

**THE MÉRIDA INITIATIVE: EXAMINING UNITED
STATES EFFORTS TO COMBAT TRANSNATIONAL
CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER, MARITIME,
AND GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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THE MÉRIDA INITIATIVE: EXAMINING UNITED STATES EFFORTS TO COMBAT TRANS-NATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

Thursday, June 5, 2008

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER, MARITIME, AND GLOBAL
COUNTERTERRORISM,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:13 a.m., in Room 311, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Loretta Sanchez [chairwoman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Sanchez, Lofgren, Langevin, Cuellar, Green, Souder, Reichert, and McCaul.

Ms. SANCHEZ. The subcommittee will come to order. The subcommittee is meeting today to receive testimony on the “Mérida Initiative, Examining U.S. Efforts to Combat Transnational Criminal Organizations.” It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this timely hearing on the recent developments in combating transnational organized crime.

This hearing will give us a forum to examine the efforts, goals and the possible implementation of the Mérida Initiative and its role in reducing crime and drug trafficking in Mexico and in Central America. I look forward to receiving testimony from our two witnesses, hearing what their departments are doing with respect to the rise of transnational crime and their role in the Mérida Initiative.

Recently, the United States has seen a rise in the operations of sophisticated crime organizations that have little regard for law enforcement and for our border officials. We have seen this trend across the country, including in my district in Orange County, California. More often than not, these organizations maintain ties and structured operations in multiple countries. With the increase of violence from drug cartels on the Mexican side of the border in places like Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, it is appropriate to be concerned about how this is affecting our citizens here in the United States.

Many drug cartels contract out to transnational gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang to smuggle drugs and people into the United States and to smuggle weapons and ammunition out of the United States. These smuggling operations work through an intricate network of corrupt officers and secure smuggling routes on both sides of our border.

The Mérida Initiative proposal was developed to stop these operations by implementing comprehensive cross-border communication and collaboration. Interagency cooperation among and inclusion of all agencies that work on our borders and with foreign governments is essential for the success of this proposal.

Our area of particular concern is ensuring that gang and drug cartel members who are deported from the United States do not continue their criminal behavior once they return to their home countries or worse, that they come back once again into the United States to continue their work.

We must be able to coordinate with foreign authorities to ensure that these criminals are not allowed to go back into their local populations. We also need to prevent them from organizing further criminal efforts with their cartel counterparts in the United States.

Coordination from multiple agencies in both countries is essential to achieving these goals and it must not be overlooked. A concern that this subcommittee has is the exclusion of the Department of Homeland Security from many important faces of the Mérida Initiative. Violence in Central America and Mexico affects the safety and the security of the United States, and the Department of Homeland Security has personnel and equipment that can be a resource both on the front lines on the United States border and in coordinating with local levels in these foreign countries.

This committee would like to see a commitment from all involved agencies that communication and collaboration are and will continue to be on the forefront of this initiative.

Once again, I thank our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to your testimony and to receiving your answers to Members' questions. I will now yield to my Ranking Member, my good friend from Indiana, Mr. Souder, for his opening statement. Thank you.

Mr. SOUDER. Thank you, Madam Chair. In 2007, over 36,000 pounds of cocaine, 2,906 pounds of meth and 2.4 million pounds of marijuana were seized along the southwest border at our ports of entry by the border patrol. In fact, just 2 weeks ago, one of the biggest busts in Indiana history was made in my district, came across at Laredo. There is a crisis at our borders. It is critical that the United States move forward without haste to gain control of our borders, to deter, detect and respond to all illegal activity.

The consequences of the continued vulnerability along the border are clearly evident in the violence, crime and drug-related death rates throughout the United States. In an effort to address this growing threat, the administration proposed an aid package to Mexico and Central America in October 2007 referred to as the Mérida Initiative.

The Department of Homeland Security will play a critical role in carrying out the Mérida Initiative, and I was pleased to learn that Chairman Thompson placed a request with the Speaker for the Committee on Homeland Security to have sequential referral on the Mérida Initiative authorizing legislation moving through Congress, H.R. 6028. I believe this is an issue that the committee can work together to enhance this bipartisan legislation. While I believe that there is much more work that needs to be done to secure our borders, I think that the Mérida Initiative offers an historical

opportunity to partner with Mexico and Central America and to work together on securing the region from drug traffickers.

Since 9/11 we have spoken about the need to push our borders out and to look for opportunities to detect threats before they reach the United States. The Mérida Initiative is part of that philosophy and with appropriate controls and oversight, could be a significant force multiplier in the counternarcotics fight and assist in securing the borders.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing from the Departments of State and Homeland Security on what they hope to achieve through Mérida and how the progress will be monitored and how the partnership can help bolster security, especially in Mexico, at a time when violence directed at law enforcement is at an all-time high. I am especially interested in gaining better understanding of how DHS is involved in Mérida and what impact this will have on resources. While I am excited to discuss the Mérida Initiative, we must understand that Mérida alone will not secure our border. We must continue to provide adequate resources and enforcement tools to U.S. law enforcement agencies while working hard to secure our homeland.

To that end, I look forward to participating next week with my partner Mr. Cuellar to the rollout of the ICE Operation Armas Cruzadas to address cross-border weapons smuggling. These guns often end up in the hands of the drug cartels, elevating the level of violence along the border and within Mexico. I would like to take a moment to express appreciation for the actions taken in Mexico by the Calderón administration over the past 18 months to disrupt drug trafficking organizations and corruption.

Often Mexico only gets criticism it seems in the United States and it is important that we praise the initiatives of the Calderón administration. Since President Calderón entered office in 2006, Mexico has allocated more than \$6.5 billion to combat drug trafficking and increase public security. What is really important politically for Americans to understand is it is largely our drug problems that have caused the violence in Mexico and I am really pleased that the Mexican government have taken these risks and taken this leadership to try to address it as it transits through Mexico headed to the United States.

In 2007, Mexico seized a record 50.7 tons of cocaine worth more than \$7.6 billion in street value. In addition, Mexico has extradited a record 93 criminals to the United States since January 2007 including three drugpins and a former Mexican Governor. These successes have sparked an increase in border violence as smugglers have become more desperate in their attempt to smuggle these narcotics that are moving through Mexico and coming into the United States. Also, it is important that we recognize the sacrifice of Mexico's law enforcement officers, military personnel and the citizens of Mexico who continue to be targeted by ruthless drug trafficking organizations.

More than 400 military and law enforcement officers and 2,650 civilians have been killed in drug-related murders. We are also seeing an alarming increase in violence targeted at U.S. law enforcement along the border. By lateral cooperation, the war on drugs is at an all-time high. The Mérida Initiative may be the best way to

strengthen the relationship with our regional partners. I look forward to working and hearing from our witnesses about how the Mérida Initiative will help secure our borders and reduce illegal drugs entering into our country. Thank you, Madam Chair. I yield back.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Other members of the subcommittee are reminded that under committee rules, opening statements may be submitted for the record. Now I welcome our panel of witnesses. Our first witness, Mr. Paul Rosenzweig serves as Acting Assistant Secretary for International Affairs and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Department of Homeland Security. He has previously served as Acting Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and counselor to the Assistant Secretary for Policy. Prior to joining the Department, he served as senior legal research fellow in the Center for Legal and Judicial Studies at the Heritage Foundation.

Our second witness, Mr. David T. Johnson, was sworn in as Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs on October 31, 2007. Prior to this appointment, he served as deputy chief of mission for the U.S. Embassy in London from August 2003 until July 2007. Mr. Johnson entered the foreign service in 1977. Without objection the witnesses' full statements will be inserted into the record.

I will ask the witnesses to summarize their statements for 5 minutes beginning with Assistant Secretary Rosenzweig.

STATEMENT OF PAUL ROSENZWEIG, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, AND DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POLICY, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. Thank you very much. It is indeed a great pleasure to be before this committee today and it is an honor to be here to able to articulate for you why the Department of Homeland Security supports the Mérida Initiative and to lay out for you some of the unique competencies DHS brings to the table for this important undertaking.

Before discussing the Mérida Initiative, we must, I think, begin by acknowledging the violent and dangerous backdrop to this hearing. In Mexico, drug cartels are waging war. These drug cartels kill with impunity killing not only members of competing cartels, but also the police and military who protect Mexican citizens from crime and ensure a strong and economically viable Mexico.

Parts of Central America have become a transit zone for human, arms, money and narco traffickers. Transnational criminal organizations take advantage of circumstances where governments that may otherwise have the political will to counter transnational criminal activity lack the resources to do so. Neither this criminal phenomenon nor the violence that follows recognizes borders. The United States suffers from gang violence, crime and the trafficking of both people and narcotics with causes and effects across the border.

This is further compounded by the fact that the same activities used to fund criminal organizations and move contraband can and may be used by terrorists to fund their activities and to move dangerous weapons and people. Indeed, the threat posed by

transnational criminal organizations in this region is as multifaceted and as dangerous as any this Nation has faced. This regional violence has become a border integrity issue, and the Mérida Initiative is the U.S. Government's response to the regional crime, violence and drugs that are crossing our borders. Mérida is, of course, a multinational multi-agency effort with many facets. It represents at an historic opportunity to transform our regional security cooperation and is a significant effort to confront the threats of organized crime that affects Mexico, Central America and the United States. Our partners south of the border have called for assistance, and that call must be answered.

Let me speak a little bit about what DHS can contribute to answering that call. In the Mérida Initiative, if adopted by Congress and if funded, we offer many opportunities for assistance through immigration and Customs enforcement, CBP, Customs and Border Protection and the Coast Guard, we are charged with primary responsibility and authority of interdicting and investigating the vast majority of cross-border criminal activity.

While we have a number of programs that already are in place, many of which are in my testimony which complement the Mérida Initiative, if adopted, the Initiative will allow us to engage in even more significant ways.

For example, the Mérida Initiative will tap into CBP's border security expertise. Through the Mérida process, we are exploring the possibility of helping to procure and then train our counterparts in multiple countries on the effective use of nonintrusive inspection equipment. Through this effort, we are fulfilling the unique CBP responsibility of helping to defend the front lines on the front against transnational crime.

Another CBP program, the analysis of Advanced Passenger Information System, helps through the collection and analysis of passenger information to detect and interdict those individuals who may pose a law enforcement, immigration or national security risk as they travel in the air transit system.

Through this arrangement under Mérida, Panama would be targeted for a pilot program in which we would assist them in the analysis of API data and allow us to then provide targeted information and assistance directly back to Panamanian law enforcement agencies and train them in how to do this themselves. ICE equally offers the development of a fully operational multidisciplinary set of programs, including the training of vetted units that work with our government law enforcement agencies to interdict narcotics and trade, illegal trade along the border.

If funded, Mérida would allow ICE to provide participating governments with training and equipment for the establishment of bulk currency smuggling units, BCSUs.

With the purchase of maritime surveillance aircraft for the Mexican Navy, the U.S. Coast Guard would also contribute to the Mérida Initiative. By increasing the interoperability of the Mexican Navy's maritime surveillance aircraft with our own, we are proposing to purchase for them the same platforms that our Coast Guard uses, ensuring that if operational, there will be full interoperability and ability to communicate in both tactical and operational ways.

Our US-VISIT Program would, in conjunction with CBP and ICE, be positioned to assist the Mexican National Migration Institute, INAMI, to develop its integrated system for immigration operations through sharing our information on biometrics and technology. In short, we have an active role to play in the development of the Mérida Initiative. Mérida is, as I said, the U.S. Government's attempt to partner with foreign governments to increase regional security by fighting cross-border and organized crime.

We are a strong advocate of the Mérida Initiative and the inter-agency process that has developed it. We have been involved in all aspects of the planning and will continue to be so during implementation.

In conclusion, the Department of Homeland Security fully supports Mérida because Mérida offers us an unprecedented opportunity to work closely in partnership with the Calderón administration in Mexico and with our other partners in Central America, and it will put the security relationship with our neighbors to the south on a new and different level that ultimately will benefit the homeland security interests of the United States. Thank you.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Thank you, Secretary.

[The statement of Mr. Rosenzweig follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PAUL ROSENZWEIG

JUNE 6, 2008

Chairwoman Sanchez, Ranking Member Souder, and Members of the committee: It is an honor to submit this testimony to articulate why the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) supports the Mérida Initiative and to lay out the unique competencies that DHS brings to the table for this important undertaking.

THE IMPACT OF TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS ON REGIONAL SECURITY

Before discussing the DHS vision of the Mérida Initiative, there must be an acknowledgement of the violent and dangerous backdrop to this hearing. Nearly every day, media outlets report on the activities of transnational criminal organizations operating in Mexico and Central America: whether it is the assassination of the Acting Chief of Mexican Federal Police, or gang violence organized from within a prison and directed against persons in the United States, Mexico and Central America are beset by thugs and criminals intent on pursuing their own ideological or financial gains at the expense of everyone else.

In Mexico, drug cartels are waging wars against each other and those attempting to stop their illicit activities. These drug cartels kill with impunity; killing not only members of competing cartels, but also police officers and members of the military who are attempting to protect Mexican citizens from crime and ensure a strong and economically viable Mexico. The administration of Felipe Calderón has taken very serious and courageous steps to combat this violence and to stem the drug trade which fuels it.

Parts of Central America have become a transit zone for human, arms, money, and narco-traffickers. Transnational criminal organizations take advantage of circumstances where governments that may otherwise have the political will to counter transnational criminal activity, lack the resources to do so. In some cases, these governments have been infiltrated by criminals resulting in corruption and inaction that puts the very security of the region at risk.

It is also increasingly the case that cross-border criminal organizations recognize that routes used to traffic narcotics and people northward can also be used to traffic guns and bulk cash southward. The result has been a surge in crime in the region and a wave of violence that is shocking.

Neither this criminal phenomenon, nor the violence that follows, recognize borders. Accordingly, the United States suffers from gang violence, crime, and the trafficking of both people and narcotics. According to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) statistics, since 2005, ICE agents across 100 field offices, working in conjunction with hundreds of Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies

Nation-wide, have arrested over 7,000 street gang members and associates, representing over 736 different gangs. These apprehensions include over 2,500 criminal arrests and nearly 5,500 administrative immigration arrests. One hundred sixteen of those arrested were gang leaders. More than 2,500 of the arrested suspects had violent criminal histories. Through this initiative, ICE has also seized and removed over 300 firearms from the streets.

Major Mexican drug trafficking organizations maintain a working relationship with U.S.-based gangs, particularly in California and Texas. The threats that cross-border criminal groups pose to the United States and the region is further compounded by the fact that the same activities used to fund criminal organizations and move contraband could possibly be utilized by terrorists to fund their activities and move dangerous weapons and people. Indeed, the threat posed by transnational criminal organizations in this region is as multi-faceted and dangerous as any this Nation has faced.

This regional violence has become a border integrity issue, and the Mérida Initiative is the U.S. Government's response to the regional crime, violence, and drugs that are crossing our borders. The Mérida Initiative is a multinational, multi-agency effort to combat transnational organized crime by increasing each country's capacity to maintain security. As such, the Mérida Initiative becomes part of the solution to these problems inasmuch as it enhances work with regional partners to counter these threats. President Bush has said that we have a shared responsibility to confront transnational criminal organizations and the Mérida Initiative represents this shared responsibility.

RATIONALIZATION OF THE MÉRIDA INITIATIVE TO BRING STABILITY AND SECURITY TO THE REGION

Though more time could be spent describing the dangerous situation to our South, this testimony will focus on why DHS supports the Mérida Initiative and how DHS can contribute to this important partnership.

The Mérida Initiative represents an historic opportunity to transform regional security cooperation for the benefit of all and is a significant effort to confront the threat of organized crime that affects Mexico, Central America, and the United States. The Mérida Initiative seeks to integrate security from the U.S. Southwest border to Panama and strengthen our partners' capacities in three broad areas: (1) Counter-Narcotics, Counterterrorism, and Border Security; (2) Public Security and Law Enforcement; and (3) Institution Building and Rule of Law. The purpose of the Mérida Initiative is to support the efforts already undertaken by our southern neighbors to end the scourge of violence, gangs, and drug trafficking that plagues their citizens and spills over into the United States.

Rather than simply giving money to foreign governments, the Mérida Initiative has been tailored to provide our foreign partners with the specific tools they each need to fight transnational organized crime and work cooperatively with the United States. Through a robust interagency working group, which facilitated discussions with Mexico and Central American officials and coordination with U.S. Government officials in those countries, interagency subject matter experts assessed the needs of each country and proposed specific items to aid those countries efforts against cross-border criminals.

DHS views the Mérida Initiative as a vehicle to facilitate cooperation and capacity building between the U.S. Government and our partners in the Western Hemisphere. From the DHS perspective, the Mérida Initiative is an opportunity to more fully engage our regional counterparts and more cooperatively work together to deter and dismantle cross-border criminal organizations and the threats they pose. By working with regional partners on regional initiatives, DHS multiplies the effectiveness of its own border security efforts and helps the United States, over the long-term, develop sustainable security partnerships. In this sense, DHS sees the Mérida Initiative as a step forward in homeland security and a significant piece of a comprehensive national security plan. DHS recognizes that a regional effort—which involves multi-national cooperation—is ultimately required to ensure the security of our homeland. The United States will be most secure when the entire region is secure.

DHS has been an integral part of the Mérida Initiative because border security and protection is part of our mandate. The Mérida Initiative rightly complements existing security strategies that are owned by DHS, mention DHS expressly, or have goals that parallel DHS's mission. DHS is charged with the responsibility to protect the homeland: to control and protect the U.S. border; to investigate border violations; and to ensure the legal flow of goods and people—among the same aims of the Mérida Initiative.

For example, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* places significant emphasis on limiting the illicit flow of people and all types of contraband, including drugs, through or between our ports of entry. The Mérida Initiative provides funding to improve our partners' ability to harden their own ports of entry through training and equipment that increases their capacity to identify and confiscate contraband. Also, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* emphasizes the need to protect critical infrastructure. Again, the Mérida Initiative has funding set aside for critical infrastructure improvement. Later, my testimony will outline some of the specific programs that are part of the Mérida Initiative proposal which directly connect to DHS missions and operational expertise, but these general examples serve to illustrate how closely the aims of the Mérida Initiative mirror DHS missions.

In a similar fashion, Central American leaders convened and participated in the U.S.-Central American Integration System (SICA) Dialogue on Security in July 2007. In this meeting, Central American ministers identified gangs, drug trafficking, and trafficking of arms as their most pressing security concerns. Later, the SICA group issued its regional security strategy which identified the transnational threats that Central American governments mutually agreed were most pressing and against which they were committed to undertake joint action. From its inception, the Mérida Initiative was tied directly to the SICA strategy, thus building on the articulated will and initiatives of Central American leaders. Many of the issues identified by SICA are issues within which DHS has a responsibility.

The Mérida Initiative also runs parallel to other U.S. Government strategies, like the *National Southwest Border Counter-Narcotics Strategy*, which outlines U.S. efforts to improve coordination of law enforcement activities both within the U.S. Government and with international partners, and in which DHS plays a substantial role.

DHS will also play a substantial role in many aspects of implementation of the Mérida Initiative if funded. Through U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), DHS is charged with primary responsibility and authority when it comes to the interdiction and investigation of the vast majority of cross-border criminal activities (including trafficking in arms and people), has significant responsibility with regard to drugs, and serves as the clearinghouse for issues related to border security enhancement. The Mérida Initiative's ultimate end goal is to increase the security of our homeland by increasing the security of the region. In that light, given that all programs within DHS share the goal of improving homeland security, nearly every DHS program in some way complements or enhances the programs of the Mérida Initiative.

As an example of how closely DHS efforts mirror the aims of the Mérida Initiative, the following is a sampling of DHS efforts that are connected directly to the Mérida Initiative.

Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST)

The Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) program was proposed in 2005 as the Department of Homeland Security's approach to combat cross-border criminal activity and violence along our southern border with Mexico. In 2006, Secretary Chertoff adopted the BEST initiative to bring together Federal, State, local and foreign law enforcement resources in an effort to identify, disrupt, and dismantle organizations seeking to exploit vulnerabilities along the southern border and threaten the overall safety and security of the American public. ICE, CBP and DHS' Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) personnel work cooperatively with other law enforcement entities to take a comprehensive approach toward combating criminal organizations involved in cross-border crimes. One of the primary missions of the BEST program is to prevent the illegal exportation of firearms from the United States into Mexico, a particular concern of the Mexican Government. The Government of Mexico has agreed to assign full-time representatives to each of the BESTs.

The BEST program is one of our most highly successful southern border law enforcement programs. In fiscal year 2007, the BESTs were responsible for over 500 criminal arrests, over 1,000 administrative arrests, 160 indictments, and 77 convictions. The BESTs were also integral in the seizure of over 1,300 pounds of cocaine, nearly 50,000 pounds of marijuana, 150 pounds of methamphetamine, 135 pounds of heroin, 237 weapons, 12 improvised explosive devices, 178 vehicles, approximately \$2.5 million in U.S. currency, and the discovery of two cross-border tunnels used to smuggle drugs, arms, and/or persons.

In an effort to stem the flow of weapons being smuggled illegally into Mexico, ICE is also promoting a new initiative utilizing the investigative strengths of both the U.S. and Mexican representatives to the BESTs in an effort to identify, investigate,

and aid the Department of Justice in prosecuting those who would seek to illegally export weapons to Mexico.

Homeland Security Intelligence Support Team (HIST)

The DHS HIST was established in the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) in the Fall of 2007 to ensure the application of national intelligence capabilities to support border operations, to strengthen intelligence and information sharing across the Federal, State and local partners, and to help ensure that front-line operators have access to the intelligence they need to efficiently perform their duties. In addition to the deployment of DHS Intelligence professionals to EPIC, the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis is deploying both Reports Officers and classified computer networks to key locations along the Southwest border. The purpose is to enhance DHS' ability to rapidly and efficiently share critical intelligence with those who need it most, and this has significantly increased its analytic focus on border security issues to serve the Department of Homeland Security, as well as our Federal partners, State, local and tribal stakeholders, and the intelligence community at large.

Operation Against Smugglers Initiative on Safety and Security (OASISS)

Since August 2005, CBP has worked closely with Mexican officials in a bilateral alien smuggler prosecutions program called Operation Against Smugglers Initiative on Safety and Security (OASISS). OASISS is a joint initiative between the United States and Mexico that enables both governments to share information and prosecute smugglers for crimes committed in the border region. Through OASISS, both governments are able to track and record prosecution efforts on both sides of the border and work together to make the strongest case against these criminals. The intent of the program is to target alien smugglers and human traffickers operating in the immediate border region. The OASISS program has had a significant and positive impact on operations, and has furthered smuggling investigations both in the United States and Mexico. Due to current expansion and awareness of the OASISS program, the number of cases generated from fiscal year 2006 to fiscal year 2007 decreased 12 percent, and the number of principals prosecuted decreased 70 percent during the same time period. As you can imagine, with success like this, we are looking to significantly expand this program under Mérida.

Bulk Cash Smuggling

ICE has a number of programs to address the problem of bulk cash smuggling. One of these—"Operation Firewall"—addresses the threat of bulk cash smuggling via commercial and private passenger vehicles, commercial airline shipments, airline passengers, and pedestrians transiting to Mexico along the southern border. ICE and CBP have conducted various Operation Firewall operations with Mexican Customs and the Mexican Money Laundering Vetted Unit. ICE hopes to expand existing Operation Firewall operations to designated locations in the near future, including additional border crossing locations along the southern border with Mexico. All significant Operation Firewall seizures result in criminal investigations with the goal of identifying the source of the funds and the responsible organizations.

ICE has also recently established a Trade Transparency Unit (TTU) with Mexico, located in Mexico City. The mission of the TTU is to identify cross-border trade anomalies, which are indicative of trade-based money laundering. Under this initiative, ICE and law enforcement agencies in cooperating countries work to facilitate the exchange of import/export data and financial information. The establishment of our TTU with Mexico was completed just a few weeks ago. ICE has provided, and will continue to provide, Mexico TTU representatives with in-depth training on the Data Analysis and Research for Trade Transparency System (DARTTS). ICE has already installed the system, has provided expert technical support, and will continue to do so as needed. Once fully trained, Mexican TTU representatives will be able to use trade data to develop criminal targets involved in crimes such as tax evasion, customs fraud, and trade-based money laundering. The establishment of the TTU in Mexico City will benefit both Mexico and the United States in their efforts to combat criminal organizations. ICE has TTUs in multiple locations around the world and continues to seek new partners.

Firearms Trafficking

CBP, ICE, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) have developed a joint strategy referred to as the Southwest Border Trafficking Initiative, which aims at identifying and disrupting the illicit cross-border trafficking of firearms and ammunition. As part of this interagency strategy, these organizations have agreed upon broad principles to identify, investigate, and interdict the illicit cross-border trafficking of firearms and ammunition into Mexico. Discussions are ongoing to address more de-

tailed procedures regarding the coordination of multi-agency operations and information sharing. The initiative's strategy is based on three pillars: Analysis of Firearms Related Data, Information Sharing, and Coordinated Operations. ATF has established the Southwest Border Gun Center in EPIC, which serves as a central repository for firearms-related information and intelligence.

The purpose of the Southwest Border Trafficking Initiative is to identify, dismantle and disrupt transnational criminal networks responsible for smuggling illegal weapons and ammunition from the United States into Mexico, posing a threat to the overall safety and security of both countries through seizures and the aggressive prosecution of such organizations. The initiative incorporates a vetted investigative unit that provides investigative responses to weapons seizures at Mexican ports of entry, as well as investigation of related border security vulnerabilities. In addition, ICE works in conjunction with CBP to facilitate interdiction enforcement operations based on intelligence generated through this bilateral initiative.

In furtherance of this strategy, ICE is initiating *Operation Armas Cruzadas* to combat the smuggling of weapons from the United States into Mexico. This initiative aims to facilitate bilateral interdiction, investigation and intelligence-sharing activities to identify, disrupt, and dismantle cross-border criminal networks that smuggle weapons from the United States into Mexico.

Drug Trafficking

CBP and ICE have significant responsibility in the interdiction of illicit drugs as such contraband crosses U.S. borders, whether at ports of entry or otherwise. DHS also has the means and expertise to investigate these international smuggling organizations, while working with our foreign and U.S. counterparts such as the DEA.

Bilateral Strategic Plan

In August 2007, Mexican Customs, ICE and CBP signed a Bilateral Strategic Plan to fight trans-border crime. The Bilateral Strategic Plan strengthens cooperation in matters related to law enforcement by expanding existing institutional cooperation mechanisms and establishing new programs of collaboration designed to fight trafficking and smuggling of prohibited goods, fraud, and related crimes. The plan establishes four working groups addressing capacity building, border management, customs security, and law enforcement. All four working groups were formally launched in November 2007. The working groups will expand on existing cooperation to coordinate and implement joint security initiatives, efficient border management, integrity and capacity building assistance and joint enforcement and interdiction initiatives. The goal of these efforts is to enhance the security of our southern border with Mexico.

Border Violence Protocols (BVP)

On March 3, 2006, a bi-national action plan to combat border violence and improve public safety was signed by Secretary Chertoff and his counterpart in Mexico. This action plan set forth goals and objectives to ensure the appropriate law enforcement agencies of the respective governments work together to provide an effective, comprehensive joint response to incidents of cross-border violence and crime. In response to this plan, CBP created a headquarters bi-national working group to oversee the development and implementation of Border Violence Protocols (BVP) along the southwest border. The BVP have now been instituted along the entire U.S.-Mexico border and are working efficiently and effectively. These protocols serve as a mechanism to facilitate operational response to incidents—with CBP, ICE and their Mexican counterparts coordinating together. At the local level, the BVPs have instituted monthly meetings between the U.S. Government, the Federal Government of Mexico, as well as State and local law enforcement officials to further develop and strengthen the working relationships between both countries. The Border Violence Protocols are another example of how the United States and Mexico are working closely together to create a safer and more secure border region.

Global Trafficking in Persons

ICE is working to combat human trafficking by applying its expertise to counter this humanitarian and security problem in which organized syndicates exploit the vulnerability of the human condition to turn a profit. This crime is not limited to our borders, as many of the victims are forced to work in brothels and other nefarious businesses throughout our country.

The President's \$50 million Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Initiative was established in 2003 to assist foreign countries in combating trafficking in persons. In furtherance of this initiative, ICE has also created a position of Global Trafficking in Persons (G-TIP) Coordinator to identify, develop, implement and coordinate these projects under the President's Initiative. ICE coordinates—in conjunction with the

Department of Justice—a G-TIP law enforcement initiative in Mexico centered around foreign law enforcement capacity building to include TIP/Sex Tourism training, establishing vetted units, rescuing trafficking victims, and providing support to prosecutors.

Non-Intrusive Inspection Technology (NII) Training

CBP employs Non-Intrusive Inspection Technology (NII) technology at all land ports of entry. This technology ensures a large percentage of conveyances are examined in a non-intrusive manner for contraband while permitting the smooth flow of legitimate trade and travel. While it would require four officers approximately 4 hours to unload and thoroughly examine a commercial conveyance full of cargo for contraband, a large-scale NII system can produce X-ray images of the conveyance and cargo permitting two officers to conduct an examination for contraband in a matter of a few minutes (e.g. 3 to 5 minutes). This technology also prevents unnecessary damage to conveyances and cargo caused by manual methods and allows the officers utilizing the technology to see into areas that otherwise cannot be examined. This technology not only ensures contraband does not cross the border but also enables us to keep our country safe from weapons of mass destruction entering our country. Under the Mérida Initiative, we are hoping to expand the use of this equipment by the government of Mexico in order to expand both countries' interdiction efforts and ensure that our border is not the only line of defense against these illicit materials.

U.S. Coast Guard

The USCG has a number of cooperative programs with Mexico and Central America in a variety of areas, including port security, search and rescue, environmental response, and other programs that often involve the Mexican Navy. With regard to enforcement for example, in recent months the Coast Guard has seen a significant increase in the level of cooperation with the Government of Mexico in obtaining authority to stop, board, and search Mexican flagged vessels (or vessels claiming Mexican nationality) suspected of drug smuggling. This includes recent cases in which the Mexican Government authorized a boarding in less than 2 hours. Previously, the Coast Guard had encountered extensive difficulties in receiving this authority. However, the efforts of our Coast Guard Attaché in Mexico City, in working with his Mexican counterparts, have greatly contributed to the enhanced cooperation and the establishment of a stronger working relationship with Mexico on drug smuggling. The United States and Mexico's participation in summits with other regional partners, exchanges of information about each nation's respective laws applicable to maritime drug smuggling, and sharing of experiences in maritime counter-drug operations continue to strengthen further the working relationship between our two countries.

THE DHS CONTRIBUTION UNDER THE MÉRIDA INITIATIVE

In addition to the list of current DHS programs provided, DHS is poised through the Mérida Initiative to engage in even more significant ways. It is worth highlighting a few specific authorities, responsibilities, and competencies that DHS has to offer Mérida.

First, the Mérida Initiative has tapped into CBP's border security expertise. Through the Mérida process, CBP has explored the possibility of helping to procure and then train counterparts in multiple countries on the effective use of non-intrusive inspection equipment. Through programs that provide equipment and training on fixed and mobile scanning technology, CBP is filling their unique mandate by helping to defend the front lines in the fight against transnational organized crime by better equipping counterparts in the detection and interdiction of illicitly trafficked contraband.

Closely tied to this program are CBP's canine units. CBP's Canine Enforcement Program is the one of the largest, most diverse, and most respected law enforcement canine programs in the country. The CBP canine program continues to diversify canine detection capabilities needed to combat terrorism, and interdict narcotics and other contraband, while helping to facilitate and process legitimate trade and travel. Providing optimal defense at and between our borders, CBP has the largest number of working dog teams of any Federal law enforcement agency in the United States.

Another CBP program—the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS)—helps to manage, through the collection and analysis of passenger information, the arrival and processing of persons entering the country at its international airports. The purpose is to better detect and interdict those individuals that may pose a law enforcement, immigration or national security risk to our homeland. Requested Mérida Initiative money would fund a pilot APIS program in Panama, where that

country would provide API data to CBP, who would then analyze it and give Panamanian law enforcement agencies immediate, actionable information regarding an impending attempt of a person of interest (be they a gang member, drug dealer, or arms trafficker) to enter or transit their country. This pilot program would serve as the basis for analyzing the requirements and costs of a viable APIS program in Central America and promote information sharing between governments.

Mérida could provide participating governments the requisite training and equipment to enable the establishment of vetted Bulk Currency Smuggling Units (BCSUs). The vetted BCSUs would be able to conduct joint bi-lateral and multi-lateral BCS and cash courier interdiction operations in conjunction with the U.S. Government. These joint BCSU operations would enable regional intelligence and enforcement coordination between the partner nations. Because ICE is the only U.S. Government agency investigating Title 31 (which deals with cross-border smuggling of bulk cash), it could assist these countries in stopping such transnational criminal activities.

ICE is not a “single mission” agency. Instead, they are an agency with responsibilities for all immigration and customs violation investigations; including human trafficking, arms trafficking, and (in cooperation with DEA) drug trafficking. ICE also offers the development of fully operational, multi-disciplinary vetted units that work with U.S. Government and foreign law enforcement entities to fight the multiple threats that face our region. These vetted units complement currently established single-focus units by broadening foreign law enforcement agencies’ investigatory expertise and facilitating the capture of cross-border criminals who engage in multiple illegal activities. Further, ICE has expertise in assets forfeiture, victim and witness protection, and fraudulent document detection/investigations.

ICE also has a significant footprint internationally. ICE currently staffs nine foreign offices—five in Mexico and four in Central America—where investigators and analytical support personnel work daily with their host country counterparts to address transnational criminal threats. Mérida would build upon this already established relationship to better eliminate these threats before they impact the United States.

Both the USCG and U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT) can also contribute toward the Mérida Initiative. For example, the CASA 235 maritime surveillance aircraft for the Mexican Navy were intentionally requested to increase interoperability with USCG maritime surveillance efforts and to increase Mexico’s capacity to patrol its own waters, protect critical infrastructure, and protect human life. Through increased operational parity, the governments of the United States and Mexico will have a better opportunity to work together in these endeavors. The USCG can also play a key role in port security improvement projects aimed at decreasing the possibility of a terrorist attack at key regional ports.

US-VISIT, in conjunction with CBP and ICE, can also assist Mexico’s National Migration Institute (INAMI) in more fully developing its immigration database, known as the Integrated System for Immigration Operations (SIOM), through sharing expertise on biometric information and technology/standards. Additionally, CBP, ICE, and US-VISIT can all play a role in helping modernize internal immigration control and document issuance processes throughout Mexico.

COORDINATION AND REPORTING UNDER THE MÉRIDA INITIATIVE

Since President Bush’s March 2007 meetings with President Calderón in Mérida and then President Berger in Guatemala, the Mérida Initiative has been framed as a partnership: A shared approach to a shared problem. On one hand, the Mérida Initiative involves the U.S. Government partnering with foreign governments to increase regional security by fighting cross-border organized crime. However, it is also the case that the Mérida Initiative represents the partnering of various departments and agencies within the U.S. Government to increase regional security by fighting transnational organized crime through the pooling of their operational expertise and programs. DHS remains a strong advocate of the Mérida Initiative interagency process. To date, DHS has been involved in all aspects of the planning of Mérida and will continue to be so during implementation.

In conclusion, the Department of Homeland Security fully supports the Mérida Initiative. Mérida offers us an unprecedented opportunity to work closely in partnership with the Calderón administration in Mexico and puts our security relationship with our other neighbors to the south on a new level to the benefit of U.S. security interests. It is DHS’ hope that Congress will fully fund the programs that are identified and allow DHS to support these countries in their fight against transnational criminals.

Ms. SANCHEZ. I will now recognize Assistant Secretary Johnson to summarize his statements in 5 minutes or less.

STATEMENT OF DAVID T. JOHNSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE, BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Madam Chairwoman, Congressman Souder, other distinguished Members of the committee, I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Mérida Initiative because along with Secretary Rosenzweig, we believe that confronting these challenges requires complementary effort not just on both sides of the border, but across our Nation's national security and law enforcement agencies. I would also like to express my gratitude for the support the Congress has shown for the President's request for the Initiative. We are pleased that the Congress has included a substantial percentage of the funding requested for Mérida in the fiscal year 2008 supplemental passed by the House and Senate. We look forward to working with you as the differences between these two bills result and we hope become law.

Madam Chairwoman, over the past decade, criminal organizations have grown in size and strength throughout Mexico and Central America. To protect their lucrative and dangerous activities, these organizations undermine and intimidate government institutions through bribery and violence directed at police, politicians, prosecutors and judges. Approximately 90 percent of the cocaine consumed in the United States transits through Mexico. Mexico is a major source of America's methamphetamine, heroin and marijuana.

But since taking office at the end of 2006 Mexican President Calderón has taken unprecedented action against drug trafficking networks that threaten his own people as well as our citizens here at home. He has reorganized the Federal police force, deployed military forces to support police operations, routed out corrupt officials, and extradited a record number of kingpins and other criminals to the United States. Over the past several weeks, we have witnessed several high-profile assassinations of senior Mexican law enforcement officials, including that of the head of Mexico's national police outside his home in the capital. These brazen attacks strike at the heart of the rule of law. They are clearly intended to deter the Mexican government's efforts to confront organized crime.

Madam Chairwoman, in January, I had the opportunity to visit Mexico City and then the border in El Paso with Intelligence Committee Chairman Reyes. Having served at the beginning of my foreign service career as Vice Consul in Ciudad Juarez, I have a special appreciation of the opportunities of that border community. On my visit in January, I was struck by the palpable concern in El Paso that the violence in Mexico could soon spill over into American border communities. Indeed, drug trafficking, gang violence and other criminal activity in Mexico and Central America are readily apparent in communities across our country. These transnational threats require transnational solutions. The Mérida Initiative is our proposal to assist our southern neighbors in their confrontation with this threat. This initiative grew out of President

Bush's trip to Mexico and Central America in 2007. During that visit, President Calderón and the then-Guatemalan President Berger, told the President that organized crime was their highest challenge and they wanted to work more closely with each other and with the United States to confront it.

To respond quickly to this urgent threat and to take advantage of this historic opportunity to improve our own security cooperation in the region, the President included \$550 million for the Mérida Initiative in the fiscal year 2008 supplemental request and another \$550 million in the fiscal year 2009 regular budget request. The first year includes \$500 million for Mexico and \$50 million for Central America and the second includes \$450 million for Mexico and \$100 million for Central America.

If appropriated, this funding would provide equipment, including transport helicopters, surveillance aircraft and inspection equipment, and training to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement, judicial and corrections institutions. The President's request also includes funding to enhance police vetting and to address criminal youth gangs, money laundering and drug demand. The equipment and activities included in the President's request were determined through a comprehensive interagency assessment of the host nation's request by validation teams of U.S. experts representing all elements of our national security and law enforcement community.

I want to assure the committee that if funding is appropriated, I will work with our interagency partners to see that it is utilized properly, that appropriate financial controls are in place, and it enhances our own law enforcement objectives and that the programs are operated as efficiently as we possibly can.

As in other State Department managed law enforcement assistance programs, no funding would be provided directly to these countries and all training and equipment will be subject to end use monitoring to ensure it is used for its intended purpose. The background of all recipients of assistance will be checked for allegations of human rights violations, corruption and ties to narco traffickers. For aviation assets which have been requested only for Mexico, we made an effort to support airframes in which Mexico has already invested to reduce the need for long-term operations and maintenance support.

Again, Madam Chairwoman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. We believe these programs can have an immediate positive impact on these countries' ability to meet these challenges and the closer bilateral and regional cooperation it forges will pay dividends to us well into the future. I appreciate the committee's interest in these issues and I look forward to attempting to address any questions you may have. Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Johnson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAVID T. JOHNSON

JUNE 5, 2008

Madam Chairwoman, Congressman Souder, and other distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Mérida Initiative and how it will help combat transnational criminal organizations that threaten security in Central America, Mexico and the United States. I am pleased to appear before you with Acting Assistant Secretary Paul Rosenzweig of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of International Affairs since con-

fronting these challenges requires complementary efforts on both sides of the border and the cooperative efforts of all agencies whose mission focuses on America's security.

With increased globalization, we have seen further proliferation of illegal migration, narcotics and weapons trafficking, violent gangs, laundered money and counterfeit goods—all phenomena whose effects spill across national boundaries. Over the past decade, drug trafficking, transnational gangs, and other criminal organizations have grown in size and strength. They aggressively seek to undermine and intimidate government institutions in Mexico and Central America, compromise municipal and State law enforcement, and weaken governments' ability to provide public security and advance the rule of law.

The growth of criminal organizations is a major threat. They corrupt the police, judiciary, and prison systems, and fuel a growing popular demand for governments to respond to the threat posed by them. The effects of this growing problem are also readily apparent in the United States in the form of gang violence, crime, and trafficking in illegal drugs and persons—all of which threaten our own national security and impose mounting economic costs.

The United States Government recognizes that working by ourselves, we cannot successfully confront the significant threat transnational criminal organizations pose to ourselves and the countries in our hemisphere. Because of that fact, in the case of youth gangs, the State Department, in partnership with the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security and others, is implementing in Central America, a governmentwide strategy that includes prevention programs, law enforcement capacity building, joint law enforcement operations, and other bilateral and regional anti-gang programs.

AFFECTS US ALL

As we see in Mexican border cities such as Tijuana, each horrific act of violence seems to be surmounted by the next. I spent time earlier in my career as a Vice Consul at the U.S. Consulate General in Ciudad Juarez, across the border from El Paso, Texas, and have a strong appreciation of the close relationship between the United States and Mexico, especially in our border communities. The level of violence has reached such drastic proportions in some areas of Mexico, including along the border, that combined Mexican military and police units have been deployed to restore order.

In the Tijuana area, border violence has increased significantly in the past 6 months. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents have suffered rock throwing incidents, forcing them to respond with crowd control tactics. We are painfully aware of the terrible day in January when Border Patrol agent Luis Aguilar was killed in the line of duty by a vehicle believed to be carrying drugs in the Imperial Sand Dunes Park. Mexican authorities, with the assistance of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) attaché office, quickly responded in that case, arresting a suspect who has been charged in Agent Aguilar's death.

There has, indeed, been a wave of attacks and assassinations all along the border, including an incident in which a Tijuana policeman was killed in his home along with his wife and 9-year-old daughter, as well as a shootout involving some 100 soldiers and drug traffickers near a kindergarten. In Ciudad Juarez, there have been more than 300 drug-related murders so far this year, surpassing the total for all of last year. The chief of police resigned after his deputy was assassinated, and several members of the police force on a drug trafficker "hit list" were murdered. Now, the acting police chief is a military officer and joint military-police units patrol the city streets.

Another major concern on both sides of the border is the threat of methamphetamines abuse and trafficking. Because of increased law enforcement efforts and the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005, most U.S.-based "super" meth labs, that is, labs capable of producing more than 10 pounds per cycle, have moved from the United States to Mexico. Partly as a result, methamphetamine abuse has increased in border areas, especially in Tijuana. The government of Mexico has taken decisive steps to address this menace by outlawing imports of the precursor chemicals used to make methamphetamine, even for legitimate use.

The leaders of Mexico and Central America are already working to beat back violence and crime for their own citizens and for ours, and they have turned to us to join them—as partners.

MEXICO

In Mexico, President Calderón has acted decisively. He has reorganized the Federal police, put new and additional resources in the hands of his security services,

deployed military units to support police operations, focused on rooting out corrupt officials, arrested major crime figures, sought fundamental legal reforms in the criminal justice system, and extradited a record number of drug kingpins and other criminals to the United States. The determination and commitment shown by the Calderón Administration is historic; and the early results impressive.

However, President Calderón has recognized that leadership and political will are not enough; he needs greater institutional and material resources for both near-term success and long-term institutional change. In an unprecedented step, he has asked the United States to launch a new partnership with Mexico and to help him strengthen Mexican law enforcement, public safety, and border security to defeat the drug money-fueled criminal organizations. The Mérida Initiative is not a “traditional” foreign assistance request. It is, as our joint declaration called it, “a new paradigm” for security cooperation.

CENTRAL AMERICA

At the same time, the nations of Central America have committed to collective action to address common security concerns. Through the Central American Integration System (SICA), these governments have expressed their political resolve to join forces to strengthen regional security; however they lack sufficient tools and capacity to execute such will. Despite these challenges, national authorities remain committed to the fight, collaborating with each other as well as with the United States. As with Mexico, they have increased the resources and other elements devoted to transnational security and enforcement efforts.

BEGINNINGS OF THE MÉRIDA INITIATIVE

It is in our own national interest to support these efforts. Over the past several months, one of the President’s highest priorities has been the Mérida Initiative, a regional security cooperation initiative which, if funded, will greatly enhance our anti-narcotics and law enforcement efforts with Mexico and the seven Central America countries. The Mérida Initiative grew out of conversations in 2007 that President Bush had with Mexican President Calderón in Mérida, just after speaking with then-President Berger of Guatemala. He heard the same concerns from both that crime is the No. 1 challenge and that they wanted to work more closely with each other and with the United States.

After much consultation with Mexico and Central America, last October President Bush asked Congress for an initial sum of \$500 million for Mexico and \$50 million for Central America in fiscal year 2008 supplemental funding to support the Mérida Initiative. In the 2009 budget, the administration has requested an additional \$450 million for Mexico and \$100 million for Central America for this initiative.

This funding request is part of over \$1.4 billion that the administration plans to request for this multi-year initiative. It will provide equipment, such as transport helicopters, surveillance aircraft, and information technology, and it will assist in our mutual efforts to break the backs of criminal organizations. The initiative will also support capacity building as well as police and judicial reform efforts already underway in Mexico and Central America.

MÉRIDA INITIATIVE PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Overall, the Mérida Initiative, if approved, will focus on three areas: Counter-narcotics, Counterterrorism, and Border Security; Public Security and Law Enforcement; and Institution Building and the Rule of Law.

The Mérida Initiative will provide support to Mexico and Central American countries based on specific requests, and after having had our experts meet to determine needs. If approved by Congress, the Mérida Initiative will provide Mexico:

- Helicopters and surveillance aircraft;
- Non-intrusive inspection equipment, ion scanners, canine units for Mexican customs;
- Technologies to support collecting information for criminal law enforcement;
- Technical advice and training to strengthen the institutions of justice—vetting for the new police force, new offices of citizen complaints and professional responsibility, and witness protection programs;
- Programs to support Mexico’s efforts on demand reduction, anti-corruption efforts and human rights; and
- Programs to support Mexico’s efforts to enhance their border management process.

Our initial proposal for the Central America part of the Mérida Initiative includes over \$25 million (out of the total \$50 million proposed) to help our partners fight criminal gangs. The Presidents of Central America have recognized the need to ad-

dress common threats regionally; our goal will be to achieve a fully coordinated response to these transnational threats. For Central America, if approved, the Mérida Initiative will provide funding to:

- Strengthen the region's ability to defend its borders against traffickers and to interdict criminals;
- Improve investigation and prosecution of dangerous gang members;
- Fight arms trafficking through tracing mechanisms and training for law enforcement; and
- Provide training in prison management, courts, prosecutors, and communities to help strengthen justice systems.

In Central America, the package seeks to address citizen insecurity by giving these governments the tools they need to more effectively address criminal gangs, modernize and professionalize police forces and reform the judicial sector to restore and strengthen citizen confidence.

To address the proliferation of gangs and gang violence, through the Mérida Initiative, we will implement all five elements of the U.S. Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico: Diplomacy, Repatriation, Law Enforcement, Capacity Enhancement, and Prevention. Under this comprehensive strategy, the U.S. Government is working with Central American governments to combat transnational and other gangs through both prevention and enforcement.

The gang prevention program will increase security by providing thousands of at-risk youth in targeted urban "hot spots" with positive education, training, and job opportunities, thereby reducing the risk of gang recruitment, crime, and violence in the region.

PENDING LEGISLATION

I want to express my thanks to the Congress for showing support for these efforts by including Mérida funding in both fiscal year 2008 supplemental bills that have been passed by the House and Senate. We look forward to continuing to work with Congress so the most effective package is included in the final bill. Both the governments of Mexico and the United States believe that there is value added by providing many of these programs and assets, especially air assets, since this will allow us to enhance law enforcement as well as military cooperation.

As for the Caribbean, we share congressional concern that drug trafficking represents a serious threat to the region. In the last 2 years the island of Hispaniola has become the principal transit point in the Caribbean for drugs headed to the United States and Europe due primarily to a dramatic rise in drug smuggling by small aircraft from Venezuela. We will continue to look for ways to improve security cooperation in this region—and to facilitate cooperation among the countries of the Caribbean.

We will be working with several U.S. Government agencies to implement the Mérida Initiative, once the supplemental appropriation is completed. We intend to work closely with DHS and DOJ to enhance the security of our Nation's border through port, airport and border security programs; through law enforcement training, crime prevention and police modernization; through financial intelligence gathering to counter money laundering; and through improving case tracking and law enforcement database management.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to address any questions you may have.

Ms. SANCHEZ. I thank the witnesses for their testimony. I will remind each Member that he or she will have 5 minutes to question the witnesses. I will now recognize myself for questions.

So here is the problem. As a Californian, we have obviously a border with Mexico in particular that has been heating up lately because of these smuggling and drug wars and because of the clampdown that has been going on by President Calderón's administration. Believe me, I think all of us are very appreciative of the fact that that government has taken on a very difficult thing to do, and that is to try to eliminate, or winnow down what is happening at the border. But it seems to be getting worse. I mean, worse to the point where my family has several properties just south of the border, and we are asking each other, do we really go down, given some of the indications and some of the violence that has been

going on in the Baja California peninsula? My constituents are asking the same thing.

So when I look at this Mérida Initiative, it concerns me that we have a Department of Homeland Security who is on the border, is making the relationships with their counterparts across the border. Let's talk right now about Mexico, for example, because this is a big concern for me. It seems to me if we really want to hamper down what is happening at the border, that the Department of Homeland Security should be, if you will, in the driver's seat of the situation. But the way I view the Mérida Initiative is that somehow State will be controlling the funds, will be controlling the issues, will be controlling where the moneys go, will be, you know, and that the Department of Homeland will be begging for funds from State for this initiative.

So I would like both of you to comment on that, if you see that or if there is really this interagency coordination going on because I don't see it on paper.

Second, I would like to ask Mr. Rosenzweig, if you had control of the money rather than State, what would be the specific places that you would initially put that money to work to stop what is really intimidating to many of our citizens on our border, and that is this whole violence that is going on across the southern border?

Mr. JOHNSON. Madam Chairwoman, if I could start by addressing, I think, part of your question.

This is a foreign assistance program. So it is appropriated under the provisions of the law that provide foreign assistance and is coordinated by the State Department. But we have engaged all aspects of our national security and law enforcement effort in this. The elements of the Justice Department as well as DHS have played a very strong role in this effort and including our Department of Defense because a significant portion of the proposal actually provides equipment for the Mexican military.

This is a fully engaged interagency process because it is a broad spectrum problem. It is an organized crime problem, but it is fueled by drugs. So DEA, of course, has a significant role to play.

You mentioned the several issues and so did Paul in his testimony where the individual elements of DHS also have strong roles to play. I would caution against looking at a kind of a single silver bullet here to try to solve the violence problem in Mexico. I think the comprehensive solution that the interagency has come up with and devised in response to the open invitation of President Calderón in particular is going to be the most effective way to seek to address this problem in the long run.

If you look back over time in Mexico, you can say that there was by some Mexican law enforcement agencies an effort to even accommodate some of this commerce and illicit drugs. We have an administration now that is willing to confront it and to deal with it, to make significant steps in improving the rule of law and reforming institutions in Mexico. I think will put us on a significant different footing than we have been in the past.

I can't predict for you that the level of violence will drop off markedly in the very short term. But I think—I am comfortable telling you that I believe that with the provision of this equipment and this training and the reform programs that it means for Mex-

ico, we can look forward to a Mexican neighbor that is much more grounded in the rule of law and is safer for us in the long run.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Well, I would just say to you, Mr. Secretary, that the people in California and Texas and Arizona can't wait for the long term. The violence is getting out of control and I hear it from my colleagues on the border States all the time. So you know, you have to do short-term things, you have to do long-term things. When I see this initiative in writing, it worries me that the moneys are not going operationally to confront what is a real threat on our southern border. Mr. Rosenzweig, will you comment to if the moneys were more in your lap, what would you do with it?

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. That is quite a hypothetical. As you know, the funding mechanisms that Congress has chosen or—are the international narcotics funding that is operated by the Department of State. I would say at the outset that throughout the world when DHS goes to do training and technical assistance missions for foreign governments, we often look to our partners at the Department of State for assistance and funding of this nature, whether it is in the southern border region under the Mérida Initiative or training that we do in Southeast Asia about human trafficking.

I think that, from our perspective, it is important to understand that there are many pieces, as David said, to this puzzle. Certainly much of what we need to do in South America, in Mexico and Central America is work that is outside of DHS's competence.

Enhancing the prosecutorial structures of our neighbors and their ability to prosecute crimes, that is something that the people of the Department of Justice know a great deal about and we know nothing about. Likewise, some of the military training that will go to the Mexican military is something that is completely outside of our particular competence.

So let me state it in a positive way by saying that the types of things that we want to do, that we think we can contribute to and that if funded and pass through, we will do are things like purchasing for Mexican Customs nonintrusive inspection equipment and providing them training on how to use it. It is a kind of 2-week training program and there will be some after-installation assistance. Each of those machines is quite expensive. They run in the million-dollar range. So how many we can provide, how much training we can provide is a function of how much you appropriate or Congress appropriates, and how much of what you appropriate gets assigned to this particular task.

Similarly, one of the proposals we have put forward is to provide training to vetted bulk cash smuggling units which are groups of vetted law enforcement officers who ICE goes down and talks to and trains on how to identify bulk cash couriers and how to interdict them more effectively. When we have given this training around the world, it has generally proven very effective. The Central American area is a well-known transit point across the isthmus for drug money going north and south, and that would be an ideal opportunity for us.

So I could perhaps go on for a great deal of time because there is so much we could bring to the table, but I certainly don't want to leave you with the impression that we have all of the answers

because we don't. Many of our colleagues in the interagency do as well.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Thank you to both of you on that. If you would, Mr. Rosenzweig, I would love to have you give us a list of those things that you believe Department of Homeland Security could do. Again, for me the emphasis is a dire one. I mean, when Californians are not going to Mexico because they are afraid of the violence going on, that creates an economic instability south of the border which creates more immigration problems for us and many more issues going on.

So, you know, we are an economy that is so connected. Right now we are really seeing the effects of a real fear of violence, or even more importantly, more violence and it is spilling really over onto the American side of the border.

I would now like to recognize my Ranking Member for 5 minutes, Mr. Souder.

Mr. SOUDER. Thank you. I feel that we have only partially laid out the problem.

Mr. JOHNSON, what—other than black tar heroin, I know in the meth data some of that is used in Mexico, just rough ballpark, taking in 10 percents, how much would you guess Mexico and for that matter Central America is a transit zone as opposed to a consuming zone?

Mr. JOHNSON. I think that Central America is not exclusively but very largely a transit zone. Mexico is becoming a consuming country as it grows a middle class. That has become part of worldwide phenomenon where people get more money and they start to consume things that they shouldn't and in addition to things that they should. I wouldn't know how to quantify that at this point. But as I mentioned in my testimony, we are in the 90 percent-plus range of the cocaine coming into the United States coming from Mexico. The amount of marijuana coming from Mexico into the United States is significant for a reason that is usually underappreciated.

While most of the marijuana consumed in the United States is actually produced here, the Mexican organized crime groups or some of—they are operating some of the production here, and in addition, they are using this as a cash cow to support their operations in Mexico. Something the Mexicans really have brought our attention to that we need to focus and to give credit where it is very much due, CBP and the border patrol have very much focused on this along with the U.S. attorneys to focus on even relatively small shipments because it has been disassembled and then reassembled in the United States. The organized crime groups kind of figured out earlier how to get around some of our threshold levels.

We have revisited that in consultation with the Mexican attorney general so that we can focus more clearly on this. But it is a problem that we are working. On the meth side, methamphetamine, the large labs are now mostly in Mexico and not the United States. On the positive side, Mexico has made some extreme steps in confronting the precursor issue and has, in fact, banned all usage for legitimate as well as illegitimate purposes of the precursors in Mexico, requiring their—the people who have the common cold there to use a different formulary.

Mr. SOUDER. I think when you go through what you just did, I think one of the most important things for the American people and the people of Mexico, and, for that matter, Central America, to understand is, this isn't the United States coming in, trying to help address domestic problems in different countries, that, in fact, the problem has grown and caused the turmoil in most of these countries just as it did in Colombia, Afghanistan, Bolivia, Peru, to some degree, Ecuador, because of an American and European—but in the case of Mexico, mostly American drug habits. For those who say this is American interventionism or in America say, why are we trying to deal with Mexico?

Look, we aggravated the problem. Therefore, if Mexico is willing to work with us, we have an obligation to work with them because we have exported our problems to them and that this kind of super-nationalism is not understanding the basic phenomenon here. In that, there is also a difference—and the reason Homeland Security becomes critical in this is the difference between Afghanistan, Colombia and other places is, they don't have a border. You don't just go back and forth across to Afghanistan and Colombia. Therefore, it is essential that we try to work the border side. Yet, another challenge here is that—and this is when we are coming in at this scale, respecting each country's desire and mix—well, one other thing.

In homeland security, when we look at this committee and you think of the Department of Homeland Security, people think of it as a picket fence border. But in fact, the Coast Guard is down in the Caribbean, down in the eastern Pacific and that is part of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE investigations with CBP Air are all the way down in Colombia. They are all over. The Department of Homeland Security is not border exclusive.

So those things are important to get out as we talk about the Mérida Initiative. Now, in Colombia and in Bolivia and in Peru, we had the same kind of basic dilemmas where you see the violence and you see the transit and all this type of thing. But one of the things we early on invested in, whether it was the Colombian national police, the Uma Parz in Bolivia and others is we invested in the law enforcement, getting vetted units, getting training, making sure that they had adequate pay. We even assisted in the pay. It is partly, do you cutoff the head of the big groups, go after the big labs, go after the big networks, which we have been trying to do, or provide them helicopters and technical equipment, what we have done, or in fact, how do we deal with this border question? Because the violence is right along our border. It is spilling over in both directions. Some of that appears to be woefully underpaid police on the other side who are intimidated, who lack protection, who when they try to enforce the law along the border, and is there anything in the package that is responding to that portion or is the package too small because we need to go after the big pieces of equipment? But what is actually being done as it relates to the fact that unlike all our other narcotics efforts, this is right along our border? If I could have each respond.

Mr. JOHNSON. I think Paul can probably respond for some individual programs. But if I can respond to a couple of things that you mentioned.

I mean, the law of concentric circles really applies here. This is right—this is not just right along our border, but it is also well into Mexico. This is an opportunity to give us a real defense in depth, not just right at the border, but because the elements of DHS and our other law enforcement agencies are both on the border on our side but they are also working with their counterparts in Mexico City. We already have a program in Mexico City funded at the level of \$37 million per year on law enforcement assistance. This initiative gives us the opportunity to greatly expand that. We have some success stories already with this nondestructive testing equipment, intrusive surveillance, vetted units that we are going to seek to build on here.

So I think we are building on a program which has already begun. On the investment in law enforcement, a significant part of the training here is for training for law enforcement. It is to provide Mexico with the ability to vet their entire Federal police force in order through polygraphs and through background investigations so that they have a greater reliance on integrity of their Federal police force. But I don't want to give you false assurances here. What this doesn't provide funding for, and what this doesn't target is the State and local people. Those are the faces that many people see at the border. I think in a second wave, if you will, that is something we will want to talk to the Mexicans about.

But this is a very big issue. It is a big country. So I think the plus-up that we are talking about here will give us a substantial effort in order to seek to address the problem.

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. Let me answer your question in kind of three parts. The first is to agree with you completely that what we have come to understand at the Department of Homeland Security is that homeland security, in fact, begins overseas. We have more than 2,000 people from our Department stationed overseas in an operational capacity on a daily basis. Roughly 30, 35 percent of those are in Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean, precisely because those areas are the ones that are closest to the homeland and thus—I like David's phrase, concentric circles. There is a concentric circle closest to us. But I often say, a border is like a coin. It has two faces. Anything that happens on one side of the border, one side of the coin, affects the other face as well. We have, as you know, already begun a number of programs cooperatively, and I will focus here on the southern border, with our Mexican counterparts that already give us a good foundation.

The best program, the border enforcement program that we have started, the OASISS, the operation against smugglers program, both of which are cooperative programs in which we work hand-in-hand with our Mexican counterparts.

You mentioned earlier a new one that is just starting up, the Armas Cruzadas, which is an ICE-operated program to work against the flow of guns southward into Mexico. That is going to require cooperation with ATF and with our Mexican counterparts. What Mérida will do—and this is the third part of my answer—is actually build on those foundational relationships and expand them by allowing us to provide better training, better technical assistance, more equipment and—this is the hardest part to quantify—

but and build relationships that are sustainable in a long-term way for a long time.

The U.S.-Mexican relationship has reflected a great deal of tension because of the nature of our border and the nature of our history. This, from our perspective, from the perspective of CBP, ICE, border patrol folks on the ground represents a unique opportunity to work in a cooperative way, no longer pointing fingers at each other across the border, but to ramp up in literally a stepped function the degree of our cooperative relationship. If we can do this, it will represent a significant opportunity for us.

Ms. SANCHEZ. I will now recognize Mr. Langevin for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Gentlemen, thank you very much for your testimony today. We certainly all have a deeper appreciation of how difficult this problem is to deal with. The size and the scope of the drug trade is obviously troubling. We are all frustrated, it seems in our ability to significantly cutoff the drug trade. I, for one, think that this Mérida Initiative has great potential, and I look to support it.

I do have some questions, mainly focused on coordination, planning and implementation on the one hand as well as training support on the other side. So if you could answer these questions in the time allotted. Under the Mérida Initiative, DHS and its components would provide a significant amount of the assets and technical expertise. Because of the large investment DHS would be making, it is obviously extremely important that the Department is involved at every step of the planning and implementation of the Initiative.

So my question here is: Are you satisfied with the level of involvement that the Department has had in the formulation of the Mérida Initiative? What can be done to improve communication channels among all the different departments involved in administration of the Mérida Initiative? Would it be beneficial to have an interagency coordinating body at the helm of the Mérida Initiative? If so, what would it look like?

On the training part of it, the Mérida Initiative obviously calls for the delivery of major aviation assets, inspection equipment, IT, hardware from CBP, ICE, the Coast Guard and US-VISIT. So will the process for procuring and delivering these—what will, I should say, the process of procuring and delivering these assets to Mexico and Central America be? Will any private contractors be used to help deliver the training and the technical expertise needed to actually operate the equipment since obviously the equipment is really going to be only as effective as those who are actually using it? If you could answer those questions.

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. Why don't I try on the first one, and I will let David answer the first one in part and most of the second one about the process for procurements since he will probably manage most of that.

Asking someone who participates on a day-to-day basis in the interagency process how he likes it is a bit like asking for the self-assessment of a marriage or something like that. There are ups and downs. But by and large, it has been quite cooperative. To be sure, there are aspects of what DHS would want to do that are not going to be the highest priority in the interagency community.

Equally so, however, we are working hard with our interagency partners to prioritize this. To a great degree, how much we will do will depend a lot on how much funding we get overall. So the interagency process becomes very easy if the pie is very big. It becomes harder as scarce resources are competed over. That is the nature of the beast, I am afraid. I certainly anticipate that going forward. There will be close coordination on an interagency basis in setting those priorities. Ultimately, though, at least as currently structured it is INL money that is being funded, and INL has its own sets of procedures in the end to distribute those.

Mr. LANGEVIN. So do you need, though, an interagency coordinating body at the helm of this Mérida Initiative to make sure that, you know, it stays on track and you have the cooperation that we need to go forward to make the program effective?

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. The existing processes will, I think, have to suffice at this point. I can't envision the creation of a formal coordinating structure at this point. So the existing processes will no doubt provide us a venue for providing the input we want.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you.

Mr. JOHNSON. Congressman, I would just add one thing to what Paul said. I think there actually has been an extraordinary degree of cooperation among the interagency law enforcement and national security team on this. Working through the initial assessment, working through how the implementation is to be done. I am, as someone who is the veteran of some arms control interagency groups, I have kind of marvelled at how we see a common purpose and we are working together. So I am pleased.

Now the—Paul is right though. This is a foreign assistance program and it is not INL money. It is the Secretary of State's foreign assistance account. So ultimately, she has to make those, you know, end-of-the-day determinations. But her charge to me is to work in full cooperation with the entire interagency community. Where the arguments really tend to come down are between law enforcement agencies rather than between me and Paul.

So it is a matter of dealing with the economic problem of scarcity, which always exists. But I think we have done a good job thus far. When and as we are provided with the appropriated funds, we intend to make whatever changes are required because of that, but to do it working as a team there as well.

In terms of the acquisition process, this will be done the same way government procurements are done in other projects as well, if possible on a competitive basis. If there is indeed a sole source which is argued for because of the unique nature of equipment, we will do that. But we will sharpen our pencil just as hard as we can because we want this money to go as far as we can make it go. There will indeed be private sector teams involved where appropriate, particularly on the training for highly technical equipment, so that the equipment can be operated effectively.

At the same time we will be bringing in those, such as DHS, who operate the similar equipment in the United States so that they can build those relationships and profit from the data that is generated. Thank you.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you. I yield back.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. McCaul from Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

In my judgment, the situation at the border, U.S.-Mexico border, presents an imminent threat to the security of this Nation. Before running for Congress, I had served in the Justice Department. In the U.S. Attorney's office, I was the chief of counterterrorism and I had a large portion of the Mexican border in my jurisdiction. Even then we could see the threat from the drug cartels controlling the routes into this country, exporting the drugs, the human trafficking.

In the post-9/11 world, this threat increased in terms of what is coming into this country. I think we have done a lot but I think the best defense is a good offense sometimes. I think if we can take this fight to the drug cartels directly through a military strategy, that that will get to the root cause of so many of the problems that we have on the border.

Congressman Cuellar and I went down to Mexico City on a Homeland Security delegation, met with President Calderón, and I was struck by the sincerity of the political will to actually get something done in terms of security. His dedication of 30,000 troops to the border is significant, and he asked for our assistance.

At the same time we have law enforcement on our side who are outgunned and outmanned. On the Foreign Affairs Committee on which I serve, we marked up this initiative, and I had an amendment that will provide equal funding for law enforcement on this side of the border, primarily through the DOJ process, Operation Streamline and other programs. But I have two questions, one obviously to DHS, one to the State Department.

What is DHS's role in all this? It seems to me that—and Madam Chair, I hope this comes through this committee so we have a chance to mark this up and show some oversight on this initiative. But it seems to me that we ought to be also talking about providing funding to the Department of Homeland Security to provide a more comprehensive border security strategy on both sides. You know, if we can hit the drug cartels on the Mexican side and then provide the resources necessary to defend us, defend our side of the border, in my view, that is the best strategy. If you wouldn't mind commenting on that.

To the State Department, you know—this isn't new. We have done this before. To some extent, what we did in Colombia is very similar to what this plan is. If you could, Mr. Johnson, talk about to me about the package for anticorruption. A lot of my constituents are concerned about the corruption in Mexico and how this would be dealt with. Also what type of metrics you would use to quantify success here. We were successful in doing this in Colombia. It seems to me if we are doing this right we can be successful in this initiative as well.

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. I couldn't agree with you more that our approach to the border requires a cooperative relationship across it. We have, through operational programs that I described earlier BEST, Armas Cruzadas, OASISS, begun doing that often in cooperation with our Department of Justice colleagues. We run—our ICE colleagues run many cross-border counternarcotics operations

in conjunction with DEA. Our ICE colleagues work with ATF on cross-border firearms trafficking as well.

To the extent that you are speaking about operational activities, that funding comes out of our existing appropriations, DHS's existing appropriations. Like any good bureaucrat, I can always use more. Send more, and we will put it to good use.

Mr. McCAUL. Can I follow up? I would like your specific recommendation. If this committee decide to authorize more funding for this side of the border for Federal law enforcement and State and local, what your proposal would be for that funding. I will yield back.

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. Can I get you a—I mean, obviously we have of a long detailed wish list of things ranging from operation firewall, which is an ICE counter-arms program that could grow more funding. OASISS only covers portions of the border now. With enhanced funding it could operationally fund—be extended from Brownsville to San Diego. Those sorts of things. You know, formal requests for money have to be cleared through the Office of Management and Budget.

Mr. McCAUL. I understand. But if you could get back to me. Mr. Johnson, I am running out of time, but I would like to get your response to the corruption issue.

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes. Mr. Congressman, on the corruption question we are highly focused on that. A significant element of the first-year proposal for Mexico will allow us to train Mexican law enforcement so that it can do its own polygraph and background investigations ultimately for the entire Mexican police force. Initially, we will be building vetted units so that we are more sure of who we are dealing with on the informational side. But we will be moving that process as rapidly as we can, assisting the Mexicans in their own vetting process. But I think the larger issue is the real reform of the justice system in Mexico. There is a portion of this which also provides for a citizen complaint system so that there is a greater transparency and a greater trust in the rule of law in Mexico. We have a broader program which is changing in cooperation with the political courage that President Calderón has shown, changing their justice system so that it is adversarial and open rather than based on submission or briefs and a decision behind closed doors so that the Mexican people and indeed we can see justice being done.

There is already a pilot program and a shift has already been done in the Mexican State of Chihuahua since the first of this year. We believe that—that type of openness and transparency and real change in the rule of law in Mexico holds our best hope for the long run. I think that will show your constituents the ability to see a less corrupt—

Mr. McCAUL. The end-use monitoring in this package was used in Colombia successfully?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes. It will be the same type of end-use monitoring.

Mr. McCAUL. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. SANCHEZ. I just wanted to let the gentleman from Texas know that we did request a sequential referral to this committee

but unfortunately went only to Foreign Affairs and Judiciary. The parliamentarian didn't see it as being as important to—

Mr. MCCAUL. That is unfortunate.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Yes. Extremely unfortunate. Yes, Mr. Souder.

Mr. SOUDER. Would you be open and our Chairman and Ranking Member to requesting that to be changed? It is inconceivable that we could be doing an initiative like this and not account for the border, and it not being part of an initiative is just inconceivable.

Ms. SANCHEZ. If my friend from Indiana is asking, should we, in an effort together and hopefully with the Chairman and the Ranking Member of the full committee, ask that this be looked at again and ask for sequential, I would be more than willing. I mean, I began with the question of will there be any moneys coming to Department of Homeland Security? My biggest issue—I mean I would like to solve the whole problem. But you know, excuse me, we have had a drug war on our hands since when, before Reagan? We don't seem to be getting control of this.

So you know, it has gone to the border and it is spilling over into the United States. We have got to stop this from happening. The Department of Homeland Security has to be funded and has to be doing this. I think it would be a great idea to do that sequential request.

Mr. SOUDER. If I may make one other comment. I have worked with INL for my entire career and the Department of State on international. But CBP Air funds do not go through INL. The State Department makes a decision who gets how many on the ground, when money goes to a foreign government, they work with that. But if there is going to be involvement of the Department of Homeland Security, there are different funding streams and not all those funding streams go.

I also find it extraordinary in Mr. Langevin's questions nor in your statement or my question did anybody refer to the Office of National Drug Control Policy. We created a drug czar who is supposed to be a coordinating agency. Where are they?

Ms. SANCHEZ. Thank you, Mr. Souder. I will now recognize Mr. Green of Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to compliment you on hosting an outstanding hearing. Mr. Ranking Member as well, thank you. I thank the witnesses for appearing.

The Mérida—

Ms. LOFGREN. Very good.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you. Mérida plan, if you will, called such because it was consummated in Mérida, Mexico, has evolved into two bills. One in the House and one in the Senate. The one in the Senate worth about \$100 million and it includes money for Haiti. The one in the House worth about \$61.5 million with money for Haiti and other countries as well. This is exclusively for these countries as an additional \$400 million in the House bill and an additional \$300 million I believe—\$350 million in the Senate bill.

I am mentioning Haiti because—I know that your plate is full—but because this has evolved into a look at or an opportunity, I believe, to try to combat this problem in the hemisphere as opposed to isolated in one area. I just want to mention to you something

about Haiti because I just visited Haiti. For those who may not be aware, Haiti has an unemployment rate of about 66 percent.

The poverty rate is 80 percent. Seventy percent of the people live off of less than \$2 a day. About 56 percent of the people live off of less than \$1 per day. It has the highest HIV/AIDS rate in the western hemisphere. We have four seasons. Haiti has five. In addition to the four that we have, Haiti has a hunger season. A hunger season. When people prognosticate that people will be hungry and that some may perish.

I mention this because we met with President Preval. He indicated what I am hearing with reference to President Calderón, a desire to have an assistance from the U.S. Government to help with the drug trafficking. Haiti is becoming a station, if you will, between the United States and other places for drug dealers to stage their activities. He has given the same clarion call for help, and I am very pleased to see that there are moneys going to Haiti to provide some assistance.

We have a big problem. It is one that requires a comprehensive security plan that includes what you are doing combined with what is happening at the border itself, coordinated among all of the various entities that can make this work for us because it is not just—while I want us to deal with the land border, there also is the border between Haiti and the United States that we have to concern ourselves with too. We have all of this to police to protect the American people.

So my question to you is, can you give me as quickly as you can because my time is quickly moving, some indication of how we are doing with the Haitian portion of what this has evolved into?

Mr. JOHNSON. Congressman, thank you very much. The threat of export of—particularly of cocaine is not just in Haiti, but because of the behavior of the Venezuelan government in particular in allowing its border region to be used as a transit zone has affected the entire island of Hispaniola, also the Dominican Republic. So we have programs in both sides of the island to help deal with this. They are not large. The moneys that you mentioned that are in, I believe, the Senate bill that are directed to Haiti and the Dominican Republic are not part of the administration's proposal. So we do not yet have developed programs as to how those moneys might be spent. Anything I would say to you today would be speculative but—

Mr. GREEN. Let me say this then, given that I have 19 seconds. I trust that the plans will be developed because one of the great human tragedies of our time is occurring just off the coast of Florida in Haiti. It is a staging area now. It is going to evolve into more if we don't do more.

Final comment is this: We have to deal with the movers with two methodologies. One, arrest, lock up, punish. But we also have to deal with those who are prospective movers. We need, Madam Chair, in some of our cities, major urban areas, some job programs for young people, for people who find themselves without opportunities and who may engage in some activities that I don't condone. I think you can be poor and not be a criminal. But it seems that poverty is attracting a lot of people into criminality.

So my contention is this: It is bigger than what we are talking about today, although this is what we have to deal with today. I respect what you are doing. But this is a major, major concern in the inner cities of this country because the movers that we are dealing with today can be replaced with persons from areas of the country that we live in, and I think that has to be dealt with.

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. Madam Chairman, can I just briefly? Congressman, I don't want to leave you with the misimpression that DHS is not engaged in Haiti. We have a number of people there, many of whom are doing precisely the counternarcotics strengthening already, even in the absence of the Mérida Initiative that you are talking about, we have a substantial number of Coast Guard presence, ICE presence who are working in the region with the Haitian government. I would be happy at some juncture to come and give you more detail about precisely what we are doing there.

As with Mérida, we could always use more resources to provide that sort of assistance. But I wouldn't want you to feel or mistakenly believe that we are not as concerned about Haiti as you are. I have a unit that focuses exclusively on the Caribbean and the main place that is on their mind is Haiti right now.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Madam Chair. I yield back.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Thank you, Mr. Green. Then I would just mention that as you know, I am a big supporter of the jobs programs for our youth. I am very disappointed that it has been cut out from the supplemental and we will do everything we can. I agree with you, especially when we see an area like yours down there in Houston where it is much better for us to employ these youths than for drug cartels to ensnare them. So I thank you for bringing that up, although it is not really our jurisdiction here.

Mr. Cuellar for 5 minutes.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank you and the Ranking Member, Mr. Souder for the leadership that you all provided.

When we talk about the Mérida Initiative, we have to keep in mind, as you know, that it involves not only Mexico, but also Central America. We have one of the Central American ambassadors here with us. We have to keep in mind the big picture here. We appreciate the leadership that you have. This year is an important year for me because back about 3 years ago we started talking about border violence. Being from Laredo, we understand what has been happening. I think some of you all are veterans of this. We appreciate your leadership. We started off with an issue there in northern Laredo right across with the missing Americans. We had about 60 missing Americans that actually—some of them, you know, because they happened to be in the wrong place, some of them because either they or the family were involved, went over, across the river and never showed up again. Some of them did show up. But some of them have been missing.

We appreciate the State Department through Ambassador Garza and the kidnapping task force that y'all helped set up that I think have finally opened up some of the investigations in Mexico. We appreciate that.

But seeing that back in 2005, my office, we helped start a couple of things. One, we started the first BEST program, my office put

together ICE and ATF and other folks, and I know that now y'all can expand that to other cities, and we appreciate that. But we also passed some legislation that established a border violence task force that I hope that y'all can look at. We certainly want to work with you.

It is authorized, but like Michael McCaul said, we have got to do our share on this side also because it works with our Federal, State and local and of course our counterparts across the river. So we appreciate that. We also have to look at some of the tools that have been available to us. For example, the FBI Gang Intelligence Center. I think we put in \$10 million that helps track gangs that come across the border, whether they are from Central America, from Mexico or U.S.-based, wherever they are from. We have got to look at some of those whether it is the border violence task force, whether it is the expansion of the BEST program. I know there are other programs up there. Or the Gang Intelligence Center that we are spending \$10 million a year right now. We have to look at those tools.

But the bottom line is, I am really excited because I actually—we started the—I guess the first initiative. We call it the Mérida Initiative. The President is impressed and we appreciate that. But we actually filed House bill 502 back in January 2007 that—we did this because being from the border, we have seen this. I am glad that the rest of the Nation is finally picking up an issue that we have been looking at. Being at Laredo right at the border, we have seen this. My brother was a narcotics agent with the State for 25 years. He used to tell me, it is difficult sometimes working with the Mexican side because sometimes you don't know who is a good apple and who is the bad apple. But it is one of those things that that intelligence is so important to us.

So I just want to emphasize the intelligence part of it. The information that you work with them because it is very, very, very important that we continue doing this. But I would ask you to do a couple of things, one is the border task force, the kidnapping because I mean, we started the first BEST program, the border violence task force. I am a big supporter of this Mérida Initiative. But we still can't forget that there are still some families that still have—their family members are missing. So whatever y'all can do to pressure the Mexican side. I know I have talked to Ambassador Garza and he has done great. But anything that you can do to help with the missing Americans, I would appreciate that you help us with that part.

My question is, do y'all have anything or are you even aware of the missing Americans, Mr. Johnson?

Mr. JOHNSON. Congressman, I am certainly aware of the effort that Ambassador Garza has undertaken, working with the Mexicans and working with law enforcement on this side of the border to bring that issue to the fore. It is not part of this initiative, if you will. We have not included you know some aspect of it. On the other hand, the types of things that are part of this initiative will help us build the rule of law so that we can support the very thing that you are talking about and make the border safer.

If I could, I would like your permission to look into how more specifically the efforts we have here would reinforce the search for the missing and get back to you on that.

Mr. CUELLAR. Appreciate that. Madam Chair, thank you very much.

Ms. SANCHEZ. I thank the gentleman from Laredo. I believe next on the list will be Ms. Lofgren for 5 minutes. Welcome.

Ms. LOFGREN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I think this Initiative is an important one and I agree that there are so many different elements that need to be addressed. Certainly Mexico has done more than we have in some of these areas. I mean, to completely ban precursor chemicals, we haven't done that. Certainly, I admire their efforts to bring transparency and reform of their criminal justice system. I mean, that is a difficult thing to do and something that they are moving forward on. It is quite admirable.

When you think about the number of people that have been lost in Mexico in the fights with the drug cartels, it is thousands of people have lost their lives in this fight. So certainly those are important efforts they are making. I personally believe that we have an obligation to cooperate with Mexico. We are interdependent with them. I mean, we share the North American continent with them. It is our Americans who are consuming the drugs moving across the northern border. But I want to focus—and I know it is not the only issue. But when I met with the Mexican attorney general last year, it was an issue he raised, the flow of arms south to them which is just completely unacceptable. I know your testimony touched briefly on that. But I would like to focus on what more we need to do. I mean, it is not just you know handguns and rifles. I mean, it is machine guns. It is even, you know, shoulder missiles. I mean, it is unacceptable. Some of it is, you know, interdiction. But I think we need to do a more aggressive job of what kind of things are available for export because it is making their job almost impossible. Can either one of you address that?

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. Let me take a swing at that for starters. The flow of arms and weaponry southward is of grave concern to the Mexicans and of equally grave concern to us. The current American structure of law divides responsibility for arms trafficking. ATF is a domestic enforcement agency in the Department of Justice. ICE, through its authorities, is the investigative authority for cross-border international arms smuggling. They work cooperatively together since, you know, frankly most every domestic violation that goes south is an international violation.

Ms. LOFGREN. Right.

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. And vice versa. Obviously in the end, the Department of Justice does the prosecutorial work. Amongst the things that could be funded under Mérida that would expand our efforts are things ranging from nonintrusive inspection devices that would allow us to look inside containers more readily, K-9 units, some of who can be trained for explosive detection which is effective. Expansion of ICE's training programs south of the border and its cooperative relationships. All of them, of course, I think in partnership with ATF who has a commensurate interest.

But what we see kind of as the core of what we need to do at DHS is bring together both of the responsible U.S. agencies plus,

I should add, the Intelligence Community. We have established an arms trafficking intelligence subunit at epic to focus precisely on this problem.

Ms. LOFGREN. If we had additional resources, would we accomplish more?

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. Always. I mean, no good bureaucrat can say no. This program, there are a number of initiatives that we can take in terms of our weapons interdiction efforts. Cooperative programs with Mexican Customs, since one of their main lacks is lack of capacity to screen southbound traffic, as I am sure you know being a Californian, we don't screen outbound traffic at all.

Ms. LOFGREN. But these weapons are being acquired in the United States for transit.

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. That is precisely why this is clearly an issue that requires a partnership between the domestic side of the House for finding the illegal manufacturers who are making the—the gun licensers or manufacturers who are making the sales here, linking it up to the intelligence about the cross-border. We have found generally that the border is a great choke point to do the interdiction because, of course, it is there that any smuggler confronts some authority, in this instance, a Mexican one. But we want to ensure that all of the components are engaged. I guess one of the issues that we haven't discussed is, there are some pieces of the draft House bill, authorization bill that seem to ignore the international component of this trafficking and focus exclusively on the domestic side. So you know, in the end I imagine we will want to work to try and encompass all of those authorities.

Ms. LOFGREN. My time is running out. I will just advance the opinion that America would be safer if we used more of our resources on this weapons situation instead of, you know, chasing down and arresting busboys and nannies. I mean, it is just a ridiculous priority compared to the drug violence and the problem that we have with weapons. I think my—

Ms. SANCHEZ. I believe the assistant secretary—I believe he has a comment for you, Ms. Lofgren.

Mr. JOHNSON. Madam Chairman, if I could just make one point. At least in part because of the attention this issue has drawn because of the development of this initiative, we have identified \$5 million in seized asset funding which has allowed Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to move forward with modifying their e-trace system so that it is more accessible for Spanish surname conventions. We have also made that database accessible not just in the embassy in Mexico City but in all of our consulates in Mexico, giving Mexican law enforcement a greater opportunity to use that system and that database in order to trace weapons that have been seized in Mexico. Thank you.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Souder.

Mr. SOUDER. One of the things that is unique about the challenge with Mexico, it is somewhat there in the Caribbean where it is just a water border. But because there is a land border, it isn't just like every other traditional international area that we work with. Trying to figure out how we handle this jurisdictionally here, how we handle it in our different agencies is a different challenge. I think looking at how we do the best teams—the IBET teams and

this type of thing, I mean, ask, are those all run through the State Department?

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. No, sir. Those are operational programs that are generally funded out of operational mission authorities within the Department of Homeland Security and likewise within Justice, ATF.

Mr. SOUDER. But they work internationally?

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. They work in a cooperative arrangement with international. We have Mexican officials who are members of—liaison officers who are partners of our BEST teams, for example. We have Canadian officers as well on the northern border.

Mr. SOUDER. The challenge here is that the funding stream determines how the decisions are made and where it goes through. In other words, if it is going directly to another government, it goes through the State Department. But if it is going to ICE and then ICE, do you fund in the IBET and BEST programs any law enforcement in Mexico or Canada? Do you provide any training? Those funds that you do, do they run through the State Department or are they run directly through you?

Mr. ROSENZWEIG. Well as you said, the training and technical assistance funding that goes directly to a foreign government traditionally goes through the State Department. In terms of BEST and ICE, we do provide what I would call some collateral funding. We fund travel and funding for Mexicans to join us at BEST centers, for example, on our side of the border. We pay for that. But we don't fund—we do not fund—we are not permitted to fund actual operations of the Mexican Federal police or Mexican Customs or any of the other operational agencies. So the answer to your question is yes to a small degree, but it is generally a collateral expenditure of funding. It is not the be-all and end-all of the organization.

Mr. SOUDER. This shows the problem we have with this committee is, is that unless there is some kind of jurisdictional overlap with international, we can't, in fact, impact the border much. One of my concerns as is all of us but Mr. Cuellar has raised it constantly, the cane and the cane is on both sides. But that means in order to address the cane issue on the Mexican side, that would actually have to go through State Department. We have to have some kind of a way that we are dealing with a unified border and cross-checking and so on to figure out how Homeland Security is going to interrelate with the State Department because I understand why the funding goes that direction. But we have to sort out how this is going to be done if we are actually going to secure our land border.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Well, I would agree with you and I think we need to visit that again. When I read the Initiative, it is so slanted away from Department of Homeland Security that, you know, I can almost see it like a stepchild begging for a dollar or two to get something done when the reality is operationally speaking, this is where the rubber hits the road. So I think we need to think about how we can work on that together, Mr. Souder.

I thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the members for their questions. The Members of the subcommittee, you may have additional questions for the witnesses. We will ask you to respond expeditiously in writing to those questions. Having no

further business, the subcommittee stands adjourned. Thank you, gentlemen.

[Whereupon, at 11:37 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ FOR PAUL ROSENZWEIG, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POLICY, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

JUNE 5, 2008

Question 1. Under the Mérida Initiative, DHS and its components would provide a significant amount of assets and technical expertise. Because of the large investment DHS would be making, it is extremely important that the Department is involved in every step of the planning and implementation of the Initiative. What can be done to improve the communication channels among all the different departments involved in administration of the Mérida Initiative? Would it be beneficial to have an interagency coordinating body at the helm of the Mérida Initiative?

Answer. The Mérida Initiative was developed through a collaborative interagency process in which DHS has been involved from the outset. As the administration begins to implement the Mérida Initiative, it will be important to continue the active and collaborative interagency process that has so far governed development of this Initiative. Although Mérida Initiative funding comes from Department of State foreign assistance accounts, we all recognize that it is important that all departments and agencies involved in implementing the various programs are active participants in the process that determines implementation decisions.

Question 2. What Department of Homeland Security (DHS) personnel will be used to support the Mérida Initiative in Mexico? Will private contractors be utilized and, if so, how? Will DHS or the State Department be responsible for private contractors for DHS-related Mérida programs?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will support Mérida-related activities in Mexico through multiple components and offices. In Washington, DC, personnel from the Office of Policy, supported by component subject-matter experts, will continue to work with the interagency steering group to ensure the Mérida Initiative is efficiently and effectively administered. In Mexico, personnel from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the United States Coast Guard (USCG)—as well as our new DHS Attaché position—will actively engage both U.S. and Mexican partners to implement Mérida-related programs on the ground. Though ICE, CBP, and USCG will bear a majority of DHS's responsibility in the actual implementation of the Mérida Initiative, other DHS component and offices will be included when their specific expertise is needed. DHS will rely heavily on its personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico as Mérida is implemented.

With regard to the role of contractors, DHS defers to the Department of State (DOS), which is the agency to which Mérida funding has been appropriated.

Question 3. As we help our neighbors to the south enhance their efforts to combat criminal organizations, we must also make our southwest border more secure. If the Mérida Initiative is successful, what type of changes do you anticipate seeing in the way DHS secures the border?

Answer. Successful implementation of the Mérida Initiative will allow DHS to strengthen the management and implementation of border-related programs through training, technology and equipment. DHS anticipates that regional cooperation with our partners will serve as a force-multiplier to combat transnational crime and aid in prioritizing resources more effectively.

The Mérida Initiative will enhance DHS abilities regarding communications and coordination capabilities with foreign counterpart agencies, through improved information sharing and relationship building. Increased cooperation and strengthened information sharing among the United States, Mexico, and Central American countries will produce a more rapid response on critical and time sensitive information

addressing both specific events and organized criminal enterprises engaged in human and/or drug trafficking and other illegal activities.

Question 4a. In your testimony, you stated that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was initiating Operation Armas Cruzadas to combat the smuggling of weapons from the United States into Mexico. How would implementation of the Mérida Initiative affect Armas Cruzadas?

Answer. The Mérida Initiative funding is designed as assistance to our southern neighbors and thus cannot legally address U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) domestic role in the area of firearms and weapons smuggling, nor can it legally allocate any additional resources or funding for ICE's outbound firearms smuggling efforts. While ICE's domestic efforts in this area cannot be funded through the Mérida Initiative, they will certainly complement the goals we are striving to achieve under Mérida. At the same time, some of the funding under Mérida is designed to go to the purchase of non-intrusive inspection equipment for the government of Mexico, which has indicated that they plan to use some of this equipment to inspect incoming shipments for any contraband, be it weapons, bulk cash, etc. Operation Armas Cruzadas was launched utilizing current ICE assets dedicated to southwest border violence, and has not received any additional resources or funding for domestic and international personnel positions, or specialized equipment.

Question 4b. How does ATF's Project Gunrunner relate to Armas Cruzadas?

Answer. We understand that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' (ATF's) Operation Gunrunner is a domestic southwest border firearms violence and trafficking strategy to focus resources in order to combat firearms violence, violent offenders, and firearms and ammunition trafficking along the U.S.-Mexico border. We also understand that the Operation Gunrunner strategy utilizes the results of firearms trace information and statistics (from both within the United States and from our southern neighbors) to target potential domestic firearms-related violations, such as corrupt Federal firearms licensees (FFLs). We respectfully refer you to ATF for additional details about this project.

ICE's Operation Armas Cruzadas seeks to enhance a timely, systematic intelligence-sharing cycle to drive interdictions and investigations in an effort to identify, disrupt, and dismantle trans-border criminal networks that smuggle weapons from the United States into Mexico. This initiative focuses on conventional investigative processes relating to cross-border smuggling organizations, as well as implementing an expanded rapid information-sharing conduit between U.S. and government of Mexico (GoM) key stakeholders.

We believe that both ATF's Project Gunrunner and ICE's Armas Cruzadas are complementary and will work in tandem—as well as with the Mérida Initiative—to stop the flow of arms southward from the United States. These programs all complement the government of Mexico's own efforts in this area.

Question 4c. Is training or equipment provided to Mexican law enforcement agencies under the Mérida Initiative that would affect Armas Cruzadas? If yes, what are they?

Answer. DHS continues to work closely with the Department of State in regard to the implementation of the Mérida Initiative. Some funding under the Mérida Initiative will purchase non-intrusive inspection equipment for the government of Mexico, which has indicated that they plan to use some of this equipment to inspect incoming shipments for any contraband, be it weapons, bulk cash, etc. We believe that by working together on both sides of the border, we can improve the cooperation, communication, and success of both countries' efforts to reduce the flow of arms southward.

QUESTIONS FROM HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ FOR DAVID T. JOHNSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Question 1. While the State Department currently has the lead for the administration on the Mérida Initiative, the plan calls for significant contributions by the Department of Homeland Security. Furthermore, DHS has the largest presence on the U.S.-Mexico border of any Federal agency, and often has established working relationships with its Mexican counterparts. What has the State Department done to bring the Department of Homeland Security into the planning process for Mérida? Does the administration have an interagency coordination and communication process for Mérida? If so, please describe that process.

Answer. The Mérida Initiative was designed as a regional approach that builds on activities already underway in the region. It also complements ongoing U.S. efforts to stop the flow of arms and weapons, to confront the very serious threat of transnational crime in Mexico and Central America, and to reduce drug demand.

We believe that confronting these challenges requires these efforts not just on both sides of the border, but among our Nation's national security and law enforcement agencies. The Department of Homeland Security and other agencies have been included in the interagency planning process from the beginning, including involvement in the validation teams that traveled to Mexico as part of the development of the Mérida Initiative. DHS will play an important role in the implementation of Mérida, which is expected to build on already existing relationships between U.S., Mexican, Central American, Haitian, and Dominican Republic law enforcement agencies. For example, we have consulted and coordinated with other U.S. agencies to identify appropriate subject matter experts (both U.S. direct hires and contractors) to provide the technical advice and training that is at the heart of this Initiative. Moreover, we will continue to work with our interagency partners to see that our foreign assistance is utilized properly, that appropriate financial controls are in place, that program objectives enhance our own law enforcement objectives, and that the projects and programs are operated as efficiently as possible with stringent end-use monitoring.

The Department of State has taken the lead on interagency coordination, including actively engaging other agencies in the planning process. The Department plans to continue this process in the implementation phase of the Initiative.

Question 2. When will an implementation plan that defines protocols and directives and coordinates efforts between the State Department and other U.S. Government agencies be finalized? Are other U.S. Government agencies involved in the drafting of this implementation plan? If so, which agencies and how are they involved?

Answer. We have engaged all aspects of our national security and law enforcement effort in our planning and we will continue to rely on experience and expertise across the Federal Government during the program's implementation. Elements of the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, USAID, and the Department of Defense have played a very strong role in the planning stages and we will continue to work closely with them as we move toward program implementation, both in Washington and at the various U.S. embassies.

The fiscal year 2008 supplemental requires the Secretary of State to submit a spending plan to Congress within 45 days of enactment. The bill was signed into law on Monday, June 30. The spending plan will also include a strategy for combating drug trafficking and related violence and organized crime, judicial reform, institution building, anti-corruption, and rule of law activities with concrete goals, actions to be taken, budget proposals, and anticipated results. This reporting requirement will be carried out in close consultation with our interagency partners.

Question 3. Some have expressed concern that the Mérida Initiative does not include adequate benchmarks to determine the efficacy of the program, which would undermine efforts to combat corruption or inappropriate activity related to Mérida funding. How will the State Department develop benchmarks to evaluate the successes and failures of Mérida? Will the benchmarks measure the overall success of Mérida, or each program? Which U.S. Government agencies will be involved in the development of the benchmarks? Will the Mexican Government develop their own benchmarks to measure the successes and failures of their own agencies under the Mérida Initiative?

Answer. The State Department has already led U.S. interagency discussions on performance measurements for the Mérida Initiative. We have developed a series of strategic goals and objectives in close consultation with both the U.S. interagency community as well as the Government of Mexico.

The preliminary document we provided to Congress outlining these goals and the indicators of success will need to be realigned to reflect changes in the training and equipment provided to Mexico as a result of the congressionally approved funding level, as well as what the government of Mexico has acquired through its own funding since the President's initial request. We would be happy to share this with you and your staff once it has been adjusted to reflect the appropriated funding levels. Again, we will work in close consultation with the governments of Mexico and Central America, as well as the U.S. interagency community, to develop those indicators that we think best demonstrate success under the Mérida Initiative.

Question 4. Some have expressed concerns about similarities between the Mérida Initiative and Plan Colombia. Are there any "lessons-learned" that we can take from Plan Colombia and apply to the Mérida Initiative?

Answer. There are significant differences between Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative. Plan Colombia had components, such as eradication and the fight against armed groups seeking to overthrow the state that the Mérida Initiative does not address. The Mérida Initiative is focused more on law enforcement development programs with the vast majority of resources flowing to civilian institutions.

However, several important lessons can be taken from our experience in Colombia. First, the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime is not simply a matter of eradication or interrupting the transit of illicit goods. Organized criminal organizations today seek to control institutions of the state through violence and corruption. To address that, we are working with Mexico and the countries of Central America on building institutions that respond efficiently and democratically to the legitimate needs of communities and municipalities. These institutions must be transparent and accountable if they are to displace organized crime. Therefore, our approach with our Mexican and Central American partners involves attacking not only the leaders of organized crime, but also the financial and personal networks these leaders use to manage their criminal networks.

Another lesson is the importance of working with communities to counter the negative influence of criminal organizations. This will require improved communication by authorities with communities in which the fight against organized crime is being conducted.

Finally, our experience in Colombia has clearly demonstrated the importance of committed national leadership, as we have seen in President Uribe. President Calderón and his colleagues in Central America have also demonstrated strong leadership in confronting these threats.

Question 5. With respect to the aircraft and helicopters that would be provided under the Mérida Initiative, what is the long-term plan to ensure that each asset will have the parts and technical support needed to remain operational? Are there similar concerns regarding other assets and equipment, and what is the plan to deal with those needs?

Answer. For aviation assets, which have been requested only for Mexico, we made an effort to support airframes in which Mexico has already invested to reduce the need for long-term operations and maintenance support. Our aircraft validation team (composed of representatives from State, DHS, and DOD) believes the mission is valid and that the aircraft will be supportable in large part because SEDENA (Army/Air Force), SEMAR (Navy), and SSP (Secretariat for Public Security) have the capability to integrate these aircraft into existing training and maintenance systems.

The assistance package includes spare parts, training, and other logistical support to facilitate training, operations, and maintenance for 2 years in the case of helicopters. In developing the package, consideration was given to the maintenance capability in the receiving entity, existing infrastructure, and the experiences of the Mexican units that will receive the equipment. We will also continue to work with the government of Mexico to tailor the logistics and training portions of the package to ensure that we have a robust support arrangement in place.

