incomplete response to migration flows.

Programs and activities funded under the U.S. strategy often lack rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to understand their direct effects on promoting prosperity, enhancing security, and improving governance—as well as their subsequent effects on migration flows. A 2019 Government Accountability Organization report, for instance, documents that "evaluations were conducted unevenly across agencies and sectors" and the existing evaluation plan "does not include a plan for evaluations of projects conducted by agencies other than State and USAID."[25] In other instances, project implementers did not collect vital data to assess progress toward the objectives. Additional transparency and reporting of these indicators, beyond the individual program's achievements, is necessary to isolate the impact on migration flows, particularly in the short term.

A second key challenge in levering U.S. assistance and development to address the root causes of migration is the related and compounding effects of political will and resistance to anticorruption and good governance reforms, particularly considering the varying levels of cooperation across the 3 Central American countries.[26] This challenge proved significantly difficult to overcome under previous efforts to

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[21] USAID, "USAID/Guatemala Country Fact Sheet," updated April 2020.

[22] USAID, "USAID/Honduras Country Fact Sheet," updated August 2018.

[23] USAID, Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) fiscal year 2020–2025, updated on March 24, 2021.

[24] USAID, "USAID/El Salvador Country Fact Sheet," updated July 2018.

[25] U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *U.S. Assistance to Central America: Department of State Should Establish a Comprehensive Plan to Assess Progress toward Prosperity, Governance, and Security* (Washington, DC: GAO, September 2019), pg. 25.

[26] Ernst et al., *U.S. Foreign Aid to the Northern Triangle 2014–2019.*

couple the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America and the Plan of Alliance for Prosperity in Central America, through which the 3 countries committed to a 5-year investment of $22 billion to create incentives for people to remain in their own countries, but lacked transparency to evaluate project accomplishments.[27] In the next phase of the U.S. strategy led by the Biden administration, the withdrawal of international anti-corruption agencies from Guatemala and Honduras, and more recently an overhaul of the Constitutional Court and the Attorney General in El Salvador, pose significant doubts of political will to enact reforms in the region.

One option to bolster political will in the region is to reexamine and restructure the layered conditions on foreign aid that these Central America governments must meet to disburse assistance under the U.S. strategy. For example, the Secretary of State must certify that individual governments are addressing 16 different issues of Congressional concern prior to releasing 50 percent of assistance approved by Congress.[28] To maintain continuity among programs deemed effective in reducing irregular migration, Congress should consider lowering requirements to disburse key types of assistance—like humanitarian and food security programs—while increasing requirements for other types of assistance to leverage political will. Still, balancing investment priorities and withholding criteria, which at times has included requirements to step-up migration management, in practice requires careful consideration to avoid counterproductive delays in program implementation as has occurred in previous iterations of the U.S. strategy.

At the same time, the United States Government and international organizations can tackle these challenges by incorporating actors from civil society and the private sector into the design of these programs to foster a sense of co-responsibility and subsequently raise government accountability. Following the promising model of community-level assistance programs that leverage existing resources across government institutions, establishing this multi-dimensional approach to addressing the factors of migration may lead to more sustainable results.

CONCLUSIONS

Breaking the boom-and-bust cycles of migration flows at the U.S.-Mexico border and in the region requires a steadfast and long-term commitment to changing the conditions propelling migrants to leave Central America. Yet, tailored, community-based assistance and development programs that focus on violence prevention and food security for at-risk populations can reshape irregular migration from Central America in the near term. To build successful programs, governments, policy makers, and program implementors should consider the following recommendations:

1. Assistance programs that provide financial support or skills training while simultaneously strengthening local opportunities are best positioned to lessen irregular migration flows;
2. Building in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the design of programs promotes sustainability of successful programs and flexibility to amend them if they are not efficient for particular populations;
3. Adjusting country-specific withholding requirements to disburse key types of assistance quickly can strengthen continuity and build on program results; and
4. Incorporating actors from civil society and the private sector in the design of programs fosters a sense of co-responsibility and raises government accountability.

Through a combination of smart development assistance and investments that support governance measures in the region, the United States can help alleviate deep-rooted economic stagnation, violence, crime and promote local resilience to climate change in Central America. But even in the best-case scenario, development assistance alone is not enough to reduce irregular migration. Rather, assistance programs should be considered complementary to the other pillars of an effective regional migration system. Laying a foundation that promotes efficient and fair asylum systems, legal employment pathways, and immigration enforcement based on rule of law is the best combination to promote safe, legal, and orderly migration. Under this regional system, migration management is the responsibility of every country, and as institutional capacity improves, the region will be better equipped to respond to changes in migration flows.

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[27] Peter J. Meyer, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Review Service, November 2019).

[28] Ibid.

Chairman CORREA. I recognize Sheriff Hinkley to summarize his statement for 5 minutes. Welcome, sir. Sheriff Hinkley, welcome, sir.

STATEMENT OF STEVEN HINKLEY, SHERIFF, CALHOUN COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Mr. HINKLEY. Thank you. Good afternoon Congressman Meijer and Members of the subcommittee. For some, I think it may be good morning. I am Sheriff Steve Hinkley with the Calhoun County Sheriff's Office located in Marshall, Michigan. I am pleased to testify before the subcommittee today to discuss the crisis at the Southern Border and how it may impact northern communities when unaccompanied children are placed into communities for temporary or long-term sheltering.

On or around April 12 of this year, over 100 unaccompanied migrant children arrived at a location called Starr Commonwealth, which is in the Sheridan Township in Calhoun County. At this time, there was little, if any, information communicated with local officials regarding plans for the potential impact to the local communities.

With already razor-thin emergency services existing in many communities, including ours, we were extremely concerned on the burden that it may cause to local citizens. Eventually Starr Commonwealth communicated that the Federal Government would handle all aspects of housing needs, and there would be absolutely no impact to any local community services.

Unfortunately, most of that information proved to be inaccurate. And a much deeper overhaul assessment must be considered and outlined, regarding our local emergency services laws and capabilities.

The Federal Protection Services have been assigned to secure the perimeter of the campus with missions including unauthorized entry and exit from the 305-acre campus. It was really critical to understand the legal role and the authority of specific law enforcement agencies and it is impossible that the Federal protection agencies can enforce State or local laws. Simply said, the property of Starr Commonwealth is propriety. It is not Federal property and it does not fall under any Federal jurisdiction. So, anything that happens on that campus to children, staff, or any individual occupying the campus, falls under the local jurisdiction of the sheriff or the State police.

To say that the local law services may not be affected would be essentially impossible. Shortly after the arrival of the first unaccompanied migrant children to the campus, a meeting was had with the authorities and some clear outlines were established. The Federal protection would be protecting the perimeter of the facility only, and they would not be interacting or policing any of the unaccompanied children in the facility in case there was a crisis or an emergency.

All private security at the facility does not have law enforcement authority. It was made clear that they would not be interacting or assisting during a crisis, that they would monitor and they would call 9–1–1 local law enforcement. Then Starr Commonwealth indicated they did not have any plans for any type of restraint or de-

escalation team in the event there was an emergency crisis with the children. Again, they would call 9–1–1 and emergency services would respond.

To summarize, it is not my intent in any way, shape, or form to take away from the humanitarian message or the role in this case, but it is to outline the importance of collaboration, communication, and most importantly, funding to local jurisdictions that are affected in these cases to build the success of all.

Any type of Federal actions or decisions in these regards will have an enormous impact on emergency services and place partial, if not all, of the safety and security responsibilities in the lap of local authorities.

I thank you and I am humbled to sit here and have this opportunity to testify about my experience. I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hinkley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STEVEN HINKLEY

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON DHS IMMIGRATION CRISIS

Good afternoon Congressman Meijer and Members of the subcommittee, I am Sheriff Steve Hinkley with the Calhoun County Sheriff's Office located in Marshall, Michigan. I am pleased to testify before this subcommittee today to discuss the crisis at the Southern Border and how it may impact northern communities when unaccompanied children are placed into communities for temporary or long-term sheltering.

On or around April 12, 2021, over 100 unaccompanied migrant children arrived at Starr Commonwealth Campus in the Township of Sheridan, Calhoun County, Michigan. At that time, there was little, if any, information communicated with local officials regarding plans or the potential economic impact to our local communities. With razor-thin emergency services already existing in many communities, including ours, we were extremely concerned on the burden it may cause to our local citizens. Eventually, Starr Commonwealth communicated that the Federal Government would handle all aspects of the housing, all needs, and there would be no impact on any local community services. Unfortunately, most of that information is not accurate. A much deeper overall assessment must be considered and outlined regarding our local emergency services, laws, and capabilities.

Federal protective services have been assigned to secure the perimeter of the campus with missions including unauthorized entry and exit from the 305-acre campus. It is critical to understand the legal role and authority of specific law enforcement agencies and it is impossible that Federal protection agencies can enforce State and local laws. Simply said, the property at Starr Commonwealth is proprietary, not Federal property and does not fall under specific Federal jurisdiction. Anything that happens on the campus to children, staff, or any individual occupying the campus, falls under the local jurisdiction of the sheriff and State police. To say that local services may not be affected, is impossible.

Shortly after the arrival of the first unaccompanied migrant children to the campus, a meeting was established with authorities and some clear outlines were established.

- The Federal protection would be protecting the perimeter of the facility only and they would not be interacting or policing any of the unaccompanied children in the facility.
- All private security at the facility does not have law enforcement authority and it was made clear that they would not be interacting with any of the children or staff at the facility. They would only monitor and call 9–1–1 if there was an issue.
- Starr Commonwealth indicated that they did not have any plans for any type of a restraint or de-escalation team in the event there was an issue with any of the children and they again would call 9–1–1 for any type of law enforcement or emergency services.

To summarize, it is not my intent to take away from the humanitarian message or role, but to outline the importance for collaboration, communication, and most importantly funding. Any type of Federal actions or decisions in these regards will

have an enormous impact on emergency services and place partial, if not all, safety and security responsibilities in the lap of local authorities.

I thank you for the opportunity today to testify about my experience and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Chairman CORREA. I am glad you accepted our opportunity to be here today, and we will have some questions for you in a minute. I thank all the witnesses today for their testimony. I will remind the subcommittee Members that each of us will have 5 minutes to question the panel. Now, I will recognize myself for 5 minutes of questions.

I am going to start out by asking Mr. Ruiz Soto, during your testimony, you talked about some good investments have been made in Central America and you talked about some bad investments that maybe empowered corrupt individuals in Central America. Can you elaborate where you see some bad investments that maybe as a Nation that we made and how we can fix that moving forward? I don't want to see American tax dollars end up in a Swiss bank account somewhere.

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. Thank you, Congressman. So, to be clear, one of the key things that we have found is that throughout the U.S. strategy for engagement in Central America, more is needed to be able to provide clear guidance of what is working. What we have so far pointed out—as I mentioned in my testimony, that the most effective programs are doing the focus on smaller, local level practices. The ones that are less effective, at least have less results so far, I should say, are those that focus on the broader sort of issues that go more or less to try to create jobs and without a plan on how to evaluate them.

There is a lot to be said about training programs. I think the best evidence that we found so far is for youth. Especially for youth in municipalities in high migration areas. In other parts of the countries, for example, in Honduras, less is the case and there is less evidence of programs that focus, for example, on tying job opportunities with some other key sectors and private-sector components.

That doesn't mean that these are not reliable and that we should stop them, but what I am saying here is that we should begin to evaluate them better and be able to be more flexible from one program to another.

The key component here that is also important to mention is that these programs are most effective when they have support of the local governments as well. What we saw in El Salvador, for example, is that the smaller investments, even in security measures, were most effective at reducing violence—not just homicides, but violence—when they had the buy-in from the local governments.

Chairman CORREA. Are you saying, Mr. Ruiz, that we have got to have our local folks from the U.S. Embassy, folks that oversee this operation, working with the locals, with the local churches, as opposed to just dropping it in the local Federal Government and hope to God that it goes to the right place?

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. You are right that the programs are most effective when they have the local cooperation and coordination with international partners.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you very much. I am running out of time here. So, very quickly, I want to ask Ms. O'Neil and Mr. Restrepo. We have had spikes in the past, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2019. We have had a terrible situation in Central America about 50, 60 years. Can you make a correlation? Is there a correlation we can draw between these spikes in instability, natural disasters in Central America?

Ms. O'NEIL. I will start and then Dan, I will turn to you. Yes, when there are immediate causes, acute causes, you do tend to see a spike. So, we have seen both from the hurricanes, as well as I would say, COVID–19. You know, the economies are being destroyed.

The one thing I did want to make sure that we have on the table too is, yes, it is Central Americans coming in at some of the peaks that we have seen over the last decade. But it is, again, Mexicans who are starting to come. Particularly, over the last 9 to 12 months we have seen Mexicans——

Chairman CORREA. Why is that?

Ms. O'NEIL [continuing]. Starting to come in.

Chairman CORREA. Why is that?

Ms. O'NEIL. It is many of these same reasons. There is increasing violence in that nation. It is the lack of economic opportunity. It is COVID–19 destroying big parts of the economy there. It is the pull of community ties, family ties, and economic opportunity here in the United States. We are a country that we share a very long border with.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you. Mr. Restrepo.

Mr. RESTREPO. Yes, so, it comes from in part, a response to detonating events, right? So, it is the storms that hit the region in late 2020. It is COVID. But there is also steady peak. It is also from—we have, and Ariel got to this—you need a systemic—people are on the move for a bunch of different reasons. But we don't actually have a system that accommodates any of the reasons, right? We have a kind-of one place, one door, one place where if you are on the move because you need protection, you can't find it close to home. Or if you are looking for family reunification, there is no line to get into. There is no means of doing that legally.

So, you are forcing everybody to come to the U.S. border. We have been doing this for decades—this is not new—to claim asylum. That is why part of this response is addressing these acute causes, these root causes, but also setting up mechanisms so people have optionality. So, you can order this migration. This isn't that many people on the move if it were orderly. If it were orderly, it can be safe. It can be humane. It can be lawful. But right now, we are kind-of funneling everybody to that pressure point that is the U.S.-Mexico border in a way that simply doesn't make sense given the number of reasons people are on the move and have been over the last 30 years, really.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you very much. I'm out of time. So, let me now recognize our Ranking Member, Mr. Meijer, for 5 minutes of questions. Welcome, sir.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to build on those remarks by continuing with Mr. Restrepo, a quick question. How have we seen the shifts over time between individuals crossing the

border with an eye toward employment and then sending remittances back to a home country versus full-on relocation?

Mr. RESTREPO. So, we have seen a couple of different things happen over the course of the last couple of decades. No. 1, is that we have generally seen, until this past year, a decrease in Mexican migration. Mexican migration had been largely single adults coming to work seeking employment in the United States. We have also seen them be replaced by initially single adult Central Americans on the move for a very similar set of reasons.

Over the course of the last roughly decade—a little bit less—you have seen a real increase first in unaccompanied minors. So, folks that are 17 and younger coming to the United States and presenting for asylum purposes, and family units. So, I think that goes to this issue that there are a bunch of—right now, you are seeing basically all of the above for the reasons discussed. The storms, COVID, family reunification, protection needs. So, you have this kind-of diverse group of folks who are on the move or who have this—who are being impelled to move for a different set of reasons, but really no system that brings any order to that, right? That channels it to places. Quite frankly, having places to channel folks actually also enhances your enforcement ability, right? Because if you are enforcing, you want to be sending people somewhere, rather than just saying you just can't come, right? Because as we have seen over the course of, again, 30 years, folks are going to come. The question is how do you most cost-effectively, most humanly, and most effectively order those types of movement?

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Restrepo. Again, I want to thank the Chairman for allowing us to also be, you know, drawing the contrast between not only what may seem remote and that is what is occurring in Mexico in their northern tribal countries, but then also how we are experiencing those kind of distant patterns, those distant trends, those distant issues, and how that is making an impact here at home as well.

So, I want to shift to Sheriff Hinkley. Sheriff, in your testimony, you outlined a few challenges that you have been confronting within Michigan as a result of housing immigrant children at Starr Commonwealth. So, this administration has opened several emergency intake sites similar to Starr Commonwealth to help HHS deal with the influx of unaccompanied children coming to the Southern Border this year.

Could you please talk a little more about these challenges and how local law enforcement, including your sheriff's department, has had to adapt in order to meet them?

Mr. HINKLEY. Absolutely. So, this, I mean, this is an interesting situation when we have children in our jurisdiction that our State law has already provided significant protection for children in our communities. So, when the children are in our jurisdiction and the Federal authorities—and let me start this off by saying this has been a fantastic relationship. We have had great communication. But this is surrounding funding. When it comes back to—we were trying to make sure that all of our State law obligations were met with the children that are on the campus there, and so, when there is a crisis or an emergency, local law enforcement has to be involved.

I would like to say initially they had asked for a number of—our community services officers to be on the campus to be plugged in. Then we eventually found out that there was absolutely no funding to make that happen. Our intent was to make sure that all of the State law guidelines were being met with the children so, we both had the same—everyone had the same goal here for success. We just didn't have the funding to make that happen. There were so many other things, including law enforcement and mental health and our sexual assault services investigations in the county that is going to be affected by this impact and there is just no funding to offset it.

Mr. MEIJER. Then, Sheriff, could you speak to just your impressions, you know, are you witnessing—I know you have spoken positively at least of kind-of the interactions of communication. Were you under the impression that these were kind-of well-developed plans or something that was put together a little bit more in haste?

Mr. HINKLEY. Yes, absolutely. It was very, very unexpected and if we had to do this over again, I would have rather had this conversation a month out and we were able to establish those plans and how the Federal laws interact with State laws so everything was taken care of. It just—it just didn't happen. It was very unexpected and when you are in the middle of the budget cycle for your own department, and you are asked to do more services and you just don't have the funding to do that, it was—it is a crisis here at our agency, also, trying to make sure that these are all met.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Sheriff, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to continuing working on this and I yield back.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Meijer. Now, I recognize Ms. Titus for 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for having this hearing. I have a number of people from this area. In my district, many of them are TPS holders, especially from El Salvador and Honduras. I want to ask about the impacts of not keeping that TPS protection.

But first, let me go to the problem of climate change. It has been mentioned by almost all the speakers and we have certainly seen how it exacerbates the problems of poverty in this Northern Triangle. I think the statistics from the U.N. World Food Program shows that food insecurity just in 2020 increased from 1.6 to almost double to 3.0 million people. So, I wonder if Ms. O'Neil would just describe briefly what the immediate need for food is and what we can do to set up sustainable agriculture or infrastructure to not just give you a fish but teach you how to fish. Can we ensure that with the corruption in government that this will get to the people who need it?

Ms. O'NEIL. Great, thank you, Congresswoman. Yes, climate change has hit this part of the world incredibly hard and many of these countries have parts of their countries where there has been drought for 6, 7, or more years. So, it has been incredibly difficult and leaving millions food insecure with all kinds of deleterious effects of the like.

What can we do? I mean, especially given the hurricanes, given COVID, given, you know, many of these economies have shut down. There is a direct need for food that the United States can fill in

weeks, months, today. I think that is important. So, there is the short-term acute response that I think the United States should fill.

There is a longer-term response, and I started mentioning that. But I do think there is—these—for farmers to stay on their land, and keep their land, and not lose their land when their crops fail, they need to change the kinds of things they grow. They need to grow them in different ways and they need to find new markets and, hopefully, cut out middlemen and others so they can earn more for each type of produce that they grow or each crop that they had.

So, that can involve things like setting up irrigation and drainage, managing water systems differently, as Ariel had mentioned. It can mean helping farmers switch to other crops that they are not familiar with. So, some technical training and the like to get to that point.

Then it can be, you know, how can you help some of these communities come together and do, you know, fair trade coffee where they get paid much more per pound than they would today for other kinds. So, there is a lot of things there that is the teaching to fish. But it is really, these are farmers. They know how to farm. But helping them get to a different set of markets and a different set of crops that will give them much more to support their families with. Making sure that they get to keep their land because sometimes what happens when your crop fails, you lose your land because of your debts. Then you are, you know, you are out of that whole game. You are looking for somewhere to go, which could be a city in Central America or it could be the United States.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much. Mr. Restrepo, you mentioned that ending DACA and TPS would have put additional strains on existing governments. I wonder if you and Mr. Ruiz Soto would comment on that. The House has passed the Promise Act and extended provisions for TPS holders. Many have been here for generations.

Mr. RESTREPO. Correct.

Ms. TITUS. That is a burden that just sending them back or not giving them that security puts on home governments, which adds to that push factor for other immigration. No longer would they have the remittances that are occurring now. But also, they would have more people to serve and fewer resources.

Mr. RESTREPO. That is precisely right, Congresswoman. There is several kinds of layers of effect, if you will, in terms of what—a termination of TPS. For these communities, who as you rightly point out, have now been in the United States for decades, who are very much a part of our societies and part of our communities. So, you disrupt that remittance flow, you would bring in—it is actually you have an interesting labor market effect also in the countries themselves in that you would be sending back more skilled workers. Folks who have acquired skills here in the United States who would displace lessor-skilled workers in these countries, making them more prone to migrate.

So, it is kind-of you have a knock-on—kind-of a bunch of negative knock-on effects. You would cut a remittance flow that has allowed people to stay in place. You would be displacing a particular kind

of migration-vulnerable segment of the population with these kind of displaced workers back into these countries. So, it would be a lose-lose-lose. We would lose here in the United States where these folks are already members of our community. We would disrupt part of the economies in these countries that allows people to stay and live out their dreams in their home communities in the region. You would displace a segment of a work force that is already under enormous stress and make them more likely to migrate. So, the termination of temporary protective status, again, is kind-of a lose-lose-lose proposition.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. That was great. That is an argument we need to make more effectively.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Ms. Titus. Now, I would like to recognize Mr. Bishop from North Carolina for 5 minutes of questions. Welcome, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One thing Mr. Restrepo, I thought I heard your testimony. You said, I think, that the powers that be in Northern Triangle countries treat people as export commodities. Is that what I understood?

Mr. RESTREPO. That is correct, Congressman.

Mr. BISHOP. If that is the case, isn't it important that American policies be decidedly organized to deter, you know, not to enable that practice?

Mr. RESTREPO. I think U.S. policy—and that was exactly my point—should be to disrupt that practice. What do I mean by that? The U.S. policy should be on behalf of free market competition in these economies. These economies serve a very small number of people. There is an enormous amount of economic concentration. Those folks just build higher walls and hire more private security to protect them from their own population. There is more private security in Guatemala today than there is public security. That should tell us a lot about that Guatemala's not really working as a society. That those folks are the problem. So, we should be—United States should be actively promoting market economics in these countries to give folks—Shannon was talking about it earlier—to give these farmers an opportunity to get a fair price for their goods. The farmer who gets a fair price is much likelier to stay in their country than a farmer who is working at barely subsistence levels for kind of big coffee in this case. Those folks can just kind-of be moved out of the country, less social cost, and they send back remittances.

Mr. BISHOP. I get the picture. Let me follow up. So, isn't it—doesn't it seem sort of implausible—I know you were talking about—or somebody was making reference to a $4 billion spending plan the President is talking about. Doesn't it seem somewhat implausible that these societies and the way they have been set up, that you have this exploitation that you describe, doesn't it seem implausible that the United States about sending in more money to these—I understand you don't want to send them into the hands of the governments that you regard as corrupt. That is not going to give rise to a system that suddenly becomes successful, is it?

Mr. RESTREPO. It certainly can. It certainly can contribute. Again, it is about empowering folks. It is not that the United States is going to come in and do this. There are plenty of folks

in civil society, in the private sector, in these Central American countries who want a better system. Who are, kind-of demanding a better system, but, again, the system is rigged against them. I think if the United States comes in effectively be that $4 billion or obviously, the Congress gets to decide that number, but make sure you target it in the right way to disrupt these—again it is a small number of folks who are—who have rigged this system. If the United States comes in on behalf of everyone else in Central America, I think absolutely the United States can make a positive difference and that can affect migration positively both for the region and for ourselves.

Mr. BISHOP. So, it just seems to me more plausible that governments are formed, societies that become successful, do so by their own internal decisions. I am skeptical that you are going to get foreign countries to solve these problems for these countries.

But let me talk about what is happening in the United States for a moment and let me ask Sheriff Hinkley. The impacts you were describing were on a private campus. Are these unaccompanied minors who are being cared for? Is that who you are referring to, the hundred that arrived in Michigan?

Mr. HINKLEY. Yes, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. I understand also you have family units with small children coming in and they are being distributed throughout the United States and then some are waiting. Are you aware of personally, or have you heard about any of that in your community?

Mr. HINKLEY. I have not. Only children, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. You were illustrating one point, one impact, local police resources and you mentioned mental health services. I assume there are going to be—at some point these children are going to move off this private campus, right?

Mr. HINKLEY. That is my understanding that they are going to be moved to private families somewhere in the United States.

Mr. BISHOP. Presumably, they will need to be educated. They will need health care. Do you have any information about the capacity of the recipient families or recipient persons to meet all of their own economic needs as well as for these unaccompanied minors?

Mr. HINKLEY. None. No, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. You are describing that their resources are constrained in the United States for public services of all these kinds, wouldn't you say?

Mr. HINKLEY. Yes, sir, absolutely.

Mr. BISHOP. So, if we are sending $4 billion to try to change what hasn't been done by these nations abroad, do you believe this $4 billion could be useful in the United States to try to ameliorate the problems here?

Mr. HINKLEY. I certainly do, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. My time has expired. Thank you.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Bishop. Now, I would like to recognize Mr. Torres of New York for 5 minutes of questions. Welcome, sir.

Mr. TORRES. Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, it is important to note that migration is an episodic event. It is not unique to the Biden administration. There had been waves of migration in 2014 during the Obama administration, 2019 during the Trump admin-

istration, and now, in 2021. So, President Biden is hardly the only President to manage a wave of migration. He is the only President, however, to do so during an infectious disease outbreak, which has put unprecedented constraints on the shelter capacity of the Federal Government, particularly, Health and Human Services. So, I would hope instead of demagoguing the issue of immigration and scapegoating the President, as too many Republicans have done, we ought to commit ourselves to seriously grappling with the root causes of episodic migration.

We should ask ourselves why are these migrants fleeing their home country? Why are they taking the treacherous journey from their home country to the U.S.-Mexico border? My first question is for the Center for American Progress. Is it fair to say that migrants flee their home country because of instability at home?

Mr. RESTREPO. Absolutely, among other reasons, absolutely.

Mr. TORRES. What did the Trump administration do to address the instability driving the migration?

Mr. RESTREPO. Very little. One might argue they took steps that undermined stability in those countries. For example, turning a blind eye to Juan Orlando Hernandez in Honduras, stealing the Presidential election several years ago led to an immediate rise in migration thereafter. And left Honduras in the hands of somebody who has now been named and identified as an unindicted co-conspirator in successful drug prosecutions in the United States Federal District Court against his brother and other Honduran kingpins.

Mr. TORRES. By contrast, what does the Biden administration profess to do to address the instability driving immigration?

Mr. RESTREPO. A number of things. To address the acute causes and more humanitarian assistance right now to deal with food insecurity and to help put people back to work rebuilding their community. Then going after corruption. So, anti-corruption issues, efforts, transparency efforts, addressing gender-based violence, addressing the insecurities that affect too many people in these countries, in many of the ways that myself and my colleagues here on the panel have been talking about.

Mr. TORRES. I have heard several Republicans raise questions about the efficacy of humanitarian assistance, but humanitarian assistance has a successful track record in history. I mean, certainly, the Marshall Plan was a success. Is that a fair characterization?

Mr. RESTREPO. Absolutely.

Mr. TORRES. Is it fair to say that migrants who are risking their lives on the treacherous journey are doing so because of their inability to apply for asylum from within their home countries?

Mr. RESTREPO. Certainly, there aren't lines to get in. There aren't mechanisms for protection close enough to home or for the other reasons the people are on the move.

Mr. TORRES. Right, so, you have the Central American Minors Program. That program was suspended by the Trump administration, correct?

Mr. RESTREPO. Correct. I think my co-panelist, Ariel is more expert in the efforts to get it back up and running.

Mr. TORRES. Is it—then I will address the question to your co-panelist. Is it fair to say that the Trump administration's suspension of the Central American Minors Program is one example of how the Trump administration made the situation at the border worse for the Biden administration?

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. Well, it certainly really did cause a disruption for what we could do. But the program itself also from the beginning had a small number of recipients. So, in the future, I think one of the things that we have been looking at here is to try to increase how it is implemented so that it is able to reach a higher population.

Mr. TORRES. How do we bolster the implementation of the program, the participation in the program?

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. Just very briefly, 2 quick things that can be done; No. 1 is how it is defined of who is able to petition for children. Right now, at least in the past iteration of it, it was focusing on people who could prove they were with lawful presence in the United States. That included TPS holders. But we do know that there is a significant number of other families that wouldn't be able to petition for their children. No. 2, it is because the CAM allocations are actually directed to the refugee resettlement numbers and so, therefore, that also potentially should be increased to actually increase the capacity of people that are coming through.

Mr. TORRES. Do you think the American people would want their country to close the borders to unaccompanied minors? Do you think most Americans would wish that outcome on other people's children?

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. I don't think so. I think there is public opinion that has said that there should be a better way to provide humanitarian processing. It is really trying to see, as I think Dan mentioned earlier, how can we make the process better so that people can at the border, but also in their countries, have better access to protection assistance.

Mr. TORRES. Most of the migrants who are coming here have family here in the United States, correct?

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. There is a large segment of them that do, especially from El Salvador and from Guatemala. Honduras is slightly a different case, but certainly from El Salvador.

Mr. TORRES. So, we should strive toward humane reunification between these migrants and their families here.

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. That is one example and one key, I guess, area that we have been looking at at MPI and we want to continue to do that further. So, yes, it definitely should be one of the keys of the components in relation to the regional immigration strategy that I outlined earlier.

Mr. TORRES. I cannot see the clock, but I am sure my time has expired. So, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Torres. Now, I would like to call on Ms. Harshbarger for 5 minutes of questions. Welcome, ma'am.

Ms. HARSHBARGER Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Meijer. You know, we all have a heart for these children. I mean, nobody wants anybody to go hungry and nobody wants anybody to suffer persecution. But we are a country of laws. As Rep-

resentative Meijer said, we were at the border. We saw how many unaccompanied minors are there. Those children don't want to be there.

It is like me sending my son, sending my grandchildren across the border by themselves. It is terrible. There are so many factors that brought them here, but what about those people trying to get in here legally? There are push and pull factors for them as well.

I guess, I have some questions. You know, the Biden administration canceled the Asylum Cooperative Agreements with Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. This is open to anyone who wants to answer. Were the agreements effective in helping these countries build up their asylum and refugee programs?

Mr. RESTREPO. I will take a shot at that Congresswoman. They were not effective. So, they were neither effective in kind-of building out refugee and asylum programs in these countries, which is actually a very important element of creating a migration system that meets the needs of folks as close to home as possible. So, the idea of doing that is an important one.

The ACAs were not achieving that. Nor were they particularly effective for the purpose that they were laid out. It was to redirect migrants. Only a couple hundred people were ever moved or repatriated under the ACAs. So, they weren't effective in creating more asylum and refugee capacity in the region. Nor were they particularly effective for the use, the limited use that the Trump administration put it to, of redirecting people who were arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. If I could—could I just a quick comment?

Ms. HARSHBARGER Go ahead.

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. It is just to point out that, again, one of the key components of the ACA is that I do think it should be followed up and it is part of our regional immigration system plan that I suggested is to try to increase the capacity of specific countries. But I think it does require a specific focus on which capacities are easiest to upgrade, for example. We know very little about Honduras and El Salvador. Guatemala seemed to be having a particular opportunity here. I think with significant efforts and with, again, the buy-in from the political governments there, we could begin to think of other ways that we can implement protection mechanisms. Because I think as others have mentioned in this panel, it is important for people to have access to protection closer to home in a way that makes it easier for them to be safe.

Ms. HARSHBARGER OK. Ms. O'Neil, do you know how much aid goes to different efforts like the agricultural program's approach to, I guess, reduce domestic violence or curb corruption and Government-directed trafficking?

Ms. O'NEIL. Well, the different programs have changed over time. So, as we think about this particular time, and most of them, many of them were frozen or paused in the last couple of years. So, there has been very little that has gone to those programs.

But when you look back at the Alliance for Prosperity, it was roughly $750 million from, I guess, 2016 to 2018. So, there were many different areas, but those were some of the areas that received, you know, probably in tens of millions of dollars depending on which ones. You know, what we do know from some of the eval-

uations that are out there and as my colleague, Ariel, was saying, we need to make sure evaluations are put into these programs so we see what works. What we do know is often place-based, where you focus on one particular place and you try to deal with some of the many causes that lead to an unstable situation that has people leave, that is important. So, some of this layering on. It is also important to focus on places where you do see high migration, right? Those are the places that need more support.

Ms. HARSHBARGER Well, we absolutely need measures in place for that. I do have one last question for Mr. Hinkley. Were you told that those unaccompanied minors were coming to your area before they got there?

Mr. HINKLEY. No, ma'am.

Ms. HARSHBARGER You weren't.

Mr. HINKLEY. No, ma'am.

Ms. HARSHBARGER You had no way—OK, no way of knowing or—and I have heard this over and over at different places that they received these children, didn't know they were going to come. We have colleagues in Texas that experienced the same thing. You know, just like the Border Patrol, 50 percent of their operating budget is being used to help with snacks, help with doctors, help with formula. We need to talk together in a bipartisan way and come up with a solution. That is just the bottom line. I yield back, sir.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Ms. Harshbarger. Any other Members that we haven't called on that I am not seeing here? That being the case, what I would like to do, Mr. Meijer, is go to a second round of questions, if I may. I would like to go back to all questions for everybody.

I understand President Biden has restarted the Central American Minors Program that allows children to apply for asylum in their home country. This is important because all of us have seen those children at the border. Sheriff Hinkley, you dealt with children, unaccompanied minors. There has got to be a better way to do this. I think the way to do it is to start by being able to keep those children at home, safe. Be able to apply for asylum at home. Those young ladies that I saw that were sexually attacked on their trip. The 3- and 5-year-old girls that were thrown over the border wall inhumanely looking for certain death.

This is just not a good way to do business. Question to all of you. How do we get this program up and running as quickly as possible and how do we keep those kids safe in their home country? Ms. O'Neil.

Ms. O'NEIL. I mean, a lot of the things that we have been addressing here. Trying to address the acute and the long-term factors in the long run will make those communities safer so fewer of these kids need to apply for asylum. So, that is one side, right?

The other side is can we make it possible? I mean, they are applying for asylum. They are leaving their communities because they are dangerous. So, yes, we can set up places in those countries in other neighborhoods or in other places within a particular country. We can set up asylum places where they can go in a neighboring country. But we can also, and we need to here in the United States, fix our own asylum system so that when they do come to

the border, they are not being thrown over the border because the line is a million people long, but because there is actually an efficient way at our border for them to come and see a judge to have their case adjudicated and to go through a process.

So, that will take, you know, the resources of the United States. But it is our asylum system that——

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Ms. O'Neil. I am running out of time here. So, Sheriff Hinkley, I would like to ask you. Your concern, and it is a valid one, you didn't get a heads-up. You just got somebody saying we got a bunch of children we want you to take care of. That is just not a good way to run an operation. There has got to be a better way of coordinating. What do you recommend we do next time? What do we tell the Federal Government in terms of working with our local people as well? I am very close to my local folks here, my local sheriff, local police departments. You all want a heads-up. What do we need to do?

Mr. HINKLEY. Absolutely. We need—this needs to be preplanned. We need to sit down and we need to assess every community service that will be affected. We need to decide how those affected will be funded. We need to sit down and we need to be able to discuss how the Federal law and the State law interact. They both have the same intent. But we have to be able when this happens, we have to be able to make sure that we serve both State and Federal laws. It just, you know, it just brings chaos and uncertainty when there isn't precommunication when these things are happening. Primarily, funding for local services that are affected.

Chairman CORREA. No unfunded mandates is what you are saying. Mr. Restrepo, how do we kickstart this Central American Minors Program at home?

Mr. RESTREPO. The Central Minors Program is building out the capacity in the ways Ariel talked about earlier in terms—and who is eligible to make the claims here from the United States. That is a big piece of the puzzle. In terms of which families do we want to allow reunification to take place in. Because a lot of these kids are leaving absolutely desperate straits, but they are also in search of a parent who is already in the United States. So, we need to factor that into how this gets built out.

Chairman CORREA. So, you——

Mr. RESTREPO. Yes.

Chairman CORREA. Mr. Restrepo, you bring up an important point. Which, Sheriff Hinkley, when I was at the border, those kids I talked to them in their language and they said we are here to meet up with somebody. They all had somebody. The fact that maybe that information was not communicated to you, I think, is just a dereliction of duty. We have to make sure all this information is funneled to you so you know what the heck you are dealing with and you can be part of the solution, as opposed to trying to figure how to put out a challenge, you can help. So, you know, let us figure out how to help you, Sheriff, at the local level.

Ariel, in the last 20 seconds, how do we kickstart this minors program?

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. So, it starts with trying to implement, again, the broad outlines in the processing from the countries. I think we have learned some really good opportunities in El Salvador work-

ing with, for example, the embassy there to try to make sure there is a better coordination of it within the embassy as well.

Now, a lot of the things that really delayed the program the last time that it was in effect, was that there is a long delay between processing times and for the people to be able to come here. So, if there was something that we could to expediate the process, I think that could be beneficial for the children, but also for the parents in the process sending that clear messaging as well, is something that is important.

Chairman CORREA. A message that the program actually works and you can stay home and do it from there.

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. That is correct.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you very much. Ranking Member Meijer, you are up for 5 minutes, sir.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that we are doing another round of questioning because, again, I think it is important that we continue to dive in. I want to switch slightly and just ask, well, I guess from a baseline, you know, we talk and divide things into the push factors and the pull factors. You know, we should hope that our country is always one that folks want to come to or we will have much bigger problems if that is ever not the case.

At the same time, you know, we have seen a degradation and a lack of functioning in our legal immigration system. We have seen the polarization of many areas that used to be quite bipartisan, or there was a consensus around. I think of border security a decade ago being a pretty bipartisan agreement. Then some of that has broken down, unfortunately.

So, I want to ask our panelists a little bit about the impact of that pull factor with the impact of rhetoric and of expectation. You know, how can elected officials in this country be most clear not going far to demonization, but also offering a level set of expectations when communicating our kind of border situation and our immigration policies and conversely, you know, how is that being—what is the best way to make sure that that is received accurately so we are not creating unfounded hope or expectations within Northern Triangle countries? I am not sure if Mr. Soto or Ms. O'Neil or Mr. Restrepo, please.

Mr. RESTREPO. I will take a shot, at least an initial shot. So, I think a couple of things are important to keep in mind here, Congressman. One, is that as hard as it is to believe it is not always about us, in terms of what we are saying here and how it is being heard in the region. A lot of this movement is because of on the ground facts of life in the region that are independent of U.S. policy, right? You can see that the example of just look at the last 3 kind-of significant increases in migration. They have occurred with wildly different postures by the United States.

The highest month on record at the moment is still May 2019, when we had President Trump's policies firmly in place. So, it is not as often about U.S. policy, migration policy, as I think often gets kind-of factored into our own debate.

Mr. MEIJER. That is well-understood. That is obviously,——

Mr. RESTREPO. Yes, right.

Mr. MEIJER [continuing]. You know, there is a push and pull, you know, we can affect more the pull than the push.

Mr. RESTREPO. Yes. The other thing that I think is—that is important here, is how we communicate and how dis- and misinformation play a role here. Because a lot of this kind of organizing in the migratory flow and in the migratory system is done through social media and is done through, quite frankly, smugglers who create mis- and disinformation to create kind-of the impression that things are different than they are at the U.S.-Mexico border. I think that is very much the case right now and has been in the last few months. So, this communication that matters is taking place in channels that I think sometimes as a Government, we don't really understand as well, or certainly don't really have the built-in capacity to communicate through.

The last point, and leave it to my fellow panelists, a lot of this communication actually doesn't even take place in Spanish. Which is another one of those things we need to get into our head. It takes place in indigenous languages. Because a lot of the folks who are on the move, particularly in a country like Guatemala that is so fundamentally divided on racial grounds, on ethic grounds. The most vulnerable populations are the most marginalized and those are indigenous communities and they are being communicated to in indigenous languages and being misinformed in indigenous languages by folks who are preying on them and preying on their desperate situation. I think that is something we all need to think more about how we counteract that kind of information flow.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you. I want to give enough time for Ms. O'Neil and Mr. Soto, if they want to chip in on that.

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. Just a 10-second response here. Messaging only matters because of policy, of course, it is policy setting. But also in this case, messaging matters because it lays out the foundation for the other partners in the region to actually be able to respond quickly to what we can do.

Essentially, what I am saying here is that by focusing on what the United States is working on, you can allow and provide assistance and collaboration with, for example, Mexico and Guatemala in this case, who then can also be partners in that same messaging and harmonize those efforts.

Mr. MEIJER. Ms. O'Neil.

Ms. O'NEIL. The last thing I would say is messaging would help if we have a message to give them that there is another alternative besides showing up at the U.S.-Mexico border, right? Back to Dan's point about there is only one funnel and you just put everybody there. Whatever their concerns are, whatever reasons they are coming, if we did have Central American Minors Programs, if we did have these things, then you can message about those. And lead people in different directions that is more effective all around.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Meijer. Now, I would like to call on Mr. Bishop for 5 minutes of questions, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to—Mr. Restrepo, I think you just said a minute ago that the peak was in May 2019. Were you talking about illegal crossings?

Mr. RESTREPO. A recent peak, yes, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. Well, I don't know if anybody can see this. I hope this works on it. But this is the chart that, you know, that CBP has done. Everybody has seen this chart I will bet. It looks like it is coming up. I don't know if one is working. Next to it is a line, and my understanding is that the line this year is a March interceptions or apprehensions of 172,000 was the highest in 15 or 20 years based on this. First of all, isn't that correct?

[The information follows:]

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Encounters
US Border Patrol (USBP) Title 8 Apprehensions,
Office of Field Operations (OFO) Title 8 Inadmissible Volumes,
and Title 42 Expulsions by Fiscal Year (FY)

FY
All

Component
All

Demographic
All

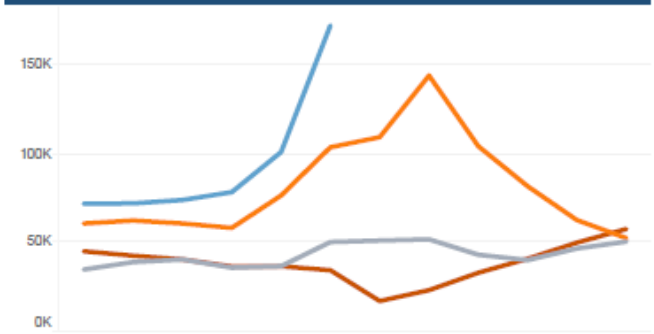
Citizenship Grouping
All

Title of Authority
All

Reset Filters

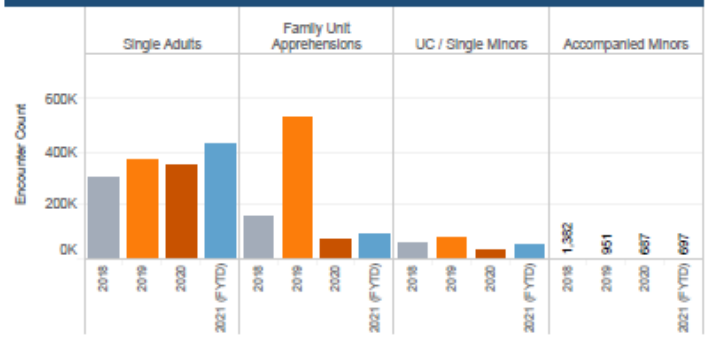
FY 2018 2019 2020 2021 (FYTD)

FY Southwest Land Border Encounters by Month



	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	Total
2021 (FYTD)	71,945	72,111	74,020	78,444	101,028	172,331							569,879
2020	45,139	42,643	40,565	36,585	36,697	34,450	17,106	23,237	33,049	40,929	50,014	57,674	458,088
2019	60,781	62,459	60,794	58,317	76,545	103,731	109,415	144,116	104,311	81,777	62,707	52,546	977,509
2018	34,871	39,051	40,519	35,905	36,751	50,347	51,168	51,862	43,180	40,149	46,719	50,568	521,090

FY Comparison by Demographic



Source: USBP and OFO official year end reporting for FY18-FY20; USBP and OFO month end reporting for FY21 to date. Data is current as of 4/3/2021.

Mr. RESTREPO. In terms of the number of apprehensions, absolutely. But one of the things that is happening right now that was not happening in May 2019, is you have very high recidivism rates. Where you have, because of Title 42 expulsion, that 170-some-odd-thousand includes many of the same people on multiple occasions in a way that was not true in May 2019. So, you probably had more unique individuals in May 2019, than you do—than you did last month.

Mr. BISHOP. OK. So, I hear your point on that. But also, in May 2019, what is interesting is that thing looks like a mountain. It goes to the top and then it goes to the bottom. I understand the CNN data they are projecting—we will see the data in a day or 2, but April is going to be little higher, yet. So, it may be 174,000 they were projecting. So, it is going to plateau at that 20-year unpreceded peak level. I don't know where it goes from there, but in terms of what the response has been from the administration, the response is oriented, it seems to me, toward increasing throughput. So, what they tout as a success is the reduction in the amount of time unaccompanied minors were spending in the custody of Border Patrol. The reason for that is they say that is advantage just because they are getting the hands of ORR, Office of Refugee Resettlement. They are going to go—they described to us—plans to go from 16,000 beds on the border for unaccompanied minors to 60. They are going to turn those beds over every 24 days or so and send all those people into the United States. Is that a recipe for success?

Mr. RESTREPO. It is a recipe with complying with U.S. law, Congressman, which, I think, is successful, right? If you are effectively——

Mr. BISHOP. I am not——

Mr. RESTREPO. If you are effectively compliant with——

Mr. BISHOP [continuing]. Asking so much what the law is, I am asking—you are talking about what we should be seeking to do. It seems to me that, that is flirting with disaster. If the policy response from the Federal—from the administration is to just bring the people in illegally faster, and distribute them through the United States, that can't possible solve the problem, can it?

Mr. RESTREPO. Sir, but you just said bring the people in illegally. But, again, this is in compliance with the United States law. And I think——

Mr. BISHOP. OK,——

Mr. RESTREPO [continuing]. The United States meeting its legal obligations, I think is good Government.

Mr. BISHOP. OK. So, you think that's good Government? That continuing that pattern and responding to it with that policy approach is good Government?

Mr. RESTREPO. I think complying with U.S. law is good Government. I think doing all of the things we have been talking about to bring these numbers down in a sustainable way is also good Government.

Mr. BISHOP. You said that most of these unaccompanied minors are coming in to join somebody in the United States. I don't know if you said if it was a parent. I would assume that given the way they are coming in, presumably those parents or those families

they are going to join must not be very well off or they would be helping them come in some other way, wouldn't you think?

Mr. RESTREPO. There is no other way, sir. That is part of the problem. That is part of what we are talking about. There is not a family reunification mechanism under law today for these families to utilize.

Mr. BISHOP. But it is true that it is an arduous and unsafe and usually cartel-dominated process by which they are coming in, right?

Mr. RESTREPO. Absolutely. Absolutely. I am not arguing that is a good way for people to come.

Mr. BISHOP. If not my premise, would you agree with the conclusion that for the most part, the folks they are coming to join are not economically well-off?

Mr. RESTREPO. The people that are coming to join don't have a legal mechanism for them to come join. I don't think we can——

Mr. BISHOP. That is not what I meant.

Mr. RESTREPO. I understand, but I don't think you can pass judgment—I don't think you can generalize across the board about the economic conditions of the folks they are coming to meet.

Mr. BISHOP. So, we don't know whether or not those people they are coming to meet are capable of providing for their needs.

Mr. RESTREPO. As a general matter, I don't think we can answer that question.

Mr. BISHOP. You would agree with me that all needs that the folks have for Government services in the United States are not completely met, wouldn't you? Resources are constrained.

Mr. RESTREPO. Oh, obviously, resources are constrained, yes, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. So, to the extent we are intensifying demands on those resources, we are worsening that strain.

Mr. RESTREPO. While you are also expanding the tax base. Most of these folks end up paying taxes and don't get the Government benefits that these taxes pay. So, the economic argument here probably cuts in a different direction than the one you are assuming.

Mr. BISHOP. OK. Fair enough. I yield back. My time has expired.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Bishop. Now, I will call on Ms. Harshbarger for another 5 minutes of questions, ma'am.

Ms. HARSHBARGER Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One of the ways the Biden administration plans to address the root causes of migration is by spending another $4 billion in the region. I guess I could ask this to Mr. Ruiz Soto. Will sending these large amounts of aid money to the Northern Triangle countries do anything in that direction or improve the economic conditions there?

Mr. RUIZ SOTO. I'm sorry, Congresswoman, I heard most of what you said, but it was a little bit choppy. But I think your question was how effective would the $4 billion be to meet the conditions of the center. So, one of the key things that we have looked at and back to your question I think you asked in the last round is about how much actually—how much of the funding actually goes toward development assistance? I pulled it up here and it is between fiscal year 2016 to 2019, about 40 percent of the funding from the United States went to development assistance. The other pieces of it were

to narcotics and security, actually, and a little bit of economic support.

But what I was trying to get at with my testimony is that we need to rethink how we provide U.S. assistance so that we can try to target those problems the most effectively. Of course, in the short run, as I mentioned, it is going to take time and it is going to take consistency across several years for these type of programs to actually have a meaningful effect for the majority of population. But that should not prevent us from focusing on the shorter-term goals for meeting the more vulnerable populations there as well.

So, my answer to your question is that it will take several years, if not decades, to try to change the conditions on the ground, even with $4 billion right away.

Ms. HARSHBARGER OK. Mr. Hinkley, I will tell you what I have heard in my district. That is some of these unaccompanied minors are being placed here and they can't speak English. They can't speak Spanish. They can't read Spanish, and they are put into the school systems for the teachers to take care of. You know, recently there was a 16-year-old put into the school system. So, what that does and you could probably address this at the State level, but it goes toward the graduation rate. You know, they have to try to incorporate them into the classrooms. So, that is an added burden on the school system in these small communities. So, do you see that happening where you are at in Michigan as well?

Mr. HINKLEY. Yes. So, that has yet to be seen. Again, locally, that question has been asked. Certainly it is—it is unanswered. So, since we are newly into this, probably less than 30 days into what is happening here, that is a question that has been posed. But we are just not certain. We have not received an answer. But certainly, if that happens, it is certainly going to affect economically and locally our communities, correct.

Ms. HARSHBARGER Yes, and honestly, when the school superintendent asked how the children got there, they couldn't answer them. So, that was a problem. We need to—that is a track-and-trace program that we need in place. Representative Meijer knows we have asked where are these people going? You know, where are they going? How many are going there? We couldn't get an answer.

But I will go back to Mr. Restrepo, you were talking about social media as one of the ways that, of course, we know this, social media is one of the ways they pull these people across the borders. This is one of the pulls if you want to look at it that way. They promise them so many things, these smugglers. It is atrocious that we cannot hold these social media companies accountable. So, give me some ideas. Tell me what we need to do as Congress to stop and hold these social media people accountable.

Mr. RESTREPO. Congresswoman, telecommunications law is little outside my expertise. But I think at a more practical level, I think at the very least, and regardless of what Congress decides to do in terms of how to govern or not social media platforms, I think the U.S. Government needs to communicate much more effectively on those platforms in these spaces to combat the kinds of lies that are being sold to desperate people in northern Central America—northern Central America and southern Mexico. The United States has to be in this information battlespace, if you will, in a way much

more robustly than the United States has ever been. Quite frankly, we are not particularly well set up as a Government to communicate in that way and as nimbly as we need to be able to combat these lies that these smugglers are selling folks.

Ms. HARSHBARGER Yes. Well, that is one of things I am constantly saying. We need to be better messengers of everything we do, period. Get your point across and make it a simple addition, not a calculus problem when we are talking to people, so.

Mr. RESTREPO. Yes, ma'am, absolutely.

Ms. HARSHBARGER I appreciate your answer. I yield back, sir.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you very much. Ms. Harshbarger. Mr. Bishop, I wanted to ask you if you would like to submit for the record your chart, the CBP chart. I have not had a chance to look at it.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to do that. I understand Mr. Meijer has got it to turn in. Thank you for the opportunity. I was about to close.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you very much. We are at the end of our second set of questions. I have 1,000 more questions to ask, but I will ask our Ranking Member if he would like to go for a third set of questions or we can conclude this hearing today.

Mr. MEIJER. Mr. Chairman, I leave it in your hands, sir.

Chairman CORREA. Then what I would like to do is conclude by saying that this was, in my opinion, a very good start to a very challenged issue. Mr. Bishop, I listened to your comments. I think at the end of the day, this is the Western Hemisphere. This is our backyard. We have got to make sure that we are taking care of business in our own backyard. This is going to take a discussion on both sides of the aisle because this has to go beyond 1 or 2 administrations. We got to keep watching long-term, asking the tough questions of how things are governed, the economic systems in Central America. A lot of tough questions that we as Congresspeople maybe are not used to dealing with.

But you know what? When things go wrong south of us, we feel it. We have to begin to take ownership not because we want to, but because it is in our own strategic interest to take care of business. So, that being said, Mr. Meijer, would you like to say a couple of closing statements?

Mr. MEIJER. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for holding this hearing. I strongly agree. You know, what I think we are dealing with right now and we have been seeking to have this represented both the immediate consequence that we are seeing at the border, you know, what we can be doing in the short term to address and to manage and mitigate. But then also how we can be implementing long-term solutions so we are not just in the process of avoiding, getting distracted, and then having this be a challenge that resurfaces periodically. So, I appreciate your leadership in bringing together these panelists. I am grateful for the panelists for sharing their thoughts. To my colleagues for bringing a variety of concerns reflecting that, you know, immediate to short-term to long-term continuum that we must be operating on. I look forward to continuing to make sure that we are improving not only our border security, but our immigration process, and making sure that we recognize that our region is more secure, our neighborhood is

more secure when our partners in the countries who surround us are secure as well. So, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Meijer. I want to thank all the witnesses for their valuable time and testimony today, and the Members for their questions. I don't know about you, but I walk away with more questions today than I walked in earlier. It means we got a lot of work to do.

The Members of the subcommittee may have additional questions for the witnesses. We ask you to respond to those questions in writing expeditiously. Without objection, the committee record will be kept open for 10 days. Hearing no further business, the subcommittee stands adjourned. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 3:36 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]