

STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED PROGRAMS APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2024

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2023.

UNITED NATIONS

WITNESS

**HON. LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD, UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO
THE UNITED NATIONS**

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DIAZ-BALART

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs will come to order.

Ambassador Greenfield, what a pleasure to have you here. Welcome to our first subcommittee hearing of the 118th Congress, regarding oversight of the United Nations.

Now, while the President's budget has been delayed, this subcommittee has important oversight work that must be done to prepare for our next appropriation bills. That includes a review of our engagement at the United Nations, where the United States is the largest donor, providing over 12 billion dollars annually—12 billion dollars.

This significant investment from the American taxpayer is not exempt and should not be exempt from the expectation that we see that the U.S. interests are being advanced. The American people want to see a United Nations (U.N.) that supports and not undermines our security and that our allies and partners also are not attacked or undermined by this institution. Unfortunately, the U.N. too often seriously fails there.

And recent events have once again demonstrated that the engrained, institutionalized anti-Israel bias at the United Nations is, frankly, if anything, getting worse, not better.

So the question before us is whether this administration has the political will to leverage our contributions and positions to advance our reform interests and our national security interests at the U.N., again, to be more effective in achieving peace and security, which obviously is a central tenet of the U.N. Charter.

That starts with the U.N.'s response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As we were reminded last week on the 1-year anniversary of that horrific day and every day since, the Security Council remains absolutely paralyzed by Russia and China, while too many U.N. member-states are either just looking away or others, like South Africa, are actually embracing Moscow despite its flagrant violations of the U.N. Charter. So, clearly, the U.N. must do better.

Ambassador, over the last 2 years, I believe that the administration has really dismantled the leverage that we had at the U.N. on the premise that, by merely just showing up and by providing U.S. funds without preconditions, that we can advance U.S. priorities. This has resulted in a U.N. that is clearly comfortable with its own broken situation and the continuation of the status quo.

Let's take, for example, the Human Rights Council. This administration justified rejoining and reengaging in the Council by promising that the U.S. would bring change.

Ambassador, last year when you testified before this committee, we discussed my serious concerns about the Council, of which there are too many to mention in the time that I have. These concerns, however, remain: the fixation on Israel; and the membership that includes some of the worst human-rights offenders on this planet.

I hope you can report on progress since that hearing. But from the perspective of up here, it just doesn't look good.

Instead of successfully steering the Human Rights Council to focus on serial human-rights abusers, like Cuba or Venezuela or Nicaragua or Iran, the Administration laid out the welcome mat last month for the Special Rapporteur—this is hard to believe—for the Special Rapporteur from the Council to examine U.S. counter-terrorism practices, with a particular focus on the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay.

So that person is now writing a report that will be published by that Council—the same Council that has the world's worst human-rights abusers. Does anybody have any doubt—is there any question about what that report is going to say? The U.S. taxpayer just footed the bill for that. And the Biden administration opened the door for a flawed, one-sided, biased view of history.

Further, the U.N. and its agencies have yet to take successful action to address China's deliberate cover-up of the origins of COVID. And that has been in the news a lot recently. China continues to withhold critical information and refuses to comply with even the World Health Organization's investigation. And we see no action in the Security Council to hold the Chinese Communist Party accountable.

In stark contrast to China, I am sure you agree that Taiwan's exclusion from the U.N. and its related bodies is a tremendous loss to humanity. Democratic Taiwan has so much to contribute to the world. So I hope, Madam Ambassador, that you can speak to administration efforts to support Taiwan's robust, meaningful participation in the U.N. System and in the wider international community.

Madam Ambassador, these are just a few—as I said, I could go on forever—of the many areas in need of significant reform to begin the conversation today.

You have heard a tough assessment from me. It is not the first time. You have heard that again this morning. But I really believe that these questions and concerns are on the minds of the American people. And this subcommittee has to justify how every single American taxpayer money is appropriated and to make sure that it is in the national security interests of the United States.

I know, Madam Ambassador, that you have an exceedingly difficult job. And as I said to you a little while ago when we just said

hi in the other room, I want to thank you. Thank you for the hard work that you do every day, and the folks that work with you, and for your service to the United States of America.

I look forward to your testimony and engaging and working with you on all of these important issues and some others that obviously we will have time later to talk about.

So I will now turn to the Ranking Member and the former Chair of this subcommittee, Ms. Lee.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER LEE

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.
Good morning, Ambassador.

I am very pleased—and thank you, Mr. Chairman—that our subcommittee's first official order of business this year is the critical issue of United States support for the United Nations. And I congratulate our new SFOPS chairman for bringing us together on this topic, extremely important, as our first hearing.

I am even more glad to be hearing from you today, our esteemed United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, to discuss the important diplomatic engagement the Biden-Harris administration has been undertaking at the United Nations, its specialized agencies, and through U.N. Peacekeeping.

Thank you for joining us today and for your many decades of experience in development and diplomacy, bringing it to such a critically important post at such a critical time. I can personally say, having a woman of color representing the United States on the largest stage in the world, especially when the great majority of the world is female, is incredibly powerful.

The United Nations is an invaluable and irreplaceable platform for fostering diplomacy and international peace and security. I have been privileged to serve as the United States Congressional Representative to the United Nations General Assembly on five different occasions, so I have seen firsthand the importance of these issues debated in New York and how much is at stake without U.N. engagement.

The United Nations is central to the values and priorities of the United States. The U.N.'s leadership in the Black Sea Grain Initiative to get available food from Ukraine to those facing famine was vital. Just last week, the United States negotiated two additional border crossings between Syria and Turkiye to get badly needed humanitarian aid through to the earthquake victims.

These accomplishments are solidly in the United States' interest and make the United Nations indispensable to the American people. That is why it is so important to be in the room, to be part of the conversation at the United Nations. We know what happens when we are not.

I expect we will hear this morning about, of course, the bias at the United Nations against Israel. This bias is allowed to take shape when the United States is missing, like the Commission of Inquiry on Israel. When we are absent, vacuums are created and filled by countries that do not share our values and our priorities. The United States must be present and fully participating in international institutions to protect our interests as well as advocate for our allies.

Over the past 2 years, I have worked extremely hard with our committee and all of our colleagues, to make sure the United States was paying its share for these institutions. I truly wish we would have been able to go further in paying down our unpaid debts for peacekeeping—debts that have accumulated over the last 5 years and have now reached over a billion dollars.

We need to recognize the important role U.N. Peacekeepers play in conflict zones and the benefits that we gain from burden-sharing with other countries through U.N. Peacekeeping missions. We simply cannot continue to tap these multilateral partnerships while at the same time maintain arbitrary caps on our contributions and rack up millions of dollars in arrears, leaving other countries—again, a void—to foot the bill. Not paying our dues weakens our ability to lead on a host of international issues and cedes ground to our strategic competitors.

When the world unites, we can achieve amazing things. I am deeply concerned that we have lost ground on the Sustainable Development Goals, and achieving any of them by 2030 may be now out of reach. Investments that the United States has led on, such as HIV and AIDS, are a very important part of the SDGs and the tangible expression of the goals chosen by people around the world aspiring to a better, safer world.

I was proud of the work we had done as chairwoman to get the agreement that the United States needs to step forward, not back, on engagements such as rejoining of UNESCO. Also, I will continue to fight for support for UNFPA that, instead of being a political football, should be recognized for the tremendous work they do to support the health of mothers and babies.

Throughout my time in Congress, I have consistently advocated for the strongest possible partnerships between the United States and the United Nations. We may not always agree with other nations on every issue, but we must always have a venue where we can hear from other countries and be heard ourselves.

America is not always a perfect and consistent voice for human rights, but we can and have been vocal and persuasive. If we leave the table because we do not like who else is sitting there, we will allow those views to go unchallenged and be forced to live with the consequences. We need to keep making the case for human rights and human dignity.

So, Madam Ambassador, thank you for your leadership and your devotion to diplomacy and for your testimony today.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I thank the ranking member.

Ambassador, your full written testimony will be placed on the record, and please feel free to summarize the statement.

Again, it is a privilege to have you here. You are recognized.

OPENING STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR THOMAS-GREENFIELD

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you, Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, and members of the subcommittee, for inviting me to appear before you today.

I am very thankful for the many opportunities I have had to engage with committee members, and I would welcome more visits so I can show you how vital our role is at the U.N., because without our leadership, China, Russia, and others hope to shape the United

Nations, and indeed the world, in their authoritarian image. On my watch, we are not letting that happen.

At the U.N., we are galvanizing our allies and partners to tackle conflict, hunger, climate change, human-rights abuses and violations, humanitarian crises, and so much more. And we are engaged in a strategic competition, especially with China, to ensure the values of freedom, democracy, and human rights prevail.

Last week, we marked 1 year since Russia's brutal, illegal invasion of European. At the U.N., we have isolated Russia on the world stage. This past Thursday, 141 countries voted to call for an immediate withdrawal of Russian troops and for a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace. Russia is weak and alone, and this resolution showed Ukraine that global support for its sovereignty and independence remains strong.

Of course, we have been equally focused on the rest of the world. When disasters strike, we rally the international response. After the recent earthquakes in Syria and Turkiye, we, for example, pushed for two more border crossings so that humanitarian aid could flow freely to Syrians in dire need. And, last month, when I visited Somalia, I called on the international community to step up and break the cycle of extreme hunger and end famine.

We do the same when human rights are abused and violated. When the Iranian regime was killing peaceful protestors in the streets, we took actions. Iran's brave activists called on us to suspend Iran from the U.N.'s Commission on the Status of Women. Iran's presence was a stain on the Commission, and we removed it. Next week, I will lead the U.S. delegation to the Commission, where we will continue to call out Iran and other repressive regimes that violate the rights of women.

As part of our fight for human rights, we hosted a high-level U.N. Event on the genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang. We highlighted the U.N. Report which laid out China's human-rights violations in horrifying detail.

And we are vigilantly combating all forms of hate at the U.N., including anti-Semitism. A few weeks ago, we hosted with the Second Gentleman a special event at the U.N. Focused on combating anti-Semitism. We also led the successful adoption of a U.N. General Assembly resolution to condemn Holocaust denials, the first of its kind in 15 years.

Of course, we know that anti-Semitism is one dimension of anti-Israel bias at the U.N., and that is something we work to counter every single day. We support a two-state solution and continue to push both sides to avoid escalatory actions that would move us further from achieving that goal.

In the Security Council, we are addressing threats to international peace and security, like the conflict in Ethiopia, instability in Haiti, and missile launches from North Korea. And on North Korea, we are working to enforce strong U.N. Sanctions to make it harder for Pyongyang to build nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

We are working to hold the U.N. Itself accountable. We are actively advocating for a host of reforms to make the U.N. More effective, efficient, representative, and credible. Our goal is to bring the

U.N. Into the 21st century while rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse.

But the truth is, as we battle for our values enshrined in the U.N. Charter, the administration's efforts to pay our bills in full have been only partially met by Congress. We continue to maintain high balances on arrears and pay late. It is China's favorite talking point.

If we want to maintain U.S. leadership, we also need consistent, strengthened funding to recruit talented Americans into the U.N. System, which we are grateful that Congress has also recognized. We need your help to secure that funding and to build on our successes in the multilateral area. I am committed to ensuring, with adequate staff, to fully monitoring how our funding is managed.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I have had the honor of serving our country for nearly 40 years under Presidents from both parties. This moment is unique. America's global standing is at stake.

So I want to thank you for your support and for your continuous communication, and I look forward to our discussion.

[The information follows:]

**House Appropriations Committee Remarks
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related
Programs**
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield
U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
March 1, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, and members of the Subcommittee, for inviting me to appear before you today.

I am so thankful for the many opportunities I have had to engage with committee members, and I would welcome more visits so I can show you how vital our role is at the UN.

Because without our leadership, China, Russia, and others hope to shape the United Nations – and indeed, the world – in their authoritarian image.

On my watch, we are not letting that happen.

At the UN, we are galvanizing our allies and partners to tackle conflict, hunger, climate change, human rights abuses and violations, humanitarian crises and so much more.

And we are engaged in a strategic competition, especially with China, to ensure the values of freedom, democracy, and human rights prevail.

Last week we marked one year since Russia's brutal and illegal invasion.

At the UN, we have isolated Russia on the world stage.

A year ago, 141 countries voted to condemn Russia's invasion.

In October, 143 countries voted to reject Russia's illegal attempted annexation of Ukraine.

And last week, 141 countries again voted to call for an immediate withdrawal of Russia's troops and for a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace.

Only seven countries voted with Russia and against the UN Charter on that resolution.

Russia is weak and alone. And this resolution showed Ukraine that global support for its sovereignty and independence remains strong.

We also worked with others to kick Russia out of the Human Rights Council. And when Russia's war caused a spike in food prices, we rallied more than 100 countries to sign onto a Roadmap for Global Food Security.

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When disaster strikes, we rally the international response.

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We support a two-state solution and continue to push both sides to avoid escalatory actions that would move us further from achieving that goal.

In the Security Council, we are addressing threats to international peace and security, like the conflict in Ethiopia, instability in Haiti, and missile launches from North Korea.

On Ethiopia, we supported multilateral efforts that led to the current cessation of hostilities.

On Haiti, we passed a unanimous Security Council resolution to impose sanctions and hold bad actors accountable.

And on North Korea, we're working to enforce strong UN sanctions to make it harder for Pyongyang to build nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

We are also working to hold the UN itself accountable. We are actively advocating for a host of reforms to make the UN more effective, efficient, representative, and credible.

Our goal is to bring the UN into the 21st century, while rooting out waste, fraud and abuse.

But the truth is, as we battle for our values, enshrined in the UN Charter, the Administration's efforts to pay our bills in full have been only partially met by the Congress.

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Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Ambassador.

Members, I will call on members based on seniority of those present when the hearing was called to order, obviously alternating between majority and minority. Each member will have 5 minutes for their questions and the Ambassador's response. They will be calling votes, so I don't know if we will have time for a second round, but hopefully we will.

Ambassador, I am concerned—and we have spoken a lot about Israel and the anti-Israel bias. I am really concerned by the pending advisory opinion on Israel sought by the Palestinians at the International Court of Justice—again, another example of just rampant anti-Israeli bias at the U.N.

Last November, your deputy spoke out against the pending resolution. But, regrettably, a U.S. U.N. Official referred to the ICJ as, quote, "the pinnacle of the international judicial system," end of quote. That was just 2 weeks prior, which really, frankly, solely confused the U.S. position.

Ambassador, what actions are you taking or planning to take to prevent the ICJ and the advisory opinion from being abused and weaponized to attack Israel?

And if you want to also talk about who are potentially some of your allies and what the administration is doing to secure, to make sure that we get other countries to help out.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you so much for that question.

And let me be clear: Whenever the United States sees anti-Israel bias, we call it out and we address it directly.

And, as you noted, the U.N. is replete with anti-Israel actions and bodies, including disproportionate resolutions against Israel across the U.N. System. The open-ended commission of inquiry that you and Congresswoman Lee referred to is a recent example as is the recent request for the advisory opinion at the International Court of Justice.

And we believe all of those actions have really not contributed to bringing peace for Israel and the Palestinians. And we have discouraged any actions by either side that would escalate the situation on the ground and push us farther away from achieving peace.

My team is constantly vigilant on this issue. We watch it closely. I stay in close contact with the Israeli Permanent Representative in New York so that we don't let any opportunity that we can show our support for Israel pass. And I will continue to do that until my last day.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Ambassador, just a quick followup. Should the inevitable happen, which I fear it will, do you commit to correcting the U.S. record at the General Assembly that the ICJ is not the pinnacle of international justice but just another instrument to attack Israel?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. The ICJ does serve in some situations to support justice, but not in this particular case. And we have been clear, in this particular case, this was not the right approach to use, and we have objected strongly to it.

I don't know who made the statement, but I do make this statement here: that we do not find this acceptable, that this was turned over to the ICJ.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. The honorable ranking member.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much.

Madam Ambassador, on Ukraine, a couple things.

Can you—and I was in Poland last year, and the United Nations was just beginning to gear up with its work in Ukraine. I would like to delve into how the U.S. now has been working with and through the United Nations to build support for Ukraine and condemn Russian aggression.

Also, what more can be done, if anything, to rally the world and employ all of our diplomatic tools to help bring an end to this conflict?

And, finally, how are we able to work with the U.N. to build support among countries in Latin America and Africa that have been more reluctant—I understand why, but—have truly been more reluctant to take sides in this conflict? Can the United Nations help build more unity with the United States as it relates to Ukraine?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. You know, Congresswoman, we have built a strong coalition of countries who have condemned Russia. A hundred and forty-one votes is nothing to sniff at. If we could have gotten 192 minus Russia, that would have been better, but only 7 countries voted to support Russia. And even those countries that abstained, in their statements both in the Security Council but also in the General Assembly, they expressed strong concerns about the situation and basically condemned Russia in their verbal statements.

We can do more in terms of our own engagements with these countries. I work around the clock. If you saw my WhatsApp messages as we led up to the vote, I don't think I missed a country. And I was making phone calls at the same time. And we also had our embassies working across the world in pushing—

Ms. LEE. And, Madam Ambassador, not to interrupt you, but my colleague and I, the chairman and I, we disagree on Cuba, and that is well-known. But could you let me know, how did Cuba vote on these issues as it relates to Ukraine, in terms of—

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Cuba abstained—

Ms. LEE. Cuba abstained.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD [continuing]. On the vote on Ukraine. That is—as I said, only seven countries actually voted with Russia.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

Mr. Fleischmann, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Ambassador, thank you so much for being before us today. You have a very difficult job, and I sure appreciate everything you are doing in that regard. Thank you.

I am going to digress a little bit from my comments just to say, I didn't expect this today, but thank you so much for your comments in support of Israel, our true ally in the Middle East.

And my only ask would be to please continue to combat anti-semitism wherever it exists all over the world. And the Holocaust deniers who are out there need to be called out. The Holocaust was horrific. It was probably the worst event of the last century. And the world can never forget what happened in that horrible time.

So I do thank you for that rhetoric and the like.
I am going to move to my first question.

As we all know, Madam Ambassador, the United Nations Security Council currently has five permanent members who hold veto power—namely, the United States, Britain, France, Russia, and China.

While these so-called Permanent Five made sense after World War II ended, their deep divisions led to gridlock during the Cold War. The gridlock today continues, even though Secretary Blinken and, before him, Secretary Pompeo found China to have engaged in genocide against the Uyghurs and even though Russia, under Vladimir Putin, has launched an unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine.

Yet, at the same time, our ally Japan and our strategic partner India have never been made permanent members of the Security Council, even though Japan is the world's third-largest economy and a technical powerhouse and even though India is the world's largest democracy and a rising power in the Indo-Pacific.

My question to you, Madam Ambassador, is: Is it not long past due for the United States to push for Japan and India to be included as permanent members of the U.N. Security Council?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you so much for that question. And it really is an important question for me because I launched in September a discussion on Security Council and broader U.N. Reform, in which we announced and the President amplified at the High-Level Week that we support Security Council reform.

We have to make this Council more inclusive and more representative. And the Permanent Five was built into the charter. I can't change that. But we can change and add additional permanent members as well as additional elected members of the Council.

I have been engaged over the course of the past few months in what I have referred to as a listening tour, talking to all regions, all countries of the world, with the idea of moving forward on some kind of reform that allows us to bring new countries into the Security Council.

Japan currently is an elected member. India was an elected member for the past 2 years. And both of them have expressed desires to be permanent members.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Thank you. Thank you for your response.

I am looking at my time, as it begins to wane, so I will focus on the crux of this next question. It deals with Diego Garcia and the British Indian Ocean Territories.

Madam Ambassador, there have been two rounds of secret negotiations regarding the control over the British Indian Territory, the Chagos Islands, as Mauritius attempts to wrest control of the remote island territory away from the United Kingdom.

My big concern is, obviously, this is a key United States base, and I wanted to stress our support to keep that vital base on Diego Garcia going and our support of the British in that regard. And I just wanted to get your thoughts on this issue.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I don't have anything new on that, but when I served as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs,

it was an issue that was on my plate and it was an issue that I engaged with the Mauritian Government on, as well as the British Government, with the idea that we maintain U.S. control of that island.

But I don't have anything currently new. We can get back to you with what is happening.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Thank you very much.

And, Madam Ambassador, I thank you again.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Mr. Fleischmann.

Mrs. Torres.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield. Thank you for being with us today, and thank you for delivering such great and brave speeches at the U.N. on behalf of the United States.

I would like to hear more from you about how the administration can leverage U.N. resources to address migration in Central America and help bring stability to the region. There are still many Central Americans who are forced to flee their homes to escape persecution.

I am very concerned with the developments in the region, such as the detainment last July of award-winning Guatemalan journalist Jose Ruben Zamora, founder and president of the newspaper *El Periodico*. He has spent 215 days in a Guatemalan prison simply for telling the truth about what is happening in his government.

In many countries, the U.N. plays an important role in the fight against corruption. I understand Honduras has now decided to work with the U.N. To create an anti-corruption commission. However, in the same year that Honduras is creating an anti-corruption commission, Guatemala has cracked down on those who worked with its own U.N.-backed anti-corruption commission in previous years.

It is alarming and unacceptable that those who cooperate with the U.N. in the fight against corruption in Guatemala are now being persecuted.

So what is the role of the U.N. in Central America specifically as it relates to anti-corruption, given everything that has happened in recent years?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Let me just start by saying, early in my tenure, with the support of the Vice President, I called together all of the U.N. Agencies working on migration issues along the border but also working in Latin America, and donors as well, to commit to focusing attention on the situation at the border, but also working with those countries to ensure that they provide the protection that they are required to provide under human-rights laws and that they work more closely with the United Nations. And there was a strong commitment to that.

We are following what the U.N. Is doing very closely. I don't have anything specific on the Guatemalan case. We will ask our WHA colleagues to come back to you on specifically what is happening there. But I know that the U.N., particularly UNHCR and the Human Rights Council commission, are following the situation there very closely and doing everything they can to provide protection to him but also others who become victims of this government.

Mrs. TORRES. My concern, Ambassador, is that history continues to repeat itself. You know, Guatemala's CICIG, the U.N. Anti-corruption commission that was created, the commissioner, you know, was threatened by the government. When he left to visit—or to a hearing outside of the country, he was refused entry. El Salvador tried to create CICIES. That never happened. And now Honduras.

So what are the lessons here? And how—I don't want Honduras to be set up to fail like the other two countries. Creating an organization where we will just throw good money after bad actors, that needs to stop. That bleeding needs to stop. So what are the lessons that we have learned? And how can we support good actors from being persecuted the way that they are?

We have two former attorney generals here on asylum visas. We have a former prosecutor who—investigator who was working with CICIG in Guatemala here on an asylum visa. You know, not only are we taking on, you know, hundreds and thousands of people that are coming to our southern border asking for help, we are also taking on those brave actors.

And I disagree that throwing good money and getting private dollars to support these governments isn't a good idea, because corruption will continue.

And I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you. And we will have to wait for the answer on that one.

Mr. Carl, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. CARL. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Ambassador, welcome to the Hill.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you.

Mr. CARL. Thank you for your service to this country. I read your bio yesterday, and it is quite impressive, so thank you.

I have two very quick questions. Hopefully, I won't burn the whole 5 minutes, so somebody else can jump in here. But I appreciate that you have vowed to stand against the unfair targeting of Israel through the U.N. programs, such as the open-ended commission of inquiry.

Can you please discuss the current status of the inquiry and the harm it poses to any hope of peace between Israel and Palestinians?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. We have been clear that we think this commission of inquiry is unacceptable. And the first opportunity that we had to engage on this issue in the General Assembly, Ambassador Chris Lu worked diligently to decrease the budget by 25 percent and push back on the number of staff.

We have not seen any of their reports yet. I will say that this commission was set up when we were not on the Human Rights Council. And this is why I think it is so important that we are on that Council, so that we can stop these kinds of actions from happening in the future.

Mr. CARL. So do you see us getting on that Council?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I am sorry?

Mr. CARL. Do you see the ability for us to get on that Council?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. We are on the Human Rights Council now. We—

Mr. CARL. Okay.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD [continuing]. Rejoined the Human Rights Council in January.

And I will say, we have had some extraordinary successes. We were able to kick Russia off of the Human Rights Council. We were able to set up a commission of inquiry on the situation in Iran, a commission of inquiry on the situation in Ethiopia.

So I think it is important that we are there. And we will continue to push for human rights in those countries where we need to focus on human rights and push against efforts to put all of the attention, for example, on Israel.

Mr. CARL. Thank you.

I have just spent a week in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, and your ambassadors down there are incredible, the staff, the people that work down there.

But my question is, you know, the U.N.—the development activities in the countries and territories with Sustainable Development Goals, better known as SDGs—I am learning all these acronyms—are currently receiving billions of American dollars. Roughly how much of those funds would you say are going towards staff and other overhead costs other than going directly to heading of the sustainable development itself?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I can't give you a specific figure, but we can get back to you on that. That is something that we monitor very, very closely, because we want to make sure that funds are going to programs and not just funding structures and more staff than are necessary.

And, again, I have Ambassador Chris Lu constantly working on that issue. It is his 24/7 day job.

Mr. CARL. Well, one thing I did see down there—although you had incredible people. They certainly were well-staffed. I just want to make sure that money is making it where it needs to go. Because we are all trying to—both sides of the aisle, thank goodness, are trying to tighten our belts a little bit and get us in a little better place as far as financially. So thank you.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I can assure you that that is one of my highest priorities as well.

Mr. CARL. Good. Well, thank you, ma'am. I appreciate that.

Mr. Chair, I yield my time back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Mr. Carl. When you learn all the acronyms, maybe you can teach them to me as well.

The gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you.

And thank you, Madam Ambassador—

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you for your work. And I just want to echo the words of my colleagues to just urge your continued pushback on antisemitism.

I will move to a subject near and dear to my heart, which is the condition of the world for women and girls.

Interestingly, just coincidentally, last night I had an opportunity to be at a dinner with many women ambassadors to the United States. There was a very common thread of concern about violence against women especially, girls out of school, refugees—Ukraine, for example—the kidnapping of so many children, women obviously

being left to take care of their families because their men were in war.

We heard from the former Ambassador of Afghanistan, who was near tears because of what is happening in Afghanistan every day as women just have lost just about every right they had gained.

I guess I could go on and on. I had a group from Iraq in my office the other day, concern there.

And so I don't want to make it sound like the world is terrible for women, but there is obviously a lot going on there. And it could be—I know my colleague Mrs. Torres could tell you about what is happening in South America. We have visited Africa together here, my colleague on my left here.

So here is my question. Tell us, first of all, what you think are the most important issues facing the girls and women of the world and what kind of things the U.N. are doing to promote their safety, their education, their health, their welfare, and economic well-being.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you so much for that question. And I feel the same commitment to this issue as you do and so many others.

The situation in Afghanistan, with women being forced to remain home and not work and girls not going to school, is appalling; Iranian women being brutalized and killed in the streets; Ukrainian women being raped and brutalized. And we can go on and on.

So what are the important issues? It is protection for women. And we have to make sure that in every resolution that we pass in the Security Council and in the General Assembly that we recognize and highlight the importance of a focus on women and girls, on education, on health, and on safety.

We saw in Ethiopia, as well as in Ukraine, rape being used as a tool of war. We have to also look at accountability. How do you hold those who commit those crimes against women—how do you hold them accountable and ensure that they don't commit those crimes again?

And I think, if we can focus on those areas, on their education, their health, and their security, I think we get to the bulk of it. But we have to do it in every single resolution that we are working on and every single opportunity that we have—

Ms. FRANKEL. Excuse me. Not to interrupt, but can you give me some examples of some of the efforts of the U.N.?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. You know, we have worked with the U.N. And in the Security Council to condemn the situation both in Afghanistan as well as in Iran.

We had something called an Arria Formula meeting at the United Nations, where we brought a large number of co-sponsors and Iranian activists to highlight the situation in Iran and bring the situation to the forefront in the United Nations.

And, of course, in Ukraine, we are constantly raising these issues with the U.N.—

Ms. FRANKEL. Excuse me. Also, there are many U.N. agencies, correct—

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Yes.

Ms. FRANKEL [continuing]. That are working with refugees and promoting health and so forth?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. UNICEF—I will start with UNICEF, where there is an American head. UNICEF focuses on children, but they also focus on issues of women and girls, because they are very much related.

We are working with UN Women, and we have had UN Women come and brief the Council on several occasions on the situation in Ukraine and the situation in Afghanistan, as well as the situation in Iran.

We work closely with the World Food Programme, where, you know, hunger is more prevalent among women than others. And if women are not allowed to work, for example, in Afghanistan, then they will not get humanitarian assistance. So we are working very closely with the World Food Programme to ensure that they develop programs that will target women and make sure that aid and humanitarian assistance is able to get through to them.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you so much.

And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

Mr. LaTurner, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very pleased to be here with you on the subcommittee, my first subcommittee.

And, Madam Ambassador, very pleased to be with you, as well, today.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you.

Mr. LATURNER. I have appreciated much of what you have had to say.

I would like to start talking about UNRWA. While both the U.N. And the Biden administration have continually said that steps are being taken to address continued demonstrations of anti-Semitism, to monitor curriculum, and to prevent the construction of tunnels under UNRWA facilities, these things continue to happen.

And we see the same response: a promise of an investigation, staffers put on leave, a statement of condemnation. And then another violation occurs, and we are back to step one. Clearly, the steps the administration has taken to address and, more critically, prevent these violations from occurring are not enough.

What will your administration do to prevent the construction of terror tunnels under UNRWA schools and other facilities?

It is difficult for any of us to justify hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for an agency when they cannot even ensure this basic level of oversight is being conducted.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you so much for that question.

Last year, I visited Israel and met with UNRWA. I also saw a tunnel. It wasn't under an UNRWA school, but the Israelis took me to see one of these tunnels and the intense work that goes into developing these tunnels.

And let me just start by saying that UNRWA provides needed services to the most desperate people among the Palestinians, education. And the fact that terrorists are victimizing them by turning their facilities into possible places where they might operate—although I have to say, I didn't see that—is absolutely unacceptable.

I had a very intense and very strong conversation with the UNRWA leadership, both there as well as in New York when they

have come through New York, to ensure that they do everything in their power to not allow their facilities, their materials to be used for terrorist purposes. And I will continue to work on that.

We have an MOU with UNRWA that the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration is managing, and they monitor them constantly. But, also, I see it as my responsibility as well.

Mr. LATURNER. I appreciate that. And I believe you when you say you don't want this to happen. None of us want this to happen.

I think I am looking more specifically. What can you and the administration do to prevent this, specifically, from happening?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. You know, again, we have—I have even had discussions with the Palestinians on this issue, because what is happening damages them as well. It damages the Palestinian Authority, but it also victimizes students.

And we have called it out when we have seen it, and we have condemned it when we have seen it as well. As you know, these tunnels are being built by terrorists, and we have declared them as terrorists, and we have also sanctioned them as terrorists.

Mr. LATURNER. Shifting gears a little bit, recent reports have uncovered completely unacceptable behavior by Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese, including repeatedly demeaning the memory of the Holocaust, comparing Israel to the Nazis, and participating in conferences alongside leaders of U.S.-designated terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Given these actions, I do not see how anyone could expect her to be an unbiased observer on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories.

Are you planning to call for the removal of Special Rapporteur Albanese from her position?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. We find her statements, her public stances completely unacceptable. We have raised our concerns in the highest levels of the United Nations, and we will continue to do that. We have called for the U.N. to take actions against those individuals in the U.N. system who have shown a bias toward Israel, particularly in terms of public statements.

Mr. LATURNER. Will you call for her removal?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I have not specifically called for her removal, but I have called attention to what she is doing, and the U.N. system has to take—has to take that action.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Mr. LaTurner.

Now I will recognize another former Chairman of this subcommittee and the dean of the House of Representatives, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for convening this conference, this hearing.

Madam Ambassador, Iran has made significant gains towards achieving nuclear weapon capabilities. Recent reports from the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA, show that it found uranium enriched at nearly 84 percent in Iran, which is dangerously close to the 90-percent threshold to reach nuclear-weapons-grade material.

Iran allegedly explains that this significant uptick is a momentary side effect of trying to reach a finished product of 60-percent purity. However, that assurance is hardly comforting.

Given Iran's previously obstructions to U.N. and IAEA nuclear inspections, how can we be sure Iran is not intentionally increasing its enrichment efforts to use for nuclear weapons?

And, number two, if the international community is unable to reach a tenable agreement with Iran on nuclear weapons, what actions are the Biden administration willing to take to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them?

Ma'am?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you, Mr. Rogers, for that question. And, yes, we have seen that Iran has increased their production since leaving the JCPOA. And President Biden has been very, very clear that he will not allow Iran to gain nuclear capabilities, to gain a nuclear weapon.

Over the course of the past year, we have been focusing a tremendous amount of attention on the Iranians' attacks on Iranian people and have, in fact, kicked them off of the Commission on the Status of Women, and we have been focusing attention on what they are doing with the Russians, but we have not lost sight of what they are doing on the nuclear side.

And I would again stress that the President has been clear that we will not stand by and allow them to gain nuclear capabilities. And we are pressing Iran to allow for IAEA inspections and to comply with IAEA rules.

Mr. ROGERS. Well, again, reports from the U.N. show that IAEA found uranium enriched at nearly 84 percent.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Yeah.

Mr. ROGERS. That is significantly up. And it is close to the 90 percent to reach nuclear-weapons-grade.

It is no longer time to talk. It is time to act. What can you assure us?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I can assure you that the administration is very aware of this and prepared to act when necessary.

Mr. ROGERS. You don't consider it necessary now?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I won't project when and how the administration will respond, but I know that they are—that the administration is prepared to.

Mr. ROGERS. Well, you are the administration.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I am the U.N. Ambassador, and, certainly, I am watching this very, very closely. And I know that the President is committed.

Mr. ROGERS. Well, they are at 84 percent now, and 90 percent is considered nuclear-weapons-grade. I mean, they are within inches of having the bomb.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. And we have seen it; I saw the report this morning. It is very, very worrisome. And I know that we are looking at how we respond.

I can't—I don't even think we want to—if I knew the answer, I wouldn't want to share that with you in a public space. But I know that the administration is focused very, very intensely on this.

Mr. ROGERS. In what way?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Again, in determining how we will respond and when.

Mr. ROGERS. They are going to listen to you for advice, I assume? Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I hope so.

Mr. ROGERS. And what will you tell them?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. That this is something we need to be working on immediately.

Mr. ROGERS. And I know nothing about it, but I can tell you, it is time.

Thank you.

I yield.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you to the dean.

We should be able to do another round, Ambassador, so thank you for your patience.

Ambassador, when the administration announced—let's go back to the U.N., to the Human Rights Council—that it would run for election at the Human Rights Council in 2020, it did so under the premise that the United States would be a more effective force at countering a disproportionate bias against Israel.

You and I talked about this before, last year actually, when you testified before the subcommittee. It doesn't seem like much has been accomplished there since then.

Let me ask you, what measurable progress have you made to institute baseline standards for membership so countries like Cuba and China are just ineligible?

You mentioned how Russia was tossed out. You know, they should have never been in there in the first place.

So what progress have you made to institute—measurable progress—to have baselines so that these horrific dictatorships, human-rights abusers, don't qualify to be on the Human Rights Council?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. You know, clearly, the Council is flawed. There are human-rights violators on the Council. And I do think it was a significant accomplishment that we were able to get enough votes to kick Russia off of the Council.

We work every day to encourage countries that are like-minded to seek membership on the Council and work every day to support their efforts to run for the Council. Unfortunately, the system requires a membership vote, and countries that are human-rights violators want to get on the Council so they can block the action of the Council.

But us being there, we give courage to others to join. We give courage to those who are on the Council. And I was told that specifically when we rejoined the Council by some of the members, that having us there gives them the power and the courage to stand up to these human-rights violators.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And, Madam Ambassador—and, again, I have great respect for you. You know that. I mean, I really do. But what you are hearing, whether from Mr. LaTurner or the dean of the House or myself, is we don't hear—we don't see measurable progress. Great statements—and, by the way, statements can be very important, but we don't see measurable progress.

And, you know, it is \$12 billion that the United States—that the American taxpayer is putting into this institution, to the U.N. as

a whole. And, again—so that is why we keep asking for measurable progress. And that is one thing that we just have not gotten.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Yeah. We have made progress. I mean, we have made progress in ensuring that human rights stays at the center of many of the issues we are engaged in.

The fact that we got a commission of inquiry on Iran was a huge deal. If we were not on the Council, that would not have happened. I think had we been on the Council, we would not have a commission of inquiry that is unlimited on Israel. Being on the Council, we were able to expose Russia and get a commission of inquiry to look at that situation.

So I think we have had some successes, but I will admit it is challenging. We are sitting at the table with others who are human-rights violators. But we fight them every single day. And if we are not there, we can't fight them.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And, again, I don't question your commitment to that, but, again, I think you understand our frustration.

And, by the way, I think—

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. And I am frustrated too.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Correct, and your frustration as well.

To the Ranking Member, you are now recognized.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yes, I see the progress also, understanding issues of human rights all around the world, including in our own country. It is difficult to make progress, but under your leadership and this administration's leadership, there has been a total shift, I think. And so, just on the glass-half-full side, I just wanted to make that comment. Thank you very much.

The Sustainable Development Goals, going back to what my colleague mentioned earlier, just to break down exactly what they are, they are a common framework that all of our development partners have signed on to. They help explain the work of the United States and what it is doing overseas, as well as to help measure how far we have to go on alleviating poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring that all people have access to peace and prosperity.

So just let me ask you, in terms of the conversations happening at the United Nations, how to get the SDGs back on track after the negative impacts of the COVID pandemic. And how are various parts of the U.N. system working together to support countries in their pursuit of SDGs?

Secondly, are the goals still achievable by 2030? And are they being tracked and measured? Are there bright spots?

And then, finally, so many of the SDGs are applicable to the United States with vulnerable populations, especially communities of color. And I want to find out from you, how do you see we can better integrate these SDGs with U.S. development programs and priorities in our own country?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you so much for that question.

First, let me just say that we are committed to implementation of the SDG goals by 2030, both here at home as well as abroad. And over the course—because we are having the major SDG Summit in September, right now there is laser-focus on pushing that agenda forward. I am meeting with my office on a regular basis.

Ambassador Lisa Carty leads that, and she has her staff focused on these as well.

And we are working very, very closely with the various U.N. agencies in terms of identifying how they can do a better job of moving forward on the SDG goals but also kind of taking stock of what they have accomplished. And so we are meeting with individual agencies on that on a regular basis.

The Deputy Secretary-General is leading that process, and I have engaged with her also to, one, reaffirm our commitment, but also to encourage them to ramp up their efforts. Because we think that expanding economic opportunity both here and abroad, taking care of our planet, promoting good governance, and ensuring that we leave no one behind is a global issue and it is a global goal. And we think the SDGs will get us closer to achieving those goals.

Ms. LEE. Thank you.

Let me just ask you, in terms of setbacks in terms of COVID, do you see major setbacks? And do we need to escalate our efforts in some of these areas?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. There have been setbacks because of COVID, and the war in Ukraine contributed to some setbacks as well. So, yes, we do need to focus more attention on those goals here, and I would support your focusing on them from Congress.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much.

I will yield my time.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I thank the ranking member.

The dean of the House, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. ROGERS. After the Russian bludgeoning of Ukraine, Congress included a directive in the last appropriations bill to the Secretary of State to work with the U.N. to reduce their reliance on Russian military equipment, especially for peacekeeping operations.

The House bill carried much stronger language, appropriately so, which prohibited U.S. funding to pay for Russian equipment. Remarkably, it was not retained in the final agreement.

What specific steps have you taken to get the U.N. to move away from paying for Russian military equipment?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Again, thank you for that question. And it is something that we have focused on over the past year.

We have worked with the U.N.'s contracts and compliance office to open up the biddings for more companies to bid on these U.N. contracts. We are trying to encourage more American companies to bid on the contracts. And we are encouraging more transparency on the part of the U.N.

And we have made some progress on that. I can get more details to you on exactly what has happened, but it is something that we are working on.

Mr. ROGERS. Please submit that for the record.

[The information follows:]

The U.S. Mission to the United Nations has worked extensively to break the Russian Federation's monopoly on UN commercial aviation assets and create opportunities for U.S. and partner countries to compete for a greater share of UN procurement activity. The mission has also conducted significant outreach to U.S. companies to familiarize them with UN procurement rules and processes and encourage American businesses to bid on UN procurement opportunities.

Mr. ROGERS. For the current budget year, how much funding has the U.N. expended on Russian equipment, both new purchases and maintenance?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Okay. I will have to get back to you on that as well.

Mr. ROGERS. All right.

[CLERKS NOTE.—Response to the question was not provided in the time for the inclusion in the hearing.]

Mr. ROGERS. For the current budget year, how much funding has the U.N. expended on Russian equipment, both new purchases and maintenance?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Okay. I will have to get back to you on that as well.

Mr. ROGERS. All right.

Mr. ROGERS. I thank you.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you.

Mr. ROGERS. And I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, sir.

Mrs. Torres.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you.

And I just wanted to go back to my last statement to you. On the issue of refugees, it is not limited to Central America or South America; it is a global issue. It is a very, very tough global issue that, you know, we watch every single day how it impacts primarily women and children.

Can you talk a little bit more about the work of the U.N. in addressing the issues of—you know, what can we improve? I mean, are we arming the strongmen that are forcing, you know, these families to flee? What can we do to ensure that they are protected? And where can they go, when every country around the world seems to be closing, you know, their borders to these people that have no other place to go?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you for that question. As you know, I spent most of my career working on refugee issues. UNHCR is reporting that we have the highest number of refugees since World War II, with more than 13 million people having been forced to move out of Ukraine most recently.

Interestingly, I actually see that countries—when I look at Ukraine specifically, Ukrainian neighbors open up their borders to Ukrainians. I was in Poland and saw that they are allowing Ukrainian refugees to integrate into their communities.

Mrs. TORRES. As did Colombia and Chile when it came to Venezuelan refugees.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Yeah. And I was in Ecuador and saw, you know, Ecuador has huge numbers of Venezuelan refugees. It is putting pressure on these countries, as we know.

And so, even here in the United States, people, you know, when things get tough, they blame the people who are coming in from outside. And we are seeing that happen elsewhere around the world. But UNHCR has really focused tremendous efforts on its protection mandate. It has the mandate to protect refugees, and it is something that we work very diligently on, ourselves.

I was in Somalia recently and Kenya. Kenya has 450,000 refugees. Those refugees have been there for three generations. The

Kenyan President said to me—and I was really pleased—that these people have no home to go back to; they only know Kenya. And he is looking at how they can be integrated into communities as well.

So we are working to find options, to find permanent situations where refugees can be integrated into communities. And there is a real concerted effort to support those activities.

Mrs. TORRES. I was in Sudan, in South Sudan, last year. I traveled with the U.N. It was tragic, a very, very sad situation on the refugee camps, where we were not allowed to go inside. We were allowed to, you know, look inside from a tower.

So, if it is not safe for us to, you know, walk and visit and talk with the people living inside these—

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. These—in South Sudan, the IDP camps?

Mrs. TORRES. Yes.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Yeah.

Mrs. TORRES [continuing]. How can children thrive in these environments? And, at some point, how do we incorporate them into the countries that are hosting them?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. You know, children don't thrive in those environments.

And the UNHCR does provide education and they provide health programs for refugees. And we do have a resettlement program, where we are—and it is a worldwide resettlement program. There are a number of countries that do resettlement.

But resettlement can't address the larger issue. So we have to work with countries to find mechanisms where refugees can access the services that are available in those countries, and we have to support those countries providing those services.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you, Ambassador. And thank you again for being here with us.

And I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

And, Mr. LaTurner, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Madam Ambassador.

I would like for you to comment broadly about religious liberty and what you think your role is in promoting that at the U.N.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Religious liberty, religious freedom is a human right. And so we focus also on that as a human right. And whether it is focusing on what is happening in, for example, you know, places like Ukraine, where there are issues, or whether we are focusing in Africa where there may be issues of religious freedom, it is something that we call out, it is something that the Human Rights Council focuses attention on, and it is something that we address every time we see it.

Mr. LATURNER. So I am sure you are familiar with President Ortega exiling 222 religious political prisoners to the United States recently.

What you also might be aware of—but if not, I would like to talk about it—there is a man by the name of Bishop Alvarez. He is a Roman Catholic bishop of the Diocese of Matagalpa in central Nicaragua. He has advocated for political and religious freedom for all Nicaraguans and has been considered a critic of the Ortega re-

gime's violence against protestors and political opponents since 2018.

Bishop Alvarez has called for democratic reforms and an end to persecution of the Catholic Church, whose clergy and missionaries have been targeted by detentions, deportations, and death threats.

The bishop was first detained under house arrest in August 2022 when he refused to board the plane with the 222 political prisoners. He was imprisoned. The next day, his trial began earlier than scheduled, and he was convicted of treason, undermining national security, and spreading false news. He has now been sentenced to 26 years in prison for exercising the freedoms that we do every day here in the United States.

And so I bring all that up in the hopes that that is something that you can help with, specifically this case that I just mentioned.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Well, I appreciate you raising it with me, and I will raise it and focus attention on it. I know that our embassy is absolutely engaged on this, and I know that our Western Hemisphere Bureau is engaged on this issue. But in New York, I can assure you that I will as well.

Mr. LATURNER. I look forward to continuing to communicate about this specifically. Thank you very much.

I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, sir.

Ms. Frankel, you are recognized.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you.

I want to sort of get a little bit more specific on some of the questions that I went over earlier. And, again, thank you for your service.

We spoke before about what is happening to women and girls in Afghanistan—just every day, Taliban clamping down, banned from secondary schools, from universities, from working at NGOs. They are banished from the public sphere.

It is my understanding that the U.N. is still on the ground. So, really, my line of questioning now is because we are asked to fund the U.N., and I think it is important for people to know some of the efforts of U.N. agencies.

So if you could help us with, for example now, Afghanistan. U.N. still on the ground. Is there any hope or any—what can be done to help the women and the girls?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. The U.N. is still on the ground. UNAMA is an important partner of ours, and they are working diligently to find a way to support Afghan women. We also have a number of international NGOs, as well, that are working.

And what I was told in a recent briefing is that there are actually some areas inside of Afghanistan where this edict is not being fully implemented. And so there are some girls, in very limited areas and locations, who are able to go to school.

Ms. FRANKEL. Excuse me. I guess the big question here is, can we still get the money to these NGOs without the Taliban getting hold of the money?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. We are still supporting international NGOs that are not working directly with the Taliban. UNAMA is trying to work, I know, with some of what they consider less or—you know, less aggressive members of the Taliban to see

how they can find a way to push them, to push inside their system, to change this edict.

Because, ultimately, that is what is going to make a difference, and that is, reversing the edict. It is hard to work around the edict that does not allow women to work. Because the majority of the people in need are women, and they can only be accessed by women. And we have discouraged them from using men to replace women in these key positions.

So I know that they are working to try to find a way around this and find ways to get assistance directly to the women in need.

Ms. FRANKEL. Let me change just a little bit. We have heard reports that there have just been hundreds of Ukrainian children kidnapped to Russia. Could you tell us about that and any efforts to stop it or to get the children back?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. I spoke about that in the Security Council, in the General Assembly, as well, last week. We are very concerned and appalled by the fact that thousands of Ukrainian children have been forcibly adopted—

Ms. FRANKEL. Are they being taken off the streets of Ukraine or when they cross borders? How are they—

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. No. Most of them are taken in the areas where Russia has gained control.

Ms. FRANKEL. Oh.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Some of them were in orphanages already and may have lost their families in the fighting.

I am not quite sure where they are taking them all from, but we do know that they are taking—they are forcibly taking these children, issuing Russian passports, and putting them in Russian homes.

Ms. FRANKEL. And, I mean, is anything—

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. You know, we—

Ms. FRANKEL. I guess the question is, what can be done or what is being done?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. NGOs, the U.N., they are all attempting to engage the Russians on this, who are denying that they are forcing children away from their homes. But this is something we have to hold them accountable for. Of the many atrocities that they have committed, this is among the worst.

Ms. FRANKEL. Sorry to end on that note. Okay.

Yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Good questions.

Ambassador, votes have been called, but I am going to ask if we can just do maybe some quick questions—

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Okay.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART [continuing]. Less than 3 minutes.

I am going to go back to UNRWA. The State-Foreign Operations bill requires that, prior to funds being obligated, the Secretary must report on whether they are complying with several important requirements related to incitement of violence against Jews and the use of their facilities by terrorists.

Now, remarkably, despite continuing violations, the Secretary has continued to say that UNRWA is complying.

What specifically are you asking UNRWA for in terms of reform and accountability? Where are we, what do we have to show, as far as reforms that UNRWA has committed to?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Yeah. As I mentioned earlier, we have an MOU that is being monitored very, very closely by our colleagues in the State Department's Office of Population, Refugees, and Migration. But every single one of us who work with the U.N. also take on the responsibility of monitoring and also ensuring that UNRWA is abiding by our requirements—

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Ambassador, I apologize, because I am going to keep myself to the—

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Yeah.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART [continuing]. Time, as well. But, specifically, if you could get back to me on some of those, I think it would be helpful.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Okay.

[Clerks Note.—Response to the question was not provided in time for the inclusion in the hearing.]

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Ranking Member, you are recognized.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much.

Let me ask you, Madam Ambassador, despite well-intentioned reforms, allegations of sexual assault and abuse continue with regard to peacekeepers.

So is the U.N. holding troops from contributing countries accountable for the actions of their forces? And just where are we in terms of sexual assault?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Again, something we are engaged on on a regular basis.

So there was one peacekeeping country that was removed, the entire country, from a peacekeeping operation because of allegations of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

We are also aware of several cases in which individuals have been held accountable. And we require that countries prosecute them in their own country, and we are following those cases very, very closely. But they were removed from the peacekeeping operations.

Ms. LEE. This is a perennial problem. So we are making progress, though?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. We are making some progress.

Ms. LEE. Okay. Okay.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. It is still a challenge. I won't say we have been totally successful, but we are making progress.

And countries understand that if they are going to continue to participate and benefit from participating in peacekeeping operations, they have to ensure that their troops do not commit sexual abuse and exploitation.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Madam Ambassador.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

Let the record show that the Chair and the Ranking Member kept under time.

The dean of the House, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you again for convening this hearing on a matter of utmost importance.

The People's Republic of China has outsized influence at the U.N., and it has used that platform to promote its domestic initiatives. For example, China has been successful at blocking Taiwanese access to the U.N. or even allowing Taiwanese tourists to visit U.N. buildings.

These actions have broader implications and show China can reshape rules and norms.

As the largest contributor to the U.N., the United States should have the leverage to push back on Taiwan's access issue and others. What steps are you taking to curb China's authoritarian approach?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Let me just say, we have seen this in big and small ways, that they are using their presence in the U.N. to reshape how the U.N. functions. And they have shown that they are willing to use all aggressive methods here to challenge both our interests and our values at the United Nations, which is why it is so important that we are there constantly to push back on them.

Our strategy is to—literally, at every single step, we have people looking at all of the U.N. documents to make sure that China is not inserting their values, their narrative, their language into U.N. documents.

We are pushing hard on the Taiwan issue, to get Taiwanese access to any kind of event or any facility that does not require member-state.

But it has been tough. And part of what has been tough is the Chinese have gained power over the past 4 years. They really moved into spaces that we were not filling. They have a lot of staff in the U.N. system. And they are using that power. They are paying more—something we push for, but they also criticize us for not paying our dues and our arrears.

And that is why I think it is so important that we pay our dues, we pay our arrears, and we compete with strength, in a position of strength, against the Chinese. I see their actions every day, and we fight against their actions every single day. But we need—I would say strongly, we need the resources to do it.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, sir.

And Ms. Frankel?

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you.

Well, on that area of paying dues, I think not enough people know about some of the good things that the U.N. does. I mean, we are all aghast at the position on—of the antisemitism. Again, I urge you to keep pushing back on that.

But in terms of some other areas, especially keeping children safe, preventing child marriage, FGM, sex and labor trafficking, which of the agencies that are part of the U.N. are you confident are doing a good job in this area?

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. You know, I think UNICEF is doing an extraordinary job in focusing attention on all of these issues.

We saw this, particularly child marriages and sexual exploitation of children, actually increase during COVID because children were

not in school and girls were not in school. And I have seen UNICEF really, again, focus tremendous attention on these efforts.

The current head of UNICEF is an American, and she came with a tremendous amount of experience in this area. And I know that she has really galvanized her staff to address these issues.

Ms. FRANKEL. I thank you.

Mr. Chair, I am going to go vote, and I yield back. And thank you for this hearing.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

Ms. FRANKEL. And thank you, Madam Ambassador. Wish you the best.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Ambassador, again, thank you for your time and, even more important, for your service to our country.

This concludes today's hearing. And members may submit any additional questions for the record.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And, without objection, the Committee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs stands adjourned. Thank you so much.

Ambassador THOMAS-GREENFIELD. Thank you.

[Questions and answers submitted for the RECORD follow:]

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart #1
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
House Committee on Appropriations
March 1, 2023**

Question 1:

What measurable progress have you made to institute baseline standards for membership so countries like Cuba and China are ineligible to join or require competitive slates for [UN Human Rights] Council elections?

Answer 1:

The United States' standards for UN Human Rights Council (HRC) membership include a State's domestic human rights record and record of cooperation on international human rights efforts. We engage with allies and partners to work to exclude some countries with the worst human rights records and to encourage and support countries with better records to run for seats. Since the U.S. return to the body, the HRC has shined a powerful light on Beijing's human rights abuses; continued to push back against Cuba's efforts to subvert democratic values at the HRC; and pressured regimes around the world, such as Belarus, Burma, Eritrea, Syria,

and Russia, by creating and sharpening investigative mechanisms into human rights violations and abuses.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield by
Representative Diaz-Balart #2
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
House Committee on Appropriation
March 1, 2023**

Question 2:

What specific reforms have you accomplished or are actively seeking at UNRWA? Specifically, how will you enforce the MOU?

Answer 2:

Promoting neutrality and strict adherence to UN guidelines must be constantly reinforced for all UN entities, including UNRWA. U.S. funding guarantees the United States a seat at the table and helps to strengthen UNRWA's programs and oversight, including assessing whether UNRWA facilities are safe and adhere to Agency policies. UNRWA inspected every one of its facilities at least twice in 2022, while 98 percent of installations were inspected once per quarter (up from 28 percent in 2020). The U.S.-UNRWA Framework for Cooperation lays out mutual commitments and reporting requirements, which the State Department closely monitors through site visits, weekly meetings, quarterly checks of all UNRWA contractors receiving more than \$10,000, follow-up on internal and external

audit findings, individual project as well as extensive other reporting, twice-yearly dialogues, and more. In 2022, UNRWA improved its internal management structures through efforts such as its new 'Protection from Retaliation Policy,' which increases transparency and provides whistleblower protections for its staff. With PRM funding, UNRWA also reformed its financial regulations and restructured financial operations, better aligning them with UN best practices. UNRWA also made progress in other areas, and the Department will continue to monitor implementation of these and other reforms.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart #3
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 1, 2023**

Question 3:

UN Reform: In your testimony you stated that “we are also working to hold the UN itself accountable. We are actively advocating for a host of reforms to make the UN more effective, efficient, representative, and credible. Our goal is to bring the UN into the 21st century, while rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse.” Please provide specific examples of these reforms.

Answer 3:

We strengthened the oversight role of Executive Boards following the UNOPS scandal by requiring Board approval for any UNOPS decisions regarding the use of reserve funds. We've also called for further strengthening of oversight bodies like the Joint Inspection Unit and Office of Internal Oversight Services. Through the General Assembly, we recently required the Secretariat to carry out spending reviews for each department to ensure effective budgetary stewardship. Furthermore, we've consistently limited growth in both the UN regular and peacekeeping budgets and achieved agreement earlier this year for enhanced performance measures

for equipment used by troop-contributing countries in UN peacekeeping operations.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart #4
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 1, 2023**

Question 4:

Which of these reforms have been implemented?

Answer 4:

All these reforms are being implemented. For example, under the leadership of the United States, the UNOPS Executive Board, in the wake of the UNOPS scandal, pushed for and achieved significant reforms: closure of the investment fund that was at the heart of the scandal; capping operational reserves created by excessive management fees; reforming the management fee structure; crediting excessive fees to partner entities, including the U.S. Government; and other structural reforms to address the issues that led to the scandal.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart #5
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 1, 2023**

Question 5:

Many of the same reforms that we wish to implement today were also on the agenda from 2009-2016. If your statement is true, then why was the U.S. unable to secure reforms under the Obama administration when the U.S. was not in arrears? Does this mean they did not try to achieve similar reforms?

Answer 5:

Successive administrations have tried unsuccessfully to reduce the U.S. peacekeeping assessment rate to 25 percent. Changes to the scales of assessment require agreement by other UN member states in the General Assembly. Previous agreement to reduce the U.S. assessment rate required bilateral deals that led to General Assembly agreement. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss why this particular reform is so difficult and what we might do to overcome resistance by other countries to paying more, so that we can pay less.

Approved: IO – David McFarland, PDAS [DCM]

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart #6
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 1, 2023**

Question 6:

How is the United States leveraging its diplomacy and financial contributions to demand Taiwan have UN access and participation across the UN System?

Answer 6:

Increasing Taiwan's meaningful participation in the UN system and in other international and regional organizations is an important priority for the United States. The Secretary has made this point repeatedly, including in his joint statement with Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis on March 6, 2023, to support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international fora. The State Department works with the American Institute in Taiwan, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO), and multilateral partners to press for Taiwan to participate as an observer at the World Health Assembly and promote its participation in the WHO, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), INTERPOL, and other international organizations.

The United States continues to advocate for Taiwan's ability to participate meaningfully at the UN and contribute its valuable expertise to address global challenges, including global public health, the environment and climate change, development assistance, technical standards, and economic cooperation.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart #7
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 10, 2023**

Question 7:

What specific steps have you taken during your tenure at USUN to address China's efforts to undermine Taiwan through UN Resolution 2758 which took the Republic of China's seat in the General Assembly and provided it to Communist China?

Answer 7:

The State Department supports Taiwan's meaningful participation in the UN system, and our efforts include countering the PRC's distorted historical narratives, including those concerning UN General Assembly resolution 2758, which are meant to further isolate Taiwan from the international community and claim international consensus for the PRC's One China Principle.

The State Department engages in frequent dialogues with Taiwan and our likeminded allies and partners on ways to counter the PRC's efforts to exclude Taiwan from the UN, including through biennial International Organization Talks with Taiwan conducted by the IO Bureau under the

auspices of the American Institute in Taiwan as well as regular meetings with Taiwan's supporters at missions abroad. U.S. leadership galvanized 22 nations to join us in formal engagement with WHO leaders in support of Taiwan's meaningful participation in the May 2022 World Health Assembly in Geneva.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart #8
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 1, 2023**

Question 8:

Given the fact that Taiwan is repeatedly denied access to the World Health Assembly (WHA), what specific steps have you taken to leverage U.S. contributions to World Health Organization (WHO) to correct this problem?

Answer 8:

We have strongly advocated with likeminded partners for Taiwan's participation as an observer at the World Health Assembly (WHA) through engagements with Member States, WHO Director-General Tedros, and other senior WHO leaders. We have conducted public affairs campaigns in this regard as well. We also pushed the WHO to support participation, inclusion, and collaboration with non-state actors and other partners, including Taiwan, in various WHO workstreams to strengthen the global health security architecture.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield by
Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart #9
Subcommittee on State,
Foreign Operations Committee on Appropriations
March 10, 2023**

Question 9:

UN Women and UNFPA: Please confirm on the record that U.S. engagement with, and funding of, these entities abide by statutory prohibitions on U.S. assistance, including prohibition on promoting or funding abortion services.

Answer 9:

The United States complies with all legislative restrictions on our funding, including those related to abortion.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart #10 and #11
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 20, 2023**

Question 10:

What are you doing to build consensus on condemning the Maduro dictatorship, and calling for human rights for the Venezuelan people, and building on what has been unveiled by the investigations into Venezuela?

Answer 10:

The United States is committed to working with our allies and partners to support justice and accountability measures in Venezuela. We employed sanctions and imposed visa restrictions on Venezuelan officials and their family members responsible for undermining democratic governance, perpetrating human rights abuses, or engaging in corrupt practices. The United States regularly engages the international community to raise awareness of human rights abuses in Venezuela and urges allies to condemn the Maduro regime's human rights record, hold human rights abusers accountable, and call for the peaceful return to democracy. We continue

**Question for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
Rep. Barbara Lee#1
House Committee on Appropriations, State and Foreign Operations
Subcommittee
March 1, 2023**

Question 1:

United Nations peacekeeping forces must be held accountable, particularly with respect to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). We also want to ensure that U.S. bilateral assistance, particularly in the security sector, does not support known SEA violators. What steps has the State Department and the United Nations taken to share information on those known to commit abuses? What further steps could be taken to improve coordination in this area?

Answer 1:

The United States has urged the UN Special Coordinator for Improving Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse to share more information through the *Conduct in UN Field Missions* database and to expand prevention and accountability efforts.

Consistent with Department policies and procedures and section 7048(g) of the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2023 (Div. K, P.L. 117-328), the Department withholds assistance to a foreign security force unit to the extent practicable if the

Secretary has credible information the unit has engaged in SEA. Partially informed by the UN database, the United States discontinued PKO-funded Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) assistance to Mauritania (2019), Cameroon (2020), and Gabon (2020) due to SEA concerns.

**Question for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
Rep. Barbara Lee #2
House Committee on Appropriations, State and Foreign Operations
Subcommittee
March 1, 2023**

Question 2:

China is increasingly trying to leverage its growing financial and material contributions to UN peacekeeping in order to curry favor with developing countries and push peacekeeping in a direction that more closely aligns with its national interests and values, often deprioritizing human rights. Does the U.S. see this kind of impact from increased PRC engagement? How is the U.S. pushing back on efforts by the PRC to deprioritize human rights in the context of UN peacekeeping operations?

Answer 2:

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has made minor progress in weakening or striking language within key UN policy, budgetary, and mandate documents regarding human rights, rule of law, gender, and democratic governance. The United States counters these efforts within the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Special Committee on Peacekeeping, UNGA Fifth Committee, and the UN Security Council by retaining and strengthening language wherever possible and advocating strongly to retain human rights positions during negotiations.

**Question for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
Rep. Barbara Lee #3
House Committee on Appropriations, State and Foreign Operations
Subcommittee
March 1, 2023**

Question 3:

UNRWA provides vital services to millions of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. One of the organization's most important functions is providing primary and junior secondary education to more than 500,000 children through a network of schools across Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. A recent World Bank study showed that UNRWA students outperform their non-refugee peers on national and international standardized tests by a margin equivalent to more than one year of learning. Why is continued international support for these types of activities important? How does support for UNRWA promote stability in the region?

Answer 3:

UNRWA's teachers and educational programming teach children to think critically, expand their horizons, communicate well, solve problems, and work in a team. Specifically, State Department funding for UNRWA supports classwork on respecting human rights, increasing tolerance, and resolving conflicts peacefully. UNRWA is proud of how well its students perform. Its students generally perform at higher levels than other refugee or public school students in the same fields and UNRWA's basic education

dropout rates decreased in the 2020-2021 school year, despite COVID-19, with a more than 98 percent completion rate for male and female students. UNRWA school graduates have worked at NASA, are doctors in their communities, are teachers themselves, and give back constructively in many ways. UNRWA's schools are often the only option for many Palestinian refugee children to pursue education and a brighter future. UNRWA's food and emergency relief programs, employment of Palestinian refugees, education, health care, and social services all provide lifelines for Palestinian refugees, enhancing stability in the region despite increasingly difficult circumstances.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
Representative Barbara Lee #4
House Committee on Appropriations, State and Foreign Operations
Subcommittee
March 1, 2023**

Question 4:

The FY23 omnibus appropriations bill included a provision allowing the Administration to waive the statutory prohibition on funding for UNESCO, potentially paving the way for the U.S. to rejoin the organization. Can you discuss the Administration's priorities and a timeline for a potential return to UNESCO? Why does the Administration support reengagement with UNESCO, and how will rejoining the organization and resuming our financial contributions help us push back against the PRC's activities there?

Answer 4:

We appreciate the waiver provision in the FY 2023 appropriations act and are exploring options to rejoin UNESCO this year with full privileges.

The People's Republic of China (PRC), UNESCO's largest contributor, exploits UNESCO's mandates to promote its national agenda. The PRC's multi-year campaign, and offer of \$6 million annually, to host a UNESCO Category 1 center for education to shape curricula at all levels in Africa and the global south is just one example. The PRC also tries to shape UNESCO norms on emerging technologies such as AI to facilitate their use in government

repression. UNESCO's mandates, including on human rights, journalist safety, Holocaust education, and heritage protection, must be protected.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
The Honorable Grace Meng #1
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 1, 2023**

Question 1:

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, how are we working with our U.N. partners to build on programs like Safe from the Start to ensure that health care, including sexual and reproductive and mental health services, and in-kind assistance is provided to those subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse and trafficking in the context of the Ukraine war?

Answer 1:

The U.S. government supports key UN partners like UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, and UNFPA, whose mandates include prevention of and response to gender-based violence in humanitarian contexts, including Ukraine.

Additional U.S. commitments include:

- A \$10 million investment to support civil society efforts to investigate and document Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) in line with the Murad Code in the pursuit of truth and justice for victims and survivors, and accountability for crimes involving violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. An

additional \$2 million has been committed for victim- and survivor-centered, trauma-informed approaches to foster resilience during and after conflict;

- An additional \$400,000 to the United States' annual contribution of \$1.75 million to the Office of the UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, supporting work to promote justice and accountability, foster national ownership and leadership for a sustainable, survivor-centered response, and address the root causes of CRSV; and
- Funding in the amount of \$2.5 million to IOM and the International Justice Mission from the Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to provide direct protection services to human trafficking victims impacted by the war in Ukraine.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
The Honorable Grace Meng #2
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 1, 2023**

Question 2:

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, how is the Biden Administration working in UN bodies like the Human Rights Council to make sure that the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan remain front-and-center on the international community's agenda?

Answer 2:

The United States and our partners are coordinating to ensure a principled, unified stance in our advocacy for the rights of women and girls. In the HRC, we supported efforts to bolster the mandate of UN Special Rapporteur for Afghanistan Richard Bennett, as he continues investigating the situation of human rights in the country. We also are coordinating closely with UNSC partners to continue a strong mandate for the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. And we are supporting senior level UN officials as they develop a “concept of operations” to better assist women and girls in Afghanistan, including our joint statement at the CSW, following

the Taliban's December 24 edict banning Afghan women from working for NGOs.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield by
The Honorable Grace Meng #3
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 1, 2023**

Question 3:

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, how will you ensure the U.S. adheres to the goals outlined in Resolution 2250, specifically to give youth a greater voice in decision-making at the local, national, regional, and international levels and to establish mechanisms that would enable youth to participate meaningfully in peace processes?

Answer 3:

I support the goals in Security Council Resolution 2250 to give youth a greater voice in decision making. To this end, I encouraged the Secretary-General to develop internal mechanisms throughout the United Nations to broaden youth participation. We encourage UN peacekeeping missions to promote the meaningful and diverse participation of youth in peace processes, including youth from marginalized and underrepresented communities. We also seek to generate opportunities for positive youth engagement to mitigate the risk of unlawful recruitment or use of children by armed forces or groups.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2023.

MEMBERS' DAY

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DIAZ-BALART

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Good morning. The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs will come to order.

Let me start by welcoming everyone to the Member Day hearing. This is your committee. I thank my colleagues for taking time out of your busy schedules to really discuss issues that are important to you within the State and foreign operations priority.

I apologize for the delay in starting, but you all know that there are a million things going on today.

As we work to develop the fiscal year 2024 bill, input from you and all of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle is, frankly, not only welcome, but it is essential. It is essential for us to be able to do our jobs in a proper way.

Obviously, the President's Budget is Delayed, we have not received testimony on the administration's funding priorities. However, it is no secret that the fiscal environment and the rampant spending in the last number of years is requiring and needs to require for us to make tough decisions. The American taxpayer deserves to know where their hard-earned money is going and, what is achieved by that money being spent. That is why it is our duty of this subcommittee and, all the subcommittees of Appropriations to scrub every line and justify every dollar in our bill.

There are, obviously, many bipartisan priorities in our bill, from the safety and security of our diplomats abroad and supporting our allies around the world, including the Middle East, fighting HIV/AIDS, and pushing back against the threats of freedom and democracy around the planet, particularly at a time that we see an emboldened and very aggressive Communist China and Russia.

There is much to discuss, and I know that my colleagues, our colleagues before us have devoted much time and much effort to championing a lot of priorities and are deeply passionate about the critical issues around the world, which is why we are so grateful that you have taken the time to spend it with us this morning. And I look forward to hearing your testimony.

I want to thank the Ranking Member. I know she has been busy, and had to run from—pretty far away to get here. Let me first recognize Ranking Member Lee for any opening statement that she might have.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER LEE

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I apologize for being late, but many of you know I have been trying to repeal the 2002 authorization to use force—that is the Iraq

authorization—for 20 years, and we finally got it through the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs.

So thank you very much. I apologize again for being late. So I will be very quick in an opening statement and yield to our witnesses.

But what I learned—and I will conclude by saying this—over the last 2 years as chair of this committee, there is so much interest in the work of this committee as it relates especially to development and diplomacy. We had over 6,000 Member requests, and I was really quite surprised that so many Members are very focused on our global peace and security, diplomatic diplomacy efforts.

And so I look forward to hearing the testimony. And, again, I apologize for being late.

But thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much. And I will yield.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you to the distinguished Ranking Member.

Without objection, the full written statements of all Members will be included in the record.

In order to keep our schedule, I would ask that each witness limit your oral testimony to 5 minutes.

And now I would like to recognize Mrs. Radewagen for your testimony. And thank you for your patience. You are recognized.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2023.

WITNESS

HON. AUMUA AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN, A DELEGATE IN CONGRESS FROM THE TERRITORY OF AMERICAN SAMOA

OPENING STATEMENT OF MRS. RADEWAGEN.

Mrs. RADEWAGEN. Thank you, Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee, for the opportunity to testify today on the need for an increase of U.S. investment in the Pacific Island region in the fiscal year 2024 appropriations bill.

The United States is a Pacific Island nation. We have been a Pacific Island nation for over 100 years. The day starts over the skies of Guam and the Marianas and ends in my home, the pearl of the Pacific, American Samoa. However, since the end of the Cold War, we have forgotten our commitments to the region.

Over the past year, we as a country have been making overtures to our Pacific Island neighbors, with many Pacific Island leaders meeting with both the administration and congressional leaders in the fall. We have a great chance this year to further engage.

We just signed memorandums of understanding with the freely associated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau to continue the Compacts of Free Association. However, words only go so far. Now is the time for action.

The People's Republic of China is watching, and any failure to capitalize on our recent engagements with the Pacific Islands will be swiftly filled by the PRC.

The State Department has just opened an embassy in the Solomon Islands, with more embassies planned in the region. However, those embassies require staff and funding to be effective. For

example, we technically have an embassy in neighboring Independent Samoa, but it has a skeleton crew staff, with the Ambassador being in New Zealand. However, the PRC has a 3-story building, one of the largest in the country, and it is fully staffed. If we expect to compete with the PRC, we probably need to take our diplomacy a little more seriously.

Today I humbly ask that the committee support U.S. engagement in the Pacific with \$160 million for the Pacific Islands, matching fiscal year 2023 funding. This funding is essential for expanding an American footprint in the region and ensuring a free and open Pacific.

Each dollar that the United States invests in the Pacific prevents my island neighbors from being exploited by the People's Republic of China.

For the United States to maintain and deepen its relationships in the region, we must put real resources towards our diplomatic presence, partnerships for development, and engagement with civil society.

Thank you for your time and for consideration of the needs of the people of the Pacific.

I yield back the balance of my time.

[The information follows:]

**Rep. Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen (American Samoa- AT LARGE)
Member Day Testimony for FY 24 to the
Appropriations State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee**

Thank you, Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee, for the opportunity to testify today on the need of an increase of U.S. investment in the Pacific Island region in the FY2024 appropriations bill.

The United States is a Pacific Island nation. We have been a Pacific Island nation for over a hundred years; The day starts over the skies of Guam and the Marianas and ends in my home, the pearl of the Pacific, American Samoa. However, since the end of the Cold War we have forgotten our commitments to the region.

Over the past year, we as a country have began making overtures to our Pacific Island neighbors, with many Pacific Island leaders meeting with both the Administration and Congressional leaders in the fall.

We have a great chance this year to further engage – we just signed Memorandums of Understandings with the Freely Associated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Palau, to continue the Compacts of Free Association.

However, words only go so far – now is the time for action. The PRC is watching, and any failure to capitalize on our recent engagements with the Pacific Islands will be swiftly filled by the PRC.

The State Department has just opened an embassy in the Solomon Islands – with more embassies planned in the region. However, those embassies require staff and funding to be effective. For an example, we technically have an embassy in neighboring Independent Samoa, but it has a skeleton crew staff, with the Ambassador being in New Zealand. However, the PRC has a 3 story building, one of the largest in the country, and it's fully staffed! If we expect to compete with the PRC, we need to take our diplomacy seriously.

Today, I humbly ask that the Committee support U.S. engagement in the Pacific, with \$150 million for the Pacific Islands, matching Fiscal Year 2023 funding. This funding is essential for expanding an American footprint in the region and ensuring a Free and Open Pacific.

Each dollar that the United States invests in the Pacific, prevents my Island neighbors from being exploited by the PRC.

For the United States to maintain and deepen its relationships in the region, we must put real resources towards our diplomatic presence, partnerships for development, and engagement with civil society.

Thank you for your time and for consideration of the needs of the people of the Pacific.

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Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you very much for being here today and for speaking to us. I greatly appreciate your hard work. Thank you so much.

Now we would like to recognize Ms. Omar for her testimony. And, as I said before, thank you for your patience this morning.

You are recognized. Good morning.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2023.

WITNESS

HON. ILHAN OMAR, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

OPENING STATEMENT OF Ms. OMAR

Ms. OMAR. Good morning. Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, distinguished members of the subcommittee, I want to begin by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

Around the world the people who fight for democracy, for human rights, for basic human dignity, they look to the international community for support. They look to the United States for support because we profess the values of upholding human rights and international law.

It is our obligation to ensure that when we profess these values, they are not just nice sounding words in a press release or diplomatic speech. We must back up our words with action. Quite simply, when we say we are champions of human rights and democracy, we should mean it.

Part of this, in my view, has to do with our funding priorities. Our national funding priorities are a vital part of that mission. When I have traveled to Africa on congressional delegation trips, I have heard over and over about the importance of balancing the three Ds: development, diplomacy, and defense. I am sure you all have had those same conversations, probably also with the same conclusion, that we frequently get the balance wrong.

This subcommittee is at the frontline of getting that balance in order. We are often too reactive to crises and conflicts around the world, waiting until they have spiraled out of control before we begin paying attention to them.

I urge you all in this year's bill to significantly raise the budget for the Complex Crisis Fund, the Atrocities Prevention Fund, and the Reconciliation Program Fund.

The Complex Crisis Fund allows USAID to respond with flexibility and creativity to emerging conflicts, and has shown significant success in Bangladesh, Mali, among other places.

The Atrocities Prevention Fund gives the administration the tools it needs to act quickly to prevent mass atrocities and serious human rights violations from occurring.

The Reconciliation Program Fund provides communities resources for locally led peace building and reconciliation programs. This allows for durable and sustainable peace.

Combined, we spend less on these programs globally than we spend just on foreign military financing for Colombia alone.

Investing in prevention and actively working to stop conflict before they spiral out of control is both a moral and a strategic imperative. These three funds support immensely important work while costing us comparatively little. It should be clear that spending to prevent atrocities and conflict is valuable on its own, but it also represents a wise investment of taxpayer dollars. Money spent now to prevent instability represents results and less money spent later to respond to those crises.

I also would like to urge this subcommittee to be much more aggressive with your use of human rights conditions on security assistance and arm sales. In my first 4 years in Congress, I have led and co-led numerous letters to the subcommittee making the case for stricter human rights conditions on a number of countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

The truth is that list could be two or three times longer. I strongly believe that there should be strict human rights conditions attached to every dollar we send abroad in FMF or any other security assistance and arm sales.

This comes back to my point about prevention. When we arm regimes that then go on to commit serious human rights violations, it is not just a betrayal of our stated values, it is also a national security risk.

Any administration is going to fight congressionally mandated human rights conditions, as we have seen on many occasions. It is incumbent on this committee to strongly assert our authority on this matter.

Again, Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am grateful for this opportunity. I look forward to our continued collaboration to ensure that the United States really does put human rights and civilian security at the center of our foreign policy.

I yield back.

[The information follows:]

SFOPS FY2024 Member Day Testimony
Representative Ilhan Omar (MN-05)

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I want to begin by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today.

Around the world, the people fighting for democracy, for human rights, and for basic human dignity, look to the international community to support. They look to the United States for support because we profess the values of upholding human rights and international law. It is our obligation to ensure that when we profess those values, they are not just nice-sounding words in a press release or a diplomatic speech. We must back up our words with actions. Quite simply, when we say we are the champions of human rights and democracy, we should mean it.

Part of this, in my view, has to do with our funding priorities. When I've travelled to Africa on CODELs, I have heard over and over again about the importance of balancing the "three d's" of development, diplomacy, and defense. I'm sure you have all had those same conversations, probably also with the same conclusion that we are frequently getting the balance wrong.

Conflict Prevention Accounts

This subcommittee is the front line in getting that balance back into order. Far too often, we are too reactive to crises and conflicts around the world, waiting until they have spiraled out of control before we begin paying attention to them. I want to urge you all, in this year's bill, to **significantly raise the budgets for the complex crises fund, the atrocities prevention fund, and the reconciliation programs fund.**

Investing in prevention, and actively working to stop conflicts before they spiral out of control, is both a moral and a strategic imperative. These three funds, while costing us comparatively little, support immensely important work. It should be clear that spending to prevent atrocities and conflicts is valuable on its own. But it also represents a wise investment of taxpayer dollars – money spent now to prevent conflicts, displacement, and instability represents much more money saved later in responding to those crises.

Human Rights Conditionality

I also want to urge the Members of this subcommittee to be much more aggressive with your use of human rights conditions on security assistance and arms sales around the world. In my first four years in Congress, I have led and co-led numerous letters to this subcommittee making the case for stricter human rights conditions on a number of countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. And you all can expect to receive similar letters from me and my colleagues this year.

The truth is, that list could be two or three times as long. I strongly believe that there should be strict human rights conditions attached to *every dollar* we send abroad in FMF, or any other security assistance and arms sales. This is back to the point about prevention – when we arm regimes that then go on to commit serious human rights violations, it is not just a betrayal of our stated values, it is also a national security risk.

Any Administration is going to fight Congressionally mandated human rights conditions, as we have all seen on many occasions. It is incumbent on this subcommittee to strongly assert our authority on this. We have made admirable progress on this in recent years, but there is still a lot more that can be done to close loopholes and tighten conditionality. As you all know, sometimes small changes in the text of an appropriations bill can have massive impacts on the ground. This is the moment to be much stricter in our appropriations language, and much more thorough in our oversight.

Again, Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I am grateful for this opportunity. I look forward to our continued collaboration to ensure that the United States really does put human rights and civilian security at the center of our foreign policy. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you so much. And, again, thank you for taking what is the most valuable thing that we have, which is time, to spend it with us today. Thank you very much.

Mr. Sherman.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Good morning, sir. Thank you for your patience, and we greatly appreciate you being here this morning.

You are recognized, sir.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2023.

WITNESS

HON. BRAD SHERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

OPENING STATEMENT OF MR. SHERMAN

Mr. SHERMAN. Chair Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, I thank you for your time which, as you point out, is the most valuable thing you have. With 26 years of service on the Foreign Affairs Committee, I have got a lot to say, but I will limit myself to 5 minutes.

First is the need to provide, I would suggest, \$3.5 million to Voice of America so they can broadcast in the Sindhi language, the language of southern Pakistan. Pakistan is perhaps—it doesn't always get all the press—but the most complicated and one of the most dangerous situations we face. It is the only nuclear state that has had a military coup or, in this case, several.

While we reach out to the people of Pakistan in the Urdu language, that is the native language of only 8 percent of Pakistanis. There are over 30 million Pakistanis whose native language is Sindhi. And I think that with \$3.5 million—and I have been working on this for a long time—we could make sure that the Sindhi language service was a separate service, not just a subset of the Urdu service, and we could reach out to a critical part of Pakistan.

Second, we have passed through the committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, twice unanimously the Peace and Tolerance in Palestinian Education Act. My hope is that that can be included in the approps bill and actually become law, as so many Foreign Affairs bills, that is their route to becoming a statute.

We are the top donor to Israel. We are also the top donor to the Palestinian people, including the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA. The Palestinian Authority curriculum in the schools is not consistent with American values and not consistent with working toward peace. Students are taught to emulate Dalal Mughrabi, who killed 38 Israeli civilians, including 13 children. The 45th anniversary of that attack is this Saturday, and it is why I am reintroducing the bill on that day. My hope is that you will include it in your legislation.

The people of Artsakh are an Armenian community that have lived in that region for hundred—really thousands of years. Joseph Stalin, in his evil wisdom, made that region part of Azerbaijan rather than Armenia. The result has been a terrible conflict, including what is now a 3-month blockade of the Armenians living in that region. They desperately need humanitarian assistance, and

I hope you are generous in providing humanitarian assistance for the people of Artsakh.

The Rohingya people are not getting as much publicity as they once did, but the situation remains dire. These people have been denied citizenship and even safety, in Burma or Myanmar, and are living in Bangladesh. To show you how desperate they are, they have fled to Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world.

The World Food Program has announced that it is reducing rations by 17 percent due to insufficient funding. While USAID has provided significant assistance in the past, including announcing \$75 million in late January, I hope that you would increase the amount that we provide to the Rohingya refugees.

And, finally, we have seen a terrible civil war in Ethiopia and particularly its Tigray region. A peace deal has been signed, although not fully implemented. We have substantial disaster aid in the pipeline for Ethiopia. My concern is that the government in Addis Ababa will not get it to the people of Tigray, having just fought and, to some degree, won a brutal war that killed 600,000 people against that very region. And so I would hope that you would have very specific language insisting that the USAID make sure that in proportion to the suffering, the Tigrayan people actually receive a portion of USAID.

With that, I actually yield back 15 seconds early.

[The information follows:]

Congressman Brad Sherman (CA-32) Testimony

Member Day Hearing for FY2024 Dept. of State, Foreign Operations, & related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations

I want to thank Chair Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, and my esteemed colleagues on the State, Foreign Operations, & related Programs Subcommittee for allowing me to testify before you today. As a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I look forward to discussing with you all priorities that will help us navigate the opportunities and challenges we face around the globe.

Voice of America Sindhi Language Programming

There is perhaps nowhere in the world more important for the United States to battle extremism with public diplomacy than in Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state with significant security challenges. However, until last year, Voice of America's outreach in Pakistan was only done in Urdu - the native language for only an estimated 8% of Pakistanis. I want to thank the members of this subcommittee for including my amendment to create Voice of America programming in the Sindhi language, which led to the launch of Voice of America's Sindhi language website this past summer. Opening up Voice of America to a Sindhi audience has allowed us to reach over 30 million Pakistanis whose native language is Sindhi. However, there is more work to be done, including increasing funding for improved translations of the site and the eventual transition of VOA Sindhi into its own standalone site instead of a subset of the Urdu site. That is why I urge my colleagues on this subcommittee to maintain and expand funding for this critical program which will significantly expand Voice of America's impact in Pakistan.

Peace and Tolerance in Palestinian Education Act

We've seen a worrying uptick in violence in the West Bank, much of which has been carried out by minors – including several attacks last month where Palestinians as young as 13 carried out deadly terror attacks. These children are not born hating – instead, they are tragically taught hatred, antisemitism, and incitement in Palestinian Authority and UNRWA schools.

For decades, the United States and the American people have been the top donor to the Palestinian people, including to the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA - but this is not a blank check. American dollars must be spent in a way that reflect American values of tolerance and peacebuilding. Unfortunately, the current Palestinian Authority curriculum, used by both Palestinian Authority and UNRWA schools, falls short of reflecting those values.

Instead of envisioning a Palestinian state alongside Israel, textbooks erase Israel from maps, refer to Israel only as “the enemy,” and ask children to sacrifice their lives to “liberate” all of the land between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea. One horrific example includes a 5th grade textbook which encourages students to emulate Dalal Mughrabi, a convicted terrorist who perpetrated the 1978 Coastal Road massacre which killed 38 Israeli civilians - including 13 children. This Saturday will mark the 45th anniversary of the Coastal Road massacre, and I will be reintroducing my bill, the *Peace and Tolerance in Palestinian Education Act*, this Friday in memory of these victims. The bill will create new State Department reporting to address the ongoing issue of incitement and antisemitic content in textbooks used by the Palestinian

Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) – which is especially timely given that, despite UNRWA’s renewed commitments to address this issue in the 2021 Framework for Cooperation, problems with antisemitism and incitement continue to be well documented.

This legislation has passed through the Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously in both the 117th and 116th Congress, and has widespread bipartisan support – growing to 46 cosponsors in the last Congress. The reporting would create critical oversight that Congress needs to meaningfully address this issue, and I urge my colleagues to include my legislation in the FY2024 State, Foreign Operations, & related Programs appropriations bill.

Artsakh & Azerbaijan

For nearly 3 months, the human rights of the people of Artsakh have been continuously violated by Azerbaijan’s brutal blockade of the region. Food and critical medical supplies run dangerously low, and families have been separated – including children attending school in Armenia who have not seen their parents in Artsakh since the blockade began. This is only the latest in a long history of Azerbaijan’s aggression towards Artsakh’s ethnic Armenian population. It’s high time the United States ends all military aid to Azerbaijan and supports dire humanitarian needs in Artsakh through significant assistance, and I urge my colleagues on this subcommittee to support efforts to do so.

Rohingya

And of course we continue to see the devastating suffering of the Rohingya people, who rely almost entirely on humanitarian assistance to meet their essential needs due to limited employment opportunities in their refugee camps. Last month, UN experts warned about dire consequences for Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh if life-saving food aid is slashed, and they issued a plea for donations. Chronic malnutrition rates are already high among the Rohingya, meanwhile the World Food Program has announced it would be reducing rations for the Rohingya by 17% due to insufficient funding. I’m aware that USAID announced \$75 million in assistance in late January, which was on top of \$170 million in U.S. assistance announced in September. These contributions were certainly welcome and were made possible by the actions of this Subcommittee – but more must be done to avert further humanitarian catastrophe for this vulnerable population. I urge my colleagues on this subcommittee to significantly increase the U.S. contribution to the UN account for the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Ethiopia & Tigray

Ethiopia continues to struggle with conflict and severe humanitarian crisis. Just this month, the International Rescue Committee ranked Ethiopia as the country second most at risk of worsening humanitarian crisis in the world, second only to Somalia. The overlapping crises in Ethiopia affect numerous regions, but nowhere more than in Tigray. We need to ensure that any aid to Ethiopia, particularly disaster response aid, be spent to help the people of Tigray in proportion to the suffering that the people of Tigray have faced. It is critical that the U.S. works to ensure that anti-Tigrayan sentiment in Ethiopia does not prevent aid from getting to those in Tigray who so desperately need it.

I thank my colleagues for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee here today, and for their commitment to these critical priorities. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A very detailed presentation, and we greatly appreciate it. Thank you, sir.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Congresswoman Manning, thank you for being here again. Also just want to thank you for your efforts on the House Bipartisan Task Force on Combating Anti-Semitism.

You are recognized.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2023.

WITNESS

HON. KATHY E. MANNING, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

OPENING STATEMENT OF MS. MANNING

Ms. MANNING. Thank you.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lee, and members of the subcommittee. I really appreciate this opportunity to testify before you. And I want to begin by thanking you for your work on this subcommittee to make investments that are critical to so many aspects of our foreign policy, including the fight against anti-Semitism.

I am here today as the proud co-chair of the House Bipartisan Task Force for Combating Anti-Semitism. I work, of course, with my colleague, Representative Chris Smith of New Jersey, and six other colleagues on both sides of the aisle, including the House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Kay Granger and Vice Ranking Member Grace Meng.

The United States has a long-standing, bipartisan commitment to fighting against anti-Semitism. And I am here today to urge the subcommittee to strengthen our national commitment to this important priority by providing increased resources for the Office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism.

As you know, in recent months and years, we have witnessed a major rise in violence, anti-Semitic violence, and threats against Jewish communities around the world and, frankly, in this country. History has taught us that attacks and conspiracy theories that target Jews frequently grow to threaten other communities and undermine the health and well-being of democracies.

The Special Envoy is our only diplomat whose single focus is to monitor these disturbing trends and advance efforts to counter anti-Semitism around the world in all its forms.

I applaud this committee for its prior support, including appropriating \$1.5 million for the office in fiscal year 2023, an incredibly welcome increase in funding. I am confident that additional support and resources for the Office of the Special Envoy would make a real difference to our government's leadership in the fight against anti-Semitism, and that is why I strongly urge you to support \$2 million in fiscal year 2024 for the office.

We have made some progress in the fight against anti-Semitism. And in the past few years, many other countries and intergovernmental organizations have followed our lead by establishing their own dedicated, national level special envoys and coordinators tasked with countering anti-Semitism.

At the same time, the threat of anti-Semitism continues to spread, take on new forms, and emerge in different parts of the world. These trends increase the workload of and the demands on the Special Envoy. While many countries around the world are facing a rise in anti-Semitism and could benefit from the Special Envoy's expertise, there are only so many countries the Office of the Special Envoy is able to visit due to limited resources. Additional funding for the office would support greater U.S. Government engagement and leadership on this issue around the globe.

An increase in the office's appropriation would also help enhance the professionalization and specialization of a dedicated staff to support the Special Envoy, especially as the position was recently elevated to a Presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed position with the rank of Ambassador.

For these reasons, I respectfully request your support this year for the same year-on-year increase as last year, bringing the total funding for the office to \$2 million for fiscal year 2024. And I am proud to join Representative Meng and many members of the House Bipartisan Task Force for Combating Anti-Semitism in leading this letter to the subcommittee supporting this request.

Mr. Chairman, at various times throughout history when anti-Semitism was on the rise, too many failed to confront this threat. That is why it is so meaningful that this committee and so many Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle remain committed to fight this persistent form of hate.

I respectfully ask you continue to support increased funding for this office that is so vital to the Jewish community, to our commitment to combating anti-Semitism, and to America's values and foreign policy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
[The information follows:]

Testimony of The Honorable Kathy Manning (NC-06)

FY24 Member Day Hearing

House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

March 8, 2023

Dear Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, and Members of the Subcommittee,

I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you. I want to begin by thanking you for your work on this Subcommittee to make investments critical to so many aspects of our foreign policy, including the fight against antisemitism.

I am here today as a proud co-chair of the House Bipartisan Task Force for Combating Antisemitism, together with Representative Chris Smith of New Jersey and six other colleagues on both sides of the aisle, including House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Kay Granger and Vice Ranking Member Grace Meng.

The United States has a longstanding, bipartisan commitment to the fight against antisemitism. I am here today to urge the Subcommittee to strengthen our national commitment to this important priority by providing increased resources for the Office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism (SEAS).

As you know, in recent months and years, we have witnessed a major rise in antisemitic incidents and threats against Jewish communities around the world. History has taught us that attacks and conspiracy theories that target Jews frequently grow to threaten other communities and undermine the health and wellbeing of democracies.

The Special Envoy is our only diplomat whose single focus is to monitor these disturbing trends and advance efforts to counter antisemitism around the world, in all of its forms. I applaud this committee for its prior support, including appropriating \$1.5 million for the office in FY23, an incredibly welcome increase in funding. I am confident that additional support and resources for the Office of the Special Envoy would make a real difference to our government's leadership in the fight against antisemitism. That is why I strongly urge you to support \$2 million in Fiscal Year 2024 for the Office.

We have made great progress in the fight against antisemitism, and in the past few years, many other countries and intergovernmental organizations have followed our lead by establishing their own dedicated, national-level Special Envoys and Coordinators tasked with countering antisemitism. At the same time, the threat of antisemitism continues to spread, take on new forms, and emerge in different parts of the world. These trends increase the workload of, and the demands on, the Special Envoy. While many countries around the world are facing a rise in antisemitism and could benefit from the Special Envoy's expertise, there are only so many countries that the Office of the Special Envoy is able to visit due to limited resources. Additional funding for the Office would support greater U.S. government engagement and leadership on this issue around the globe.

An increase in the Office's appropriation would also help enhance the professionalization and specialization of a dedicated staff to support the Special Envoy, especially as the position was recently elevated to a Presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed position with the rank of Ambassador.

For these reasons, I respectfully request your support this year for the same year-on-year increase as last year, bringing the total funding for the Office to \$2 million for FY24. And I am proud to join Representative Meng, and many members of the House Bipartisan Task Force for Combating Antisemitism in leading a letter to this Subcommittee supporting this request.

Mr. Chairman, at various times throughout history when antisemitism was on the rise, too many failed to fully confront this threat. That is why it is so meaningful that this Committee, and so many Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, remain committed to fight this persistent form of hate.

I respectfully ask that you continue to support increased funding for this Office that is so vital to the Jewish community, to our commitment to combating antisemitism, and to America's values and foreign policy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you so very much for being here today and for your leadership.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

To the distinguished Ranking Member, any comments, questions at this time?

Ms. LEE. No.

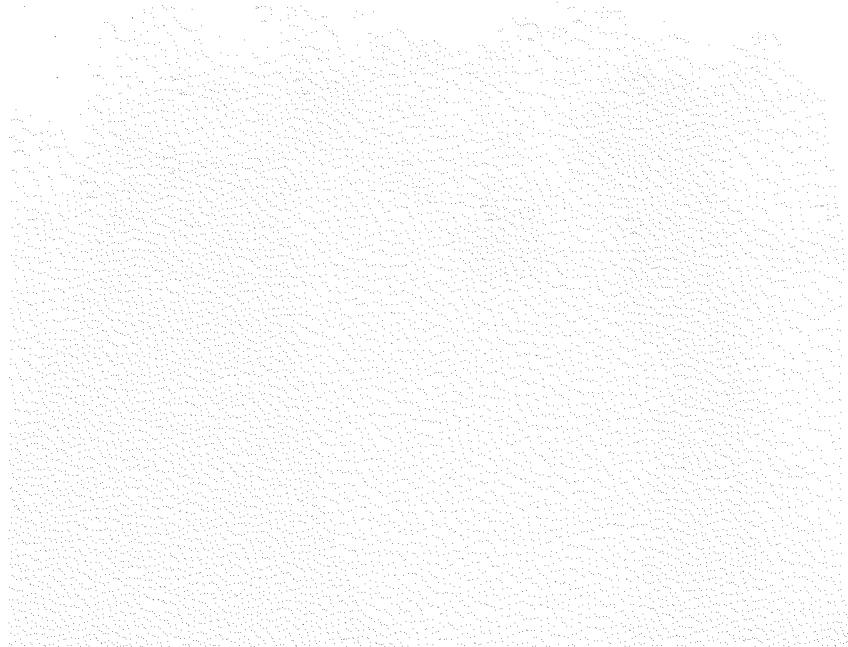
Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Great. Therefore, this will conclude today's hearing. Members may submit any questions for the record.

With that, the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs stands adjourned.

Thank you very much.

[Additional statements submitted for the record follow:]

TESTIMONY
OF
MEMBERS OF CONGRESS



**Written Testimony for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs**
Congressman William R. Keating
Massachusetts 9th District

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, Members of the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee, I submit this testimony today to stand in strong support for robust funding for state and foreign operations accounts in Fiscal Year (FY) 24. I also want to emphasize a few accounts, which I believe are particularly important in our efforts to support new and emerging democracies globally.

As part of these efforts, I strongly support continued inclusion of \$30 million to support democracy efforts in Belarus for FY24. Since the illegitimate 2020 presidential election in Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka has continued to repress his people, imprison journalists and opposition figures, and, most recently, become complicit in Vladimir Putin's illegal war of aggression in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Belarus' leading opposition figures have made strides in consolidating their movement, strengthening their plans for a democratic Belarus, and building a global coalition of partners in opposition to Lukashenka's illegal and tyrannical grip on power.

As part of these efforts, I, along with Representatives Joe Wilson, Marcy Kaptur, and Chris Smith have formed the bipartisan House Belarus Caucus which will continue to fight for a democratic Belarus. As such, I want to stand in strong support of continued U.S. support for democracy in Belarus and request that you maintain funding levels for Belarus in the Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia (AEECA) Account for FY24.

While Belarus remains central in the fight for democracy across Europe, Russia's illegal war in Ukraine has reshaped the global balance of power and brought together a transatlantic and global alliance in support of Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and freedom. Furthermore, as I expressed last year in an appropriations letter to this committee, despite great progress, many post-Cold War countries have exhibited signs of democratic backsliding. The AEECA account helps counteract these forces by supporting democratic initiatives, civil society members and independent journalists. At such a pivotal moment in European history, I strongly support increased funding for the AEECA account for FY24.

I also submit testimony today before the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee to speak in strong support for the inclusion of robust funding for the George J. Mitchell Scholarship program. The Mitchell Scholarship Program is administered by the U.S.-Ireland Alliance, a nonpartisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to educating Americans about the island of Ireland and building ties for future generations. With 2023 representing the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, funding the George J. Mitchell Scholarship Program would honor the legacy of the agreement and further efforts to ensure the success of the Good Friday Agreement for the next 25 years and beyond.

As we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, funding for global health initiatives remains vital to protect our way of life. Global health is also an acute national security and economic concern as the last few years have demonstrated. As such, I want to express my strong support for funding for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria which has

saved 50 million lives since 2002. Additionally, continued USAID investments in vaccine development for HIV/AIDS, TB, and other emerging diseases with effective accountability measures is vital especially for building research and development capacity globally.

Finally, I want to speak in strong support for USAID International Basic Education programs which are instrumental in providing access to quality education for millions of children. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on access to and quality of education for children which we know is vital to ensuring success. I strongly encourage this subcommittee to continue support for these programs.

Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee, I want to thank you both for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee and I strongly encourage support for the programs and accounts outlined above.

TESTIMONY OF REP. JAMES P. MCGOVERN (MA-02)

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS AND RELATED AGENCIES
FISCAL YEAR 2024
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
March 8, 2023**

Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee –

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on a few of my priorities for the FY 2024 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

As you know, I am active on many issues under your jurisdiction, and I hope to engage with you and your staff as the appropriations process moves forward.

I understand that each subcommittee, including yours, will be looking for areas to control spending. But the FY 2023 State-Foreign Operations bill represented a \$25.6 billion cut from FY 2022 enacted levels, and a \$6.6 billion decrease from the President's request.

I would respectfully note that significant cuts have already been made to this bill and I hope that the Committee will not seek further reductions to vital programs.

As you know, we are facing many global crises, including food security, health, and education. Many countries struggle to advance good governance and democratic institutions. Human rights defenders are on the front lines of these struggles and are often persecuted, imprisoned, and killed for their work.

At such a time in world affairs, it is critical for this Committee to demonstrate America's resolve to stand fast in its commitments.

Among these is U.S. leadership in global health and nutrition programs. One of my top priorities for Fiscal Year 2024 is the bipartisan request being led by Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick, Sarah Jacobs, Young Kim, and myself. We ask that you provide \$300 million for the

Nutrition account and \$1.15 billion for the Maternal and Child Health account, which includes \$340 million for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, within the Global Health Programs account at USAID.

This request is supported by a broad coalition of NGOs representing America's most trusted implementing partners.

While the subcommittee has provided increases to both the MCH and the Global Health Programs accounts, these increases have not been reflected in funds dedicated to the Nutrition sub-account.

We know the interventions provided to infants, including severely malnourished children, have a tremendous "bang for the buck." When we see documented reductions in stunting and improvements in maternal and child health from these proven interventions, I cannot understand why increases to the Nutrition account are so difficult.

An important role of this Committee is to promote the very best of U.S. values and advance America's global interests and relationships. What could be more central to achieving these goals than advancing the global health and nutrition of the world's most vulnerable children and families?

I want to thank the Committee for its thoughtful and effective designations regarding U.S. aid to Colombia and Central America. I strongly support, at a minimum, maintaining current funding levels for the Northern Triangle region and for Colombia.

On Colombia, we have an opportunity to work with the Colombian government to advance the full implementation of the Peace Accord. It is critical that this Committee maintain or increase current levels of U.S. economic and development assistance for Colombia.

The Committee, under Republican and Democratic majorities, has also supported the three special mechanisms established under the Accord to advance justice, the search for the disappeared, truth and reconciliation.

Last year, the Colombian Truth Commission issued the definitive report on the human costs of over six decades of conflict. The report included a set of recommendations that were accepted by the Colombian government for implementation. It is important that U.S. policy uphold these findings, continue to provide support to the Truth Commission Follow-Up Committee, and help ensure that its recommendations are carried forward.

I also encourage the Committee to continue funding for the National Unit to Search for Disappeared Persons. Not knowing the fate of loved ones, let alone being able to recover remains and provide a dignified closure, is a wound that is passed down through the generations. Support for this National Unit is central to a peace and reconciliation process that respects the rights of all victims.

The Special Jurisdiction for Peace, or JEP, has advanced several key cases and I urge the Committee to maintain its support for the JEP.

I also ask that the Committee continue allocating \$21 million for the elimination of landmines. U.S. support for demining has been critical in eradicating this scourge in Colombia. I also want to thank the Committee for its attention to police and military reform. I encourage you to strengthen your focus on this critical human rights and security issue.

Thank you for allowing me this time to speak about these priorities. I'm happy to respond to any questions you might have.

**Testimony to the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs
Appropriations Subcommittee**

Congressman Ed Case, Hawai'i District One

March 8, 2023

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of a strong Fiscal Year 2024 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill that increases investment in U.S. re-engagement in the Pacific Islands and follows through on our critical recent commitments to our partners throughout the Indo-Pacific.

The Pacific Islands region has long held strategic and cultural importance to the United States. Countless servicemembers lost their lives or were wounded in the Pacific Islands during World War II, fighting for both the security of the United States and a free Indo-Pacific. Following the war, the United States became administrator of the United Nations-designated Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (today's Compacts of Free Association countries) and developed and sustained relationships with the many countries and other jurisdictions throughout. However, our engagement unfortunately waned over time and suffered from decades of insufficient attention, a situation the pacing challenge of China has been only too willing to exploit.

Recognizing the need for substantial re-engagement in the Pacific Islands, the Fiscal Year 2023 Omnibus/State and Foreign Operations bill set aside \$150 million for the Pacific Islands region. It also set aside in report language \$4 million for trade capacity building activities and \$20

million for climate mitigation and adaptation efforts in the Pacific Islands. This was in addition to other amounts appropriated in other titles, especially Defense.

With your help, the State Department will use the Fiscal Year 2023 funds to build off prior strides towards bolstering our Pacific Islands partnerships. For example, an embassy reopened this year in Solomon Islands, and the process is underway to open embassies in Kiribati and Tonga. The administration also hosted the first ever U.S.-Pacific Islands Summit in Washington, D.C. and committed to providing an additional \$810 million in investment in the region.

However, these strides come after decades of neglect to counter the one-side narrative China has offered in the region. Our Pacific Island partners are hopeful but understandably skeptical of our long-term commitment to the region. For them, it remains to be seen if we mean what we say and if we are truly the partner they can again rely on for their present and their future. This makes it all the more vital that we fully back our commitments to the Pacific Islands in our foreign policy budget.

This means sustaining the \$150 million set aside for the Pacific Islands in Fiscal Year 2023 with a modest increase for Fiscal Year 2024. It also means following through on the promises outlined in the Roadmap for a 21st Century Pacific Islands Partnership, released at the U.S. Pacific Islands Summit. That includes funding for the return of Peace Corps volunteers; bolstering efforts to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; supporting trainings and scholarships for Pacific Islanders to study in the United States; and providing support for climate resilience projects, civil society and trade development.

Finally, we also must ensure that the executive branch has the capacity to smoothly launch and support these new initiatives. Though staffing is increasing in the region and in D.C., the State Department still has less than 10 staff members assigned to the 14 independent Pacific Islands nations. There is only one U.S. Agency for International Development officer assigned to the Pacific Islands. This must be scaled up if we want the United States to be an effective partner in the region, and must in any event be scaled up if the substantially increased funding we have already directed and are directly is to be efficiently and effectively spent.

I also note that while other bureaus at State have control of flexible funding for democracy and governance projects, the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs does not. A fund controlled by the Bureau to invest in projects in the Pacific Islands as opportunities present themselves would allow it the flexibility to be proactive and nimble in its outreach to the region. These flexibilities are necessary if we want to offer a viable alternative to a very nimble and proactive China.

Though successive administrations led by both parties have emphasized the need to shift the focus of U.S. foreign policy west to the Indo-Pacific, we have far to go and time is critical. Indo-Pacific engagement has been a motif in the 2015, 2017 and 2022 National Security Strategies, and was followed through with successive Indo-Pacific Strategies. We must now mobilize the resources needed to realize the aims of these critical documents and fully appropriate relevant strategies and initiatives. Strategic documents are a starting point, but they do nothing without resources and investment.

I urge you to craft a Fiscal Year 2023 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill that follows through on U.S. commitments to the Pacific Islands and the Indo-Pacific broadly. We have made progress, and our diplomats are working hard to realize our aims. However, without funding to support our commitments, promises made by our diplomats will ring hollow. Now is the time to ensure that our foreign policy budget reflects the importance of our ties to the Pacific Islands and our support for a secure and stable Indo-Pacific.

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Member Day Hearing | March 8, 2023 at 9:00 AM

Testimony of Representative Brian K. Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania
"Fiscal Year 2024 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill"

Thank you, Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee, for the opportunity to submit testimony for your consideration as your subcommittee drafts the Fiscal Year 2024 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill.

I have been active on foreign affairs issues throughout my time in Congress, having previously served three terms on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, as I continue in my second term on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and serving as the Chair of the House Ukraine Caucus. I believe that the U.S. must project strength in our global engagement, and that we must harness all of our tools of influence to advance our interests overseas and to protect our prosperity at home.

I have been a consistent champion for U.S. leadership in diplomacy and development, and I applaud the bipartisan work of your subcommittee in providing the resources necessary to the State Department, USAID, and our other foreign operations agencies. My role as the co-chair of the House Problem Solvers Caucus has provided me with the opportunity to work closely with so many colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and I know that our foreign policy and national security is much stronger when we set aside our party politics and come together to support robust U.S. engagement in the world. As you craft this year's State Foreign Operations bill, there are a few areas of particular importance that I respectfully request you to consider prioritizing.

Maternal and Child Health: This Committee has a long-standing record of supporting USAID's global work to promote maternal and child health. In fiscal year 2021 alone, the appropriations that Congress provided enabled USAID to provide 91 million women and children with access to essential health services, including reaching 31 million children and 11 million pregnant women with lifesaving nutrition interventions. The MCH account supports delivery of cost-effective, proven services in countries where the burden of preventable deaths is often the highest. USAID's lifesaving investments provide access to skilled birth attendants and emergency obstetric care, training for frontline health workers, safe water, sanitation and hygiene in healthcare facilities, health commodities, and nutrition services like breastfeeding support.

Early Childhood Development: With the passage of the bipartisan Global Child Thrive Act in January of 2021, Congress sent a strong signal to the Executive Branch that we must keep working to ensure that children — especially young children — are not just surviving, but thriving. This requires moving beyond children's physical needs to addressing their developmental, emotional, and mental well-being, which are vital for achieving health, education, and economic outcomes

later in life. To meet this challenge, Congress must direct more funding to early childhood development (ECD) overall and to direct a more substantial portion of that ECD foreign assistance to the most vulnerable— children with disabilities and children in crisis and conflict contexts. Smart investments in early childhood development -- including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development--can ultimately contribute to a country's stability, security, and economic prosperity by promoting the health of its future generations.

Global HIV/AIDS- as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and Congress works to reauthorize this program, it is incumbent on us to maintain our funding commitments both to our bilateral PEPFAR program and to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. The combined work of PEPFAR and the Global Fund has saved more than twenty-five million lives over the last two decades through prevention, treatment and care programs across the globe. While we strive to achieve an AIDS free generation in our lifetime, the practical reality is that HIV/AIDS will be with us until we develop an effective vaccine. We have made great progress in the development of vaccines and monoclonal antibodies, and we must double down on our commitment and investments to developing a vaccine that will finally defeat the HIV/AIDS virus.

Thank you for your consideration of these vital foreign operations programs and for allowing me to testify before the subcommittee today.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Foytak".

Written Testimony of Congresswoman Anna G. Eshoo (CA-16)
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Member Day Hearing
March 8, 2023

Thank you to Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing by submitting written testimony about the importance of investing in international peacebuilding programs in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24).

According to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, there were more active armed conflicts in 2022 than at any time since World War II. From Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine to bloody civil wars in Ethiopia and Yemen, this surge in violence has inflicted tragedy on millions of people around the world, fueled mass migration, disrupted the global economy, and contributed to deadly food shortages.

Given the recent increase in armed conflict around the world, I encourage the Subcommittee to provide robust funding for international peacebuilding programs in FY24. Specifically, I request that the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill for FY24 include the following:

- **\$66 million for the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Complex Crises Fund (CCF)**, an increase of \$6 million. Congress established the CCF in 2010 to enable USAID to respond quickly and flexibly to the early warning signs of conflict abroad. The Fund is used to support reconciliation programming, counter misinformation and extremism, and bolster civil society groups working toward peace. As the only account of its kind, the CCF has been used to prevent or mitigate violence in more than 30 countries.
- **\$40 million for Reconciliation Programs administered by the Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention at USAID**, an increase of \$15 million. USAID's Reconciliation Programs facilitate dialogue between ethnic, racial, religious, and political groups in countries that have experienced civil conflict. By working to heal the social divisions which so often fuel violence abroad, these programs promote peace and stability in the world's most volatile regions.
- **\$25 million for the State Department's Atrocities Prevention Fund**, an increase of \$20 million. This funding increase will enable the State Department to implement the recommendations included in the first-ever U.S. Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities, which was published by an inter-agency task force last year. If implemented properly, the Strategy will strengthen our country's ability to detect the early warning signs of mass atrocities and genocide, and work with international partners to stop them.

These critical investments in peacebuilding will save lives and advance American interests by helping to create a safer and more prosperous world. I'm grateful to the Subcommittee for your consideration of my requests and your commitment to promoting peace abroad.

and that the only truly sustainable path from poverty to prosperity is through private sector led growth. USAID must evolve into an agency that is more capable of understanding and partnering with the private sector, as well as appreciating and harnessing the huge development potential from market forces and for-profit endeavors. For these reasons, I also am a strong supporter of the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation and the Millennium Challenge Corporation- as two agencies that seek to eradicate poverty through advancing economic growth. The DFC has huge potential, both to expand and improve its development impact, and to serve as a critical tool in advancing U.S. foreign policy interests across the globe. Likewise, the MCC represents the best of American values by building multi-year compact partnerships with countries that embrace our ideals of democracy, free markets, and the respect for freedom.

Maternal and Child Health- This Committee has a long-standing record of supporting USAID's global work to promote maternal and child health. In fiscal year 2021 alone, the appropriations that Congress provided enabled USAID to provide 91 million women and children with access to essential health services, including reaching 31 million children and 11 million pregnant women with lifesaving nutrition interventions. The MCH account supports delivery of cost-effective, proven services in countries where the burden of preventable deaths is often the highest. USAID's lifesaving investments provide access to skilled birth attendants and emergency obstetric care, training for frontline health workers, safe water, sanitation and hygiene in healthcare facilities, health commodities, and nutrition services like breastfeeding support.

Global Vaccines- The COVID-19 pandemic both revealed the critical importance of investing early in the development of vaccines countermeasures against the highest threat pathogens, and

the pandemic also revealed how a regional or global disease outbreak can wreak havoc on routine child immunizations programs. I supported the Securing America from Future Epidemics (SAFE) Act, which was enacted into law at the end of 2021, and which provided the authorization for U.S. contributions to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). CEPI has played a critical leadership role in advancing the development of longer-lasting and more effective COVID-19 vaccines, while also working on a library of vaccines to protect the global population from future pandemic threats that cut across more than twenty-five viral families. I also have championed the importance of Gavi, the Global Vaccine Alliance, which has provided routine immunizations to nearly 1 billion children over the last twenty years and has been responsible for preventing more than 16 million child deaths. Yet, routine immunizations in low- and middle-income countries were severely reduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related shutdowns and supply chain disruptions. We must make up the critical lost ground in global child immunization. Both Gavi and CEPI provide great value for money and leverage through balanced burden sharing with other donors, and the U.S. must continue to provide significant funding contributions to advance the critical missions of these two global health organizations.

Nutrition- While nutrition remains a small portion of our overall global health budget, malnutrition remains the biggest killer of children under the age of five, accounting for nearly fifty percent of the 5 million children under five who die each year. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees have provided consistent funding increases for the nutrition account, as well as directing USAID to focus on the most evidence-based and cost-effective interventions. Last Congress, I was proud to co-lead and support the final passage of the Global Malnutrition

Prevention and Treatment Act, which went a step further in calling on USAID to provide strategic focus in its nutrition investments to a target set of countries and through the Power 4 package of prevention and treatment interventions. Congress also provided emergency resources last year to scale up the production and distribution of Ready-To-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF) treatments for the more than 50 million children who suffer from the most severe form of severe acute malnutrition, known as wasting. USAID provided \$200 million last year, alongside \$330 million from other donors, to significantly scale up RUTF treatment coverage levels from 20 percent to more than 50 percent of the children in need. I urge you to provide the necessary resources to maintain this level of USAID funding for RUTF so that we avoid a cliff scenario, where coverage levels drop back down to the point where only one in five children have access to these life-saving treatments.

Steve Cohen, Tennessee Ninth District

Thank you for the opportunity to present my top priority for the Fiscal Year 2024 State and Foreign Operations bill. I appreciate your consideration of the following priority focused on global polio eradication. Thank you for your ongoing support of funding for the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Polio Eradication Initiative. I request the consideration of \$165 million for this program in FY24.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) is one of the largest, most successful, public-private health initiatives ever created. As a result of this global effort, nearly three billion children have been immunized, 20 million have been spared disability, and over 900,000 polio-related deaths have been averted. In addition, more than 1.5 million childhood deaths have been prevented, thanks to the systematic administration of Vitamin A during polio campaigns.

Global polio incidence has been reduced by more than 99 percent and wild poliovirus incidence was reduced by a further 96 percent in 2021 as compared to 2020. However, outbreaks of circulating vaccine derived polio represent an ongoing challenge. These outbreaks are made possible due to under-immunized communities; and these have increased following COVID-19 health service disruptions.

This funding will enable USAID to intensify its support of the GPEI's Polio Eradication Strategy 2022-2026 through active subnational and community-based surveillance to detect and investigate cases in 25 countries and 5 regions, by expanding environmental surveillance, and by increasing the number of surveillance medical officers and community-based surveillance officers, particularly in high-risk areas. It would also support high-quality immunization campaigns - including outbreak response immunization campaigns in high risk and remote areas

- by supporting targeted, evidence-based innovations to overcome barriers, building community demand and addressing vaccine hesitancy, and strengthening in-country capacity in order to interrupt polio transmission globally.

The first confirmed case of paralytic polio in the United States in decades and detections of polio virus in wastewater in several counties in New York, as well as in the United Kingdom and Canada were stark reminders in 2022 that until the world is polio free, all children, even those in the United States, remain at risk.

This issue is of particular importance to me because I suffered from polio as a child just as vaccines were starting to be administered. My father was a doctor responsible for giving the polio vaccine to second-grade students when my older brother was in second grade. He vaccinated my brother and brought a vaccine home to give to me, but he decided not to give me the vaccine because he was not supposed to give it outside of the second-grade test group. Four or five months later, I came down with polio, and I continue to experience the long-term effects to this day. Being vaccinated against polio just a little earlier would have made a big difference in my life.

Until the world is polio-free, all children, even those in the United States, remain at risk. Continued U.S. leadership is essential to ensuring we capitalize on the historic opportunity to rid the world of polio once and for all. To continue this tremendous progress, I respectfully request your continued support for the polio eradication efforts of the USAID in the FY2024 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill.

THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2023.

**OVERSIGHT HEARING—UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR
GLOBAL MEDIA**

WITNESS

AMANDA BENNETT, CEO, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DIAZ-BALART

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. The State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs will come to order.

I want to first welcome our witness and our guests, Amanda Bennett, the CEO of the United States Agency for Global Media.

Ms. Bennett, you are at the helm of an agency that is tasked with providing free independent information globally including, as you well know, in the most repressive media environments conceivable. The timing of this session, of this hearing so early in the cycle of our hearings should send a clear message of the priority that we place on this agency and the importance of your mission. And it is no secret that I am a strong supporter of the mission.

As a Cuban American with the strongest admiration for pro-democracy movements across the globe, I can attest to the importance of American-sponsored information and broadcasting in Cuba, in Iran, and around the world. Congress' support for international broadcasting dates back eight decades, beginning with the Voice of America during World War II.

Unfortunately, Putin's brutal war in Ukraine reminds us today the need to inform those who are, again, victimized by authoritarian regimes. That need is just as great as it was in the 1940s. And I wish that was not the case, but the need is there.

Your agency's mission—to provide people around the world with really an opportunity to know who we are, what America stands for, and what is the reality in their country, well, that is vital. It is absolutely vital. For people living under repressive regimes such as Russia and Iran and Cuba, access to accurate reporting and the ability to counter propaganda with real and truthful news is critical.

In countries where authoritarian regimes have implemented information blockades like Iran and Cuba, allowing people to gain access to information including uncensored, uncensored news from within their own countries is essential. Something that we take for granted here, obviously, is something that they do not have access to.

Ms. Bennett, today's hearing focuses on the oversight of USAGM. And I look forward to hearing from you on the many, many components of USAGM and the programs and how the Agency spends its funds.

I want to understand your efforts to invest in technology and new methods to overcome the ways that bad actors, starve their own people of information and free access to media.

I will have some questions. I want to ask you about the Office of Cuba Broadcasting because I am profoundly concerned by the Biden Administration's continued pursuit of demoralizing and destabilizing cuts to the vital program at a time when the regime is, encountering protests, when the Cuban people are hitting the streets, and when even minors—have been sentenced to decades in prison for the sin of just peacefully asking for freedom.

Let's just be honest—if it were anywhere else in the world, funding would have increased. But, because this is Cuba, for some reason, OCB has repeatedly faced unjustified cuts while other programs have received huge increases, something that I do not understand and would love to see if anybody does.

Ms. Bennett, I want to hear from you directly on how USAGM and OCB are responding to challenges related to your workforce, and whether you are willing to work with me and my colleagues on this subcommittee to strengthen and restore this crucial, critical office. And I appreciate the conversation that you and I had regarding that.

As chairman of the State, Foreign Operations Subcommittee, I can tell you that our own investment into USAGM is not taken lightly. Your appearance here is happening within the precise time span of a newly-released budget for fiscal year 2024, where 944 million dollars is being requested for USAGM.

While the mission is important, funding for agencies like yours must be predicated on thoughtful planning, on performance, and ultimately, obviously, on results. We are going to be scrubbing every dollar and every cent, even in the high-priority areas.

Before continuing, I want to note that the story of USAGM cannot be told without talking about the people that work with you and most notably the brave journalists who work around the world. We know that many of them are under personal threat, safety threats, including from hostile regimes acting to prevent your reporters and your broadcasters from operating and from doing their job and from letting the people know what is actually happening.

Ms. Bennett, I look forward to working with you on what I believe is a very crucial, crucial agency for our national security interests and also for what it means to be an American and living in this great, amazing country of freedom.

It is a top priority of mine to proudly tell the American story, the story of freedom, opportunity, and democracy all over the world, and to tell the story also of those who have been displaced by authoritarian regimes around the world, whose story also is emblematic of the greatness of the United States. But they are also the truest representative, as you know, of what is going on in those countries. So we must never shy away from reminding people what we stand for, helping them become informed about their own lives, and countering our adversaries, which I know is something that is keen on your mind.

So I thank you for your service. I thank you for appearing here today. And I look forward to continue working with you.

Let me now turn it to the distinguish Ranking Member, Ms. Lee, for her opening remarks.

You are recognized.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER LEE

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon. Thank you so much for being here. Your agency, the U.S. Agency for Global Media, has a mandate—and it is such an important mandate—and mission that is really more relevant now than perhaps ever.

As the world grows more connected, the importance of objective news and accurate information is essential to the health, livelihood, stability, and the ability to make decisions amongst people throughout the world, especially those vulnerable people in some of the most difficult countries. Decisions, I think, should be informed decisions and I believe that your agency has a duty and responsibility to present the facts to help make decisions.

Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Asia, they are a key part of meeting this crucial strategic interest. But, once again, sometimes I question the factual nature of some of the messages that go out.

Today the U.S. Agency for Global Media and its grantees are at the forefront of supporting freedom where it is consistently being undermined. Working across 63 different languages to an audience of 410 million people last year, the demand for independent journalism continues to grow. According to human rights groups, there were 187 internet shutdowns in 35 countries in 2022, which is the highest number in a single year since statistics were tracked.

So your affiliates are critical lifelines in China, Nigeria, Iraq, Iran, Russia, Burma, among others. For example, in their support for freedom globally, USAGM and its Open Technology Fund are supporting Iranian protesters, galvanizing Iranian society as they demonstrate. USAGM is key to keeping the internet on and working for those protesters and ensuring that they can communicate with each other. I will continue to stand with the women of Iran, and your agency is at the forefront of making it happen.

As anyone who tries to keep up with the latest social media knows, it is not easy to stay cutting edge and relevant and be objective. After years of criticism by several of my colleagues, including myself, as well as several derogatory inspector general reports, which were very factual, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting has instituted several reforms that I hope will bring its credibility back to U.S. taxpayers, although I have some question about what the purpose is in the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.

By supporting USAGM, we are strengthening one of our most important resources in the fight against misinformation and for democracy globally. Access to information is a human right. United States Agency for Global Media protects this right for millions around the world and is a rightful cornerstone of U.S. engagement abroad. That is why I hope to hear how the messages are developed and how factual these message are because it is so important for the United States to be part of bringing objectivity to the world about democracy and human rights and other issues that your agency addresses.

So, with that, Chairman Diaz-Balart, I yield back. And thank you very much.

Thank you for being here.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you very much, Congresswoman Lee.

Ms. Bennett, your full written statement will be placed on the record. Feel free to summarize your testimony. And, again, thank you for being here.

You are recognized.

OPENING STATEMENT OF MS. BENNETT

Ms. BENNETT. Chairman Diaz-Balart—Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, distinguished members of the subcommittee, I thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today about what we all agree is the important work of the U.S. Agency for Global Media.

Through the work of our six entities—the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Middle East Broadcasting Networks, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and the Open Technology Fund—we proudly present fact-based news and information to parts of the world that do not have a free and open press.

And, as we all recognize, this hearing could not have come at a better time because we are at a critical moment in history. Authoritarian regimes are using malign influence, propaganda, information manipulation to undermine those seeking fact-based news about the world around them. And when Russia invaded Ukraine, the horrifying consequences reverberated around the world and brought the global information war into very sharp focus. The Kremlin quickly silenced dissenting voices inside of Russia, while expanding its malign influence abroad.

Meanwhile, in China, the government has built one of the most repressive media environments in the world. And it has been working hard to export this model to other countries.

And the reality is, if we miss this opportunity to match the investments Russia and the PRC are making, we run the risk of losing the global information war. We should be alarmed at that but also optimistic, alarmed because we are being vastly outspent but optimistic because we still have a chance if we act now.

This is a moment that USAGM was built for, as it was during World War II and the Cold War, to combat malign foreign influence. With over 4,000 media partners worldwide and objectively measured high credibility, we are well positioned. The firewall, which ensures the editorial independence of our broadcasters, is essential to that credibility and trust.

Right now we have measurable data showing that we are still outperforming the PRC and Russia in many markets. In Latin America and Africa, VOA is vastly outperforming the reach of Russia and China's local language brands. In the Middle East and North Africa, MBN is consistently competitive and in some cases outperforming Russia's Arabic language brand. And it is not too late for us to secure this competitive advantage.

Our true power lies in our ability to harness the reach of the entire USAGM network for greater impact, and that is exactly what we are doing. Through dozens of translations, USAGM takes the

work of RFE/RL's brave journalists on the ground in Ukraine and shows the horrible reality of Putin's war, not only to people inside Russia and Ukraine but also to nearby countries. Just as we are pushing back against Russia's malign influence worldwide, we are also reaching a growing audience in and near Russia.

For example, RFE/RL and VOA's video content in Russia and the Ukrainian languages was viewed 8 billion times in the year since the full-scale invasion, and that is more than double the year before. Of course, this crucial reporting does not come without grave security risks. Tragically, last year, Vira Hyrych, a talented member of RFE/RL's Ukrainian service, paid the ultimate price for her commitment to sharing the truth no matter how dangerous.

Our networks are bringing this global story to audiences in places like Cuba, Iraq, Cambodia, Nicaragua. And, with help, we can extend that reach around the world. As we provide an alternative to PRC propaganda in key markets like Latin America and Africa, our audiences inside China show that they are willing to go great lengths to reach our content. In times of crisis, audiences seek us out and trust us to report the truth, especially when it is a truth their own governments would prefer to hide.

Radio Free Asia's coverage of the 2022 protests against the zero-COVID policy in China broke records for web traffic and social media engagement. In 2021, a record number of Cubans turned to OCB's Radio Marti for news of the July protests.

But, even the very best journalism is of no use if people can't see or hear it. And the Open Technology Fund supports censorship circumvention tools, allowing audiences and journalists to get past authoritarian regimes blocking the internet. For example, during these recent protests in Iran, one in four Iranians used these tools.

USAGM remains committed to delivering on our mission and being consistently competitive in today's dangerous world of information manipulation and heavy investment by authoritarian regimes, but we can't do this without the support of Congress.

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, members of the subcommittee, we are deeply grateful for your support, and we value your oversight role and advice. Thank you, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

[The information follows:]

**Statement of Amanda Bennett
CEO
U.S. Agency for Global Media
Before the
House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
“Oversight Hearing – United States Agency for Global Media”
March 9, 2023**

Introduction

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the critical mission and work of the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of USAGM, an independent agency that provides accurate, objective, and professional news and information to parts of the world that do not have a free and open press. As a journalist by training, I often explain our mission by saying we export the First Amendment.

The history of U.S. international media spans more than 80 years, starting with the creation of Voice of America’s first radio show during World War II. Since then, U.S. international media has evolved from its origins in radio to include a full spectrum of modern delivery methods. Whether on radio, television, or online – from satellite streams to Telegram accounts – we meet our audiences where they are. In fact, 410 million people in over 100 countries turn to us every week for news and information in 63 languages about what is going on in the world around them.

We advance our mission through the work of six entities: Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB), and the Open Technology Fund (OTF). Each USAGM network contributes to our mission by fulfilling a unique role in their respective markets. VOA provides comprehensive regional and world news to their local audiences, while also covering the United States in all its complexity. RFE/RL, RFA, and OCB act as surrogate broadcasters, providing access to professional and fact-based regional and local news in their markets. MBN serves as a hybrid of the two models, providing accurate and comprehensive news about the region and the United States. OTF works to advance internet freedom worldwide, enabling audiences to access and share independent news, and empowering our journalists to do their jobs, without fear of repressive censorship or surveillance.

A Critical Moment in the Global Information War

We are at a critical moment in history. Free, objective information is targeted as never before by authoritarian regimes using malign influence, propaganda, and information manipulation to undermine those seeking credible, fact-based, and unbiased coverage of the world around them. When I was director of VOA, I traveled to 22 countries witnessing the depth of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Russia, and Iran’s propaganda around the world. I also saw people’s hunger for believable, trustworthy information. I realized then that international public service

media like USAGM and the BBC networks were, for all practical purposes, the only free press in a huge part of the world.

The media landscape has since shifted. Independent global media is constantly under threat — this includes even some of our strongest and longest-running democratic allies. Earlier this year, the BBC announced cuts in radio and television services around the globe. These cuts represent some of the larger challenges many independent public service broadcasters are currently facing in the global information war. While international public service broadcasters from democratic nations face steady or declining budgets, authoritarian regimes like Russia and China are making massive investments in many media markets including Indonesia, Nigeria, and Pakistan, to expand their spheres of influence.

The reality is: if we miss this opportunity to target investments to counter inroads Russia and the PRC are making, we run the risk of losing the global information war. Right now, we have a head start in many markets, but these next two years will be absolutely critical. We should be alarmed, but optimistic — alarmed because we are being vastly outspent, but optimistic because we still have a chance if we act now.

This is a moment that USAGM was built for, as it was during World War II and the Cold War, to combat malign foreign influence. While the governments of China and Russia expand state-sponsored propaganda not only in their own countries but also into regions including Latin America and Africa — USAGM, with over four thousand media partners around the world, is well-positioned to counter this authoritarian influence offensive. We have measurable data showing we are outperforming China and Russia in many key markets. And our credibility and trust with audiences are high because we tell the truth. It is not too late for us to secure our competitive advantage.

To stay competitive in the 21st century, we must continue to find new ways to reach our audiences, improve our infrastructure from digital security to physical safety, lead new forms of engaging content and build on what is already working, and leverage the global reach of each individual network for greater impact. By leveraging our media partnerships, we can continue to expand the delivery of fact-based journalism to larger audiences around the world for just pennies per person. USAGM represents a powerful investment that continues to show an outsized and scalable impact across the globe. By maximizing the best use of available resources and the talent of our journalists and staff, USAGM remains committed to providing a trustworthy, fact-based alternative to state-sponsored propaganda.

Our Global Impact

USAGM uses a variety of research and analytics tools to measure our impact. We conduct nationally representative surveys to measure how often our global audiences consume content and on what platforms. We also measure whether audiences find our information credible and share it with others, and whether it helps them form opinions.

As the brutal war in Ukraine grinds on, Russian-language news that combats Kremlin disinformation reaches larger and larger audiences every day. At the start of Russia's full-scale war in February 2022, RFE/RL was uniquely positioned on-the-ground to deliver exceptional multi-platform breaking news coverage to millions of people in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and around the world. This crucial reporting did not come without grave personal risks. Vira Hyrych, a talented journalist and producer for RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, paid the ultimate price for her commitment to sharing the truth about Russia's aggression against Ukraine. On April 29, 2022, Vira was killed in Kyiv after a Russian missile strike hit the residential building where she lived. With great bravery and despite the risks, correspondents reported from the frontlines, drawing on their deep local knowledge to bring nuance and context to a fast-evolving historic moment. Ukrainian and Russian audiences are seeking out RFE/RL coverage of recent events in the war in unprecedented numbers despite extensive Kremlin attempts to block RFE/RL's websites and most social media platforms. Between February 24, 2022, and February 23, 2023, RFE/RL web and social media videos in Russian and Ukrainian were viewed billions of times. For example, RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service video views on Facebook alone were viewed 1.1 billion times, an increase of 119% compared to the same period the year before.

Our research from 2022 also shows that audiences are choosing USAGM networks' content over that of Russia and China in a number of key target markets across Eurasia, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In Nigeria, for example, VOA reaches a third of all adults while Russia's state-controlled network, RT, reaches just 1% and China Radio International, less than 3%. In Cambodia, despite a government crackdown on the free press, RFA and VOA together reach 16% of adults, compared with China's state-controlled network, CGTN, at less than 2%.

Our levels of credibility across all the broadcasters are objectively high—over 70% of our weekly audience considers our reporting to be trustworthy. Both our mission and the editorial firewall, which prohibits U.S. government interference in the editorial autonomy of the broadcasting networks, underpin the worldwide credibility that USAGM's broadcasters enjoy. The firewall is essential to that credibility, ensuring editorial independence and protecting USAGM and its journalists from outside influence, including from U.S. government officials. This firewall is what sets us apart from state-controlled propaganda networks like Russia's RT and China's CGTN. Audiences see our example of openness and candor in exercising press freedom in a democratic society as proof of our credibility. In so many countries, people yearn for the truth – even if it is a painful truth. In times of crisis, traffic to our networks' websites and social media often spikes as audiences seek us out to learn the truth. We have seen this again and again in recent years, from the coup in Burma to the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the recent protests in Cuba and Iran, and the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

Even the very best journalism is of no use if people cannot see or hear it. As authoritarian regimes become increasingly sophisticated in blocking information, OTF is ensuring we become even more sophisticated in breaching those barriers. For example, following the Iranian regime's severe blocking of the internet during the protests over the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022, the

number of monthly active users of OTF-supported censorship circumvention tools grew dramatically, and now over 90% of USAGM's Iranian audience uses OTF-supported Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to access USAGM network content. Backed by OTF to reach users in Iran, RFE/RL's Farda partnered with Toosheh, a U.S.-funded Satellite file-casting app that does not need Internet access. This one-way file distribution system can download content packages via satellite datacasting that can then be shared on messaging apps. This helped the network maintain accessibility for audiences at key moments during protests. Over the last three years, use of OTF-supported circumvention tools has quadrupled globally, increasing from about 9 million monthly users to over 40 million monthly users. While these tools have a very economical monthly cost of only 7 cents per user, OTF has been strained by the enormous demand for their tools by our audiences in Iran, Russia, China, and other countries where it is increasingly dangerous to access the internet and seek out truthful information.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, MBN brings news and programming about the region, the world, and the United States to audiences. USAGM's research shows that MBN is consistently competitive with and, in some cases, outperforming Russia's widely available RT Arabic channel. MBN's Alhurra reaches more than twice as many adults weekly as RT Arabic in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. In Iraq and Morocco, the two networks reach similar audiences, with Alhurra slightly ahead of RT in Iraq and just behind in Morocco. MBN sheds light on and explains the U.S. perspective on topics or events that are often ignored or not covered comprehensively by competitors such as Qatar's Al-Jazeera, Saudi Arabia's Al-Arabiya and UAE's Sky News Arabia. For example, when Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited South Africa in August 2022 to launch the U.S. Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa, MBN covered his visit comprehensively and was the only network among its competitors to play his speech in its entirety for MENA audiences. MBN's weekly digital series 'Did It Really Happen?' fact-checks prominent dis- and misinformation being spread on social media in Arabic, including that being disseminated by Russia and China, while the television program 'Alhurra Investigates' focuses much of its investigative reporting on Russia, Iran, and China by fact-checking false narratives and shedding light on stories omitted by the local press.

Despite facing challenging circumstances, OCB remains committed to fulfilling its mission for the people of Cuba and staying competitive in the 21st century. As access to the internet increases in Cuba, OCB is developing a new focus on digital distribution. After a spike in video views during the July protests of 2021, OCB has increased its digital reach on the island. Video views on Facebook in 2022 totaled 27 million – up from 22 million in 2021. With an estimated 75% of Cubans using the internet according to Statista, OCB's new focus on digital storytelling will reach even more people in Cuba over the coming months and years. At the same time, OCB remains committed to maintaining and strengthening Radio Martí, our flagship broadcast to Cuba for almost 40 years.

VOA is successfully reaching audiences in regions that are major targets of malign influence from the PRC and Russia, including Africa and Latin America. Last year VOA Spanish reached a measured weekly audience of more than 66 million adults in Latin America – that's a price of just 8 cents per audience member reached for an entire year. Russia and China both operate major Spanish-language brands in the Latin America media market, but neither comes close to the reach of VOA. VOA reaches 47% of adults weekly in Bolivia, 24% in Colombia, 51% in the Dominican Republic, and 39% in Ecuador, all while Russia's RT Spanish reaches 5% or less in each market and China's CGTN reaches 6% or less in each market. VOA's reach is made possible by its extensive network of media partners in the region – including the top radio and television stations in nearly every country, and the most important independent outlets in countries like Venezuela or Nicaragua where the free press is under threat. VOA serves as the U.S. bureau for its media partners, covering major U.S. and international stories for them, providing custom reports for major partner stations, and working closely on a daily basis to ensure content is tailored to the needs of their audiences. When our media partners cover events like President Biden's State of the Union address or recent visit to Ukraine for their local audiences, it is VOA reporters who provide the reporting, analysis, and coverage of these events. VOA's simultaneous translations of major speeches mean that audiences around the world can tune into important U.S. news events in real-time, and in their own languages.

Our true power lies in our ability to harness the reach of the entire USAGM network for greater impact. Through translation of war coverage into dozens of languages, USAGM takes the work of RFE/RL's brave journalists on the ground in Ukraine and shows the impact of Russia's invasion not only to nearby countries like Belarus, Moldova, Bosnia, and Kazakhstan but also brings this global story to audiences in places like Cuba, Iraq, Cambodia, Vietnam and Nicaragua. USAGM takes VOA's footage of the protests in Iran, or RFA's exclusive reporting on Uyghur detention camps in China, and brings this news and information to audiences all over the world who rely on us.

Countering Malign Foreign Influence from Russia

Russian President Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine not only sparked the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II, its consequences also reverberated around the world, bringing the global information war into sharp focus. For many in our audience, the full-scale invasion forced them to question their entire worldview. As the Kremlin moved aggressively to centralize power, eliminate opposition, and silence dissenting voices inside of Russia, it also launched wide-ranging malign influence operations abroad with a special focus on Russian speakers in its immediate region.

It is in this context that USAGM's role in providing fact-based, independent, and reliable reporting to the Russian public, to Ukraine, and to the world became even more important. Since the invasion began in 2014, USAGM network journalists, led by RFE/RL, have been on the literal front lines of this war, reporting from the fields and trenches of heavily bombed towns of Ukraine, highlighting the horrible reality of Russia's invasion for audiences across the globe.

Despite the Russian government's unprecedented censorship of independent media inside its borders, which forced RFE/RL to make the difficult decision to shutter its Moscow bureau and relocate to Riga, Latvia, there has been a surge in demand for VOA and RFE/RL Russian-language content along with a spike in the use of OTF-supported circumvention tools. Our networks reach a combined 11.7 million Russian adults each week.

USAGM is actively pushing back against Russia's malign influence in nearby countries and across the globe. In nearby countries, USAGM networks provide news and information in languages including Ukrainian, Belarusian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Serbian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Azerbaijani, and Georgian, among others. Through projects like Polygraph, VOA's English-language fact-checking website, we are confronting Russia's disinformation efforts in English for a global audience as well. "Systema," an RFE/RL Russian-language Investigative Unit conducts deep investigative journalism modeled after the Ukrainian Service's successful project "Schemes," which has uncovered Russian atrocities in Ukraine, filling a void left by Russian-state media. The RFE/RL Current Time program 'Footage vs. Footage' exposes Russian disinformation campaigns, contrasting the fake footage with actual footage to debunk the lies behind the propaganda. This year, OCB's Radio and Televisión Martí and the Ukrainian fact-checking outlet, StopFake.org, launched a joint project to counter Russia's propaganda circulating in the Spanish language in Cuba.

Leading up to the full-scale invasion and to this day, Russia continues to deploy a variety of false narratives in Russia and around the world to justify an unjustifiable war. Much of this disinformation involves the U.S. - including the false claim that NATO and the West were the aggressors threatening Russia's security and escalating the war. The governments of China and Russia often work together to amplify disinformation campaigns, obscure the facts, and cause confusion on a global scale. This is where VOA comes in. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a global story: VOA is not just covering the war for Russians and Ukrainians, they're covering it for the world. Interest in this story was extremely high across many target regions: places like China, Vietnam, Iran, Latin America, Indonesia, Georgia, Albania, and Myanmar. In the year since Russia invaded Ukraine, VOA's coverage of the war attracted more than 2.4 billion video views on social media and 144.4 million engagement actions across social media platforms, as well as over 83 million visits to VOA websites.

OTF-supported circumvention tools have played a critical role in enabling Russian citizens to access the uncensored internet. Use of OTF-supported circumvention tools has surged in Russia from only 250,000 monthly active users prior to the full-scale invasion in Ukraine to over 8 million today. In addition, OTF-supported mirror sites have received over 200 million visits per month. With the help of OTF, RFE/RL's digital audience in Russia has grown significantly despite ongoing censorship of their digital platforms.

USAGM's networks are maximizing resources to reach an even larger audience in and near Russia. RFE/RL and VOA video content in Russian and Ukrainian was viewed 8 billion times in the year since the full-scale invasion — 2.5 times the numbers from the year before. To put that number into context, just under 300 million people speak either Russian or Ukrainian. In the

months following Russia's invasion, Current Time, the 24/7 Russian-language television and digital network led by RFE/RL in cooperation with VOA, signed over 50 new media partners in countries like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Moldova — just as media outlets in those countries were dropping Russia's RT. Despite significant censorship, Current Time Facebook videos were viewed 2 billion times, an increase of 163% compared to the same period the year before. Current Time videos routinely trend number one on Russian YouTube, a sign that Russian-language audiences want access to trusted news. In a powerful on-the-ground example, we received evidence that activists inside Russia took it upon themselves to begin posting flyers with QR codes disguised as furniture ads; but when scanned, the QR codes direct Russians to the Current Time YouTube channel.

Countering Malign Foreign Influence from China

China's media environment is one of the most restricted in the world and it has been working hard to export this model to other countries. Within China, the government exercises near-total control over both mass media and the internet, through a sophisticated system of content blocking, filtering, and surveillance.

Outside its borders, the PRC government is deliberately and effectively extending its reach far beyond its previous sphere of influence of the Pacific Rim and Southeast Asia, and rapidly moving into Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. In Latin America for example, the PRC government is doing extensive marketing campaigns in the region and offering media executives lavish trips to China to promote placement of China's state-controlled media content. In Africa, China is installing low-cost satellite dishes to provide poor and rural citizens with limited, government-controlled programming. The energy with which the PRC government drove its Belt and Road expansion a decade ago is now being replicated in the information space.

Despite independent global media operating with only a fraction of the budget of China's state-controlled media, USAGM's networks have made significant gains in getting information to audiences in China and diaspora communities outside of the country, and bolstering media partners in regions targeted by China. VOA and RFA broadcast in Mandarin, Cantonese, Uyghur, and Tibetan, providing a variety of news, political and cultural programming as well as English-language instruction. VOA's English-language fact-checking project, Polygraph, includes a website dedicated to producing videos and articles in Mandarin to confront China's disinformation efforts and present evidence to debunk falsehoods. Similarly, in 2022, RFA launched the Asia Fact Check Lab, a project in both English and Mandarin that monitors and fact-checks China's false narratives and misinformation campaigns. Across Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia, RFE/RL's journalists increasingly witness and report on growing connectivity between disinformation from the PRC and Russia, and they cover Beijing's growing footprint across the region.

VOA and RFA represent some of the only sources of credible information for people living in China, while OTF increases their access to information – and their combined impact is powerful. Audiences in China yearn for a comprehensive, uncensored view of China, the U.S., and the world. They feel seen and heard, and often express gratitude when VOA and RFA cover events the PRC government would prefer to hide or distort, including the 2022 protests against the PRC government's zero-COVID policy. Last year, RFA's timely coverage of these protests broke records for web traffic and social media engagement. RFA experienced historic surges on social media, as RFA Mandarin gained 75,000 new followers on Twitter in one week and saw a 233% increase in traffic from mobile Google searches, and RFA Cantonese's Facebook video views increased by 10 times over the previous week. One RFA video showing these protests was viewed over 4 million times on Twitter.

Audiences in China are also intensely interested in coverage of U.S.-China relations. When former Speaker Nancy Pelosi traveled to Taiwan last year, VOA Mandarin received over four million pageviews on their website in one week as the network live-streamed the speech, interviewed former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and several Senators from both sides of the aisle, and published articles with in-depth analysis. This type of coverage is a window into the U.S. and the world for many: one loyal audience member described how she started listening to VOA's Mandarin Service on a shortwave radio in 2001 and continues to listen to this day through the network's digital platforms.

Our audiences in China show that they not only prefer USAGM network content, but also that they are willing to go to great lengths to overcome the “Great Firewall” to reach that content. For example, last year VOA's Mandarin Service content on YouTube earned nearly double the video views as China's CCTV. When thinking about our impact, we must take into account that China has the most sophisticated internet censorship in the world. OTF supports leading VPNs in China, which help over 2.5 million monthly active users protect their privacy while they access the internet.

Conclusion

This is the most important time for this agency since the Cold War, and perhaps since World War II. USAGM must be positioned to be consistently competitive in today's dangerous world of information manipulation and heavy investment by authoritarian regimes and other bad actors. To do so, we will stay true to our agency-wide priorities: modeling transparency and accountability in everything we do; maintaining mission focus; expanding and improving access to USAGM content; ensuring journalistic independence for every broadcaster and entity; and bolstering journalistic safety, security, training and ethics.

USAGM remains committed to delivering on our mission to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy. We cannot do this without the support of Congress and the critical decisions made by appropriators on this Committee. We are confident that any increased investment you might consider making in our work will be crucial as we fight this global information war. Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, and distinguished

members of the Subcommittee, we are deeply grateful for your support of and interest in our work and we value your oversight role. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you very much. I appreciate your testimony.

Ms. Bennett, as part of your written testimony, the use of satellite technology in Iran is, frankly, fascinating and crucial.

Are we looking into similar approaches to other places including Cuba where having that technology during the protests I think in July 2021 could have been a game changer?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, we are.

And, as an example, not about Cuba right this second but during the Ukraine war, we actually turned to satellite technology to help us reach into markets that had been closed off by the Russian forces who were cutting off the internet access. So we are using satellites there right now.

We have a very pragmatic policy on how we get our information and what technology we use. Basically it is whatever technology will get the mission into these countries is the technology we will use, which means satellites, circumvention technology, and even shortwave in places where it is still relevant.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And, in a lot of places, it still is relevant.

Ms. BENNETT. In a lot of place it still is.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Right.

Ms. BENNETT [continuing]. Is relevant.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Because they don't have access to hi-tech equipment, et cetera.

Ms. BENNETT. After the assaults on the Rohingya people a couple of years ago, we stood up a Rohingya service. And the only way we could get that information into the camps was by shortwave. So that is what we used.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And, as far as the, for example, the use of satellites and the places that you have done, do you have a way to track down that it is actually working, that it is penetrating at all?

Ms. BENNETT. Well, we can't track exactly that particular thing.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Right.

Ms. BENNETT. But we do have, we use reputable survey agencies to do sampling just like any other media company would elsewhere in the world to look at our audience.

Plus, the digital revolution means that we can track in real time the use of our content. So it is really quite fascinating what we are able to learn by doing that. So, yes, we can tell whether it is working or not.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And, as I mentioned in my opening statement, you are dealing with some of the most difficult places in the world in many cases. Right? What is your assessment, for example, the level of information freedom in Cuba? Because my frustration has been that I think this administration hasn't been taking that very seriously.

So what would you say is the level of information freedom in Cuba and how does it compare with other places that you consider to be restrictive and closed?

Ms. BENNETT. I think Cuba is one of the most restrictive media environments in the world. I think it has very successfully cut people off from the rest of the world. And yet at the same time we do see, as I have some data to show you, that the Cuban people still want and crave that information and will go to lengths to find it.

So, if we offer it in better ways, I believe we will be able to reach them.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Great. I have a number of questions. But, as you can see, this subcommittee is very well-attended.

So let me now go to the Ranking Member Lee.

You are recognized.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much.

A couple of things. The first question, as it relates to Cuba, your commitment to, and the implementation of, journalistic ethics has been questioned in recent years. And this was an issue across grantees but especially very egregious at the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.

So what steps have you taken in the last 2 years to correct some of the identified—and, mind you, Mr. Chairman, these were identified deficiencies—and protect the journalistic ethics of the organization? And how do you hold your employees accountable for these standards? That is the first question.

Then the second quick question, I have always wanted to ask this question because I have never been able to quite understand what the criteria is for your messages in terms of providing the truth and information versus a goal of overthrowing a government. I mean, are there criteria that we use, that you use? Or is it all, whether it is a democratically elected government or not, the messages are different? Or is that just something this agency does not see as a goal?

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you, Ranking Member Lee. I appreciate that question.

I have had a close to a 50-year career in journalism, and journalistic ethics and standards have been my life. And I am very, very proud of the fact that we try and maintain these standards.

And you are right. There has been significant lapses at the Office of Cuba Broadcasting in the past. And, under the leadership of Sylvia Rosabal, who I think many of you have had the chance to meet, we are really very aggressively moving towards putting in place structures that will help guarantee that.

One of them is mandatory training, which had not existed before, but mandatory training in journalistic practices and ethics, content review, more aggressive content review to help us look and see what is going out and to assure those high standards through program reviews, and basically making sure that there is no tolerance for anything other than the highest standards of journalistic ethics. I think this is going to go a long way towards improving the things that you mentioned right now.

And, as for the criteria we use, they don't vary according to different markets or different governments. We believe that we export the First Amendment. What we do is we export one of the most precious freedoms that we have by showing people in the country, in the different countries that we can be trusted to tell them the facts of what is going on, even when their own governments are unable to do so.

So our criteria is factual, relevant information that is important to the lives of the people there, both inside their own countries and around the world, and in the case of Voice of America, which has a very unique mission, making sure that the views, the practices,

the habits, the culture of the United States is well-represented because if we don't tell America's story abroad, there is plenty of other people who are waiting to do it.

Ms. LEE. Thank, Mr. Chairman. I will yield.

And then if we have time, I have a couple more questions.

Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mr. Fleischmann, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Thank, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Bennett, thank you for appearing before us today. I really appreciate this. It is fascinating.

We appreciate your work for our Nation. And I know you alluded to this in your opening comments, but I think it is worth repeating, the efforts of your agency's six entities: Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and the Open Technology Fund. So I thank you.

I have a question, only one question, on cooperation with allied public broadcasters. We all recognize that we are in an increasingly competitive geopolitical environment while simultaneously our countries and most of our friends and allies face significant fiscal challenges. We are thus seeing the impacts to free world press coverage, notably the BBC's planned cuts to many of their global services.

My question to you, Ms. Bennett, is, what is the official and informational relationship between the Agency for Global Media and the public broadcasters of our allies in and friends? And is there any way we can improve those relationships for our mutual benefit?

And I thank you.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you very much. I very much appreciate that question.

There is a formal working group that comprises the broadcasters, what we call the free broadcasters. There is right now eight of them, and we meet. I just came back from a meeting over Christmas with them. And we talk about how we can cooperate and further the missions of both.

And, for example, there has been a pretty long-standing cooperation that, by the way, is now in jeopardy because of the Turkish Government. Us, Voice of America, and Deutsche Welle had a joint publication broadcast operation inside Turkiye that was very successful, so successful that the Turkish Government is now trying to shut us down, so but that kind of cooperation.

Also, in terms of representing women around the world, Voice of America, also—and I apologize. My experience, as you know, I was the Director of Voice of America before I came here. So I have a fair amount of familiarity with that. But we adopted the BBC's 5050 project, which was aiming to introduce faces and voices of women into the broadcasts because, when I got to the Agency, you would find that very large proportions of our news broadcasts were 100 percent male. And so we took the BBC's project and applied it inside Voice of America. And you are right. BBC is under significant, significant pressure.

And so we look forward to having more of that kind of cooperation, and I think what you find is that everyone's interest and appetite for that kind of cooperation is also rising quite dramatically.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Thank you very much. I appreciate your answer.

And, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, sir.

Ms. Meng.

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Madam Ranking Member.

And thank you, Ms. Bennett, for being here today.

The effectiveness of U.S. international broadcasting in promoting U.S. foreign policy goals and national security interests has long been debated. Some argue that, instead of providing a balanced presentation of issues of importance, both to target foreign populations and U.S. foreign policy goals, international broadcasting should act to counterbalance anti-America sentiment with its own partial programming.

Some have also recommended that international broadcasting could be better coordinated with U.S. public diplomacy and other foreign messaging under a more unified communications strategy to ensure that U.S. Government-funded communications are not perceived as acting at cross-purposes.

One of my priorities in Congress is ensuring women's access to adequate sanitation facilities and feminine hygiene products. I am proud to have supported programming at USAID that focuses on efforts to break the silence around menstruation and reproductive health in countries where education about how to spot warning signs of reproductive tract illness or irregular menstruation is non-existent.

When I think about aligning international broadcasting with U.S. foreign policy priorities, I think about the unique priorities for USAGM to highlight the incredible work that USAID and others are doing on the ground in places like Nepal to support women and girls' access to menstrual hygiene products.

In Ukraine, one of our biggest success stories has been the incredible work of USAID to provide nearly 1 million menstrual hygiene pads to women and girls who, without the United States' help, would struggle to access these products.

Can you tell us what USAGM is doing to tell some of these foreign aid success stories, especially in places where issues like menstrual hygiene health may still be taboo?

Ms. BENNETT. Congresswoman, thank you so much for that question and also your description of the work you are supporting. Obviously, the situation of women and girls around the world is of very much interest and importance to what we are doing.

Now, while I can't tell you the exact broadcasting that we have done on the topic you are talking about, I do know that topic has been approached and covered in many of our networks over the years and in particular more recent years as the issue has become more prevalent and more aware.

And so I would look forward to hearing more and getting more opportunity to actually do more on that subject because the lives

and the important day-to-day situation of women around the world, including the topic you mentioned, is very, very important.

Ms. MENG. Thank you very much.

I will try to do my second question quickly.

Five minutes. Right? Okay.

This past December, I passed into law our Divided Families Reunification Act, which requires the Secretary of State to consult with South Korean officials on potential family reunion opportunities for American families and their relatives in North Korea. It also requires the State Department to consult biannually with representatives of Americans with family members in North Korea about its efforts to support family reunions and to report to Congress on opportunities to utilize video conference technology to encourage virtual reunions.

You spoke highly in your confirmation hearing of the ability of VOA and Radio Free Asia to provide truthful news and information to the people of North Korea. Time is not on the side of many Korean Americans with relatives in North Korea, as many are currently in their 70s, 80s, and 90s.

Do you think there could be an opportunity to take advantage of the broadcasting done by VOA or Radio Free Asia in North Korea so that Korean American families could send a message to their loved ones in North Korea, whether that is because they are highlighted in an article your journalists write or some other platform?

Ms. BENNETT. I think there is certainly opportunity for much broadcasting of that type. And, as a matter of fact, the—a lot of the work that is done by Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, apologize, depends heavily on the work and the presence of defectors who oftentimes have families back in North Korea.

And so, by tapping into those networks, I think there is a tremendous opportunity not only to let people know what their relatives are up to but also to let people know what life is like outside of North Korea.

So thank you for asking that question.

Ms. MENG. Thank you so much.

I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you. I think that is a really important issue that you just brought up because people don't have—not only do they not get news, they don't have the ability to communicate among themselves either. So thank you.

The dean of the House, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for the recognition.

Welcome to a former Kentuckian, a former editor of the Lexington Herald-Leader, my paper. It is good to have you in this wonderful position that you are in.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you. It was a wonderful paper, and I loved living in Kentucky.

Mr. ROGERS. We would love to have you come back.

Ms. Bennett, Putin's invasion of Ukraine has shown a spotlight on the real-world impact of the global information war. Russian civilians have been arrested by the thousands for speaking out against the war, some sentenced to jail for years. But spreading the truth to the Russian populace about the invasion may be one of the

only ways to pressure Putin to stop this ungodly bloodshed. It is also incredibly important for countries who still may be conflicted on what to believe.

I understand your journalists, led by Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, are on the front lines, covering the war for world audiences. But, without a bureau in Moscow any longer, the reach within Russia is challenging. And you covered part of this in your opening statement.

But describe or expand on the tools that you are using to get around Kremlin censorship to reach Russian citizens. And what is the viewership, and how has it evolved over the last year?

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you very much and thank you to a fellow Kentuckian, at least if only briefly. Thank you.

This is an incredibly important question and one that I think we have some real-time evidence of because, when Russia invaded Ukraine, we also had to move journalists out of the way of harm because Radio Free Europe in particular has a very large contingent of journalists there. And we had to move them to western Ukraine or to neighboring countries. So that was a big problem. And you are right. There is no active bureau in Russia right now, although there are journalists still there who are contributing to us.

But how that affects the audience, I showed Chairman Diaz-Balart a graph that shows how our audience has increased around pretty much every crisis that has happened in the world in the past 2 years and including the Russian invasion of Ukraine because people realized that they were not getting the information that they could trust. So you can see that our digital audience goes up quite substantially right after the invasion.

And we also find that we are able to attract a reasonably good audience inside Russia. Now we reach about 10 percent of Russian citizens, Russian adults—excuse me—inside Russia, which sounds like a small number until you realize that CNN and Fox News each have only about 20 percent audience here in a very, very free media market. So to me, reaching 10 percent of adults inside Russia is a pretty amazing accomplishment and also speaks very highly to the demand for this news by the citizens inside Russia.

We also focus on not just citizens inside Russia but Russian speakers around the world. So, by targeting our information to the Russian periphery, we believe we get information into not only these vital countries, which are also affected by this, by this move, but also can use them to transmit the information back into their own home countries.

And, again, you can see the tremendous interest because, in the year following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the video of Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, who together broadcast a current time program, was viewed more than 8 billion times, 8 billion times. So there is a tremendous interest in this.

Mr. ROGERS. Well, it is ironic that, in that Russian war on Ukraine, the practical application of information could pressure Putin to withdraw. I mean, that practical application of information capability is terribly important at this moment.

Ms. BENNETT. And I couldn't agree with you more.

And, in fact, this Russian invasion of Ukraine really provides the very, very clear and dramatic example of the value of information from the United States' ability to predict the war, the invasion of Ukraine when Putin was saying it wasn't going to happen to the real-time views of what was happening when they were saying nothing was happening.

This really shows that you can influence the course of events simply by providing accurate information to people who don't have any other access to it. So I agree with you.

Mr. ROGERS. I applaud the journalists who are in danger, reporting on the truth.

Ms. BENNETT. I apologize. I couldn't hear you.

Mr. ROGERS. I just wanted to express our appreciation to the brave journalists who are fighting danger to do their job.

Ms. BENNETT. I am so grateful to these journalists, so admiring of those journalists, so fearful for these journalists.

And one of my priorities is—has been, since coming, to make sure that we do everything we can to protect their security, both physical security for the people who are in Ukraine, are in the line of fire, and also digital security, which particularly affects women, Congresswoman Meng. We want to make sure that we increase the protections for these journalists so that their bravery and their sacrifice, we try and help them in any way we can because we depend on them so much.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you for your service.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

I know that Congresswoman Frankel will not object if—I mean, she is free to object, we have been joined by the distinguished Ranking Member of the Full Committee, and it is privilege and an honor to have her here at our subcommittee.

So, unless Congresswoman Frankel objects, Ranking Member DeLauro is recognized, thank you for being here. It is a privilege.

You are recognized.

Ms. DELAUB. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and the Ranking Member and to Congresswoman Frankel for, you know, your graciousness. I apologize for being late. You are just kind of running from place to place these days.

And I thank you so much, Ms. Bennett, for being here. And I heard Congressman Rogers talk about, you know, your efforts today. It is critical work that you do at the helm of the Agency for Global Media. You talked about the issue of Ukraine and democracy in Ukraine, and we need organizations such as yourself to combat disinformation.

However, I am troubled by a report that is out called—from The Center for Renewing America, a group that is headed up by the former budget director, Russell Vought, and who was the prior administration's budget director.

And, in the section on funding at the Department of State and foreign aid—and I think this is something that we should all be troubled about. It says here: Eliminate the global media fund.

It says: U.S. Agency for Global Media and its mouthpieces around the world via Voice of America disseminate U.S. Government-funded news. Such tools have been found to often use the

weight of the U.S. Government to promote radical, social, and cultural policies abroad, including LGBTQ ideology and pro-abortion movements, and nations targeted as being socially or culturally conservative. Additionally, radical woke U.S. propaganda does nothing to enhance or further core diplomatic activities abroad that further U.S. security and economic interests. In that sense such spending is wasteful and better channeled into other areas.

It is my view, and I guess it is shared with others here, that you are at the forefront of supporting freedom where it is being undermined.

So my questions are: Can you describe broadly the global security consequences that would result if USAGM and Voice of America funding was zeroed out or even cut precipitously? We have seen the President's budget request today, and I am glad that it shows strong support for USAGM. How would you use the additional resources from Congress to carry out your work, specifically as nations fight for their democracy during these times of international crises?

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you very much, Congresswoman DeLauro.

And I have to say my heart goes a little faster when I hear things like that, saying that they would like to eliminate this. It would be catastrophic.

Ms. DELAUBRO. It is here in black and white.

Ms. BENNETT. It would be catastrophic for the United States and for the world because, if you look around the world, you see that the closing of societies by authoritarian governments is increasing, and they are getting better at doing it.

And, between us and the BBC, we are really the not only the only free press but the only idea that a free press can even exist in a very large part of the world. If you eliminate that idea that a free press can exist, what happens around the world when people begin to believe, as they are beginning to believe in China right now, that the constrained environment in which they live is actually reality?

What would we do with the increased resources? One thing we talked about before is increasing our means of access, getting the information into these—these authoritarian regimes are getting better at closing off their citizenry—from misinformation. We need to get better at learning how to get around it.

And one example I can give you is, just following the head scarf rebellion in Iran, we were faced with a really interesting dilemma, which was that there was so much demand for our news and information via the virtual private networks that the Open Technology Fund provided to them, even though it was costing us only 7 cents a month per user, we were going to run out of budget in about 3 months, the entire year's budget for the entire world, because of the demand from Iran.

So supporting access is incredibly important. That is one of the things that we would use the extra funding for.

I mentioned security for the journalists around the world. We need to make sure that our journalists, both our staffers and our freelancers, are well-protected and supported. That is another thing.

And the other thing is we need to make sure that our content is appealing and relevant and modern and that it appeals to many different aspects of society, including young people. All of that requires new skill sets, new technologies, new types of journalism. So all of that requires change and investment. Those are the things that we would like to do.

And, in the long run, even though we are not proposing this right now, you see that there are many, many countries that we have previously thought of as off limits because they were democracies such as Brazil, such as the Philippines—

Ms. DELAUBRO. Yeah.

Ms. BENNETT [continuing]. That I think are increasingly going to require our support.

Ms. DELAUBRO. Thank you very, very much.

And I thank, again, you know, my colleagues here for the time.

I think that there is support from, from a number of us, and I think we have to help to educate our colleagues on the value and the incredible importance of the global media and what is being done so that we can counteract those who would think that this is something that should be eliminated. It can only help the United States really be a leader in the future and help with open societies.

Thank you very, very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I thank the Full Committee Ranking Member for being here.

The hardest working man, Member of the House probably, Mr. Reschenthaler.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I know you have a lot of duties. So thank you for being here.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Well, I appreciate being here and thanks for the Cuban coffee, a nice little treat in the afternoon.

Ms. Bennett, are you aware of the Ms. Sieg situation? Ms. Sieg? Doesn't ring a bell?

Ms. BENNETT. I am sorry. Ms.?

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Ms. Sieg, S-i-e-g?

Ms. BENNETT. Oh, okay. Yes, I, yes, I have heard about it, yes.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. So you are aware that she was fired for mismanagement, abuse of public funds, and falsification of credentials under the last administration?

Ms. BENNETT. I believe she was put on leave. I don't believe she was fired.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Okay. Put on leave, fired, however you want to describe it, she was rehired by this administration, though, right?

Ms. BENNETT. Again, this took place before I arrived here. She was, as I understand it, she was placed on leave, and then she was returned to duty in another place after subsequent investigations cleared her of those charges.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Why—I don't think she was cleared of the charges. But why would you take somebody with egregious ethical issues and reinstate them after they were already put on leave?

Ms. BENNETT. Again, with respect, those decisions were made before I was here. I had nothing to do with those decisions, and those also take place within the networks.

And I think, as you all know, the firewall does not permit me to reach across to influence their decisions in terms of what they do with their journalists.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. We can talk about the firewall in a second because I am pretty sure the firewall is selectively used.

But it is my understanding that Mr. Chairman—I am sorry—Chairman McCaul has written to you on numerous times requesting information on the Sieg situation.

Are you aware of that?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, I am.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Why have you not responded to the chairman?

Ms. BENNETT. Again, with respect, we have responded consistently. We responded many times, and our intention is to comply with any requests for information that are legitimately posed to us. We would like to be as transparent as possible.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. So that is quite ironic that you want to be transparent when you haven't responded to Mr. McCaul. Chairman McCaul says you have not responded.

So you have responded?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, we have.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Okay. If you have not responded and Mr. McCaul is right, which I believe he is, will you commit to responding within 30 days?

Ms. BENNETT. I will commit to responding in whatever way we are required to do and is appropriate for us to do.

And I can ask my colleagues back here how many times we have responded, if you would like me to do that.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Yeah, I would like you to follow up with me because I am pretty sure you have not responded.

Ms. BENNETT. We don't have a number but many, many times.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. You responded, but you did not provide the requested information. I will clarify.

Will you give the information that Mr. McCaul is requesting?

Ms. BENNETT. We will follow any kind of oversight that is required to do, that is legitimate for us to do, and will follow any kind of habits and requirements that are appropriate.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Yeah, so much for transparency and accountability.

Let's talk about your firewall. I have a lot of concerns about censorship at your agency.

VOA published an article in February of this year where the writer detailed the situation with Ms. Sieg and Chairman McCaul's letter to USAID on the issue. A few days after that, the information was scrubbed from the site with a note saying that it was removed for quote/unquote, "pending further review."

On the 1st of March, a suppressed version of the same article was republished with no mention of Ms. Sieg and only a vague mention of the House Foreign Affairs Committee pressing USAID for more information on the hiring and vetting process.

This seems to be a clear violation of USAGM's statutory firewall requirements of editorial independence, integrity, and objectivity.

Ms. Bennett, why was this content removed?

Ms. BENNETT. To the best of my knowledge, this situation was handled the same way we handle any other situation of that sort, and that is it is handled—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Did you engage in censorship? You removed an article, then reposted it after it was scrubbed?

Who made that decision? Was it you?

Ms. BENNETT. No, I did not make that decision. I am on—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Who made—

Ms. BENNETT. [continuing]. The other side—it was handled—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Who made it?

Ms. BENNETT. It was handled within the Voice of America. And all I ever ask in situations like this is that I be informed of the outcome. Because of the firewall, I do not—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. You can't tell me who the decision was made by. You don't know.

Ms. BENNETT. I cannot. It was made inside Voice of America.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Will you commit on record right now to preventing this kind of injustice in the future?

Ms. BENNETT. I am sorry. Could you—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Will you commit to not censor—to not censoring in the future? Will you do that, to not taking down articles that were published that might have embarrassing information to the Agency?

Ms. BENNETT. Again, sir, on the other side of the firewall, this is not something that I engage in personally. I make sure that the—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. So you won't—you won't commit to scrubbing your website of information.

Ms. BENNETT. I will—sorry.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. I am going to yield back.

Before I yield back, I am going to say my, my, my, here we go again.

I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

I do think that, we will follow up with you to make sure that we—that any information that has been requested, if some information has been requested that has not been received back, we will follow up with you.

And I would like to work with you on that, sir.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Mr. McCaul would really like that information as well.

Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Ms. Frankel, thank you again for your patience. And I know that—because you did not complain very ferociously about the ranking member of the full committee going before you.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Anytime our Ranking Member wants to be heard, I yield to her.

Thank you for your service to our guests today.

I am going to change the subject a little bit. So, as of September 2022, USAGM—that is long—what is the short word for that?

Ms. BENNETT. There is none.

Ms. FRANKEL. There is none. Okay.

The USAGM's affiliate Radio for Europe was running radio shows with educational content for girls in Afghanistan, and apparently the shows were able to provide 14 hours a week of curriculum. I don't know if that is true, but that is what we heard. And now I guess the Taliban has shut down the radio transmissions.

So is there going to be any ability for you all to get the news into Afghanistan?

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you.

And, yes, that is incredibly important, and that content, in particular, providing educational opportunities via the radio to women and girls after the Taliban prevented them from getting a higher education, is very, very important.

And, in advance, as we were anticipating that this was going to be happening inside of Afghanistan, USAGM did take proactive measures, for example, start launching satellite, free-to-home satellite transmission. And also we were able to very quickly stand up three medium wave transmitters in neighboring countries that are able to broadcast in. And also we are still able to broadcast on private radio networks.

So, while we are not able to do the same level of transmission we were doing before, we are reaching into Afghanistan at about 12 hours per day and that includes the content that you are talking about addressed to women and girls.

Ms. FRANKEL. Do you know what your reach there is terms of number?

Ms. BENNETT. We don't right now, and because we spent heavily on sampling, it is hard to sample inside these countries where it is dangerous to do so.

Ms. FRANKEL. So next topic but thank you for that answer.

A new study found that—Mr. Chair, you can always count on me to bring up a new subject.

A new study found that gender disinformation can become a national security threat when foreign actors use it to exploit divisions in society.

And the study found that actors, especially Russian state-backed sources, are spreading more disinformation about women than men. And, among the women, marginalized women are targeted more viciously by disinformation attacks. And digital platforms have failed at protecting women against disinformation. I should also say women leaders, political leaders, have been under attack and under threat.

Can you tell me the USAGM's role in fighting against disinformation, especially against women?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes. Absolutely. And it is very much in our minds that this is an issue of the fact that disinformation is very much, is very much gendered. People are aware of that. We try and make sure that our coverage reflects that, that—and, in addition, that our, as I mentioned before, that our own journalists and broadcasters, women, appear in our news, appear in and are used in our news so that people can see and hear the faces and voices of women providing this news.

And what is more, what you mentioned as to the gendered misinformation, there is also quite dramatic gendered issues with the digital harassment of women.

And so giving women the ability to protect themselves and to deal with this is something that we are now doing as part of our safety strategy.

Ms. FRANKEL. So just give me an example of what you are doing. You say you are doing it. But what are you doing?

Ms. BENNETT. Well, for example, in the digital safety, the training and—

Ms. FRANKEL. Okay.

Ms. BENNETT [continuing]. Of journalists particularly at Radio Free Asia. Radio Free Asia is finding that that is a particular problem for them. So the digital training and how to respond to digital harassment, when it becomes dangerous, how you respond to the attacks to you, all of those things are things that we are doing right now actively.

Ms. FRANKEL. I think I am running out of time.

But what about to just laypeople or to politicians, anything going out to them?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, there is. But you know what? To find specific broadcast examples of it, I would be very happy to go back and retrieve some of them to make sure that you get them.

Ms. FRANKEL. Okay. Thank you so much.

I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you very much.

Mr. LaTurner, thanks for being here. And you are recognized, sir.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Director Bennett, I appreciate the invaluable work that USAGM is tasked with across the globe in providing unfiltered, uncensored information. You discussed in your testimony the areas where we are outperforming China and Russia in key markets, with VOA reaching far more individuals in places like Nigeria and Cambodia than RT and China Radio International. I am encouraged to hear these success stories.

But where are we struggling most to compete with China and Russia in the information economy? Are there regions where their reach is more expansive than that of USAGM?

Ms. BENNETT. I would like clarify. Their reach is growing. It is absolutely true that their reach is growing. The foreign affairs—for example, estimates that they are spending \$10 billion a year to expand their media, their media reach.

So you can see by—we have research that you can see the size of their footprint. The size of their footprint is large. What I am saying that we have the advantage that they don't, and that our information is truthful and factual, and it is also more interesting.

And so right now they don't have the engagement of the audience, even though they are broadcasting more. So right now we have the advantage of better content and more truthful information. They have the advantage right now of spending and scope. And so those things are going to be balancing out over the years.

Also, one of their goals is to reach into and become part of the media ecosystem in these different countries. And that is someplace

they are really outperforming us, for example, in providing tools. The Belt and Road Initiative that you read so much about, this has now expanded into the media area.

So they are providing equipment. They are providing training. They are providing trips. They are getting—they are providing free content that is high quality to different media organizations.

So basically I would say that you don't want to—you can't speak specifically to any specific area but that this overall is where they are right now outperforming us, and we still have the edge but it is not going to be forever.

Mr. LATURNER. The growing influence of China is an issue that is incredibly concerning, as you have just talked about. And it is concerning for Members across the aisle.

I know that Open Technology Fund has done extensive work in ensuring access to information in high censorship environments like China. But what is the next threat that OTF will face from these repressive governments? What are we doing to counter crackdowns by organizations like the CCP against dissidents and protesters?

Ms. BENNETT. So I think what you are talking about is what is the next threat to—in—from shutting down information getting into the country? Yes, that is a huge issue, and we don't have a specific answer for it right now. But thinking about different ways that you can use VPNs, thinking about different ways you can use mirror sites, thinking about different ways you can satellite transmission, and also different ways that you can, in fact, just physically get the information into the country the way that we used to do during World War II.

And so we are heavily researching and supporting the development of any kind of new technology because I don't want us to be doing what we have been doing for the last several decades, which is catching up to the last piece of technology. I see that my tenure here at USAGM should be to set us up for the next decade, and that means making sure we not only have the appropriate technology but are planning for the appropriate technology.

Mr. LATURNER. In 2020, the Office of Personnel Management completed a report that found extensive concerns about USAGM's safeguarding of classified national security information.

Of the recommendations made in that report, what is the status of implementation? What is USAGM doing beyond just these recommendations to ensure that individuals working for the Agency who come in contact with sensitive or classified information are properly vetted?

Ms. BENNETT. Congressman, I am going have to look into that and get back with you because I am not aware of anything having to do with anybody at USAGM using sensitive, classified information. So I will have to find that report and get back to you with it.

Mr. LATURNER. You are not familiar? It is a report from 2020, the Office of Personnel Management.

Ms. BENNETT. In 2020, I was not at the Agency, and so I don't—I am not aware of it. Plus, I am not aware of any extensive use of classified information within the Agency. So I will have to basically look into it and get back to you.

Mr. LATURNER. I would really appreciate it.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you. I will do that.

Mr. LATURNER. I think it is important.

Ms. BENNETT. I will do that.

Mr. LATURNER. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mrs. Torres. Thank you for your patience.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you, Chairman.

And, Ms. Bennett, thank you so much for being with us today and thank you for the work that you do with TheDream.US organization that you founded with your husband. Thank you for all of that.

I share your concern with global information, with the global information war, and how corrupt actors use disinformation campaigns to avoid accountability for their actions. Foreign malign influence campaigns also work to shift U.S. policy. And many Members, from the chairman to, you know, myself, have been the targets of online misinformation campaigns by foreign actors, including interference in our reelection campaigns.

I would like to hear more from you about how the U.S. Agency for Global Media can address foreign malign influence campaigns, especially in Latin America.

Ms. BENNETT. So what we find is the best antidote to foreign misinformation/disinformation campaigns is flooding the zone with accurate information and providing an alternative. We find that pushing back is not necessarily the most effective way to do things but to make sure that these alternatives are available.

And, in Latin and South America, one thing that I am trying to plan to do and that is to use the entire resources of USAGM—that means the reporting in Ukraine, the reporting in Russia—and make sure that we make that available through our broadcast partners and our own operations inside Latin and South America so that a much broader swath of information including first-person video information that comes from the—on-the-ground reporting in Ukraine is readily available to the people in Latin and South America.

What is more, I don't know if you are aware of this. But, in Latin and South America, we have a very, very interesting and very effective model. And that is that our journalists are, in fact, the Washington bureau for a wide range of Latin and South America news organizations so that, when there is something coming from a hearing like this, from testimonies, from the State of the Union, and you go to it and now live from Washington, you will find that it will be a USAGM reporter who is on those TV shows from Washington, providing that information.

I think that is incredibly powerful.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you for bringing up that subject also. I am co-chair of the Central America Caucus, and many journalists within the Central America region speak to me about how they are persecuted for the work that they do.

One example of this persecution that comes to mind is, in July of last year, the award-winning Guatemalan journalist Jose Ruben Zamora, founder and president of the newspaper *El Periodico*, was arrested and imprisoned. He has been in a Guatemalan prison for over 220 days on trumped-up charges simply for doing his job. He

is not alone in this. It is difficult for these folks to even get an attorney because then the attorneys are also persecuted.

What are we doing to help address the issues that are causing so much misinformation and preventing local journalists from doing their jobs?

Ms. BENNETT. And the thing that we are doing is the thing that we believe is the most effective in any of these countries, which is making sure that there—that the stories are available and amplified and that people know about this because, if these journalists are arrested and kept in incarceration, without people knowing about their stories, then they are effectively disappeared. And this is an issue—you mentioned in Guatemala—in Nicaragua and also Vietnam, Cambodia. We have—Radio free Europe has several journalists now in custody right now. It is a growing problem around the world.

Mrs. TORRES. The critical issues of migration and asylum seekers that we are facing every single day is a telling story of what is happening in these countries.

To the extent that we can help bring, you know, real information, real data about the risks involved in, you know, coming to our southern border, you are such a key and important and play such an important role in providing that American message in Latin America that I fully support your work and just want to know how we can help you continue to succeed in this field.

And I went past my time. So I am going to yield back.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you very much.

And I appreciate the support. And the support itself is helping us, helping us succeed. And, as I say, I know that you all face really tough issues this year. But this is one area in which more resources equals more audience. It is just a one-to-one correspondence because we have got a pretty good way of translating that into audience, to make sure that people can see, hear, read, listen to the news that—the news and information that we are giving them.

And, by the way, migrants and refugees have been an increasing focus because we realize that we need to reach people where they are displaced in the languages that they speak.

Mrs. TORRES. I yield.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

Congresswoman, I think we can do another round if that is—if that is all right.

And let me start. You are obviously an expert—you are from an agency that applies really important tools and resources to, as we mentioned, information in very difficult places.

I want to talk about something that you and I have briefly talked about in the past. And that is that USAID's total budget over the years has trended upward, as have all your broadcasting components, except for one which is OCB, which has been nose diving in funding.

And, as you mentioned in the beginning, in response to one of my questions as to, you know, we have all established, we all know that Cuba is a closed, difficult, unfree place where there is no freedom of press, which is exactly what USAID's funding is supposed to address, right, closed societies.

Yet USAGM is now applying just one-third of the funding that it had 10 years ago, 10 years ago in that area, in OCM—OCB and the number of staff is one quarter of what it was 10 years ago. Again, this is happening at a time when the Cuban people have hit the streets. There is, you know, sentences—particularly Afro-Cubans like the San Isidro Movement artists are being thrown in prison.

And so this is the question: Do you think that USAGM and OCB are matching the appropriate level of tools and resources to different challenges, particularly in the case of OCB?

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you very much.

I think we can say that I am completely in accord with you about the need to make sure that we get the funding that is required to do the job that is required in Cuba which is one of the most information-starved places on the planet, and I have been pushing for a budget increase ever since I got here. I will continue to do so. I think we should make sure that the Office of Cuba Broadcasting gets the resources that are appropriate to the need.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I appreciate that.

And, again, I look forward to working with you not only on that issue but on, you know, on the entire area.

I am going to be brief because I know that we have a lot of other members that have questions.

So let me now recognize our distinguished ranking member.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much.

Just one comment on Cuba as it relates to the Afro-Cuban population, which I know very well, many of the issues with the Afro-Cuban population are economic. There is such a huge gap, similar to here in our own country with African Americans. Primarily, Afro-Cubans don't receive remittances because they did not—their families did not leave Cuba.

And so I am hoping that we can figure out a way to really begin to close that economic gap. But, given the embargo, I am not sure how we move forward. So that is just an added issue as it relates to Afro-Cubans.

Let me ask you about the work with Voice of America on the continent of Africa and the opportunities that might exist to expand such work. So many Americans actually believe that Africa is a country, and there are 54 countries on the continent of Africa. Each country is unique in terms of culture, language. Ghana is Ghana. Namibia is Namibia. So how does Voice of America, in terms of content, how do you address the continent of Africa?

And then, second, with regard to African Americans who work with VOA to provide content for Voice of America, for Africa because, of course, you have Africans in America in the diaspora who would be very helpful in developing the messages between the African-American community here in America and in Africa.

Ms. BENNETT. So the first—the first question is, what are the opportunities on the African Continent? That would be the first one?

Well, it is very interesting because, when we were talking the about the places that we are still ahead of the Chinese and Russians, they are very much taking their Belt and Road Initiative into Africa. But we still have a really commanding lead in Africa. I am going to have to give you rough figures because I can't find

my document here. But we have something like a 30-percent market share inside Nigeria compared to 1 percent for Russia and 3 percent for China, and that is still the case right now.

We have a very strong presence in Africa. And we, generally, our broadcasts are created and broadcast and reported by former residents of those countries or current residents of those countries. So they are people who understand the countries and don't mistake them one for another. I mean, Nigeria is not like Kenya, and it is not like Burkina Faso.

Ms. LEE. They help develop the continent.

Ms. BENNETT. They—they—

Ms. LEE. Content.

Ms. BENNETT. Our individuals, we have individual bureaus staffed with journalists. Many, if not most, of them are originally from that country and speak that language fluently in a colloquial, modern manner. So that is how we get that information. And it depends heavily on the stringer network that is inside Africa, too, to bring news about what is going on there, too.

So it is a very important thing because, as you know, the French to Africa and Portuguese to Africa and all the various, Hausa and Fulani and all of these languages, that is one of our strengths is being able to communicate with people in the language that they speak.

Ms. LEE. And how about in terms of African Americans within Voice of America working on different regions, specifically the continent of Africa or the Caribbean or wherever, the people that are of African descent or Africans?

Ms. BENNETT. And so—

Ms. LEE. Given what is happening, I think, just in terms of China, I think it is important that the continent of Africa through VOA and through whatever other mechanisms, trade, development, that Black Americans be very involved in this movement to try to close some of these gaps as it relates to China.

Ms. BENNETT. And we do have African-American journalists and technical people inside Voice of America, but they are involved across the entire thing. We don't confine them to Africa.

Ms. LEE. No, no, no, not confine them. I mean—

Ms. BENNETT. Yeah.

Ms. LEE. There is value of having—

Ms. BENNETT. Yeah.

Ms. LEE [continuing]. Specific ethnic groups—

Ms. BENNETT. Yes.

Ms. LEE [continuing]. In the diaspora—

Ms. BENNETT. Yes.

Ms. LEE [continuing]. Related to people on the continent.

Ms. BENNETT. And some of the issues that I can recall us looking at would have to do with the relationship between Africans in American and African Americans and how they relate to each other. So that is one thing I can remember us doing.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much.

I will talk to you offline.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I thank the Ranking Member.

I will also, by the way, put the ranking member in contact with a number of the political prisoners in Cuba—Afro-Cubans who are there for political reasons, not for—

Ms. LEE. And, Mr. Chairman, I know many of the families also, and I have talked with them.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. But I am sure we will swap those lists because I think there are a number that I think you would be—I know that you will probably ask for their liberation as well.

Ms. LEE. Well, I have them.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I appreciate that.

Ms. LEE. So I look forward to working with you on Cuba in terms of how we help the Cuban people—

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Absolutely.

Ms. LEE [continuing]. Starting with getting them off the State Sponsors of Terrorism list because they are not a terrorist nation and, secondly, by making sure we have normal relations. That is how we get started.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Well, there you and I disagree, as you well know—

Ms. LEE. Always. Always. My friend, though.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And there you go. Thank you, again. And you are recognized.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am very, I think all of us here, very concerned about the rise of antisemitism around the world, in our own country, too.

So I wanted, sort of a two-part question, to get your sense in terms of broadcast—I am not worried about your broadcasting but other broadcasting, especially coming out of the Middle East. What is your sense of what is going on? I know that some of the biggest media agencies are—I don't know if I can pronounce them right but Qatar's Al Jazeera, Saudi Arabia's Al Arabiya, and UAE's Sky News Arabia. Do you find any antisemitism or anti-Israel sentiments in that broadcast scene or other broadcasts in the world?

Ms. BENNETT. So I am afraid that I am not personally an expert in those broadcasts, although I know that that area is very much dominated by state-sponsored media organizations. And I do know that the Middle East Broadcast Networks is very concerned about making sure that things like anti-Semitism, anti-women, anti-gay issues are all covered appropriately so that the information that gets into those countries is, as we say, not pushing back but offering alternative narratives.

So, while I can't tell but the nature of the broadcasts by the foreign broadcasters, I can tell you that the Middle East Broadcast Networks, which is part of our organization, is very aware of the need to broadcast appropriate and socially—socially conscious broadcasting.

Ms. FRANKEL. So who—does anyone have the responsibility of monitoring or getting a sense of what is going on with these other broadcasters?

Ms. BENNETT. Oh, absolutely.

And, again, I apologize. This has got to do with my newness at the organization—

Ms. FRANKEL. Okay.

Ms. BENNETT [continuing]. And my trying to learn what is going on.

But, yes, the Middle East Broadcast Networks has a very professional staff over there that is very aware of what is going on and monitors them and tracks them quite substantially.

Ms. FRANKEL. Okay. And I just note, I am not—I am not making any disrespect to the Middle East broadcasters. But I am just curious whether there was a sense if there is any disinformation or anti-Semitism in any of the broadcasters anywhere in the world. But you are not—that is not in your bailiwick, you are saying, or you—

Ms. BENNETT. I think you were specifically talking about the Middle East.

Ms. FRANKEL. Yeah, I did mention that.

Ms. BENNETT. And that is the area right now, since I am pretty new here, that I am the least familiar with, although—

Ms. FRANKEL. What about any other areas of the world?

Ms. BENNETT. Again, I am aware that this is going on. But for me to specifically say a particular piece of broadcasting, I can't do that right now. But I would be happy to go back and look at it for you.

Ms. FRANKEL. That would be great. If you maybe have somebody who is tracking that, that would be great.

Ms. BENNETT. Yeah, I would be happy to do so.

Ms. FRANKEL. Okay. Thank you very much.

And, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Well, thank you. And thank you for bringing—because antisemitism, as you know, is not only prevalent out there, but it is unfortunate, I think—you know, I don't have statistics to show it. But I have heard those statistics—I don't have them here—that it is actually on the rise.

Ms. FRANKEL. Yes.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. So thank you for bringing that up.

Ms. BENNETT, I look forward to working with you. And I know that you are relatively new, and you have a very important task. So I really, really look forward to working with you. You know, we will continue to be in touch with you. I, again, thank you for your service. I also thank you for being here today.

And, with that, we will conclude today's hearings. And, obviously, members may submit any additional questions for the record.

Unless the ranking member has something else—

Ms. LEE. No. Thank you very much.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs stands adjourned.

Thank you so much.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you so much.

[Questions and answers submitted for the record follow:]

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
 Amanda Bennett, USAGM CEO,
 by Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart
 Subcommittee on State, Foreign
 Operations, and Related Programs
 Committee on Appropriations
 March 9, 2023**

Questions Related to Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) Budget and Personnel Planning

- 1. How did USAGM initially arrive at the request of \$13.656 million, which would have been a more than 50% cut, to the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) for FY 2019? Does the Biden Administration agree with the Trump Administration's reasons for the requested cut to OCB? Please explain where the Biden Administration agrees, and where it disagrees, with the assessment underlying the FY2019 request. Why did the Biden Administration continue to request roughly \$13 million for OCB through FY 2023, and \$15 million for OCB for FY 2024, including after the July 2021 protests? If comparable cuts must be made to the rest of USAGM generally, where would you pinpoint these new savings?**

A: Each year, USAGM engages with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to develop the contours and funding levels that will be included in the President's Budget. In FY 2019, the President's Budget included significant cuts to State Foreign Operations programs, including a particularly large cut for the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB). Budget reductions enacted by Congress in FY 2020 and later years necessitated a series of reforms and modernizations to address the lower funding levels while continuing OCB's historic engagement with the Cuban people. Under the current Administration, USAGM continues to develop its budget in cooperation with OMB while continuing to implement ongoing reforms and modernizations at the network. OCB has continued to have tremendous impact on the island, particularly in providing critical coverage in the wake of the historic July 11, 2021 protests in Cuba. The President's Budget for FY 2024 includes a \$2.043 million proposed increase for OCB, representing a nearly 16% increase above current levels. The President's Budget for FY 2024 also includes a broad series of investments in USAGM's other federal and grantee networks, reflecting the imperative to address pervasive global misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda emanating from state and non-state actors.

- 2. Was the 2022-2023 RIF at OCB initiated as a result of reorganization, reform, or budget constraints?**

A: The impetus for a reduction-in-force at OCB was driven by severely reduced funding levels. USAGM networks are highly dependent on the input and productivity of their staff, and staffing costs absorb the majority of budgetary resources across most of our operations. OCB's budget was reduced by over 55% between FY 2019 and FY 2021, necessitating changes in the network's cost structure, including staffing levels.

3. Has the entire transfer authority for FY 2022 and FY 2023 been used for OCB? How was it used specifically?

A: The entire transfer authority was used exclusively for OCB. In FY 2022, OCB had a payroll of \$13.5 million and needed the FY 2022 transfer authority to be able to meet payroll. For FY 2023, OCB will be using the entirety of the transfer authority for the mandatory costs related to the reduction-in-force, as well as critical updates to equipment, technology, and for content.

Question Related to OCB's Audience and Surveys

1. What is the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) strategy to expand on the audience in Cuba? Does USAGM intend to continue providing a wide variety of platforms for Cubans to access independent media, including shortwave radio, internet sources, satellite, and other new technologies? Does USAGM's strategy include continuing to partner with the Open Technology Fund to circumvent internet blackouts and other means of censorship? Does USAGM intend to work to expand internet access on the island? If so, is USAGM partnering with other USG agencies to do so?

A: While we are conducting our upcoming survey to better understand all of the implications, available information indicates that the media market in Cuba has changed significantly in just the last few years, as increasing numbers of Cubans have come online. It will be critical for Martí to continue to invest in news for digital platforms to ensure it is able to serve audiences on the platforms where they are seeking news and information. As we do in many other difficult or closed markets around the world, USAGM will provide content on all relevant platforms, from older technologies like cross-border radio to the newest social media apps. Our content distribution strategies are driven by data and the needs of our audiences.

USAGM will continue to ensure that OTF-supported tools are available to the people of Cuba to access news and information provided by Martí and other credible sources. OCB has circumvention tools such as Psiphon and nthLink VPN technology built into their mobile apps, and mirror nodes and Tor .onion sites which make blocking harder and protect at-risk users from surveillance that are ready for promotion. In the case of internet shutdowns, OTF is prepared to assist in whatever way it is able.

Expanding the infrastructure for internet access is not within USAGM's mandate, as it is considered information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) work. USAGM's Internet Freedom funds can only be used in the context of bypassing censorship and surveillance to access existing infrastructure via software such as VPNs, proxies, mirrors, etc. U.S. Agency for International Development implements ICT4D projects, and USAGM coordinates with its interagency colleagues through a long-standing, regular working group.

2. We understand there is a listenership survey for Cuba planned in the spring. Could you provide details about which company is conducting the survey and the methodology for accruing reliable data? How do you offset Cubans' disinclination to truthfully acknowledge their listening habits when they know the regime prohibits it? Specifically how is USAGM utilizing findings from previous GAO reports (which note flawed surveys) to inform your methodology on this survey; could you outline the modifications for us? Also could you describe how you will administer quality-controls?

A: Bendixen & Amandi International will administer a face-to-face survey, known as a Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) survey. Bendixen & Amandi is a respected market research firm with experience implementing polls for many media companies, including The Miami Herald. Bendixen & Amandi is the only U.S.-based research firm that maintains relationships with researchers in Cuba. Bendixen & Amandi completed the agency's previous 2017 media survey in Cuba, and USAGM commissioned their work a second time precisely because of their unique ability to conduct face-to-face survey with Cubans on the island.

All surveys asking people to honestly report on their media use are subject to bias and recall (memory) issues. This is why USAGM conducts research using the best methods to encourage honest responses, including using local research teams, limiting the length of the survey, and "masking" the topic of the survey by asking about other domestic and international media brands.

The agency conducts research on audiences in many countries with repressive regimes, such as Vietnam and Russia. In these environments, while there is risk in admitting they use our media brands, we have found that the people who actively seek out our content are often willing to admit to it and to participate in our studies.

The interviews will be conducted face-to-face by Cuban interviewers and all questions have been pre-tested to ensure they are not so sensitive that they would encourage people to lie or quit the survey. Additionally, we have in-depth interviews scheduled with former and current Martí users to understand if people are hesitant to admit international news use, so that we can caveat our estimates appropriately. In this case, if Cubans are not truthful about their listening habits, it will likely undercount the number of users, providing a more conservative estimate of Martí reach in Cuba. In general, USAGM prefers conservative estimates of reach, and is careful not to report inflated estimates of reach in any market.

The 2011 GAO report notes that the 2008 survey was a telephone survey representative of approximately 20% of the Cuban population. In contrast, this year's survey will be a face-to-face, nationally representative survey, representative of approximately 95% of the population of adults living in Cuba at the time of the survey (only excluding individuals living in Guantanamo and Isla de Juventud). The sample of 1,250 adults in Cuba will be constructed using a probability sampling method that allows us to project results onto the national population with a Margin of Error of approximately 3%.

Conducting an in-person survey in Cuba is extremely difficult, but this survey will still follow USAGM's stringent quality control (QC) standards and industry best practices. In order to ensure interviewer safety, some typical procedures of USAGM's surveys cannot be implemented, such as returning to a household at a later date to interview a respondent and rostering full households. Instead, interviewers will roster individuals currently available to conduct the survey and be allowed to replace households, but never respondents, if the selected respondent is not willing to conduct the survey. USAGM, its third-party Quality Control team, and Bendixen & Amandi will check the data weekly to ensure that interviewers follow household and respondent selection procedures and that interviews are of an appropriate length.

Questionnaire development was conducted by USAGM and Cuban nationals to ensure that terminology was appropriate for the unique environment and dialect. Translations were approved by USAGM's third-party experts and OCB, and were localized by Cuban nationals. A rigorous pre-test ensured that questions and translations were appropriate to ask in Cuba and easily understood by the local population. Interviewer training was a multi-day affair, conducted in-person by a trusted partner.

Due to security concerns, interviews cannot be audio reviewed, but supervisors will observe at least 1/4 of all interviews to confirm responses and make sure all interviews in the final sample are of acceptable quality. USAGM's third-party data quality control vendor will also run pattern and logic checks on the data, flagging any outliers or suspicious cases. Any recorded observation that does not meet USAGM's QC standards will be thoroughly investigated and removed from the sample if necessary.

3. Will the funding for this survey come from OCB's budget? How much will it cost?

A: The funding for this survey will not come from OCB's budget. USAGM research is funded by the agency's Office of Policy and Research, administered through its International Audience Research Program (IARP), which secures and oversees audience research for all USAGM five networks. Given the multiple vendors carrying out hundreds of research projects on behalf of the agency continuously around the world, the agency's Office of Policy and Research manages contracting and maintains and enforces adherence to research standards.

The nationally representative survey with a sample of n=1250, and approximately 25 in-depth interviews, plus analysis and reporting costs \$250,000.

Question Related to Satellite Technology

1. Can you explain the extent to how satellite technology plays prominent roles within USAGM's strategy, especially in Iran? Separately, can you explain how strategies and approaches using satellite technologies on Iran are being considered in the Cuba context?

A: Satellite to Iran

Satellites are a key technology for USAGM to get content into Iran, particularly as the country shuts down the internet and blocks access to social media sites and communication apps whenever there is social unrest in the country.

Despite the 1994 law in Iran that banned satellite dishes and occasional crackdowns by authorities to confiscate and destroy them, their use in Iran remains widespread. Dishes continue to dot rooftops in towns and cities across the country to the extent that some Iranians jokingly call the satellite dish Iran's national flower. Reported satellite dish ownership has gone up and down since 2010, but as of 2021, more than four out of ten (42.5%) Iranians report owning a satellite dish, the highest number in a decade.

To reach Iranian TV audiences, USAGM leases space on two of the region's most popular direct-to-home (DTH) TV satellites, namely Yahsat Y1A and Eutelsat 13B. USAGM content is available free-to-air, meaning that the content is not encrypted, so no subscription or special equipment is required, beyond a satellite dish and receiver.

VOA365, VOA's Farsi-language TV channel, is available on both satellites in HD. To accommodate viewers with older televisions, VOA365 is also available in SD on Eutelsat 13B. RFE/RL's Radio Farda TV is available on both satellites in SD only. Along with these USAGM channels, Yahsat Y1A and Eutelsat 13B viewers have access to dozens of other popular news, sports, and entertainment channels.

While the Eutelsat 13B satellite has DTH viewers in Iran, it is most prevalent as a free-to-air platform over Europe. As USAGM reviews its platform utilization, it is considering alternative satellites that will help the agency place its Farsi-language content on Europe's cable systems. Also, as growth of internet access outpaces growth of satellite TV usage, digital platforms (social media, streaming services, etc.) are becoming the most effective and economical way to reach Farsi-speaking audiences, particularly young people.

Recently, Iran's state media have moved its own channels off of Eutelsat 13B and Yahsat and on to other satellites, presumably in an effort to draw Iranian audiences away from platforms where USAGM content can be accessed. USAGM will continue to monitor audiences' satellite TV preferences and will seek to remain on the most popular, easily accessible platforms.

Satellite to Cuba

The Cuban government has long maintained strict control of the media, particularly television. Though about a decade ago, the government expanded its content offerings by allowing the Venezuela-based Telesur to broadcast on the island. Pirated American content, ranging from cartoons to documentaries, is very popular.

Meanwhile, there are thousands of clandestine satellite dishes and legal "video banks" that supply Cubans with the latest movies, TV shows and sports programs. Satellite dishes are smuggled into the country from Miami, then installed in lofts, plastic water tanks, or other

locations that obscure them from public view. Dishes serve multiple households, as their owners create mini cable networks by linking up with the TVs of their neighbors. In this way, the signals from one satellite dish can reach homes in a several-block radius. As of March 2022, OCB's TV Martí is available on Telstar 12 Vantage as a free-to-air DTH channel. Pending updated research, USAGM may seek other satellite platforms, if others are deemed more popular among Cuban audiences.

In 2020, USAGM was requested to investigate the development of a satellite-based broadband internet service for Cuba. While technically possible, developing, integrating, installing, and managing such a service would be both very costly and complex. Even where people already access television content via satellite, broadband internet over satellite requires specialized transmit-receive hardware at each location, a dedicated high-power satellite, and additional infrastructure support. The simple reason for this is that television services are one-way transmissions (receive-only), but internet services are two-way, requiring terminals that must transmit back to the satellite.

Question Related to Countering Malign Influences

1. What is USAGM's analysis on Chinese and Russian propaganda strategies in Cuba and how USAGM plans to counter it?

A: PRC's and Russia's propaganda are widespread throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and especially in Cuba. While the Cuban regime does its best to block and censor credible, fact-based content produced by Radio Televisión Martí and other public service media, content from Russia's Spanish-language RT and China's international station CGTN are widely available, including through partnerships with Cuban state media. We have also seen increasing evidence that the PRC and Russia are coordinating their disinformation narratives abroad, particularly regarding the war in Ukraine, in an attempt to deflect blame toward the United States and our allies for Russia's unprovoked invasion. Kremlin-controlled media outlets RT, Sputnik, and RIA-Novosti have been the main providers of news content on the war in Ukraine for the Cuban official press and the digital sites of provincial newspapers.

USAGM plans to continue countering PRC's and Russia's propaganda through the provision of timely and accurate news about Cuba and the world, on the platforms audiences can access, using state-of-the-art censorship circumvention technology. OCB is also launching targeted programming to specifically address falsehoods. In February of this year, Radio and Television Martí and prominent Ukrainian fact-checking outlet StopFake.org launched a joint project to counter Spanish-language Russia's propaganda circulating in Cuba. Russia's media claims being fact-checked on the site include statements such as, "The Ukrainian government 'calls for the genocide of the Russians,'" and "The U.S. was planning a war and a crisis in Europe."

2. What are the strategies of Radio Free Asia (RFA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and Voice of America (VOA) to tackle Chinese and Russian propaganda?

A: Addressing adversarial malign influence and propaganda is about much more than just individual responses to falsehoods, it is encompassed in everything we do as a reliable, credible source of news in places where the media is not fully free. Propaganda is especially dangerous in the kinds of censored media environments where USAGM networks operate. Providing a source of measured, verified, factual information in local languages to counter the falsehoods promoted by America's adversaries is critical. VOA, RFA, and RFE/RL have unique and complementary roles in combatting propaganda: VOA provides relevant news about the United States and U.S. policies, as well as international news (for example, reporting about Russia's invasion of Ukraine for audiences in Africa and Latin America); RFA and RFE/RL cover specific developments within their local markets. All three networks are especially focused on not just the propaganda of adversarial authoritarian states, but also the many other threats they pose to the international order, including the export of censorship and surveillance technology, deployment of mercenary forces, and debt-trap investments.

Just a few specific examples of our work include:

- Content that debunks specific pieces of disinformation, like RFE/RL's *Footage vs. Footage*, which shows how the same story is covered by Russia's propaganda and also by reliable sources. The videos show that a certain narrative is false, they also teach audiences how to be more critical consumers of media, and how to spot the kinds of manipulations that propagandists use. The videos routinely get millions of views online.
- Investigative reporting, including the pioneering work that the RFA Uyghur Service has done, as the first media outlet to demonstrate the CCP's systematic effort to eradicate Uyghur culture and identity through mass surveillance, "re-education" camps, and other brutal measures. USAGM networks have also had an important multiplier role with this story, ensuring that it is told all over the world in places where China would otherwise be able to intimidate local media into staying away from the story.
- Our reporting takes advantage of the incredibly wide geographic scope of USAGM networks to tell unique stories, such as VOA's special report to coincide with the 10th anniversary of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Jointly produced by multiple VOA language services and the English-language News Center, the project features a wide range of multimedia reports on BRI projects across the world, noting the successes and challenges of the initiative and what they could mean for its future. VOA's project also included expert analysis, the financial cost, and the impact they are having on local communities.

3. What projects are focused on countering Chinese and Russian's deceptive media and the specific funds allocated for these projects?

A: PRC's and Russia's propaganda is geographically widespread and pervasive in virtually all of the regions and countries targeted by USAGM networks, from their immediate geographic vicinities in Asia and Eastern Europe, stretching out to the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. To combat this, VOA has increased its African service by \$4 million and Asia service by \$2.7 million. The preponderance of RFA's \$63 million budget goes toward

countering the PRC's influence in the Asia Pacific region. RFE/RL has used its \$20 million increase in FY 2022 and the Ukraine supplemental to provide programming countering Russia's disinformation. See the above response for several specific examples of projects focused on countering China's and Russia's deceptive media practices.

4. What is USAGM's strategy to reach audiences inside Russia and China? Please provide specifics as well as impact and audience-reach information.

A: As Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime invaded Ukraine and moved aggressively to centralize power, eliminate opposition, and silence dissenting voices, USAGM's role in providing quality, independent, and reliable reporting to the Russian public became even more important. USAGM supports multiple brands for Russia and Russian-speakers around the world, including VOA (Golos Ameriki), RFE/RL (Radio Svoboda), and joint TV and digital network Current Time. RFE/RL also operates successful regional reporting projects for particular areas of the Russian Federation, in Russian, Tatar, Bashkir, and Chechen. RFE/RL is now preparing to launch a Russian-language streaming service carrying a variety of non-news content, including cultural programming and documentaries, targeting younger Russians.

Despite the Russian government's unprecedented censorship of independent media, there has been a surge in demand for VOA and RFE/RL Russian-language content along with a spike in the use of OTF-supported circumvention tools. To combat Russia's disinformation following the invasion of Ukraine, USAGM expanded program delivery and access with the addition of more affiliates in and around Russia, including over 50 new affiliates for Current Time alone as regional distributors dropped Russia's RT and searched for a Russian-language replacement. On radio, RFE/RL has expanded its availability on medium wave (AM), reaching parts of Russia. In January 2023, with additional funding provided through the FY 2022 appropriation and Ukraine supplemental funds, RFE/RL opened new offices in Vilnius and Riga to house teams displaced from Russia and Belarus, as well as new investigative journalism and digital innovation hubs serving the region.

Despite the challenges of operating in a very hostile environment, as of our most recent survey in summer of 2022, USAGM's two brands together were reaching 10.6% of Russian adults weekly. (To put these figures in context, in the United States, a 2022 Reuters Institute study found that Fox News reaches 23% of Americans weekly and CNN 17%. Top public media brands in the United States include NPR News at 8% and PBS News at 7% weekly use.) In the year following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, RFE/RL and VOA video content in Russian and Ukrainian was viewed 8 billion times across digital platforms — 2.5 times the numbers from the year before. Even with Russia blocking of USAGM websites and most social media platforms, traffic from Russia continues to significantly exceed pre-invasion levels, as Russians seek out circumvention tools, including those provided by OTF, in order to continue accessing fact-based, compelling reporting.

Meanwhile, VOA and RFA represent some of the only sources of credible information for people living in China, while OTF increases their access to information – and their combined

impact is powerful. China's media environment is one of the most restricted in the world, and it has been working hard to export this model to other countries. Both VOA and RFA serve Chinese audiences in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Tibetan, and RFA also has the only international broadcasting service in the Uyghur language. Minority language broadcasts play an important role in not only informing audiences, but also preserving languages and cultures under severe threat from CCP policies. RFA also launched the WHYNOT online brand in 2020 for young Chinese around the world, generating conversations inside and outside China's internet firewall with fresh content and perspectives otherwise unavailable in Chinese-language media.

To increase reach and engagement with audiences in China, USAGM is prioritizing content on digital platforms, particularly popular visual platforms, and continues to invest in the development and deployment of sophisticated internet anti-censorship technology to overcome the "Great Firewall." The networks are also investing in investigative reporting and fact-checking to counter pervasive CCP propaganda. Finally, VOA and RFA are seeking to expand reach with diaspora audiences, both as target consumers themselves, and as conduits to send information back to family and friends inside the PRC.

USAGM's last round of audience research in China, conducted in 2017, found an audience of 65 million adults for two brands combined. Since then, due to increasing levels of repression by the CCP, USAGM's research partners have not been able to field a new survey asking about our brands. USAGM is currently evaluating proxies for direct survey measurement, including data modeling from digital engagement metrics and alternative research options from within the PRC's internet firewall.

We do see indications in digital metrics that VOA and RFA are having significant impact inside the country. Our audiences go to great lengths to overcome the "Great Firewall" and reach our content with the help of OTF. OTF supports leading Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) in China, which help over 2.5 million monthly active users protect their privacy while they access the internet. VOA's Mandarin Service content on YouTube earned nearly double the video views as China Central Television (CCTV) in 2022. Recently, both VOA and RFA saw large spikes in traffic during the recent protests against China's draconian zero-COVID policies. One RFA video showing these protests was viewed over 4 million times on Twitter.

5. Please provide information on the role of Chinese media in Africa and Latin America and what the agency is doing to address this challenge.

A: The PRC has been making a major media push in both Africa and Latin America, through both its owned media properties and a variety of other business models. In addition to its branded properties, other outreach involves coproduction arrangements, paid content placement, media capture, unlabeled content, provision of free content, payments or gifts to local journalists, ambassadorial op-eds, journalism trainings in China, and local government interference.

In addition to its branded properties, including China Global Television Network (CGTN) and China Radio International (CRI), the PRC has invested in a newswire model of content distribution through its Xinhua wire service and other outlets, which frequently results in placements in trusted local media with little to no indication of the ultimate source of the content. One especially notable example is Xinhua's partnership with Spain's EFE, which is widely used across the Spanish-speaking world. Thousands of international journalists have taken part in China's journalism training programs. China has recently launched or expanded multiple regional media cooperation efforts, including the China-Latin America and Caribbean Media Action project, and a "Media Cooperation Forum" with more than 40 African countries. China's state-linked programming appears on popular local news stations, and at times Chinese media offers technical or production assistance for covering a story in exchange for some editorial control. Latin American affiliates of VOA have told USAGM representatives that Chinese outlets are ever-present and extremely accommodating, with vast content-gathering resources all over the world. Finally, the PRC spreads its influence and narratives via technical investment. China's StarTimes is one of the largest pay-TV operators in sub-Saharan Africa, offering television packages with affordable access to local and Chinese channels, but not major Western brands. China also offers significant assistance with other technical infrastructure, funding entire new studio complexes or the transition to digital television for cash-strapped local media outlets and ministries. The terms of these deals are often opaque.

To date, USAGM has been very successful in pushing back against the PRC in these critical regions. VOA offers news and information in Spanish and Haitian Creole for Latin America, and in 17 languages for Sub-Saharan Africa, including a number of local vernacular languages. In FY22, USAGM brands reached more than 70 million in Latin America and nearly 80 million across sub-Saharan Africa. According to USAGM research from 2022 in a selection of African and Latin American markets, VOA reaches far larger audiences than Chinese brands CGTN and CRI. In Nigeria, for example, VOA reaches 33.2% of adults weekly, compared with CRI's 2.5%. In Colombia, VOA reaches 24.2% of adults to CGTN's 1.7%, and in the Dominican Republic, VOA reaches more than half of adults – 50.5% – compared with CGTN's 6%. VOA's credible, trustworthy content has accumulated large audiences over the many years of the brand's presence in these markets. However, a comparison of reach among only those familiar with the brand shows a much smaller gap. As the PRC brands are far newer than VOA, this indicates the possibility that they will grow their reach as audiences become more aware of their existence. USAGM will need to continue to invest in these regions to stay ahead of its competition.

Finally, USAGM networks have built deep partnerships with local media in both regions. USAGM distributes its content through 1,600 local partner stations in Latin America and Africa, often the largest stations in a given country. These partnerships, built up over years of engagement, are highly coveted by China. Examples include TV Azteca in Mexico, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation in Accra, KTN in Nairobi, Nigerian Television Authority, ORTM in Mali, Rwanda Broadcasting. In addition to content, USAGM provides partners with opportunities for co-production, and training in various journalism and business topics. Much has been made of China's efforts to court media leaders with trips and money. USAGM also has its own pipeline to media leaders on both continents. In May, USAGM will hold a

conference for 40 English-speaking media CEOs across Africa to provide training on new ideas and learn about the markets. In Latin America, USAGM has a major partnership with 22 major broadcasters across Latin America through the Bogota-based Alliance for Latin American Information (AIL). USAGM will present at the AIL annual meeting in April.

Reaching Audience in Other Closing/Closed Spaced

- 1. Please provide us with information regarding USAGM's strategy to expand presence in countries with closed societies, such as Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Iran (add more countries) and where governments control access to information.**

A: USAGM networks broadcast to a large number of closed or closing societies, including Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Iran, Cuba, the PRC, North Korea, and many others. Strategies are market by market, depending on the ways in which audiences use media and the platforms USAGM networks are able to use to distribute content. USAGM is fortunately able to conduct survey research in the vast majority of its target markets, and to collect qualitative information from defectors and travelers from others, so we base our program distribution decisions on relatively recent data in most cases.

Digital media plays a large and increasing role in our ability to reach audiences, even in fairly closed markets. OTF is a critical component of this work, allowing audiences to safely access the content their governments seek to censor. OTF's established circumvention and privacy tools support 38 million users on a monthly basis. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, use of OTF tools in Russia has surged from approximately 250,000 monthly users to over 8 million users. In Iran, the growth in users has leaped from a previous multi-year baseline of 5 million users per month to over 23 million users as of early 2023 today – around a quarter of Iran's total population.

Cross-border means of broadcast transmission also remain critical in many parts of the world. USAGM offers satellite television channels for Iran, Afghanistan, and closed markets in the Middle East. Medium wave (AM) and even shortwave radio remain relevant means of content distribution in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, parts of East Asia (particularly to reach some of USAGM's most closed markets, such as North Korea and the XUAR region of China), and in a few markets in Eurasia. The agency is committed to maintaining broadcast capabilities where relevant, while continually reevaluating its overall program distribution posture to ensure it is as effective and efficient as possible.

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Hearing: United States Agency for Global Media
Thursday, March 9, 2023

Congressman Reschenthaler

1) Setareh Derakhshesh Sieg:

Setareh Sieg, a Persian Voice of America (VOA) official, was removed from her position in 2020 after the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM) Labor and Employer Relations (LER) staff conducted an investigation and concluded that she had falsified credentials and misused public funds. Shortly after President Biden took office, however, Ms. Sieg was rehired despite the detailed evidence against her in LER's initial report.

Questions

Ms. Bennet:

1. **During your testimony, you stated that USAGM had responded “many times” to Chairman McCaul’s inquiry regarding Ms. Setareh Sieg. In fact, the agency, as of March 13, 2023, has not provided any documents that Chairman McCaul requested over a year and a half ago. Will you please confirm for the record that the agency has been willfully noncompliant on this matter and explain the agency’s legal rationale for this obstruction?**

A: USAGM respects the critical oversight role of Congress and responds to congressional requests in a manner that seeks to accommodate a committee’s information needs in support of its legitimate legislative goals while protecting longstanding Executive Branch confidentiality and other institutional interests.

USAGM has worked with Rep. McCaul’s staff for some time on the matter referenced during his tenure as both the Ranking Member and now as Chairman of HFAC. As we noted to Chairman McCaul on February 13, 2023, the agency has responded to a number of requests for information from his office pertaining to Ms. Sieg after the Office of Special Counsel requested a stay of the proposed personnel action against her that was initiated by the prior leadership of the agency. Our engagement with Rep. McCaul’s office on this matter has included: two oral briefings (March 18, 2021 and April 26, 2021); written responses to questions from staff (March 8, 2021; June 22, 2021; October 26, 2021; December 8, 2021; May 11, 2022;

and May 17, 2022); provision of reports on two internal investigations conducted by USAGM's Office of Human Resources (April 23, 2021 and January 19, 2022); and multiple calls to update his staff on the status of this issue. Additionally, the agency hosted HFAC Committee staff for an in-person review of documents related to this matter on Tuesday, March 14, 2023 at USAGM headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Moving forward, USAGM expects to continue working with Chairman McCaul and HFAC staff to accommodate their informational needs.

2. As you know, Chairman McCaul has requested that USAGM investigators sit for transcribed interviews in the Sieg matter. Will you commit to facilitating these interviews before the end of March?

A: USAGM takes congressional oversight very seriously and will continue to be responsive to concerns that arise pertaining to the vital work of the agency and its entities. As noted above, the agency has been engaged on this matter with HFAC staff for some time. The agency has also been actively engaged with Chairman McCaul's staff to accommodate their oversight and informational requests in this matter and will continue to do so.

3. Regarding recent censorship at VOA that resulted in an article's mention of the Sieg matter being scrubbed, you mentioned during your testimony that you were not the decisionmaker who requested the "editing" of the original article. Please provide the names and job titles of the individual or individuals that mandated that the article be scrubbed, and explain why foreign translations of the article in other media outlets did not result in the same scrubbing being performed.

A: USAGM takes concerns regarding the post-publication editorial decision to update a February 25, 2023 Voice of America (VOA) story detailing VOA's determination to place two journalists in its Russian-language service on leave very seriously. As you know, the editorial independence of the journalists and broadcasters at USAGM's networks is a bedrock principle. This independence is enshrined in both law and practice, including by the legislated firewall protecting the professional independence and integrity of our broadcasters, their content, and staff from government interference. This structure, combined with USAGM's commitment to supporting freedom of expression and information as universal human rights, ensures that its networks operate as public service media organizations.

VOA and the rest of USAGM believe that the editorial firewall between VOA and the rest of the U.S. government, including USAGM, is sacrosanct. The firewall underpins our agency's worldwide credibility and is of the utmost importance. To uphold these principles, an internal review of this matter is being initiated, per our existing standard agency processes, in accordance with all applicable agency policies.

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2023.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

WITNESS

HON. ANTONY BLINKEN, SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF STATE

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DIAZ-BALART

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Good day. The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs will come to order.

Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for being here today to discuss the fiscal year 2024 budget request for the Department of State and thank you for your service to our country.

In particular, I know that your schedule these days is rather challenging, so don't think that we don't understand that and that we take it for granted.

Before I get to the budget I want to start by raising some concerns on what I believe have been some really serious blunders that have damaged relationships with our allies and emboldened some of the most dangerous anti-American actors throughout the world.

Let me just throw out some examples. The abrupt withdrawal from Afghanistan resulted in the creation of 13 new Gold Star families and the horrific abandonment of those who risked their lives to help us, and now women and girls in Afghanistan are trapped in their homes.

They are unable to receive an education. They are raped, they are maimed, they are killed just if they dare to even attempt to leave their house, to read a book, or even walk outside without a male escort.

It will take decades at best for Afghanistan to regain the progress that took 20 years of hard work and blood to achieve and I fear even longer to really regain our reputation with those who might be inclined to help us in the future.

Communist China—well, they continue to steal intellectual property. They have an expansive espionage network in the United States. They threaten their neighbors. They unleashed a pandemic that killed more than a million Americans with zero accountability and, frankly, no assistance in finding the origin, and continue funding their military at an alarming rate. Now we see that they are—very publicly they are deepening their alliance with Russia.

North Korea has again resumed its dangerous and irresponsible missile tests that had been, frankly, slowed rather dramatically in the past years.

After failed attempts to get another deeply flawed Iran deal the terrorist state of Iran is on the verge of becoming a nuclear power and we even see that Saudi Arabia and Iran reestablished relations and that was brokered by Communist China.

And here in our hemisphere, Colombia and the repressive Maduro dictatorship are deepening their relationship to the detriment of, frankly, not only the Venezuelan and the Colombian people but also the security of the region.

As you know, Mr. Secretary, fentanyl is flowing into our country at unprecedented levels and killing our youth at numbers that, frankly, are beyond alarming, and around the globe we are giving unilateral concessions to enemies of freedom such as diplomacy with Maduro and weakened sanctions on the petroleum industry there.

Despite historic protests in July of 2021 this administration really did little more than lip service to support them and so many others struggling for freedom from tyranny.

And meanwhile, frankly, putting pressure on our allies, whether it is the Dominican Republic or Guatemala, while doing just the opposite to the enemies of freedom.

And so some might try to paint a rosy picture of what the situation is right now. But those are the facts as they are. These issues are of such great concern to me because I really believe, Mr. Secretary, and I think you do too, that American leadership remains indispensable, as do our allies and our security partnerships, in helping to keep the peace in an increasingly dangerous world.

At this time in history our strategic priorities should be very clear. In Europe, I think we must continue strengthening our alliances and one way that that we strengthen alliances is by ensuring transparency and accountability for every dollar and ensuring the burden of jointly providing Ukraine with the military equipment and other tools that it needs to defeat Russia and to win that war.

In the Indo-Pacific we must strengthen our defense posture and collective deterrence to advance regional peace and security including by helping to provide Taiwan with the capabilities it needs to prevent or even defeat an aggression by Communist China and we can't be late to that.

In the Middle East we must continue to support our strong ally, Israel. We have to continue to degrade or really start degrading in a much more aggressive way ISIS, build on the Abraham Accords and prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and cease their practice of exporting terrorism, whether it is directly or through proxies like Hezbollah and others.

Another priority must be to, again, stand up for freedom, for human freedom, and the democratic principles that we all share. It is essential for the United States to stand with those who courageously struggle for freedom, for individual liberty and democracy in some of the world's most oppressive political environments and that includes Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua just here in our hemisphere.

Mr. Secretary, returning to the budget, we are all aware of the nation's fiscal challenges and this committee is uniquely responsible for being good stewards of the people's hard-earned money. The President's fiscal year 2024 budget request for State and USAID, unfortunately, really misses the mark.

The annual increases requested by this administration have been rejected in Congress, even by the President's own party, year after year.

So proposing yet another large increase to a Republican House in such a, frankly, difficult fiscal environment strikes me as willfully unrealistic. But the problem is it also sets unattainable expectations abroad. In the weeks ahead this subcommittee will scrub every line of the budget proposal to determine what funding is directly tied to U.S. national security.

We will write a bill that is focused, strategic, and really aimed at addressing the top foreign policy priorities of our country.

Now, respectfully, what we will not fund are controversial woke programs that tarnish the reputation of America abroad.

The State Department must end its effort to export a radical political agenda on issues that even in this country are divisive. Not only do these programs stir controversy and division in the countries where they take place, they, frankly, further diminish support for foreign aid here at home. Here at home. And at a time, Mr. Secretary, when because of the situation you are going to need all the help you can get.

Mr. Secretary, in closing, I want to, again, and I mean this sincerely and I think you know this—I want to thank you for being here and particularly, I know—we all know—your schedule right now in these days, and for your service to this amazing country of ours.

And I also want to thank, through you, the men and women of the Department of State for the work—the hard work that they do day in day out on behalf of all Americans.

So thank you again, Mr. Secretary.

With that, I want to recognize the distinguished ranking member, Congresswoman Barbara Lee, for her opening statements. You are recognized.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER LEE

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon.

I would like to add my welcome to you, Mr. Secretary, and I want to thank you for your testimony regarding the President's proposed fiscal 2024 budget request for our State Department, foreign operations and related programs.

Secretary Blinken, first of all, your travel and your energy are truly inspirational. We appreciate the active and robust diplomacy on the part of the United States. There is no doubt that it is sorely needed with the challenges that we face on just about every continent, and I too want to salute and thank all of the employees of the Department of State.

We do have three legs of our national security policy—development, diplomacy, and defense—and, certainly, the two that you are shepherding have been amazing in the last few years.

But also we need to have more resources in development and diplomacy. You are showing how diplomacy works. The work done by this administration, in large part thanks to you and the State Department, has kept a global coalition together in support of Ukraine and the condemnation of Russian aggression.

This diplomacy increases the chance of us getting to a lasting and peaceful resolution. The past year we have seen a truce in Ethiopia hold beyond expectations, U.S.-led efforts with partners around the world to respond to massive natural disasters and food

security crises, and new global leadership breakthroughs such as the new malaria vaccine getting ready to roll out. Great accomplishments.

These achievements have not been possible without the United States and its leadership. But meeting these challenges requires the United States to have the presence, the tools, and resources to show up, engage in dialogue and consensus building and hold everyone including ourselves accountable for hard-fought commitments.

It is this primacy of our diplomacy and development work to both the United States' strategic interests as well as global peace and stability that makes me so concerned about the cuts being considered by the new Republican majority for fiscal 2024.

The administration's request recognizes the need for the United States to engage in every fora, especially where those that do not share our values are present.

A cut in resources will exacerbate vaccine development, stunt efforts to build a skilled and, yes, diverse staff, that reflects the population of the United States.

A reduction to the budget undermines engagement at all levels, putting the United States on a back foot. Reductions would delay both physical and cybersecurity upgrades needed to keep the United States facilities and personnel safe and secure, and cuts would cripple United States' efforts to invest in the Sustainable Development Goals, the framework agreed by every single country to tackle shared challenges like gender inequality, extreme hunger and poverty, and threats to public health.

I hope that you will discuss this administration's ongoing approach to building partnerships in sub-Saharan Africa where, of course, the last administration called these countries s-hole countries, and the Caribbean, both of which represent untapped potential for U.S. engagement.

My colleagues are often quick to focus on the influence of the People's Republic of China. I will point out that China has now more embassies and more diplomats around the world than the United States does.

Simply, we are being outmanned and outwomaned as countries are clamoring for greater partnerships with the United States. So we have got to figure out a strategy to close this gap.

Another area that we can't afford to fall back on is global health. United States leadership and investment has helped millions to survive and thrive. But these gains are fragile. The world is organizing to make sure we are better prepared to detect and respond to the next disease outbreak.

Cuts to global health funding will prove shortsighted the next time a pandemic from abroad comes to our shores. The COVID pandemic cost trillions of dollars in global economic output. We cannot afford to put preparedness on the back burner again.

And last but not least, we must get on track to deal with the existential challenge of climate change. I joined the most recent Conference of Parties, or COP, in Egypt last October with you and many of our colleagues, which is the largest gathering of policy-makers, experts, and activists on climate annually.

Every person I came across emphasized the need for United States leadership and their frustration that resources and action have not matched our rhetoric. The people suffering from most extreme weather, changing climate patterns, and the loss of biodiversity are those who had the smallest role in causing these changes.

Decades of investment in agriculture, health, and infrastructure are being wiped out by these new climate trends. Countries are slowly being swallowed by the sea.

My constituents in California certainly understand, and I expect those suffering from hurricanes in Florida, drought in the Southwest or flooding in the Midwest do also.

The United States has a moral responsibility and a self-interest to address the drivers of these changes and the effects on the most vulnerable. We need to do much more on climate change, not less.

Mr. Secretary, it is evident the administration has worked very hard over the past two years to restore America's global reputation and promote engagement and dialogue with international organizations and partners.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle bring some distinct priorities. But I believe we all end at the same conclusion. Active United States leadership and engagement leads to better outcomes for both our country and, I hope we would agree, the rest of the world.

A more stable, peaceful, democratic, and prosperous world depends on an active and engaged United States. A robust and growing international affairs budget is desperately needed to achieve this.

And so I want to thank you again for your tireless work on behalf of our country and for being with our subcommittee today, and I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I thank the ranking member.

Now I am honored to yield to the Chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee, Ms. Granger, for her opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN GRANGER

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you, Chairman Diaz-Balart, and congratulations on your new role.

Welcome, Secretary Blinken. You are here at a time of growing threats to our national security. Our Director of National Intelligence recently said this is a complex and pivotal time for our country.

Our military commander in the Indo-Pacific region has also described this era as the most dangerous he had seen in 30 years. As we face growing threats around the globe I am concerned your budget proposal is not adequately prioritized to meet these challenges. I would like to discuss a few areas of concern. First, with Russia continuing to wage war in Ukraine there are growing questions about how and when this conflict ends.

This budget proposal does not explain how the administration plans to assist Ukraine in winning the war. It also doesn't say how much funding you think will be needed this year and beyond.

In addition, many administration priorities such as climate change would receive huge increases while security assistance is at a lower priority. With China and Russia forming a strong partner-

ship it is more critical than ever that we assist countries aligned with our values. In the Middle East, our great ally, Israel, continues to face threats from Iran and its expanding nuclear program. We must do all we can to ensure Israel has the resources it needs to protect itself.

I am also concerned about the significant increase proposed for the United Nations. As the largest contributor, we can't afford to write a blank check. We must ensure that the U.N. is held accountable including for the unacceptable bias against Israel.

Finally, in our own backyard the number of migrants crossing the border illegally is at an all-time high with more than 2.7 million last year. Cartels are taking advantage of the administration's open border policies to sneak in deadly weapons and guns and drugs. Your request seeks to address some of these challenges but it misses the mark on many key priorities.

To close, Mr. Secretary, we understand the demands of your job and want to work with you on all of the issues to strike the right balance. We wish you and your department success in keeping our country and allies safe and secure.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

I now also have the honor to yield to the ranking member of the Appropriations Committee, Ms. DeLauro, for her opening statement. You are recognized.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER DELAUBRO

Ms. DELAUBRO. Thank you very much, Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee, for hosting what is a very important hearing.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here today and welcome to you.

It is over the past two years with your visionary leadership, steadfast commitment to the safety and security of our nation and the world, the Biden administration has made great strides toward restoring America's place as leader on a world stage.

You are at the forefront of addressing some of the most pressing global challenges, and in partnership with you this committee has passed bills over the past two years that strengthen our alliances, promote democracy, and improve our diplomatic capabilities, support our world's most vulnerable people, bolster global public health infrastructure. You know, like we know, that our nation is safer when alongside defense we provide significant funding for diplomacy, development, and humanitarian assistance.

Though I am so proud of the progress we have made, extreme House Republican calls to cut the 2024 spending to the 2022 level and even more extreme calls by former Republican officials to fully eliminate critical foreign policy agencies and programs threaten global democracy and the health and the safety of our nation and the world.

Given the enduring global challenges we are facing, I am glad to see that the President's budget request seeks to address them. This moment in time requires the United States be present and participating in multilateral forums and with a diplomatic staff that represents the diversity and the richness of our nation.

I am glad that the President's budget request invests in our diplomatic corps, increases our contributions to key U.N. agencies and peacekeeping operations. Having a seat at the table is the only way we can maintain our role as a global leader and to advance our interests, and as natural disasters, the pandemic, rising food and fuel prices, conflicts, the war in Ukraine, shows so clearly why America's support for vulnerable communities around the globe is critical, which is why I was pleased to see the President's request for increased funding for humanitarian aid, for development assistance, for economic support, democracy programs, because we should be affirming our commitment to those most in need, not eliminating support for global democracy, for refugees, where there are 103 million refugees in this world, and for the programs that improve the lives of women and girls. It is simply the right thing to do, and as the pandemic has made abundantly clear, keeping others safe keeps us safe as well.

As the budget request confirms with new funding for global health, health workers, pandemic preparedness, we must never shortchange these programs. They are critical to ensuring that we do not incur the destructive costs of a new pandemic.

Our nation is at an inflection point. Will we ensure we are equipped to handle the crises of the future or will we allow ourselves to fall behind in global goals and leave our allies behind with baseless politically motivated budget cuts?

I will fight hard so that we are equipped to work with partners around the world to solve the most pressing challenges of the day. I look forward to hearing from you, Secretary Blinken, on how we continue to do that.

And with that, I thank you, Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee, and I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you so much.

Mr. Secretary, your full written statement will be placed in the record. Obviously, feel free to summarize your testimony. Again, you have the floor. Thank you for being here.

OPENING STATEMENT BY SECRETARY BLINKEN

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much.

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lee, Ranking Member DeLauro, all the members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity today to speak with you about the fiscal year '24 budget for the State Department and USAID but also thank you day in day out for the work that we are doing together.

This is critical for us. We appreciate deeply the work of this committee, and I really look forward to the year ahead as we work together to try to make sure that we have the strongest possible tools to advance America's interests around the world.

And second, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lee, thank you both for your strong and positive words about the State Department, the people of the State Department. I couldn't agree with you more. I am so deeply honored for this period of time to be leading them and serving with them and I deeply appreciate the appreciation you have expressed for the work that they do day in day out. So thank you for that.

And I could not agree more we are at an inflection point. The post-Cold War era is over and there is an intense competition underway right now to shape what comes next. The United States has a positive vision for the future, a world that is free, that is secure, that is open, that is prosperous.

This budget will help us advance that vision and deliver on issues that matter to the American people by preparing us to take on two major sets of challenges that are distinct but also interconnected and overlapping.

The first set is posed by our strategic competitors, the immediate acute threat posed by Russia's autocracy and aggression, most destructively through its brutal aggression against Ukraine, and, of course, the long-term challenge that is posed by the People's Republic of China.

The second set of challenges is posed by shared global tests that we have to meet including the climate crisis, migration, food and energy insecurity, pandemics, all of which directly affect the lives of our fellow citizens as well as their livelihoods and people around the world.

With this committee's leadership and support, including through the fiscal year '23 omnibus, the United States is in a stronger geopolitical position than we were a few years ago to take on these challenges.

We have drawn enormous power from investments that we have made here at home in our economic strength and technological edge including through the Infrastructure Investment Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act.

The unmatched network of alliances and partnerships has never been stronger and I think that is in part because we have reinvested in them, working to reengage them, rejuvenate them, reenergize them.

We are expanding our presence in critical regions like the Indo-Pacific and we are leading unprecedented coalitions to confront aggression and address humanitarian crises around the world. The fiscal year '24 budget request for the State Department and USAID meets this moment. The budget will sustain our security, our economic, and energy and humanitarian support for Ukraine so that we ensure that President Putin's war remains a strategic failure.

The budget will also strengthen our efforts to outcompete the PRC. President Biden is firmly committed to advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific. That is why this proposal asked for an 18 percent increase in our budget for that region over fiscal year '23.

The budget contains both discretionary and mandatory proposals—I suspect we will come back to those—four new innovative investments to outcompete China including by enhancing our presence in the region, ensuring that what we and our fellow democracies have to offer, including things like maritime security, disease surveillance, energy infrastructure, digital technology, is more attractive than the alternative being proposed.

The budget will help us push back on advancing authoritarianism and democratic backsliding by strengthening democracies around the world, including through supporting independent media, countering corruption, defending free and fair elections, and it will allow us to pay our contributions to international

organizations because we do need to be at the table wherever and whenever new international rules, standards, and norms are being decided that affect the livelihoods of our people. Wherever they are being debated and decided we need to be there.

The budget will also allow us to continue leading the world in addressing these global challenges from food and energy insecurity to climate and health crises.

Just on that last point, we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of PEPFAR, which I believe is one of the greatest achievements in our foreign policy over the last couple of decades, and to Ranking Member Lee, to you and others for your strong support and leadership on this, I think it has been a great tribute and credit to our country.

It is something I hear as I travel, for example, throughout Africa. It has saved 25 million lives. This budget will help us continue the fight against HIV/AIDS while advancing health security more broadly through a new Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy, which I look forward to working with Congress to establish this year.

The budget will advance our efforts to modernize our department, including by expanding our training float, updating our technology, carrying out diversity, equity, and inclusion accessibility initiatives, including to make our overseas missions more accessible.

I am grateful for the progress that we have already made together, including Congress' support in updating the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act and the Accountability Review Board to give us the flexibility to open new missions and to better manage the risks that our people facing around the world.

We know there is more to do and we are looking forward to working with Congress, working with this committee, to accelerate modernization efforts so that the Department can better attract, retain, and support our first-rate workforce that you refer to.

We are in a competition there too for talent and I want to make sure we have a Department that attracts that workforce and keeps them.

Finally, the budget will further what is a personal priority for me that has been referenced already and I know for many of you, and that is supporting and Enduring Welcome, our whole of government effort to resettle our Afghan allies. Keeping our promises to those who stood by us and served with us remains an unwavering priority for me. The budget will help us continue to make good on that commitment.

When I took on this role one of the things that I was dead serious about was working to restore Congress' place as an equal partner in our foreign policymaking. I really am serious and committed to that.

I, Mr. Chairman, deeply appreciate the conversations we have had and the work that I hope we can do together. So with that, I welcome questions and comments. Thank you.

[The information follows:]

**Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken
Written Statement
Budget Hearing- Fiscal Year 2024 Request for the U.S. Department of State
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Thursday, March 23, 2023**

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lee, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of Subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the Administration's proposed FY 2024 budget for the State Department and USAID.

We meet at an inflection point. The post-Cold War world is over, and there is an intense competition underway to determine what comes next. The United States has a positive vision for the future: a world that's free, secure, open and prosperous.

This budget will help us advance that vision, and deliver on the issues that matter most to the American people, by preparing us to meet two major sets of challenges.

The first set is posed by our strategic competitors – the immediate, acute threat posed by Russia's autocracy and aggression, most destructively through its brutal war against Ukraine... and the long-term challenge from the People's Republic of China.

The second set is posed by shared global tests, including the climate crisis, migration, food and energy insecurity, and pandemics, all of which directly impact the lives and livelihoods of Americans and all peoples around the world.

With this Committee's leadership and support, including through the FY 2023 Omnibus, the United States is in a stronger geopolitical position than we were two years ago.

We've drawn enormous power from investments we've made in our economic strength and technological edge at home, including through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. Our unmatched network of alliances and partnerships has never been stronger. We're expanding our presence in critical regions, like the Indo-Pacific. And we're leading unprecedented coalitions to confront aggression and address humanitarian crises worldwide.

The President's FY 2024 Budget Request for the State Department and USAID meets this moment head on.

This budget will sustain our security, economic, energy, and humanitarian support for Ukraine to ensure President Putin's war remains a strategic failure.

This budget will also strengthen our efforts to outcompete the PRC. President Biden is firmly committed to advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific, which is why this proposal asks for an 18% increase in our budget for that region over FY 2023. The Budget contains both discretionary and mandatory proposals for new innovative investments to outcompete China – including by enhancing our presence in the region, and ensuring what we and our fellow democracies have to offer, including maritime security, disease surveillance, clean energy infrastructure and digital technology, is more attractive than any alternative.

This budget will help us push back on advancing authoritarianism and democratic backsliding by strengthening democracies worldwide – including through supporting independent media, countering corruption, and defending free and fair elections. And it will allow us to pay our contributions to international organizations, because the United States needs to be at the table wherever and whenever new international rules that affect the livelihoods of our people are debated and decided.

This budget will allow us to continue leading the world in addressing global challenges, from food and energy insecurity to climate and health crises. On that last point: we're celebrating the 20th anniversary of PEPFAR, which has helped us save 25 million lives worldwide. This budget will help us continue the fight against HIV/AIDS, while advancing health security more broadly through a new Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy, which I look forward to working with Congress to establish this year.

This budget will advance our efforts to modernize the State Department, including by expanding our training float, updating our technology, and carrying out diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility initiatives, including to make our overseas missions more accessible. I'm grateful for the progress we've already made together, including Congress' support in updating the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act and Accountability Review Board to give us the flexibility to open new missions and better manage risks. We know there's more to do, and we're looking forward to working with Congress to accelerate

modernization efforts, so the Department can better attract, retain, and support our first-rate workforce as they advance US interests in a complex and fast-moving landscape.

Finally, this budget will further a personal priority for me, and I know for many of you: supporting Enduring Welcome, our whole-of-government effort to resettle our Afghan allies. Keeping our promises to those who served the U.S. remains an unwavering priority, and this budget will help us continue to make good on that commitment.

When I began this role, I committed to restoring Congress's place as an equal partner in our foreign policymaking.

I'm looking forward to continuing that close coordination, and I'm grateful for the chance to answer your questions. Thank you.

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Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

The ranking member and I were talking behind the scenes. We are going to need a little bit of flexibility as to who we recognize first because folks do have to go.

And so I will start with the chair of the full committee, again, Chairwoman Granger. Thank you for being here and you are recognized.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you very much. I have just two questions.

Is Iran continuing their weapons build up and construction of underground facilities and what more can be done to stop Iran's support of terrorist organizations?

Secretary BLINKEN. So, Chair, two things. Yes, they are continuing, just to be as clear and specific as I can be, not their weapons program per se, which we believe continues to be halted, but the production of the capacity to produce fissile material for a weapon on very short notice.

And yes, what we have seen over the last few years is a reacceleration of that program to have enough fissile material on hand to produce very quickly should they develop a weapon the means to have an explosive nuclear device.

Second, we are in place after place and with partner after partner confronting the egregious behavior exhibited by Iran, including going after with sanctions and other measures many of the actions they are taking—the UAV network, for example, that is supporting Russian aggression against Ukraine, working to counter the activities that they are engaged in throughout the region including in Syria and Iraq, working, of course, to end the war in Yemen where they are supplying the Houthis that are firing rockets and projectiles at Saudi Arabia, as well as in Yemen itself and building stronger partnerships to deal with Iranian misbehavior.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you very much.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And Congresswoman DeLauro?

Ms. DELAUBRO. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Again, Mr. Secretary, I am pleased that the department budget prioritizes multilateral contributions to the U.N., and other international organizations, funding I believe is critical to supporting global peace, to support our allies across the world, organizations like UNICEF, U.N. Development Program, International Civil Aviation Organization, close partners of the U.S. in some of the toughest areas of the world.

However, I will add some of my Republican colleagues and some extreme Republican official—former extreme Republican officials have called for the eliminating funding for the U.N.

Just can you speak to the catastrophic effects this would have on global democracy if such cuts were made? And there are those who claim that they want to be tough on China are among the same who are calling for spending cuts in this area.

How would multilateral cuts further enable and advance the interests of our adversaries like China and Russia?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yeah. Thank you very much for raising that. And look, we all know that the United Nations as an institution has various programs need reform, need to be strengthened, need to be challenged where they are not producing results.

Having said that, I think—you know, if you think about “It’s a Wonderful Life” and, you know, you took George Bailey out of the picture and you saw what happened in Bedford Falls, for all of its deficiencies you take the U.N. out of the picture and we are going to be faced with a really hard choice, either ourselves doing the work that the U.N. is doing around the world or it not getting done.

If you are looking at public health, if you are looking at vaccination campaigns that the U.N. is engaged in, of course, we had COVID where it played a critical role. But we have UNICEF that is reaching almost half of the world’s children with lifesaving vaccines.

We have the work that it is doing to ensure that infant and maternal mortality rates have gone down dramatically in the world as a result of its work.

We see it in education where an organization that is part of the U.N. like UNICEF is providing education to hundreds of millions of out of school children who are out of school for one reason or another, typically conflict displacement, and doing it in a way that hopefully means we don’t have lost generations.

If you look at global food security, the work of the World Food Programme, the Food and Agricultural Organization, et cetera, WFP last year, with David Beasley’s tremendous leadership, fed 140 million people around the world dealing with humanitarian emergencies, peace and security challenges, peacekeeping, very challenged and there are, you know, issues with that that need to be resolved.

On the other hand, if you have, roughly, 100,000 U.N. peacekeepers, a handful of whom are American, and they are taking on missions in places that are important and if they weren’t doing it someone else would or no one would do it. That is important, too.

And I could go on but the bottom line is this. It is engaged in critically important work that advances our own interests and so we need to sustain it.

When it comes to the budget, look, we are kind of contorted right now because, yes, we are the leading contributor to the United Nations and to most of its programs.

But because we don’t pay on time, because we are often in arrears in certain programs, some of our competitors, starting with China, point to that and say, look, the United States isn’t serious about this and it undermines the credit we should be getting for being a leading contributor.

Finally, what we have seen over the last few years is a very serious competition coming principally from China—it is also some other countries—to try to dominate the international organizations, taking on the open positions, making sure that they are the ones who have their seats at the table.

We have pushed back the last couple of years relentlessly on that, organizing campaigns to make sure that Americans or people from like-minded countries are competing and winning these jobs.

We just ran a very successful campaign for the International Telecommunications Union, something that probably a handful of Americans have heard of but it is critical for setting standards and

norms in telecommunications, which is a security issue for us as well as an economic issue.

So, you know, it is the old adage if you are not at the table you are on the menu. We want to be at the table.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you.

If I can—just a couple quick questions with regard to Ukraine. There are some members who have suggested that it is time to end sending U.S. aid to Ukraine.

If we cut off aid what would be the impact on Ukrainian people, their will to continue to fight against Russian aggression? Do you expect the need for another Ukraine supplemental? I noticed the amount of humanitarian resources provided in '22 and '23 through emergency supplemental, the '24 budget requests only a modest increase to ensure these programs are providing services for the most vulnerable.

If humanitarian accounts are not increased, given the huge need in the world, what will the impact be on the most vulnerable?

Secretary BLINKEN. Simply put, the assistance that we provided through the generosity of American taxpayers to Ukraine has literally been the difference between life and death—life and death for individuals, life and death for the country itself.

But the fact is as well we have rallied, as a couple of you pointed out, more than 50 other countries around the world well beyond Europe to engage in that support with us and I think it is very important to focus on the fact that we do have real burden sharing when it comes to Ukraine because I think the American people deserve to know that they are not in this alone.

If you look at the money that has already been expended, not the money that remains to be expended but the money that has already been expended, security assistance to Ukraine we have provided about 32 billion dollars thus far of actually expended money.

Non-U.S. money in that has been about \$22 billion. When it comes to budget support, economic support, we have provided about 15.5 billion dollars, other countries \$24 billion. When it comes to humanitarian assistance, we have provided about \$2 billion.

It has been vital. But other countries altogether have provided about 3.5 billion dollars and, of course, our European friends have taken in about 8 million Ukrainian refugees and supported them with social services, ability to work, go to school.

So I think if we pulled the plug on that, either ourselves or allies and partners, it would have disastrous consequences for Ukraine.

And let me just emphasize one last thing if I can. First, I take very seriously, deadly serious, our responsibility, Congress' responsibility, to make sure that the money that our taxpayers have generously provided to Ukraine is being well and appropriately spent and I appreciate the chair's focus on this as well.

So we have in place a very strong system to make sure that the money is being appropriately spent. I have 45 people in our embassy in Ukraine whose job it is to oversee the expenditure of these monies. The Pentagon has its own team making sure that the weapons that are being provided are not diverted, not misused.

We just had our first report by the Office of the Inspector General on the oversight of the monies being expended in Ukraine and I know that report has been shared. I am happy to say we got very

good grades on what we are doing, how it is being done, the process.

Finally, it is worth noting that the way most of these funds are expended typically are through a World Bank program that only pays the money upon a receipt for an authorized expenditure. And so that system itself is very important and, of course, we have third party validators involved including, for example, the Deloitte accounting firm, which is working in the ministry of finance and working to make sure.

I would note, finally, that it is my belief that President Zelensky is dead serious about the importance of our money, everyone else's money, being well spent. You have seen that in recent weeks he has fired a bunch of senior officials across various ministries because he was concerned either about corruption or simply inadequate management.

That, to me, is proof that he is not only paying lip service to but is taking action to make sure that our money is being well spent.

Ms. DELAURO. When do we expect another supplemental?

Secretary BLINKEN. I can't honestly speak to that right now. Because, again, of the generosity of Congress at the end of last year the last supplemental carries us through much of this year and so much is going to depend on what happens on the ground.

I will say this. I think we also have to work to get to a sustainable place in terms of our support for Ukraine for the mid to long term, which is to say what are the right kinds of programs, not just us, the international financial institutions in particular, other countries, so that their economy can be on sound footing, their deterrence and defense posture is adequate to prevent another Russian aggression, et cetera. We are going to have to focus on making that kind of transition at the right moment.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. No, thank you, and let me also thank the Ranking Member Lee for allowing some flexibility because of people's schedules.

Just spend some time talking about the Ukraine, and I will tell you I am glad what you just focused on which is accountability. I will tell you that I think it is important that the concept that Putin can win and get away with this would be a very dangerous sign, particularly not only for what Russia might do in the future in Europe but also what China would potentially see as a green light.

So I think it is important that Putin be defeated but it is crucial—crucial—that every dollar that is coming from the United States is accounted for, every penny is accounted for, and it is crucial to make sure that the Europeans are stepping up.

And so I like what you have just said but, Mr. Secretary, just know that we are going to continue to push and press on that. I know also that Chairman McCaul has a hearing precisely on this kind of thing, which is important.

So I look forward to working with you and I know you will not be surprised if we are exceedingly aggressive to make sure that every cent is accounted for and every piece of equipment is accounted for.

And so I look forward to working with you on that front. Now totally switching to a different part of the world—the establishment of the Abraham Accords by the previous administration, I thought, was really important and I support your efforts, by the way, to further expand these agreements, to deepen economic and diplomatic and security relationships between our democratic ally, Israel, and other partners in the region.

What can you tell us about the administration and your efforts to expand the Abraham Accords and also can you tell us—I mentioned at the beginning of my statement about this now—not an alliance but the renewal of relationships—formal relationships between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the Chinese as arbitor.

What can you tell us about where we are there and give me your point of view and what you see coming forward in the next few months.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And just very quickly, I really appreciate the focus that you are bringing to the expenditure of our resources in Ukraine. I couldn't agree with you more.

And by the way, I think it is very important that Congress play that leading role. It actually helps me, helps us, for example, in going to our Ukrainian partners and saying the folks who are actually providing the money that you need are very focused on this and you need to remain focused on it, too. So thank you for that.

Second, on the Abraham Accords in the Middle East let me just say two things. First, Abraham Accords, I could not agree with you more. We from day one have strongly supported them and we are looking to do two things. We are looking to deepen them—that is, to deepen the partnerships with the existing participants, and to expand, to bring in new countries.

And, of course, I think it is no secret that we and Israel, would hope ultimately that Saudi Arabia might be brought in to the Abraham Accords. But there are a number of other countries that we are looking at.

Second, in terms of actually advancing things, one of the things we did last year was to stand up something related to it and supportive of it called the Negev Forum where we took Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Bahrain, Egypt, to work together to establish working groups in six different areas that can actually produce concrete results, concrete projects, that will benefit people in all those countries because what is so important about this is that we need to demonstrate through these Accords that it is actually bringing real benefits to people.

That will grow the support for them, it will deepen it in countries, and we are already seeing it manifest itself.

On the Saudi-Iran agreement, this has been something that has been in the works for several years, not just several weeks or several months.

The Saudis and the Iranians have had meetings in Oman, in Iraq, going back some time, and this all goes back to, I guess, 2016 when the Saudis put to death a very prominent Shi'a cleric. There was an attack on the Saudi embassy in Iran. They broke off relations.

So the last couple of years they have been trying to get them back. I think what—it is most accurate to say about China's role is not so much a facilitator but simply a host of the final act in this smart diplomacy. But this was really the product of work between the two countries.

Mr. Chairman, I think that, first, we have to be appropriately skeptical about whether this will actually be implemented. We will see. Iran has made agreements before that, of course, it hasn't kept.

But if it is, I actually see this as a net positive because if the result is to decrease tensions in at least part of the region but specifically to curb Iranian behavior that we object to, for example, helping the Houthis attack Saudi Arabia with the provision of missiles, where, by the way, we have 80,000 Americans, that is actually a good thing. So we are going to—we will track this closely.

We will see if it actually gets implemented. And by the way, I don't think it undermines, for example, the interest and prospects for having at some point Saudi Arabia be part of the Abraham process.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And we will continue that conversation another time because to me that is very concerning, the fact that, you know, we have seen an emergence of China in a way that we haven't seen, frankly, ever.

To the ranking member, thank you again for your patience.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me just make a comment with regard to taxpayer dollars and accountability. Just for the record, I want to remind you that the Pentagon has failed five audits and the waste, fraud, and abuse in the defense budget is rampant and at some point we have got to get that under control and taxpayers need to know that is the only agency, the Pentagon—the Defense Department—in history that has failed five audits and indeed has never passed one. That is an FYI, for the record.

Mr. Secretary, you mentioned PEPFAR. It has been really a bright spot of bipartisan support. However, probably 20 to 25 percent of the members serving today were serving in the early 2000s when we worked together to authorize PEPFAR, which has saved at least 20 million lives. And this is something every member of Congress and every American should know and be proud of.

So from the State Department's perspective, why should the re-authorization of this flagship program continue and why do we need to continue it with bipartisan support?

And secondly, many PEPFAR focus countries—well, several—have reached epidemic control levels. What would a reduction of resources for the program mean this close to the 2030 goal of global epidemic control? Because we still are on track to end the AIDS pandemic by 2030.

Secretary BLINKEN. And I think you put your finger on it. The simple truth is that for the extraordinary number of lives saved and changed the job is not yet done and we have the very real possibility of eradicating this epidemic by 2030.

But that requires continuing the program, and we have seen in some places some of the dramatic progress actually slow if not halt. So if we take our foot off the accelerator over the next seven or so

years, I think there is a real danger that we risk losing some of the gains that we have made.

So we have to see this through, and I just took part in—by video on an event that President Bush—former President Bush had to celebrate the 25 years.

I think that is hugely important because it does remind people or actually informs people, to your point, of what an achievement this has been on a strong bipartisan basis and it is a huge credit.

One other element. You know this better than I do. Wherever I travel in Africa, in particular, the thanks, appreciation, gratitude that we get for the PEPFAR program is extraordinary and that, frankly, helps our diplomacy. It strengthens our standing in country after country.

On a human level, when I get to hear from people who have benefited from the program it touches me deeply. But geopolitically this is at a time when, again, we are in competition with China and others for influence.

This is one of the programs that would make—that has made a huge difference. Were we to undercut it or underfund it I think that would actually have geopolitical consequences, not just global health consequences.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Do I have another minute or how are we doing this?

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I am not going to tell you to be brief.

Ms. LEE. Well, this will be very brief.

With regard to—I already made my statement about the misuse of taxpayer dollars so this next question has to do with Haiti, your assessment of the situation in Haiti and how can the United States best assist the people of Haiti in forging a process to establish a new government that is broadly representative of Haitian society and how are we dealing with the gang issues in Haiti? I am glad to see the President meeting with Prime Minister Trudeau.

Secretary BLINKEN. I don't want to sugarcoat this and the chairman and I have actually discussed this as well. This is a daunting challenge and we have interconnected problems, many of which, of course, have built up over the years and over the decades that we have to grapple with.

We need a political way forward that actually gets Haiti to elections so that there can be a clearly legitimate government. Our diplomats are working day in day out to try to bring the different stakeholders together to include the government, the Montana Group, and others to see if they agree.

But I have to tell you and, again, you know this so well, given the profound insecurity, that is—the single biggest challenge we face right now is insecurity and we have a country that in critical places is simply dominated by gangs. The state does not have control over security.

And there is a nexus between gangs and various elites—political elites, economic elites—that we have been trying to break because many of these gangs are funded and directed by individuals for whom it is in their interest to have gangs doing their bidding.

So we have directly targeted a number of those individuals, including many who enjoy coming to the United States, to make it

clear that if they continue to support gangs that is not going to happen.

So we need to break that, and then we need to, as we have been doing, support the Haitian National Police in trying to build up their capacity, not just equipment, training, et cetera.

There is, as you know, a very active discussion going on at the United Nations and beyond about whether there needs to be some kind of international force to bolster, probably a police-based force the Haitian National Police and to provide greater security.

It is a very active discussion. We are heading—in a few hours to Canada with President Biden, and Canada has been one of the countries that has been in the lead over these discussions. We will see where we get.

But I also think that we all need to be thinking hard together about what is it we can do to be sustainably effective. We have been at this for years, for decades, and in so many ways the Haitian people have been afflicted with so much that is beyond anyone's comprehension. But we have to, I think, come together to find ways to be confident that what we are pursuing can actually be effective in a sustainable way. And, again, this is not easy, given the long history and the challenges. But those are our areas of immediate focus.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I know you are interested in Haiti.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. This is a conversation that we are going to have to continue long and hard.

Ms. LEE. Yeah. Thank you very much.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Long and hard. No, I thank the Ranking Member and thank the members for your patience.

Mr. STEWART, again, thank you for your patience, and you have the floor.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you.

Secretary, thanks for being here. I want you to know that representing the other side of the aisle that many of us have respect and we appreciate your service—

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Mr. STEWART [continuing]. And a job you are doing at very difficult time, honestly, in both domestic and foreign policy.

I wanted to do two housekeeping items, if I could. I am going to try and do it in 30 seconds and get to what I think are important questions.

One, my colleague and friend Mr. Reschenthaler, you and he discussed something very important to him as well as to I and other members of Congress and that is Marc Fogel—

Secretary BLINKEN. Yeah.

Mr. STEWART [continuing]. Who is being what we think is unlawfully detained or at least wrongfully detained. There is, obviously, discrepancy, and I know you have heard this, between his treatment and treatment of others, say, Brittney Griner. And I just want you to know that we are going to follow up on that. We won't ask you to comment but we will follow up on that.

Secretary BLINKEN. I welcome working with you on that.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you. The second housekeeping item is I agree with our—the chairman here as well as others as far as over-

sight of expenditures. Easier to manage oversight of weapons. Very, very difficult to do oversight of actual cash payments.

I got to tell you, I am not optimistic that we are going to have a real great outcome on that just because it is an enormous shift in culture in Ukraine if we do find out there wasn't corruption and waste because the government just isn't and hasn't been manned by a bunch of Mother Theresas.

We know that, that it has been considered one the most corrupt governments in the region and probably the world. We hope that we can provide oversight and we need to hold them accountable. But again, I wish I could be more optimistic. But that is, again, just a comment sharing your concern.

If I could now go to my questions. I want you to know that I have supported Ukraine, and there was a previous question about some people wanted—did not want to support them at all. I got to tell you, I don't know anyone who feels that way.

But there is a growing number of us who want to continue to support them but we also want to understand what it is we are trying to achieve there, and I think we have to adjust our goals and our policies as things develop and probably ask ourselves for the last 20 years have we learned lessons in Iraq and Afghanistan that we probably should apply here.

The President has said we are going to be here as long as it takes and I have said this before, as long as it takes to do what. And I asked this question of General Milley earlier today and I don't want to paraphrase his answer but you will recognize it because it is the President's words.

Basically, it is this, to ensure that the international rule of law is upheld, that Ukraine continues as a free and sovereign nation, and that its territory is intact and it is—that is where I want to concentrate, its territories intact, because my great fear is not a recognition that Crimea is different than the eastern Donetsk region and if our commitment and our agreement with Mr. Zelensky is we will support you for whatever you want to achieve including the free—you know, no Russian presence at all in Crimea then we are asking for a world of hurt.

I want to know if you agree with that, briefly, if you could, or do you think I am overreacting? Because I don't know that you could convince me that I wouldn't. I am dramatically concerned about whether our goals are aligned with Mr. Zelensky's when it comes to Crimea.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. No, I appreciate the question. It is an important one and just to try to be brief, look, fundamentally, in the first instance, these have to be Ukrainian decisions about what they want their future to be and how that lands in terms of the sovereignty, the territorial integrity, the independence of the country, and exactly how that is defined.

So as we are speaking the Ukrainians are working to take back as much of the territory—well, now they are defending against the Russian offensive but they are also looking at continuing to try to take back as much of the territory as they can that was seized by Russia since February of last year.

From our perspective, we think that there is a profound principle at stake, which is that we want peace, we want to see this settle,

but we think it does need in our own interest to be just and durable. And what do I mean by that?

Just in that it upholds the basic principles that are in the U.N. Charter and that had been the basis for peace and security since after two world wars and that is upholding territorial integrity, upholding independence, upholding sovereignty.

How exactly that is defined? On the ground, we look to the Ukrainians to tell us, and then durable because what we don't want for everyone's interests is to have this settle in a place and in a way that simply invites the Russians to rest, rearm, and then reattack.

I think, though, to get to your question, I think there is going to be territory in Ukraine that the Ukrainians will—are determined to fight for on the ground. There may be territory that they decide that they will have to try to get back in other ways. But we will look to them to—

Mr. STEWART. And I appreciate that, and once again, you say it is up to Ukraine to make that decision. But it is up to us to decide how far we will go with them down that road as well.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Absolutely.

Mr. STEWART. And my time is up so let me just make this comment if I could very quickly. And when it comes to burden sharing and you said it is 32 billion dollars to 22 billion dollars.

I wish those numbers were reversed and I think they should be reversed. This is Europe's backyard and you are going to have growing demands in Congress, you know, so you can share this with our partners, for a more of a one-to-one burden sharing than we have seen in the past. And, again, if you would convey to our partners that Congress is going to be leaning much more towards that.

Secretary BLINKEN. And it is very—and it is actually helpful to have that, yes.

Mr. STEWART. Exactly. For you to know that this can—you can blame us if you want. We are the bad guys.

Secretary BLINKEN. That is what I do.

Mr. STEWART. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. [Laughter.]

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Mr. Stewart, for bringing up really, really important issues.

Ms. Meng, what a pleasure to recognize you now.

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member Lee. Thank you, Secretary Blinken, for your service and for being here today.

Actually I wanted to ask about a more domestic issue. I have been really alarmed by the extended wait times for U.S. passport renewals and visa applications.

Every single day in my office, and I am sure the offices of many of my colleagues, we are receiving frantic calls and outreach from a lot of our constituents. These extended wait times have placed such a burden on our constituents looking to travel to see family and friends or to conduct business abroad.

I had secured language in the fiscal year '23 SFOPS report directing the department to dedicate the necessary resources to ensure passport and visa applications are processed in a timely and

efficient manner and to proactively seek technological and procedural alternatives to streamline consular services, where possible.

How does the administration's fiscal year '24 budget support the department's effort to return to visa processing at full capacity at all embassies and consulates and to cut down on passport processing wait times?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Look, I very much appreciate that, maybe more than any other issue. We, but especially you, hear this from constituents on both sides, passports and visas, and as you all know, with COVID the bottom basically dropped out on the system.

The demand went way down, and this is a thing that actually pays for itself in the department, one of the few things, and even adds a little to our budget.

That all went down. The floor dropped out. We had to let go or rededicate personnel to do other things. The contractors that we had working on this let go. So with the emerging from COVID we had to build back, and we have been in an intense effort to do.

Let me just quickly say, and we will share more detailed information, on the passport side. So we had an unprecedented demand for renewed travel, which is a good thing. Historically, demand has been cyclical. The busy season is kind of March to late summer. Basically it is full-time now. We are getting 500,000 applications a week for a passport. That is 30 to 40 percent above last year. So it is dramatic.

Now, in fiscal year 2022, we issued a record number of passport books, 22 million. We are on track to break that in fiscal year 2023. We have hired staff to increase adjudicative capacity, and to make sure that we have got the customer service phone lines open. Ma'am, we have more people in the pipeline, and that is also reflected in the budget. It is hugely important.

I have a task force established at headquarters to marshal all of these efforts that we are really digging in on this. We are authorizing overtime. We have opened satellite offices. We are organizing corps at the headquarters to assist in processing.

Processing times. I would just say—and we will get you, if it hasn't already happened, this information. I think it is really important that we be as clear and transparent as possible with people who are looking for passports to know what they can expect. So right now, given the unprecedented demand, we are looking for a regular passport about 10 to 13 weeks, and for an expedited passport about 7 to 9 weeks.

We have launched an online renewal pilot. This is something I have great hope for. We did this in 2022, because there is no reason, frankly, that someone who already has a passport and just needs to renew it should not be able to do that online and not have to come in to a passport center with all the resources that requires. We have 500,000 renewal requests submitted through this pilot project. We have now halted it to make sure that we can fine-tune it and improve it before we roll it out in a bigger way.

But here is the bottom line. We expect that 65 percent of renewal customers for passports will be able to do so online once this program is fully up and running.

On the visa side, this has been a major, major effort for us, and I think we are starting to see results. First, I just want to assure you, when it comes to the categories of visas that have the most impact on our economy, particularly for students, for temporary workers, for business travelers, maritime crews, they have been the priority. And so we have tried to make sure that they are served, and we are at pre-pandemic levels or better in those categories.

For visitor visas, the median global interview appointment wait time is 2 months, half of what it was a year ago. In most places the wait times are much lower.

By the way, we have about 58 million foreign nationals who actually hold valid visas, either because they are Canadian or because their countries are part of the Visa Waiver Program, so they do not have to worry about this. But for those who do, we are surging our resources into that. We have very high productivity that we are finally getting. The first 5 months of fiscal year 2023, 18 percent more non-immigrant visas were issued than in the same period in fiscal year 2019, before the pandemic. In category after category, we are actually getting back to an even better than pre-pandemic levels.

The immigrant visas are a whole other issue. We are doing a lot of work on that.

I know I am going on but what I would love to do, Mr. Chairman, is to make sure that we are sharing with you detailed information about the work we have done and the work that is left to do, both on passports and on visas.

Ms. MENG. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you. Important questions, and we look forward to continuing to work with you on that.

Mr. Fleischmann, you have the floor, sir. Thank you.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for appearing before us today. Thank you for your service to our nation.

As you may know, I am the Chair of the Energy and Water Subcommittee of Appropriation and I have a rather unique constituency in the great city of Oak Ridge, around there. Earlier today we had Secretary Granholm before us. So my questions are going to be centered around that.

The first question is going to involve strategic and nuclear stability, sir. As we know, Russia has, unfortunately, suspended its participation in the New START treaty, a move that greatly saddens and concerns me. I grew up in an era of mutually assured destruction and the like. I am 60 years old. So I do not want to see another arms race. But we have seen China, at the same time, make it clear that they have no interest in discussing arms control.

My question for you, Mr. Secretary, is do you anticipate the global strategic stability will continue to deteriorate through the rest of the decade in light of what Russia and China is doing, and what measures can we take as a nation—and I will be specific, perhaps something along the lines of regaining our ability to domestically enrich uranium, as one matter. But I want your thoughts on that—specifically regarding our own nuclear arsenal to strengthen us as a nation? What are your thoughts, sir?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Look, I share this concern, and I think Russia's decision to applaud New START was both deeply regrettable and deeply irresponsible. The limitations of START, which is says it is going to continue to comply with, but also the verification procedures, the inspections, the notifications, all good for us, also, frankly, good for them. I think they made a big mistake.

To your point about China, this is a real concern as they build up their arsenal in a very opaque way. And we have engaged them on, at the very least, working on risk reduction with us, if they are not willing to engage in arms control. Thus far that is not something they have been willing to do. So I think this poses a growing problem.

We are determined, and we will make sure that our own nuclear stockpiles, for however long nuclear weapons are needed, is safe, secure, effective, and we are determined to do that. When it comes to making sure that we have appropriate supplies and we do not have dependencies on other countries, that is something we are also looking very hard at as well, and I appreciate your focus on it.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Yes, sir.

The second issue deals with global energy geopolitics. Our adversaries, and I will be specific, the Russians and the Chinese, go into countries with a very, I will say a very attractive and lucrative package for civil nuclear energy, and they will agree to build, they will agree to finance, they will agree to run a nuclear power plant.

I have spoken with leaders in Poland. I have spoken with leaders in the Czech Republic. I am being specific, Romania. They come to me and they say, "We do not want to do business with these other countries. We want to do business with the United States."

The problem that we are seeing, and I have spoken with members of both administrations. I spoke with someone from the Biden administration last night about that, a very knowledgeable gentleman, talking about the fact that we do not have a funding mechanism to allow us, as a nation, to compete. We have got some of the best nuclear designs in this country. As a matter of fact, today I was with TVA and GE Hitachi. They are looking at a model.

But there are several small, modular nuclear reactors out there that could allow the United States to go in and not only compete and win in the global markets, economically, American jobs, and the like, but also to thwart that geopolitical advantage that our adversaries have.

So my question is, what do you see as a financing mechanism? Could it be the EMBank? What are your thoughts about that? I have spoken to folks at the World Bank. They say no. Where are you on this?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yeah, again, I very much agree with you on this. We have, I think, a huge opportunity with the small modular reactors. The technology is extremely attractive. We have, as you know, an agreement with Romania to proceed with that. We are working on a number of others.

But to your point, in the absence of adequate financing, especially for countries that are challenged, it makes it a lot harder. So one of the mechanisms that I have tried to turn on and direct at

projects like this, which it was not doing the best, was DFC, Development Finance Corporation, and I think we are seeing some success there.

We have to find ways to get, in some cases, some equity in the game, or at least to help finance part of it. At the end of the day, as we all know, our comparative advantage is being a catalyst for the private sector. We are not going to match a country like China, for example, dollar to dollar with taxpayer resources. But if we are using the tools that we have in government effectively, like DFC, like EXIM, et cetera, then we can catalyze the private sector, but they need to have some sense of security that at least the beginnings of the foundation of financing is there. And again, I think the DFC is one of the tools that we are now trying to use in that area too.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for your answers to my questions, and I appreciate that.

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

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, sir.

The member from Florida, Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Secretary, for your service.

Let me start quickly with something which I think we have very good bipartisan support and then I will move to something where there might be a little anxiety in the room.

First on Israel, thank you. I can tell you I fully support your budget for U.S. assistance to Israel, which includes the 3.3 billion dollars security assistance, which is part of the memorandum of understanding followed by both Obama, Trump, Biden administration. And I just wanted to say for the record that I would expect and hope that, I know there is some political conflict internally in Israel, but that should not affect our full support in terms of Israel's security.

And then on the next subject, my, my, my, I know we are going to go again on this, which has to do with women and making sure, in my opinion, that women are in control of their own personal decision whether or not to, how and when to bring in a child, and so forth. So I want to ask you a couple of things about the budget.

First, and I think this also ties in with the fact that rape and sexual abuse is being used as a weapon of war, especially we know in Ukraine. Yesterday we met with women from Afghanistan, and they also complained in that regard.

So first, I do think there is going to be, or maybe an issue in terms of cuts to family planning and to UNFPA. I would like to get your opinion on what that would mean in terms of security and in terms of women.

Secretary BLINKEN. To us, these programs and our ability to fund them is critical. It is not only critical to making sure that women and girls have the protections that they need and deserve, it is also, I think, important to larger questions of security and stability in a number of these countries. We follow the law, and we will always follow the law, but we also believe we need to continue to lead in global health, in advancing gender equality, in women and girls' empowerment, and evidence-policies to advance public health. And we are determined to do that. The budget reflects that. That

includes support for sexual reproductive health and the associated rights, which is key to the well-being and the health of women.

One thing I would point out. This goes more broadly to the gender gap that we see around the world. If we were able, just in terms of compensation and employment, to eliminate the gap that exists in the world on a gender basis, and women were able both to earn and to be employed to the same extent as men, there is a very compelling study that shows it would add about \$28 trillion to the global economy. That is very powerful.

So specifically when it comes to health, our budget reflects this, we will strongly continue to support, and more broadly, we have an effort underway to advance greater gender equity and equality and the empowerment of women around the world.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you. We just had a bipartisan meeting of Women, Peace, and Security Caucus meeting with women from Ukraine who were explaining to us that, I mean, not only, of course, many of them have had to flee the country but now many women are actually in charge of so many things, making sure that things happen in the country because the men, so many men are fighting. So obviously getting them the health care that they need.

And I see I am running out of time but I want to say the same thing about education. There are so many girls out of school in the world, especially because of what happened with COVID. I would like you to comment about that.

Secretary BLINKEN. You know, one of the risks, and of course we face this at home in different ways, is exactly that. The last thing that we want obviously for ourselves but also for people around the world is any kind of lost generation because of being out of school. Around the world, of course, it is not just COVID. It is the fact that you have, in so many places, conflict, population displacement, where it has been vital to make sure that we provide, and others provide the resources necessary to provide for kids' education.

I mentioned earlier the vital role that an organization like UNICEF plays in making sure that those who do not have access to a normal education actually get it.

So the request we have in our own budget is about \$650 million for basic education and about \$230 million or so for higher education. I think the landscape has been somewhat transformed by COVID-19. There are changes to education programming, kids returning to schools. We have some money that remains in the pipeline. And I have to tell you as well, we have a bit of a challenge, because in places where we have sought to spend money on education, we have, in some cases, been blocked by governments that do not necessary like that.

So my belief is that with the money requested, as well as with some existing money that we have not been able to spend in the way we wanted, we have the appropriate resources for this coming year. But we very much want to work with you on this. We need to get this one right, and it is something that I have got an intense focus on.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you very much. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you. Mr. Secretary, you are now going to be able to speak to, we have two new members of this committee, and frankly, they have made a dramatic impact already.

And so the first one will be Mr. Carl. It is a privilege to have you on the committee, sir. You are recognized.

Mr. CARL. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for joining us today. And I have really enjoyed hearing all these different topics and conversations, but I would like to talk to you about one that is close to home for me, and I will start with that.

In the news lately the direct impact in the state of Alabama, last Tuesday the Mexican government began seizing the assets of Vulcan Materials marine terminal facility there in Mexico. I read your statement, the department claiming that, and I quote, "you are concerned about the fair treatment of our companies in Mexico." Frankly, Mr. Secretary, I find that to be pretty weak, considering you just had an American company's assets seized. And I really am very concerned about other American companies that are there, that they will seize. So I think you need to put a little stronger statement together.

Please explain to me, or elaborate on how the State Department actually plans to ensure that security is fair for these companies, fair treatment of our companies abroad?

Secretary BLINKEN. No, I appreciate you on that and I think you are right. I have to tell you, I am very concerned about the fair treatment of our companies in Mexico, both just in terms of the larger environment in which they are operating, something that we have engaged President Lopez Obrador repeatedly, but I am also very concerned about the situation—I think you are referring to Vulcan Materials—

Mr. CARL. Yes.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. In this case. I am very concerned about that situation.

We have had our team on the ground, as well as from back here in D.C., very actively engaged on this. We have been requesting information from local authorities as well as from the Federal Government about the military and police presence in—

Mr. CARL. If I can interrupt you there, I was in Mexico City 3 weeks ago. I met with the President for 3 hours. I met with their Interior Department for 2 hours. I was assured that it was about to be worked out, and I get back to find out they have been overrun by the military. That is not diplomacy right there. And I am really fearful for all the other companies we have there—and I do not mean to cut you off.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, no. Can I just say, but I think your point is extremely well taken because besides this particular case the potential for a case like this to have a chilling effect on further investment or engagement by our companies as they see what is happening should be a real concern to the federal government in Mexico.

Mr. CARL. So Vulcan Materials, out of Birmingham, Alabama, has invested billions of dollars up there in that facility, that the Mexican government is now going to turn into a terminal. I know I do not need to tell you, but for the record, the mission of the State Department is to protect and promote U.S. security, prosperity, and democracy values and shape the international environment—if I read that correctly—in which Americans can thrive. And

I do not think what is happening with Vulcan is a good example of where that fits.

My question is pretty simple because I am running out of time here too. Tell me how 20,600 dollars sent to the State Department to fund drag performances at a culture event in Ecuador, or 300,000 dollars grant opportunity for the U.S. Embassy in Botswana to support the LGBTQIA+ groups—I realize the numbers are a very small scheme here, but I am just curious how we can spend money on these issues outside this country and it fits within the prelude of the definition of your department.

Secretary BLINKEN. So a couple of things on this. First, we are engaging around the world in cultural diplomacy. We are engaging in also making sure that we are doing what we can to help protect the rights of marginalized groups, including, notably, the LGBTQIA+ community, which, in so many countries around the world, is under threat and in many cases under a growing threat. And I believe that it is fundamental to our democracy to demonstrate that we are looking out for marginalized populations, whatever they may be. We do the same thing with persecuted religious minorities around the world, something also of deep concern to me and to the department.

On the cultural programming, look, in this particular instance the particular program you mentioned in Ecuador, that actually did not go forward. The grantee in this case decided to put a halt to it. You or I may not have chosen to fund this particular program. I think picking one program out of the many that we do for particular scrutiny I do not think is an accurate reflection of what we are doing, but in this particular it did not go forward.

Now I have to tell you, maybe it is just me, I remember a time when I think the most popular movie in the United States was “Tootsie,” and then a little while later it was “Mrs. Doubtfire,” and then we had “The Birdcage,” all movies that I loved. So on one level I have got to say I am just not sure I get what the concern is about, but I also acknowledge that, again, you or I may not have chosen to fund this particular program.

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

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you. Mr. Secretary, I look forward to the issue that he just brought up about Mexico. It is not only in Mexico that we have an issue. We have a similar issue with Honduras. And so we will continue to be in communication on those issues.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mr. LaTurner. Again, also a privilege to have you on this subcommittee, sir. You are recognized.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it. Thank you for being here today, Mr. Secretary.

As you know, the menace of the Chinese Communist Party is growing abroad, and now it has even come to our shores. We have seen President Xi and the CCP buy up American farmland, steal our intellectual property, and violate our sovereignty by spying on us with high-altitude balloons.

Being from Kansas I want to talk about regarding the Chinese purchasing of American farmland, and I want to know what specifi-

cally your administration is doing to track and prevent this from negatively impacting our national security.

Secretary BLINKEN. So Congressman, one of the things that we have been intensely focusing on is investments from other countries, notably China, that could in any way undermine our security, and we focus, of course, in the technology sector, in sensitive places geographically. As you know, we have a committee that looks at foreign investment in the United States through that lens.

So I think from my perspective, it is very important that we build the highest possible fence around the most sensitive areas. Now I have to admit, it is beyond, in a sense, my province, my expertise when it comes to much broader investments, particularly, for example, in farmland. I can see, obviously, the merits and importance of continuing to generate foreign investment, including from China. It is beneficial to our economy, beneficial to our farmers, et cetera. On the other hand, if there are real concerns about the security or strategic impact that this could have, that is obviously something we need to address.

Mr. LATURNER. Would you be willing to provide a classified briefing to members on any efforts that are currently ongoing related to this specifically?

Secretary BLINKEN. Certainly. If there is anything that is within our jurisdiction, yes.

Mr. LATURNER. Okay. I appreciate that.

Your administration has never truly set a red line on Afghanistan in regard to the practices of the Taliban. They had their first day of school earlier this week, and girls across the country were denied access to basic education, not to mention countless other barbaric measures they are exposed to.

What measures are you taking to ensure that no U.S. funding ends up in the hands of the Taliban or is used to further the goals of their brutal regime?

Secretary BLINKEN. First of all, I deplore the edicts that the Taliban has issued when it comes to, among other things, women and girls, including the edicts preventing them from getting an education, either above the sixth-grade level or going to university, or participating in the economy and participating in the provision of humanitarian assistance, which is fundamentally against the interests of the Afghan people besides being wrong.

When it comes to that, first, I think we have been very clear that to the extent the Taliban is looking for any kind of more normal relationship with any country around the world, if this continues it is simply not going to happen. And we are making sure, with country after country, that they hold the line on these practices and making sure that they do not go forward with a more normal relationship, which the Taliban wants.

But in terms of our funding—

Mr. LATURNER. Yes, that is what I—

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, I know you wanted to—

Mr. LATURNER. I do not have a lot of time on it.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, no. I appreciate that. In terms of our funding, we provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. We have been the leading provider of humanitarian assistance, including since the withdrawal, to make sure, to the best of our ability,

that people who desperately need food and basic humanitarian support, get it. We do it, of course, through implementing partners, United Nations and NGOs.

Mr. LATURNER. Will you communicate with my office about your efforts specifically to prevent money from—

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Mr. LATURNER [continuing]. Of course going to the valuable aid but not going to the Taliban?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Absolutely.

Mr. LATURNER. On March 20th, your department released the 2022 Human Rights Report, which rightly identified the violence perpetrated by the Ortega regime in Nicaragua, including arbitrary arrests, tortures, and killings. This includes closures of Catholic universities, banning Way of the Cross processions, and recently exiling 222 political prisoners and members of the Catholic Church to the United States.

However, one of these political prisoners, Bishop Rolando Alvarez, bishop of the diocese of Matagalpa, refused to board that plane to the U.S. and has been sentenced to 26 years in prison for his courage in speaking out against President Ortega's anti-democratic persecution. They do not know what prison he is in now. His family cannot communicate with him now.

Is Ambassador Sullivan in Managua taking any concrete action to secure the release of Bishop Alvarez?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Mr. LATURNER. Are you familiar with this?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am very familiar with it. In fact, those who were released, I met with a number of them at the State Department when we got them to the United States. I am very glad that they are out of jail, where they never should have been in the first place. It is deeply unfortunate, of course, that they were expelled from their own country and cannot continue to live and work freely there, but at least I am glad they are out of prison.

Bishop Alvarez, exactly as you said, chose not to do this. I have deep admiration for him, and our embassy is tracking this and I am tracking this. Our influence with the Nicaraguan government is somewhat limited, but we have made very clear our conviction that he should be released from prison.

Mr. LATURNER. If you will forgive me, Mr. Chairman, who specifically in your office can we communicate with on this topic?

Secretary BLINKEN. I would start with the Assistant Secretary, Brian Nichols, for the Western Hemisphere, and we have Naz Durakoglu, who is here, who is our Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs, who is somewhere in the room behind me. So I invite you to work with Naz or work with Brian Nichols.

Mr. LATURNER. Very good. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you. Members may submit additional questions for the record. Mr. Secretary, you have been generous with your time, and we want to be respectful to you, because the engines are probably already running on the airplane.

So this will conclude today's hearing. The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs stands adjourned. Thank you.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Questions and answers submitted for the record follow:]

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #1
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Cuba is a State Sponsor of Terror: Mr. Secretary, as you know, I am in very strong opposition to removing Cuba from the State-Sponsor-of-Terrorism list. Considering the number of people within the Hemisphere whose lives have been lost or profoundly ruined by terrorists like the ELN and FARC, by domestic terrorists like Joanne Chesimard, I cannot fathom what justification exists to merit even the consideration of this question. Is the Biden Administration seeking to remove Cuba from the State-Sponsor-of-Terrorism list?

Answer:

The Department of State designated Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) on January 12, 2021, for repeatedly providing support for acts of international terrorism in granting safe harbor to terrorists. Under U.S. law, specific statutory criteria must be met to rescind SST designations. The Department carefully reviews available information, from many sources, to determine if a country meets the statutory criteria for designation or rescission. Any review of Cuba's SST designation would be based on the law, including the criteria established by Congress.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-2-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #2
House Committee on Appropriations
April 6, 2023**

Question:

Are there inter-agency deliberations related to this issue which you would characterize as serious?

Answer:

I am not going to comment on internal deliberations regarding State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) designations or rescissions. However, under U.S. law, specific statutory criteria must be met to rescind SST designations. The Department carefully reviews available information, from many sources, to determine if a country meets the statutory criteria for designation or rescission. Any review of Cuba's SST designation would be based on the law, including the criteria established by Congress. President Biden remains committed to policies that will advance the democratic aspirations of the Cuban people.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-3-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #3
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Cuba Broadcasting: As a member of the President's Cabinet and the National Security Council, please provide your views on the following questions. Do you agree with the drastic and unjustified cuts proposed annually since FY19 to the Office of Cuba Broadcasting within the United States Agency for Global Media?

Answer:

The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) serves an important role in providing objective, uncensored news for Cubans given the repression of journalists and media by the Cuban government. Under the independent U.S. Agency for Global Media, OCB reports on political prisoners and the human rights situation, and combats disinformation and malign foreign influence in Cuba providing an alternative to state-run media. I support OCB's requested 15 percent budget increase – from \$12.973 million enacted in FY 2023 to \$15.016 million for FY 2024.

UNCLASSIFIED

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-4-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #4
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Do you believe the Office of Cuba Broadcasting was an important tool in responding to the July 2021 protests?

Answer:

The mass demonstrations in Cuba on July 11, 2021, marked an unprecedented display of political activism and a collective call for political freedoms, human rights, and economic reforms. I believe the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) played an important role in providing news and information programming during and following these protests in Cuba. The OCB remains an important tool given the Cuban government's continued use of repressive tactics, censorship, and imprisonment for legitimate acts of political protest and freedom of expression.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-5-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #5
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Were there times when radio was the only way to get information to the Cuban people following the protests?

Answer:

During and around the protests on July 11, 2021, there were widespread reports of internet outages and cellular service disruptions in Cuba. Since those protests, and during subsequent periods of civil unrest on the island, independent media and human rights non-governmental organizations report frequent internet disruptions for journalists and civil society activists. The Office of Cuba Broadcasting's enduring 24-hour Radio Martí and its array of digital media platforms help ensure programming for all audiences throughout Cuba.

UNCLASSIFIED

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-6-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #6
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Mineral Security: Mr. Secretary, you testified about China's supply chain dominance in critical minerals which led you to form the Mineral Securities Partnership that aims to partner with other countries to invest in critical minerals to prevent dominance by one country. Is it in the U.S. national security and economic interests to secure critical minerals here in the United States where they exist in addition to investing in such efforts abroad through programs like the Mineral Securities Partnership?

Answer:

The State Department works to ensure that supply chain diversification efforts feed into broader support for the U.S. clean energy industry. Domestic investment is central to bolstering these supply chains crucial to national security and the domestic economy. However, increased U.S. mineral demand and the distribution of global mineral deposits mean we cannot solely rely on domestic sources. The Mineral Security Partnership is a global initiative, which complements our domestic efforts.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-7-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #7
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Afghanistan: Mr. Secretary, the nature of our chaotic abandonment of Afghanistan has thrown the country and the region into instability. But I believe Afghanistan is not a lost cause. The day before the hearing, we heard from Afghan women leaders who urged our members to support every avenue to reverse the brutality of the Taliban against women. What are you doing to roll back these barbaric rules on women and girls in Afghanistan, including allowing girls to return to school?

Answer:

I remain committed to advocating for the rights of Afghan women and girls. Following the Taliban's reprehensible edicts, we imposed visa restrictions on certain Taliban individuals responsible. We frequently engage Afghan women to ensure our efforts are informed by their recommendations. We also coordinate with the international community on a unified response, producing joint statements urging the Taliban to reverse their harmful edicts. We are committed to using all diplomatic and

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-8-

programming tools at our disposal to promote respect for the human rights
of all Afghans.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-9-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #8
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Are other countries applying enough pressure on the Taliban?

Answer:

The international community has united in condemning the Taliban's human rights abuses, especially those affecting women and girls, and the lack of an inclusive and representative government. Muslim majority countries, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Pakistan, Qatar, and Indonesia, in addition to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, continue to press the Taliban both publicly and privately and in bilateral and multilateral settings on its unacceptable policies.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-10-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #9
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

How are you preventing contagion by this apparent victory by the Taliban that other radicals may find inspiring?

Answer:

The United States is committed to helping the Afghan people through the humanitarian and economic crises that the Taliban exacerbate through their discriminatory policies. We have made clear the Taliban cannot expect to have normal relations with the international community when their decisions cause suffering for the Afghan people. We also continue to work with partners to bolster regional capabilities to counter terrorism and drug trafficking and enhance border security in support of regional stability, and to counter extremism by building local resilience and social cohesion.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #10
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Pakistan: The regional instability caused by our withdrawal from Afghanistan includes the latest turn for the worse in Pakistan. I am particularly concerned about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. The economic crises and the uptick in terrorist attacks inside Pakistan are adding fuel to the fire. How are you encouraging Pakistan to move in a direction that improves conditions for the people of Pakistan and for our national security?

Answer:

Cooperation in traditional areas of U.S.-Pakistan shared interests, such as regional security and counterterrorism, continues to remain relevant. However, engaging Pakistan in other areas of the bilateral relationship is equally critical for its stability. Recent U.S.-Pakistan engagements, including the Energy Security Dialogue, Trade and Investment Framework Agreement Council, Climate and Environment Working Group, Mid-Level Defense Dialogue, and Counterterrorism Dialogue, demonstrate our robust

192

UNCLASSIFIED
-12-

collaboration in improving conditions for the Pakistani people and
supporting U.S. national security.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-13-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #11
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Are you engaged in the IMF negotiations that are currently taking place with Pakistan?

Answer:

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an independent entity. To put Pakistan on a sustainable growth path, the Department encourages Pakistan to continue working with the IMF, especially on reforms that will improve Pakistan's macroeconomic conditions and business environment. For questions about specific IMF programs, I refer you to the Department of the Treasury, which is the U.S. government lead on policy related to the IMF.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #12
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

How are we preventing any future IMF loan from being used by Pakistan to simply repay their predatory debt to China?

Answer:

Many low and middle-income countries are facing potentially unsustainable debt loads and International Monetary Fund (IMF) programs are designed to help countries restore debt sustainability. I refer you to the Department of the Treasury's U.S. Executive Director's Office at the IMF for specific questions around IMF policy and lending. The Department continues to emphasize that good governance, long-term capacity building, and sustainable market-based approaches that let the private sector flourish are the best paths to sustained growth and development in Pakistan.

UNCLASSIFIED
-15-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #13
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Do you believe the IMF should insist on transparency with Pakistan's military budget and restraints on government spending as conditions for any loan?

Answer:

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an independent entity and the Department does not insist on conditionality for IMF arrangements, which are negotiated between Fund staff and the borrowing country. For questions about specific IMF programs, I refer you to the Department of the Treasury, which is the U.S. government lead on policy related to the IMF.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #14
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

North Korea: Mr. Secretary, North Korea conducted more missile tests last year than ever before, and this month, it reportedly carried out its sixth ICBM test in less than a year. Given these developments, I hope that you can convince me that this Administration is not letting North Korea take advantage of the world's attention being focused on Ukraine. It is my understanding that North Korea's missile tests are unsanctioned under UN Security Council resolutions. What consequences has North Korea faced for these tests, which in some cases seem intended to threaten the U.S. homeland?

Answer:

Unfortunately, the PRC and Russia have largely sheltered the DPRK at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) from facing consequences for its unlawful ballistic missile tests, including by vetoing the UNSC resolution we proposed in May 2022. As a result, we have focused on strengthening other response options and are reaffirming the U.S. extended deterrence commitment to the Republic of Korea using the full range of U.S. defense capabilities, working closely with like-minded countries to disrupt DPRK illicit

UNCLASSIFIED
-17-

cyber activities, and sanctioning individuals and entities tied to the DPRK's
WMD and ballistic missile programs.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-18-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #15
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

It was also reported earlier this year that Kim Jong-Un ordered an “exponential” expansion of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal, which included ICBMs that could potentially target the U.S. Is denuclearization still the Administration’s policy objective, and if so, have you made any progress towards this objective over the past two years?

Answer:

The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula remains the Administration’s goal and one we share with our closest allies and partners. However, denuclearization can only be achieved through diplomacy. We have repeatedly sought to engage the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), but it continues to ignore public and private calls from senior U.S. officials to engage us in dialogue. In the absence of engagement, we will continue to strengthen our extended deterrence and work with allies and partners to enforce and strengthen sanctions related to the DPRK.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-19-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #16
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

It has been reported that North Korea—like Iran—is providing military assistance to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. What is the extent of this assistance and what are we doing to curtail it?

Answer:

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) completed an initial delivery of infantry rockets and missiles to Russia in November 2022 for use by the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group. This is in direct violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions. Although we assess the amount of material delivered to Wagner was not enough to change battlefield dynamics in Ukraine, we are concerned the DPRK is planning to deliver more military equipment to Russia. We are working with partners and allies to dissuade Pyongyang from engaging in such arms shipments, and we are coordinating with the Department of the Treasury to identify potential sanctions targets.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-20-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #17
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Iran & Waning U.S. Influence: Mr. Secretary, there have been several developments in the Middle East over the past month, which cause me great concern. Among these include— Exposure of Iran's role in facilitating Russia's aggression in Ukraine; Reports that President Putin has agreed to return enriched uranium to Iran; The discovery of uranium enriched to 84% at Iran's underground nuclear facility; The growing number of Middle Eastern officials who have reengaged with the Syrian regime; and The March announcement that China brokered an agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran to reestablish diplomatic relations after seven years of severed ties. During President Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia last July, he said, "We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia, or Iran." How do you respond to those that look at these developments and say that's exactly what has happened?

Answer:

The United States remains the key actor bringing together Middle East partners to counter Iran through defense cooperation and advancing regional stability, including through the Negev Forum, Abraham Accords, and the GCC-U.S. Strategic Partnership. Our unparalleled military presence in the region allows us to counter threats from Iran-aligned militias and terrorist groups, and with our partners, we continue to interdict Iranian

UNCLASSIFIED

201

UNCLASSIFIED
-21-

weapons bound for these groups. Our partners strongly prefer U.S. military equipment while PRC sales to the region remain comparatively modest.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #18
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question 18:

What is the Administration's strategy for halting this slide and getting us back on track?

Answer:

The United States will remain actively engaged in the Middle East as the region's leading diplomatic and defense partner. Our diplomacy has de-escalated regional conflicts and strengthened regional stability. We have furthered Israel's regional integration, incorporating it into U.S. Central Command and leveraging the Negev Forum to deliver on regional security cooperation. We have also brought Gulf partners closer together, meeting together this past February to discuss how we can work together to constrain and deter further acts of Iranian aggression.

UNCLASSIFIED
-23-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #19
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Malign Influencers: During the hearing, there was a discussion regarding “malign influencers.” Do you qualify Cuba and Venezuela as “malign influencers” similar to Iran, Russia, and China?

Answer:

We generally use the term malign influencers for actors that undermine democracy, human rights, and hemispheric security, and international peace and security worldwide. Regardless of any particular terminology, the Department actively opposes and works to counter such efforts.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #20
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Visa Appointments: U.S. citizens are having to wait over two years for immigrant visa interviews at some U.S. Embassies and consulates. I am particularly concerned with delays regarding immediate relative petitions filed by U.S. citizens. Please explain what State is doing to alleviate the backlogs regarding immigrant visa appointments, particularly in Mexico?

Answer:

Embassies and Consulates around the world have leveraged policy and technology innovations to automate processes and streamline communications with beneficiaries, petitioners, and attorneys to ensure timely action on immigrant visa (IV) applications. Mission Mexico has cut its pandemic-driven IV backlog by 36 percent since its height in May 2021. In fact, they have already outpaced their processing in the first half of this fiscal year compared to the same time period in FY 2019 prior to the pandemic.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #21
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Russian Overflight: The United States and other allies of Ukraine should do all we can to ensure the Russian regime is cut off from financial resources. One source of foreign revenues that the regime maintains is from airlines that pay the Russian government to overfly in Russian airspace. Before the war, this generated millions of dollars per year in revenues just from U.S. carriers alone. While many airlines, including all U.S. and most European airlines, no longer take these routes over Russia, many others do—including Middle East, Chinese, and Indian airlines. As a result, these airlines have an unfair advantage with more direct routes, less fuel usage, and the ability to carry more passengers. Overflying Russia is also dangerous for passengers, particularly those from the United States. Should an aircraft overflying Russia need to make an unplanned landing at a Russian airport for a mechanical or other issue, this would put such passengers at risk. Most U.S. passengers departing from U.S. airports would not know which airlines overfly Russian airspace. Has the State Department taken any specific action to prevent foreign airlines from overflying Russian airspace on flights coming to or departing from the United States? If not, why not?

Answer:

I am concerned about foreign carriers that overfly Russia on routes to and from the United States. We continue to track the issue closely with interagency colleagues to identify potential responses consistent with domestic and international legal obligations. Foreign carriers transporting

UNCLASSIFIED
-26-

U.S. citizens on flights to and from the United States that overfly Russia should notify prospective passengers of any risks of such flights and explain how the carriers intend to mitigate those risks.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-27-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #22
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

How has the State Department considered the safety of Americans
overflying Russian airspace during its conflict with Ukraine?

Answer:

The Department has no higher priority than the safety and security of
U.S. citizens who travel abroad. We continue to track the issue closely with
interagency colleagues to identify potential responses consistent with
domestic and international legal obligations.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #23
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

American University in Cairo: For over 60 years, the American University in Cairo is a significant part of U.S. assistance to Egypt. The Egyptian economy has become unpredictable with the currency losing half its value during a period of record inflation. What can the State Department do to ensure that the AUC is able to continue its mission of providing an American Liberal Arts education to as many students as possible?

Answer:

We are committed to ensuring our longtime partner, the American University in Cairo (AUC), can continue its important mission – including establishing 46 career centers at 27 public universities, 3 technical universities, and four not-for-profit international universities. U.S.-government grants and scholarship initiatives, including to youth from throughout the region, ensure AUC can continue to build the professional skills, including English language and critical thinking, of the region's next generation and also develop their skills related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

UNCLASSIFIED
-29-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart #24
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Can you explain to us the role that institutions like the AUC play in Egypt, and their significance in the context of our foreign aid programs?

Answer:

The American University in Cairo (AUC) is a strategic partner on a range of programs and a crucial link to Egyptian and regional youth. Some of our key partners in Egypt are AUC graduates. AUC administers grants and scholarships that provide Egyptian students with access to U.S. education, which greatly helps build and maintain our people-to-people ties. Since 1985, USAID has provided nearly \$500 million to AUC. The State Department has provided a total of \$33 million to AUC through the Tomorrow's Leaders program, which equips youth with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective leadership.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #1
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

What can we do to help our Caribbean neighbors address barriers to assistance and better combat the effects of these storms and the climate crisis recognizing how vulnerable they are?

Answer:

Under the U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis (PACC 2030), the Biden Administration supported the request of Barbados and Jamaica to obtain almost \$1 billion in funding under the International Monetary Fund's Resilient and Sustainability Fund, and USAID plans to support Barbados's Blue-Green Bank which will finance climate change mitigation and adaptation projects in the region. The President's FY 2024 Budget Request also provides \$71.7 million in assistance to support our Caribbean neighbors in strengthening energy security and enhancing adaptative capacity to climate impacts.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-2-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #2
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

The FY23 SFOPS bill included authority for loan guarantees for small island developing states and dedicated funding to be used for these countries' needs. How is the State Department planning to implement this assistance?

Answer:

The Department will finalize the FY 2023 653(a) allocations and submit the report to Congress soon. The 653(a) report will include \$50 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) consistent with section 7019 of the FY 2023 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act and the ESF table included in the accompanying explanatory statement. We plan to use this funding to help respond to the complex challenges facing SIDS, including those that rely on external financing; to help prepare for, and recover from, climate-related disasters; and to manage growing debt burdens.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-3-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #3
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

How can we increase the United States' diplomatic attention and presence in these Caribbean islands?

Answer:

As a follow-up to the President and Vice President's historic meeting with Caribbean Heads of State during the Summit of the Americas, the Administration launched High Level Action Committees to identify action plans on energy, finance, and food security. These plans complement the U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis (PACC 2030) and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CSBI). I am also actively considering an increase in our diplomatic presence in the Eastern Caribbean to further develop relationships and to counter the malign influence of other actors.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-4-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #4
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Please provide an update on efforts to improve diversity and inclusion at the State Department, including the recruitment, promotion, and retention of minority staff.

Answer:

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives are critical to my Modernization Agenda, and our efforts to remove barriers for underrepresented groups to join the Department – including revisions to the assessment process, offering paid student internships, and expanding fellowship opportunities – are reaching greater numbers of diverse and highly qualified candidates. We created a new Core Precept of DEIA, which all Foreign Service employees must now demonstrate when they are considered for promotion. We also created a Retention Unit in the Bureau of Global Talent Management that is working on a strategy to ensure that State prioritizes a work culture that attracts and retains diverse talent.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-5-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #5
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Making progress on diversity and inclusion will require sustained progress over many years and holding the Department accountable for meeting established benchmarks. Has the State Department established any workforce diversity benchmarks?

Answer:

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion, established two years ago, finalized a five-year Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategic Plan for the Department that outlines almost three hundred actions designed to improve DEIA across the Department. In addition, the Department developed a DEIA Agency Priority Goal to integrate DEIA principles into the agency's strategic and performance planning processes. A range of outcome measures and metrics are being developed to assess the effectiveness of steps taken to improve DEIA.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-6-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #6
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

What humanitarian assistance have we been able to provide to the suffering communities in Artsakh?

Answer:

Since September 2020, the United States has provided more than \$21 million in humanitarian assistance in response to the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, including for assistance inside Nagorno-Karabakh. This assistance via our international partners supports a range of activities, including providing food assistance, improving water and sanitation, providing vital healthcare supplies, training medical workers, supporting winterization needs, tracing cases of missing persons and reuniting families when possible, visiting detainees, supporting vulnerable populations, and providing income support to civilians.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-7-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #7
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

What are the obstacles to being more active?

Answer:

U.S. government personnel have not been permitted access to the area to conduct needs assessments or monitor programs. Humanitarian access to Nagorno-Karabakh is currently extremely limited, with only a single international humanitarian organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), given access by all parties to operate in the region. Lachin corridor remains impeded for private and commercial vehicles. The Department of State continues to call for the reopening of the roadway publicly and privately.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-8-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #8
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

What current USAID programs are helping at-risk Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh? (Please include program descriptions, partners, and funding amounts.)

Answer:

Access to Nagorno-Karabakh is limited; however, since September 2020, the United States has provided over \$21 million in humanitarian assistance, including \$2.5 million through the World Food Program, People in Need, and Catholic Relief Services. The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration currently supports humanitarian assistance inside Nagorno-Karabakh, including the delivery of food and medical supplies, family reunifications, and medical evacuations. USAID recently conducted humanitarian assessments in Armenia and Azerbaijan and is continuing to closely monitor the situation, including through contacts inside Nagorno-Karabakh. USAID is also developing

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-9-

contingency plans with regional stakeholders, such as UN agencies and NGOs, in the event the situation deteriorates.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #9
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Has the U.S. engaged in any conversations with officials of the Azerbaijani government regarding the movement of populations into Nagorno Karabakh?

Answer:

Yes, the United States raises this issue continually at all levels. The United States supports a long-term peaceful solution to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. We recognize that the future of Nagorno-Karabakh and its residents is an important part of achieving a durable peace settlement. Armenia has publicly acknowledged that a conversation between the population of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijani government is essential for securing the rights and security of the ethnic Armenian population. The State Department continues to raise the need for rights and security for the population of Nagorno-Karabakh in every engagement – including with President Aliyev.

UNCLASSIFIED
-11-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #10
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

How will the State Department ensure that U.S. foreign assistance prioritizes support for locally-led peacebuilding and locally-designed programming to better help prevent and reduce violent conflict and fragility?

Answer:

The Department plans and implements foreign assistance programs to prevent conflict and promote stability based on conflict analysis and extensive consultation with local stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and the private sector. Local counterparts help identify the causes of conflict and design strategies, programs, and other interventions to address them. The Department uses inputs from consultations and ongoing dialogues to inform the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability country and regional plans to support locally led priorities.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-12-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #11
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

How will the State Department identify and support locally-led solutions to problems globally, and provide more direct funding to local and nontraditional partners, particularly women, youth, and faith actors?

Answer:

The Department prioritizes the engagement and leadership of local partners, including women, youth, and faith actors, in its foreign assistance programs globally. Applicants for Department funding are encouraged to demonstrate, and are evaluated on, how well they meaningfully represent and integrate local partners in the design, implementation, and monitoring of programs. This includes ensuring that appropriate resources are allocated to local partners to facilitate their leadership on identifying and advancing sustainable, local solutions to the most pressing global challenges.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #12
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

How can the State Department better prioritize the role of youth in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery effort? How does the Department seek to support directly youth-led organizations and initiatives?

Answer:

The Department consults with local youth and youth-led organizations and supports the diverse and meaningful participation of youth leaders in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery. The Department is integrating the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda into the implementation of relevant U.S. policies such as the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability and the National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality. Via the Summit for Democracy, the Department has supported youth-led entities driving political and civic engagement globally.

UNCLASSIFIED
-14-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #13
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

What impact has the resumption of U.S. assistance had, so far, on the lives and livelihoods of Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem?

Answer:

The resumption of U.S. assistance for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza has served important U.S. interests. Since the Biden Administration took office, the United States has provided more than \$940 million in assistance for the Palestinian people including in support of providing critical support to those in great need, fostering economic development, building toward peace, and supporting Israeli-Palestinian security coordination, as well as education, health care, and humanitarian assistance for Palestinian refugees through support for UNRWA in the West Bank, Gaza, and the region.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #14
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Given the deteriorating security situation, what role can U.S. assistance play in de-escalating tensions?

Answer:

U.S. assistance is an important tool that furthers U.S. policy interests by promoting stability. Economic and humanitarian assistance programs improve the lives of millions of Palestinians by providing immediate relief and addressing basic needs while advancing development across sectors such as health, economic growth, and civil society, while security sector programs support Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation to enhance the stability of the West Bank.

UNCLASSIFIED
-16-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #15
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

In November 2019, the Trump Administration reversed decades of long-standing U.S. policy by announcing that it did not view Israeli settlements in the West Bank as inconsistent with international law. What is the Biden Administration's position on whether settlements in the West Bank are consistent with international law?

Answer:

The Biden-Harris Administration has been clear that advancing settlements undermines the geographic viability of a two-state solution, is an obstacle to peace, exacerbates tensions, and further harms trust between the two parties. We strongly oppose the advancement of settlements and urge Israel to refrain from this activity.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-17-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Barbara Lee #16
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

I greatly appreciated this Administration's work to support the largest replenishment in history. That said – there are still goals to be met in the global fundraising space to fully fund the Global Fund. What else will the Administration be doing to continue to bring additional donors and additional funding in support of this critical program so the full U.S. pledge can be utilized?

Answer:

Since the pledging conference for the Global Fund's Seventh Replenishment hosted by President Biden in New York City on September 21, 2022, \$1.4 billion has been pledged by additional donors, bringing total pledges for the Seventh Replenishment to \$15.7 billion. These subsequent pledges reflect substantial U.S. government engagement and advocacy. The Biden-Harris Administration will continue to work with and support the Global Fund to identify and pursue opportunities to secure increased and new pledges for the Seventh Replenishment in order to

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-18-

ensure that the matching requirements for release of the full \$6 billion U.S. pledge are met.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Guy Reschenthaler #1
House Committee on Appropriations
March 22, 2023**

Question:

Fentanyl: In 2021, 66 percent of deaths in the United States attributed to drug poisoning were due to synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2020 data, Pennsylvania ranks 8th highest among all states for drug overdose mortality. The Pennsylvania Department of Health reports that a staggering 75 percent of overdose deaths in the Commonwealth involved fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. Secretary Blinken, as you know, the United States hosted the second High-Level Security Dialogue at the State Department on October 13. Could you provide the indicators that Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Director Dr. Rahul Gupta mentioned to assess the U.S. and Mexico's efforts to tackle the fentanyl threat?

Answer:

Disrupting the production and trafficking of synthetic opioids contributing to the U.S. overdose epidemic continues to be the Department of State's top drug control priority. At the High-Level Security Dialogue with Mexico in October 2022, the United States reaffirmed our commitment to the Bicentennial Framework on Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities. We are finalizing with Mexico the joint indicators we will use

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-2-

to measure our shared progress on public health and disrupting
transnational criminal organizations and their illicit supply chains.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-3-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Guy Reschenthaler #2
House Committee on Appropriations
March 22, 2023**

Question:

What other metrics will be used to evaluate progress in implementing the joint synthetic drug action plan?

Answer:

There is an interagency process to track progress against action items in the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) to Globally Disrupt the Illicit Fentanyl Supply Chain. For example, the Department's metrics include use of international information and data sharing systems, which would help understand broader trends, as well as the number of UN Member States taking domestic action to disrupt the precursor supply chain. The Department is also tracking metrics related to partner government-initiated investigations and successful prosecutions. With Mexico, the Department is finalizing details on the synthetic drug action plan.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-4-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Guy Reschenthaler #3
House Committee on Appropriations
March 22, 2023**

Question:

China continues to be the primary source of precursor chemicals used to produce fentanyl. I understand that you were planning to reengage China to ask for its cooperation in halting the flow of precursor chemicals to international drug trafficking organizations that are manufacturing fentanyl. What concrete actions will you ask China to commit to that will ultimately reduce the deaths in the U.S. due to fentanyl poisoning?

Answer:

The United States seeks meaningful counternarcotics cooperation with the People's Republic of China and other international partners to strengthen international oversight of unscheduled precursor chemical flows and has requested that Beijing increase information sharing with international law enforcement, strengthen enforcement of globally-agreed-upon World Customs Organization standards for identifying chemical exports, and require companies to implement "know your customer" practices that identify customers in order to restrict purchases by illegitimate buyers.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Guy Reschenthaler #4
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Global Water Security: Approximately 2.2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water and two billion people lack access to proper sanitation. Continued U.S. investments in safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) provide sustainable access to basic services for millions. Secretary Blinken: Last year the White House unveiled an action plan on Global Water Security with the first pillar focused on access for water, sanitation, and hygiene. How do you propose meeting this goal?

Answer:

Working multilaterally with UN Agencies and members of the donor community, we aim to raise the profile of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); prioritize water in national development plans; and increase technical capacity in the water sector, especially regarding WASH objectives. The Department is specifically working to increase water-focused projects as preferred targets for Ambassador discretionary spending projects, as well as encouraging our posts to raise water, sanitation, and hygiene issues in engagement with host countries.

UNCLASSIFIED
-6-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Guy Reschenthaler #5
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

How does the administration plan to focus on water, sanitation, and hygiene systems in health care systems globally?

Answer:

Increasing equitable access to safe, sustainable, and resilient drinking water and sanitation services and adoption of key hygiene behaviors is a key objective of the U.S. Global Water Strategy. Many health care facilities lack consistent access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). USAID will directly mobilize \$1 billion dollars of financing for water security, resilient watersheds, sanitation, and hygiene, in addition to other USAID investments. Additionally, the Department is engaged with faith-based and other non-governmental providers of health care to improve WASH in health care systems globally.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

-7-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Guy Reschenthaler #6
House Committee on Appropriations
March 22, 2023**

Question:

Deterring China in the Middle East: Secretary Blinken: With the recent announcement that Saudi Arabia is taking steps to join the China-led security bloc, how is the administration working to reassure allies in the region, such as Egypt, that the United States in fact remains the preferred partner of choice?

Answer:

We remain deeply committed to regional peace, stability, and prosperity as we strengthen decades-long strategic cooperation with Middle East partners. We maintain a robust military and security presence across the region, with tens of thousands of U.S. forces, including the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain and the world's largest expeditionary air wing in Qatar. We continue unmatched training, consulting, logistical support, weapons sales, and intelligence sharing with regional partners. Our annual provision of over \$6 billion security assistance to the region remains unparalleled, including more than \$1 billion in Foreign Military Financing to Egypt.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-8-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Guy Reschenthaler #7
House Committee on Appropriations
March 22, 2023**

Question:

Are there specific steps or programs that you can identify?

Answer:

We are leading with diplomacy across our extensive security relationships to demonstrate the benefits of a long-term partnership with the United States. We continue to lead the D-ISIS coalition, ensuring the defeat of ISIS. We actively coordinate with Saudi Arabia to counter threats faced by the Kingdom and work with Gulf Cooperation Council partners to expand defense cooperation and build a sustainable regional security architecture and our maritime security partnerships have interdicted Iranian weapons shipments to regional proxies.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-9-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Guy Reschenthaler #8
House Committee on Appropriations
March 22, 2023**

Question:

Are there any new initiatives being considered?

Answer:

We launched multiple new initiatives that reinforce our position as the region's security partner of choice. We advanced Israel's regional integration as a security partner by including it in CENTCOM. We are also expanding coordination with GCC partners to improve defense cooperation and build a sustainable regional security architecture and our maritime security partnerships use new technologies to interdict Iranian weapons shipments to regional proxies.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-10-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Guy Reschenthaler #9
House Committee on Appropriations
March 22, 2023**

Question:

Russian Airspace: As you know, China recently announced a broad reopening and removal of most COVID-19-related international travel restrictions. However, it is a dangerous national security risk that Chinese carriers currently use Russian airspace to arrive and depart from the U.S. The use of Russian airspace provides funding for the war in Ukraine, potentially endangers U.S. citizens travelling on those routes, and harms the competitiveness of U.S. companies and aviation workers. Secretary Blinken: What are the State Department's plans to address this issue?

Answer:

We continue to track the issue closely with interagency colleagues to identify potential responses consistent with domestic and international legal obligations. Foreign carriers transporting U.S. citizens on flights to and from the United States that overfly Russia should notify prospective passengers of any risks of such flights and explain how the carriers intend to mitigate those risks. On the PRC, we continue to pursue a measured approach to the increase of flights in the U.S.-PRC aviation market that ensures parity and a level playing field for both countries' carriers.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Grace Meng #1
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Understanding the basics of numeracy and literacy can break the cycle of poverty. U.S. funding for International Basic Education programs – including our support for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) – has helped millions of children around the world.

During the Transforming Education Summit last fall, First Lady Dr. Jill Biden announced to the world that the United States would endorse the global Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning, which aims to cut ‘learning poverty’ in half by 2030. This means cutting in half the number of children out of school and children who are in school but not provided with the resources they need to achieve minimum learning outcomes by age 10. Yet, the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2024 budget would drastically reduce international basic education funding below congressionally appropriated levels and would cut the U.S.’ support all together for Education Cannot Wait. What are the Administration’s views on these programs and how the Administration envisions supporting its commitment to foundational learning despite these significant cuts?

Answer:

The FY 2024 President’s Budget balances foreign assistance across many priority issues, including education. For example, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) are two critical multilateral partners of the United States. The United States’

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-2-

support is more than just financial as we serve on the governing bodies of each organization and provide technical support at the global and country levels of both organizations. USAID is also a founding member of the Foundational Learning Coalition (FLC), with UNICEF, World Bank, FCDO, UNESCO and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In response to pandemic-related setbacks in literacy and numeracy, the FLC launched a Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning to build support for addressing the learning crisis globally, leverage resources, and share technical expertise and evidenced-based tools and practices for improving the acquisition of foundational learning skills.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-3-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Grace Meng #2
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

The Biden Administration has done amazing work to address the rise in gender-based violence (GBV), from the National Gender Strategy to Safe from the Start ReVisioned. Now, we need to work together to make sure that what the Administration has accomplished in terms of policy development is upheld in law. The Administration's Fiscal Year 2024 budget takes the first step, requesting an increase of \$33.5 million to implement a multi-year strategy to prevent and respond to GBV in countries where it is common in conflict and non-conflict settings. Unfortunately, there is a lack of understanding here on Capitol Hill of exactly what these funds do; namely, that they do not go toward supporting abortions. How will State use the additional \$33.5 million requested for FY24 to prevent and respond to GBV?

Answer:

The Department may use additional FY 2024 gender-based violence (GBV) funding to: provide support for survivors, including in humanitarian emergencies; train youth, communities, and civil society on GBV prevention; and increase criminal justice capacity on GBV issues. Since 1973, the Helms Amendment has prohibited use of U.S. foreign assistance to pay for the performance of abortion as a method of family planning, or to motivate or

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-4-

coerce any person to practice abortions. The Department complies with this
and all related legislative restrictions.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-5-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Grace Meng #3
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

And, exactly how the Department is using the \$250 million appropriated in FY23 for this purpose?

Answer:

Consistent with the 2022 U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence (GBV) Globally, the Department and USAID will utilize FY 2023 funds to expand evidence-driven, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered GBV prevention and response efforts across humanitarian, security, economic, and development assistance accounts.

We look forward to sharing more specific details on Department and USAID programming to address GBV in the forthcoming Section 653(a) report.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-6-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Grace Meng #4
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

The West Bank has once again reached a boiling point. Since the beginning of this year, more than 60 Palestinians and 14 Israelis have died in incidents in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC) in Jerusalem plays a crucial role in ensuring security and stability in the West Bank by supporting the Palestinian Authority's (PA) police and intelligence capabilities. The robust security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority can be attributed to the work of the USSC. This coordination helps prevent terrorism against Israeli and Palestinian civilians and combats efforts by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to establish a foothold in the West Bank. Yet, the Administration's Fiscal Year 2024 budget would drastically reduce International Narcotics Control And Law Enforcement (INCLE) funding for the West Bank and Gaza, thereby undermining U.S. leadership and credibility in a region where it is essential. How does the Administration propose it will uphold its commitment to work to reduce tensions in the West Bank if we reduce our support to the PA, who already are unable to secure a significant portion of the West Bank, putting Israeli and Palestinian lives at risk?

Answer:

Since 2005, the State Department and the USSC have worked closely to help the Palestinian Authority (PA) transform and professionalize its security sector as well as to engage with Israelis and Palestinians on security

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-7-

cooperation initiatives. The Administration remains committed to supporting the PA Security Forces, which are vital to the overall stability of the West Bank. The FY2024 INCLE budget request seeks \$40 million which includes West Bank security programs and program support costs. This is consistent with the Administration's FY 2022 and FY2023 INCLE funding requests.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-8-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Grace Meng #5
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

This generation of young people is the largest in history with 1.3 billion people worldwide between the ages of 15 and 24. While much of the U.S.' assistance around education, health care, and economic development targeted at youth is carried out by USAID, the State Department has a key role to play. The Department administers several grants programs which are directed at youth, and numerous others which benefit youth across the Department. The FY 22 Omnibus directed both the State Department and USAID to develop a strategy or policy around youth. To meet this mandate, USAID updated its youth policy in May of 2022. But as far as I can tell the State Department has yet to lead a youth strategy as directed. Specifically, the Secretary of State was directed "to coordinate with all government agencies managing foreign assistance to develop a strategy that directly addresses youth needs and youth engagement." Has this taken place? When can we expect to see this strategy?

Answer:

In November 2022, I appointed former U.S. Representative Abby Finkenauer to be the new Special Envoy for Global Youth Issues to underscore the deep impact and importance of Public Diplomacy youth programs. Public Diplomacy Sections worldwide are heavily focused on youth-centric outreach, and this is reflected in their country-specific mission

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-9-

strategies. The majority of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs exchange programs are aimed at engaging emerging leaders, and alumni of those programs regularly go on to become leaders in their communities.

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Grace Meng #6
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Safe, dignified, and quality healthcare relies on clean water, decent toilets, and good hygiene. Unfortunately, millions of people around the world lack access to clean water, risking the spread of disease. The 2022 Global Water Strategy recommits the U.S. to ensuring access to sustainable and safe WASH, globally, including prioritizing local leadership of water and sanitation systems and services and increasing access to sustainable and safe WASH in healthcare facilities. This week, countries are gathering at the UN Water Conference in New York to mobilize action to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Yet, the Administration's Fiscal Year 2024 budget would drastically reduce WASH funding below congressionally appropriated levels. How will the Administration achieve its goals as laid out in the 2022 Global Water Strategy given the proposed cut of nearly 33% for WASH in FY24?

Answer:

The Department is working with our partners to create the enabling conditions for expanded, affordable, resilient, and sustainable Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services and improved water resources management. We are also redoubling our efforts, across the U.S. Government, to mobilize commercial capital and promote market-based innovations to close the global financing gap for water and sanitation.

UNCLASSIFIED

-11-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Grace Meng #7
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Secretary Blinken, as you are aware, last year I passed into law my Divided Families Reunification Act, which directs the Department to consult with South Korean officials on potential opportunities to reunite Korean American families with family members in North Korea. There are thousands of Korean Americans who were separated from their families in North Korea by the Korean War. These Americans have lived without knowing whether their spouses, children, or grandchildren are still alive. While there have been over 21 opportunities for divided families to have reunions between Seoul and DPRK, none of these reunions have included Korean Americans. While Seoul, as well as other international organizations, has previously committed to helping facilitate the inclusion of Korean Americans in these reunions, time is running out as these family members age into their 80s and 90s. Has Secretary Blinken had the opportunity to raise the issue of family reunions with the Yoon government?

Answer:

The difficulty Korean-Americans face reuniting with relatives in the DPRK is a matter of great concern. Over the past year, senior Department officials have discussed prospects for family reunions on several occasions with ROK counterparts, highlighting the difficulties facing Korean-Americans and asking ROK officials to advocate for their inclusion should inter-Korean

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-12-

family reunions resume. Unfortunately, due to the DPRK's ongoing COVID-19 border restrictions and refusal to engage diplomatically, no family reunions have taken place in recent years. We will continue to engage ROK officials on the issue and seek opportunities for Korean-Americans to reunite with their family members.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-13-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Grace Meng #8
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Will the Administration commit to discussing the issue of family reunions with the Yoon government during President Yoon's visit to Washington next month?

Answer:

The issue of family reunions for Korean-Americans with relatives in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remains a priority for the Administration. The Department of State will continue to seek appropriate opportunities to raise the issue at senior levels with Republic of Korea officials, in order to assess prospects for the resumption of family reunions and advocate for the inclusion of Korean-Americans in any reunions that take place.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Norma Torres #1
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

I am deeply concerned about democratic backsliding and blatant disregard for the rule of law in the Northern Triangle. As an appropriator, we must ensure our U.S. taxpayer money helps people and does not go against our policy objectives. We cannot directly or indirectly prop up would-be dictators and allow these loans to support their attacks on democracy. As you know, trends in the region continue to deteriorate, especially in Guatemala with elections this year as well as in El Salvador with elections next year. Key electoral benchmarks in Guatemala include closing of electoral campaign and prohibition on campaign material (June 23), election day (June 25), hearing on challenge to election results (June 25-30), and possible run-off elections (August 20). What is your strategy for sanctions use in the Northern Triangle?

Answer:

Sanctions are a key tool to advance the Biden-Harris Administration's foreign policy objectives to combat corruption, one of the root causes of irregular migration, and to dissuade actors from undermining democratic institutions in Central America. Financial sanctions and visa restrictions also serve as powerful tools to improve transparency and promote accountability for former and current public officials or private actors who knowingly

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-2-

engage in acts that undermine democratic processes and to protect the United States from their corrupt actions. We will continue to partner with officials who combat corruption and strengthen democratic governance, advancing U.S. national security priorities.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-3-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Norma Torres #2
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Do you work to link sanctions, threat of sanctions, visa bans, and sanctions relief to key benchmarks in Guatemala's upcoming electoral cycle, with the goal of increasing pressure for minimum standards of transparency, inclusivity, freedom of expression, and non-violence?

Answer:

The Department encourages free, fair, inclusive, and peaceful elections in Guatemala. The Department uses all diplomatic tools available, including those granted by Congress, including sanctions, visa restrictions, and other appropriate authorities to promote accountability for persons working to undermine democracy and the rule of law in Guatemala.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-4-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Norma Torres #3
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Will you do so in the future?

Answer:

The Department will continue to make every effort to utilize our diplomatic tools and the various authorities granted by Congress to the Department and other agencies to confront challenges to Guatemalans' full exercise of democratic rights, and to promote accountability for all persons found to have undermined democracy and the rule of law in Guatemala.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-5-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Norma Torres #4
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

The Trump administration linked threat of sanctions, imposition of sanctions and visa bans, and sanctions relief to key electoral benchmarks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during that country's 2018 electoral cycle. Although the electoral cycle was not perfect, civil society observers assess that strategic imposition of sanctions helped to reduce state-led violence against civil society actors, protestors, and voters, facilitated a peaceful transfer of power for the first time in DRC's history, and created space for further reforms in the areas of electoral and fiscal transparency in the post-electoral period. What lessons learned in this scenario can you apply to the Northern Triangle?

Answer:

We continue to actively engage with the Government of Guatemala on the upcoming elections and urge the government to hold free, fair, inclusive, and peaceful elections. While we recognize that significant differences exist between the DRC and the countries in Northern Central America, including Guatemala, we leverage global lessons learned to strategically target our diplomatic tools and authorities to strengthen democratic processes. The

UNCLASSIFIED

256

UNCLASSIFIED
-6-

Department will continue to promote accountability for persons who
undermine democracy and the rule of law in Northern Central America.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-7-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Norma Torres #5
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

As you know, I have been increasingly concerned with developments in the Northern Triangle, such as the detainment in July of last year of the award-winning Guatemalan journalist José Rubén Zamora, founder and president of the newspaper *El Periódico*. To what extent is the State Department involved in protecting the free press and justice operatives in the Northern Triangle?

Answer:

We work with likeminded diplomatic and NGO partners to continually express our growing concerns. Our public statements, annual Human Rights Report, and private conversations decry the unjust prosecution and harassment of anti-corruption justice sector actors and members of the press in Northern Central America. We support justice sector actors and independent media of Northern Central America. We regularly attend case hearings, including for Mr. José Rubén Zamora, and raise our concerns for due process and human rights to the highest levels of the Guatemalan government.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
-8-

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Norma Torres #6
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023**

Question:

Will you or your representative seek to visit Zamora in prison?

Answer:

U.S. diplomats will continue to regularly attend Mr. José Rubén Zamora's court hearings. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) remains fully involved in his case and visits him directly. We have requested permission to visit Mr. Zamora, but Guatemala has not yet approved. We coordinate closely with OHCHR to monitor Mr. Zamora's prison conditions and treatment. His formal trial is scheduled to begin May 2. We will continue to engage with Guatemalan authorities on Mr. Zamora's treatment and right to due process.

UNCLASSIFIED

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2023.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY INTERNATIONAL
PROGRAMS**

WITNESS

HON. JANET YELLEN, SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DIAZ-BALART

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs will come to order.

Madam Secretary, let me first welcome you back to the House Appropriations Committee. I know that you were here last week, as a matter of fact, before the Financial Services Subcommittee, and we greatly appreciate your time with us. More importantly, we greatly appreciate your willingness to serve this amazing country of ours. So thank you for your service. We look forward to your testimony on fiscal year 2024 budget requests for the Department of Treasury's international programs.

Your department is seeking more than \$4 billion in the coming fiscal year for these programs. This is, to put it lightly, a substantial increase, 71 percent more than fiscal year 2023 enacted level. Now, key elements of the request would go towards the multilateral development banks, debt relief, and Treasury's Office of Technical Assistance. In addition, the request this year includes new contributions to several multilateral trust funds, a proposed capital increase for the private sector arm of the Inter-American Development Bank, as well as a new and really kind of loosely defined \$50 million fund for emerging priorities.

There are also several proposals relating to the International Monetary Fund that, like many of the new requests, would require action or review by the authorizing committees.

Finally, you are requesting a really dramatic 416 percent increase in climate funding over the fiscal year 2023. I think that merits repeating. A 416 percent increase in climate funding over the last year.

Madam Secretary, can you tell us specifically how much of this funding will actually—be interesting to know if that level of investment or any level of investment—how much will that change the temperature, slow the increase of the temperature, and by when?

As you know, China accounts for almost a third of all global emissions. That is more than the United States and Europe and Japan combined. And I, frankly, can't imagine how this extraordinary level of spending can be justified, particularly when China is rapidly expanding use of coal, and it continues to stand as the world's largest polluter. I know that people say, "Well, but we got to do our part." Yes, only if in fact it is going to yield results.

Now, in a related note, I have heard that the Department has been working towards a package of so-called reforms at the World Bank, apparently aimed in part to radically shift its mission and model to focus even more on climate change. At a time when the world is facing increased geopolitical instability and related shocks to the global economy, it is hard to see how this proposal aligns the bank with U.S. economic and security priorities. Moreover, I am taken aback and shocked by the administration's objections to natural gas projects.

You know, everybody knows that the United States has led the world in reducing emissions precisely because of our use of natural gas. And blocking resources for natural gas projects at the international financial institutions is beyond shortsighted. It is really, a real, just wrapped in a bow gift to China, and prevents us from achieving the very objectives that the administration claims to be pursuing when it comes to climate. You cannot measurably reduce emissions unless we embrace natural gas. What is the reason, the main factor that the U.S. emissions were down so drastically? That was it.

Madam Secretary, last week, Secretary Blinken testified before the subcommittee on the State Department's budget request. I reminded him that the increases requested by the Biden administration for the international affairs budget have been rejected even by the President's own party, year after year, and that again goes for Treasury's international programs as well.

I am concerned that such an unrealistic funding proposal that was put forward by the Department of State, but also now, it hurts the reputation of the United States abroad by setting really unrealistic, clearly unrealistic expectations, because these increases are simply never going to happen, and everybody knows that. It hasn't happened in the two previous fiscal years, and it is clearly not going to happen this year.

Madam Secretary, I hope that you will narrow the focus a bit and identify your top priorities for us today so we can take that under consideration for our fiscal 2024 appropriations bill. You have a great understanding of the fiscal constraints that we are facing, so your perspective on what is most important for United States national security within your request would really be welcome, as I have told you before.

Madam Secretary, I know your schedule is absolutely crazy and demanding these days, so I want to make sure that I reiterate how grateful I am for your time, and as I said before, for your service.

Now, unfortunately, our ranking member is not able to be here, and she would have done anything to get here. But I am just grateful and honored to yield to Ms. Meng for any opening remarks that she might have.

You are recognized.

OPENING STATEMENT OF MS. MENG

Ms. MENG. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

And good morning, Secretary Yellen. Thank you so much for your service and for coming before our subcommittee today to testify regarding the Treasury Department's fiscal year 2024 budget request for international programs.

I should start by recognizing the current banking and inflation challenges that our Nation is currently facing, but we are not alone. The world is continuing to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, and many nations are feeling the repercussions of Russia's war on Ukraine.

According to the World Bank, the pandemic caused global poverty to rise for the first time in over 20 years. In many countries, gains in education, health, nutrition, and gender equality have reversed, leaving the poor and disadvantaged further behind. These problems affect countries differently, but the pain they cause is shared.

This reinforces the need for a strong U.S.-led international finance system that can take decisive action to provide financing for quality infrastructure investment, climate adaptation and resilience, energy innovation and diversification, and public health.

Treasury has a unique role to play in advancing U.S. leadership to tackle shared challenges. Our contributions to the IMF, World Bank, regional development banks, and multilateral funds are part of our commitment to support global partnerships to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth, reduce poverty, and provide critical support to countries recovering from disaster and conflict. Our commitment to resolve some of the world's most challenging problems cannot be accomplished alone.

Secretary Yellen, I hope you will discuss the consequences of not being able to channel our special drawing rights into productive avenues this morning and address some of the concerns of my colleagues. Getting increased resources to low income and heavily indebted countries is necessary to aid in their recovery from the multiple shocks of the recent years and, ultimately, will support their long-term stability.

The need is significant and a lack of U.S. leadership opens the door for maligned actors who seek to entice governments to accept deals that plunge their countries further into debt and further into poverty. Like appropriations bills, the President's budget is a statement of values. Treasury's fiscal year 2024 request makes clear that significant increases are needed to improve climate resilience and drive innovation and diversification in the energy sector. By working in partnership with the multilateral development banks, we can leverage every U.S. dollar to go further.

U.S. contributions to these programs help to safeguard and improve the well-being of the U.S. This year's budget request addresses the looming problem of unmet commitments to international financial institutions, and I appreciate the administration's recognition that this is a key priority. We cannot be viewed as a credible partner while shirking our financial responsibilities.

Secretary Yellen, the Treasury Department's international programs are important tools that complement the activities of the State Department and USAID. As such, it is important that we use our influence and leadership to build partnerships and coalitions that collectively seek effective, long-lasting solutions, which is why I am concerned about the cuts being considered by the new House Republican majority for fiscal year 2024. Such cuts would cripple U.S. efforts to invest in the sustainable development goals, the framework agreed by every country to tackle shared challenges like

gender inequality, extreme hunger and poverty, and threats to public health.

We have many issues to discuss today. I look forward to your engagement with our subcommittee.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Congresswoman.

Madam Secretary, your full written statement will be placed in the record. Please feel free to summarize your testimony. And again, it is a privilege to have you here.

You are recognized, Madam Secretary.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SECRETARY YELLEN

Secretary YELLEN. Chairman Diaz-Balart and Congresswoman Meng, thank you for inviting me to join you today. And I would also like to thank you for your leadership in support of the Treasury Department's international programs.

Over the past 2 years, the world has faced serious global challenges. Thanks to the support you have provided, Treasury has strengthened U.S. leadership of the global economic system and advanced our national interests. We have led the world in our efforts to combat the global pandemic and prepare for future ones. We have made critical investments to build a more resilient food security ecosystem and mobilized the world to combat and adapt to a changing climate. And there is perhaps no place where our impact is felt more acutely than in Kyiv.

In my trip to Ukraine last month, I heard personally about how our coalition's work has enabled Ukraine to defend itself against a brutal and illegal assault by Russia. We take these actions, not out of charity, but because they are in our economic and national security interests. As I have said before, in today's world, no country alone can suitably provide a strong and sustainable economy for its people. That is why our administration is restoring and strengthening America's standing in the world.

The President's fiscal year 2024 budget advances our Nation's international priorities. Let me speak to the two pillars of our request.

First, we request \$2.3 billion for the multilateral development banks. These banks promote resilient and inclusive economic growth across the world. They also support countries recovering from disaster and conflict.

Importantly, these banks offer nations a sustainable, high-quality alternative to nontransparent sources of borrowing. Over the past 3 years, for example, the World Bank has provided 48 million people with access to clean water, and it has connected over 500 million people with essential health and nutrition services. The development banks have also been on the front lines of the response to two major challenges we have faced: COVID and Russia's war against Ukraine.

Over the next few months, you will see the World Bank undergo an important transition. We expect that Ajay Banga, President Biden's nominee, will be elected president of the World Bank. He will be charged with accelerating our progress to evolve the institution to better address 21st century challenges. This evolution will help the bank deliver on vital poverty alleviation and development

goals. Our budget request enhances U.S. leadership of the World Bank at this critical juncture.

Beyond the World Bank, the President's budget also supports other development banks that provide critical assistance to highly vulnerable low income and middle income countries.

The second pillar of our request is for specific multilateral funds that deliver on our Nation's core priorities. Food and energy security is a core focus. The President's budget requests \$122 million for food security programs. These initiatives not only mitigate hunger around the world, they also help grow the global supply of food that Americans depend on. As an example, since 2010, the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program has pooled more than \$2 billion to improve food and nutrition security for millions of people.

The budget also requests about \$1.4 billion to promote energy security and resilience. It funds programs like the Clean Technology Fund, which advances large-scale transformational clean technology projects in major emerging economies. The budget also requests \$800 million from Treasury for the Green Climate Fund, in addition to the same amount from the Department of State.

We deploy our public funds effectively. As an example, we mobilize an average of \$3.40 in private cofinance for every dollar invested by the Clean Technology Fund Program. We also request funding for our debt relief and restructuring efforts. This comes at a moment when about half of all low-income countries are in or near debt distress. We are asking for \$52 million for multilateral debt initiatives, which will help us avoid delays in urgently needed debt treatments.

We are also requesting \$45 million for Treasury's Office of Technical Assistance, which helps low-income countries responsibly manage their government finances.

Thank you again for your support of Treasury's international programs and for your partnership in strengthening U.S. leadership in the world. And I am happy to take your questions.

[The information follows:]

Statement by

Janet L. Yellen

Secretary

United States Department of the Treasury

before the

Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Committee on Appropriations

U.S. House of Representatives

March 29, 2023

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Thank you again for your support of Treasury's international programs, and for your partnership in strengthening U.S. leadership in the world. I'm happy to take your questions.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you very much, Madam Secretary.

I will call on members based on seniority of those present when the hearing was called to order, alternating between each side. We expect to have, hopefully, two rounds of questioning. Again, we thank the Secretary for being here.

Madam Secretary, before I actually go to my questions, I want to briefly discuss something you and I had talked about. I believe sanctions are critical to foreign policy. It is a tool to advance our national security interests.

I am hoping that you will work with me to bring more transparency to enforcement. I think it would be helpful if the Office of Foreign Assets Control would provide Congress with the information on enforcement actions on a regular basis. And I would hope that we could work together—you will work with me on trying to do that just to get increased transparency, if that is all right. And we will continue to follow—

Secretary YELLEN. Yes. We would be glad to do that, and share your priority on enforcement.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you so much, Madam Secretary.

Madam Secretary, as you know, Treasury has imposed strict new guidance on U.S. policy towards energy financing at the multilateral development bank, and in practice, this policy amounts to really kind of a blanket ban on fossil fuel financing, which I think will prove highly counterproductive to our national security interests.

In our hemisphere, for example, Guyana sits on substantial oil and gas deposits which, if sustainably developed, could lower energy costs, support private investment and dramatically improve the lives of its citizens. Yet I am aware of a recent port and logistics project that did not receive financing from the Inter-American Development Bank precisely because of the administration's policy.

Doesn't this just open up the door for China, for example, or other bad apples, bad actors to just help fill that financing gap that Guyana desperately needs?

Secretary YELLEN. So the policy approach that we have taken is motivated by the fact that the funds available to the multilateral development banks are very limited. Market financing is also available to countries, and they need to rely on that along with these limited MDB resources. And so we have felt that it is important and appropriate to prioritize use of these very limited MDB funds for renewables, investments in renewables.

Of course, we recognize that we are undergoing a transition, that natural gas is an important part of it, and that there will be investments in natural gas, but there are market borrowing opportunities available to countries, and we have prioritized that. But I would say, our policy is flexible, and it recognizes, especially for the lowest income countries, that if renewables are for one reason or another not a viable option, that we can be supportive of investments in natural gas.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I appreciate that. But, for example, in the case of Guyana and others gas rich—oil and gas rich developing countries, I am not sure how they will be able to achieve their development goals without having the financing to responsibly exploit those fossil fuels. And the fact that we don't do it doesn't mean that

it won't happen; it is just that it is, frankly, an outright invitation to China.

Not to mention, again, talking about national security, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted Europe's—not only Europe, the world's continued dependence, now, in the past, and for the foreseeable future on natural gas and other fossil fuels.

I think that the shift in global supply chains away from Russian gas and towards U.S. domestic energy and other suppliers is a great opportunity that we are totally, totally missing. I think we are just basically inviting, not only Russia, but China in an area that we should be leading on.

Madam Secretary, on another note, what is Treasury's stance towards the financing of nuclear power by the multilateral development banks? Is there a policy there?

Secretary YELLEN. President Biden believes that nuclear power can play an important role in addressing energy security in climate change, but it is an extremely contentious matter within the development banks. And so it is very unlikely that that will be a source of funding.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. But the administration doesn't have an objection to it. Is that what I am hearing?

Secretary YELLEN. The administration doesn't object to use of nuclear energy.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

Congresswoman Meng, you are recognized.

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Secretary, I recognize that the budget requests for international programs allow Treasury to expand its efforts to restore economic growth, reduce poverty, promote environmental sustainability and resilience, invest in quality infrastructure, reduce hunger, and create quality jobs at home and abroad. Yet there is a proposal calling for fiscal year 2024 appropriations bills to return to fiscal year 2022 levels.

Madam Secretary, you mentioned, for example, the issues with limits of MDB funds. What would be the impact of such cuts to these programs? How would greater arrears and less participation by the U.S. in, for example, the multilateral development banks, affect our influence within these organizations?

And I am also particularly interested in your assessment of what happens if the U.S. does cede a leadership role in these organizations which could create opportunity for other countries, possibly bad actors, to look elsewhere for much needed financing?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, I am very concerned with the proposal to cut back funding to 2022 levels. Such drastic cuts in Treasury's international programs would be truly detrimental to U.S. leadership and achievement of some of our most critical U.S. objectives. I think these programs and funding them adequately is really vital to maintaining a strong U.S.-led international financial system that really enables us to take decisive action on the global challenges that the world faces.

If our funding and participation were to decline, our arrears increase. They are already high, and if they were to further increase, this would really erode our influence within these institutions and greatly reduce our ability to shape the agenda of these institutions

in ways that advance U.S. interests. And this would simply open the door to greater influence from China and other countries that have different goals than ours for development in the international financial system.

Ms. MENG. Thank you. Do I have time for one more?

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Go ahead.

Ms. MENG. I wanted to ask about food security as well. Climate change is already impacting the lives of people all over the world. As is too often the case, those who have contributed the least to our changing climate are suffering the most from its effects. From floods in Pakistan to drought in East Africa and rising sea levels threatening the very existence of some Pacific Islands, poor rural people are taking the biggest hit. Not only will hunger and poverty increase, but so too will instability, migration, and conflict.

I applaud the focus of Treasury's budget request on building climate resilience and enhancing food and energy security. I wholeheartedly agree that U.S. contributions to agricultural funds, like IFAD, are necessary not only to promote global food security but also to sustain the supply of food and natural resources upon which Americans depend on.

Secretary Yellen, how do U.S. contributions to multilateral institutions like IFAD complement the U.S.' long history of bilateral development assistance programs to tackle global food insecurity and poverty?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, thank you for that question. Food security is really a critical priority of the Biden administration and of Treasury, and it has become more so in the aftermath of Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine that has raised food prices and fertilizer prices.

IFAD is an organization that operates in some of the most remote regions in the world that are underserved by other institutions that target the poorest, the most vulnerable, the most marginalized groups, including women, youth, and indigenous people. And they really contribute to our priorities by advancing inclusive growth, strengthening agricultural productivity and food security, and reducing poverty. They support millions of rural people to adapt and become more resilient to climate change.

And more broadly, I would say that IFAD is an organization that advances U.S. national security interests by contributing to greater social stability in poor, rural communities, including in very fragile states around the world.

Ms. MENG. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Congresswoman.

The gentleman from Utah, Mr. Stewart. By the way, what we always know about you is that you always finish before the rest of us. So I want to thank you for always being on target. You are recognized, sir.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you, Chairman.

Secretary, thank you for being here. Thank you for your many years of service, as we have already recognized. I don't suppose these hearings are your favorite thing to do?

Secretary YELLEN. I think it is an important responsibility to work with Congress on—

Mr. STEWART. It is. And I want you to know, I have some questions, I don't want to be in any way controversial with you or confrontational.

I would love to talk about the 416 percent increase in climate funding that the chairman talked to you about. I would love to talk to you about security of our banking system and how inflation has, I think, created a systemic problem there that we are going to have to deal with.

I have a degree in economics. I don't consider myself an economist, certainly not such as you. But I understand economics and banking law enough to know that, when banks hold hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars in bonds in treasuries that are worthless now than they were than they purchased them, that is a problem. And we are going to have to, I think, find a way to deal with that, which I am going to get to in just a minute.

As well as has been talked about here, I would love to talk about how we can use our financial and our banking system to support U.S. policy around the world. I don't have time for those things.

Let me talk to you about the two things that I think are important to me. Number one—and I want to do this one briefly, and I don't mean to beat this dead horse, but a couple years ago, you appeared before us and told us that inflation is transitory. I know that you—I don't know if you regret saying that, and it is what your expectation was at the time. But it certainly—you know, as we know, it has turned out not to be the case.

And I would just like to make this point: Who does inflation hurt the most, the poorest among us or the wealthiest?

Secretary YELLEN. It hurts the poorest among us the most.

Mr. STEWART. Absolutely. And I would love to go to a group of people who set policy on inflation, and ask them, do you know what the price of eggs is this week, or do you know what the price of gas is? Because I think many of them have no idea. Many of them don't do their own shopping. They don't think about that day to day because they are wealthy. They come from privileged backgrounds. But it hurts the poorest among us. And if we don't get better at this, it will continue to hurt the poorest among us.

And I just want to make that comment. I would allow you to respond if you want to briefly, but there is one more thing I would like to talk about.

Secretary YELLEN. Food prices have gone up enormously, and that is clearly an enormous strain on household budgets, especially for low-income people. This is—President Biden's top priority is to bring inflation down, and we recognize the impact. It is the adverse impact that it is having on American households.

Mr. STEWART. I am sure you do. And again, it is for the poorest. It is for the working Americans. And some people say supply chain. I think that is nonsense. We have worked through most of our supply chain issues. Not all of them, but most of them. It is because of government spending, as we add more and more fuel to that fire.

But I need to come to this other topic, if I could. I also sit on the House Weaponization Select Subcommittee. Couple weeks ago, we had a journalist before us, Matt Taibbi, who, by the way, is not a conservative. He is an independent journalist but is known to be progressive, or to the left, not to the right. And during the few

hours that he is appearing before Congress, an IRS agent appears at his home and leaves him a note.

Are you familiar with this? Are you aware of this?

Secretary YELLEN. No, I am not.

Mr. STEWART. Okay. Well, it has been well reported, and I could tell you more details. But here he is, a journalist is appearing before Congress to talk about the weaponization of the Federal Government, and during that time, an IRS agent goes to the home. I have got to tell you, I have never heard of an IRS agent making an appearance at someone's home, short of them being under investigation for fraud or to want to be questioned for fraud.

I would ask—I mean, you are an economist. You are a mathematician. What are the chances of that being just luck, that the IRS appeared at someone's home while he is testifying about weaponization of the Federal Government before Congress? Because I think it is minuscule. I think it is one in a million or less.

And you weren't aware of that, but now I have told you about it. I need to ask you, with direct oversight of the IRS, does that bother you?

Secretary YELLEN. It is certainly something that I would want to look into. I am not aware that IRS agents do that except, as you said, in cases where there is an investigation—

Mr. STEWART. That is exactly right.

Secretary YELLEN [continuing]. For law breaking that is underway.

Mr. STEWART. It seems remarkable that this was a coincidence. It seems nearly impossible. And one comment, if I could. I want to be respectful of our time.

The U.S. Government collects taxes almost entirely because people are willing to volunteer to be in compliance. That only works if they trust the IRS and the tax policy and tax engagement. And when we hear things like this, it breaks that trust.

And we have sent a letter to you asking for information regarding this communication, and I would ask if you would commit that you will provide that information, because it is deeply troubling for many of us.

Secretary YELLEN. I will certainly look into it as you requested. Mr. STEWART. Thank you. And we look forward to that response. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Torres, you are recognized.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, Secretary Yellen, for being here with us.

I am deeply concerned about democratic backsliding and the blatant disregard for the rule of law in the Northern Triangle, a region where I have spent the last 6 years working to try to reduce the number of asylum seekers that we have at our southern border. Last year, we saw civil society actors, journalists, independent prosecutors, and judges under attack, both in El Salvador and Guatemala, in an explosion of corruption where the wealthy few can act with impunity against the people of the region. We can't trust these governments to administer aid to fight corruption and uphold the rule of law when they are doing everything in their power to work against those issues.

As an appropriator, I feel strongly that we must ensure our U.S.—hard-earned U.S. taxpayers’ dollars—are spent and go to help the people that we intend to help, not these wannabe dictators. The Treasury Department plays a key role in ensuring that our support does not enable these corrupt actors and hopefully encourage behavior modification.

Secretary Yellen, can you give an update on how the Treasury is coordinating with the Department of State to combat corruption in the Northern Triangle? And just to go back, last year, I made sure that we increased your budget for the purpose of hiring more agents to ensure that we apply, every tool in the box to deal with this corruption.

Secretary YELLEN. Yes. Well, we work very closely with the State Department and other colleagues in government and embassies in the region on this issue. I think, as you know, the Biden-Harris administration is committed to helping Northern Triangle countries uphold the rule of law, combat corruption, and improve economic and security conditions there.

One way that Vice President Harris has been leading this effort is by promoting investment in the private sector, the object of which would be to promote economic development in the region and to comment—to really combat corruption and some of the root causes of migration that we are seeing from the region. And I think that effort has succeeded. I believe the Vice President announced in February a \$4.2 billion effort along these lines.

And Treasury, we use our sanctions authorities to target corruption and human rights abuse in Guatemala and the Northern Triangle. Our Office of Foreign Assets Control, OFAC, has imposed sanctions on individuals and entities for their involvement in public corruption, in the Guatemalan mining sector. OFAC has also designated individuals in the Guatemalan Government for their involvement in public corruption. And there have been other earlier sanctions actions that are targeting corruption in the Northern Triangle.

Mrs. TORRES. Sanctions, are something that I have been encouraging your office to increase in the region. I can tell you that I am very opposed to sending any additional aid to the region. I see no purpose in sending money where the money isn’t spent how we intend it to be spent.

We recently saw in El Salvador, they just announced that they were cutting taxes, for every sector in the country and for the very wealthy. The U.S. taxpayer cannot be on the hook saving lives at our southern border of these asylum seekers if these countries, by refusing to help them and refusing to allow the U.S. to help them in their own countries, are creating more problems for us.

I look forward to continuing to work with you and your office to ensure that we uplift the rule of law in the Western Hemisphere.

And I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

Mr. Carl, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. CARL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am sticking with you. I am the last one here for the moment.

Secretary Yellen, it is good to see you again. I think we spent a little bit of time together last week.

Secretary YELLEN. Yes, we did.

Mr. CARL. I would like to talk to you about the money that we are sending to Ukraine through the World Bank management trust fund. I am worried about the oversight of those tax dollars, and I am receiving numerous phone calls from constituents in my district. And I would like to be very clear, I think we have got to do what we can do to push back on Putin and his war that he has created over there. But at the same time, we have to be responsible for the tax dollars that we are sending over there.

So with that said, Madam Secretary, could you describe for the committee the accounting and transparent measures required by the bank when they distribute these tax dollars that we are sending over?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, I want to say at the outset, I agree completely with you that we need to be scrupulous in our attention to the way in which money that we are sending to Ukraine is being used. And one reason that we are channelling this funding, the economic funding through the World Bank, is because they have been able to set up a very careful mechanism to make sure that the funds are used exactly as intended. And they audit and ensure they reimburse expenditures only after making sure that the funds have been used for the purposes that we intend, and there are outside groups that are also hired to conduct audits.

More broadly, we have addressed, and some of the international institutions involved in Ukraine have been very clear that addressing corruption more broadly—and Ukraine does have a history of corruption—needs to be broadly a critical priority for the United States and other donors to feel comfortable supporting Ukraine.

And I would say, I was recently in Kyiv. I met with President Zelenskyy and other members of his administration, and can assure you that they are very focused on this problem and understand how important it is that they be very careful stewards of these funds.

Mr. CARL. So I have been a critic of our allies in Europe. I feel like they don't put enough money up, you know, compared to what their risks are over there. And what you have explained to me is basically the gatekeepers.

Who is checking up—let me see if I can reword this right. What are we doing to make sure that the bank is following those requirements? How are we checking the gatekeepers to make sure they are doing the job properly?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, as I indicated, the World Bank has an audit and accountability mechanism that they have established. I think it is called the PEACE mechanism. And we do have independent outside auditors who are doing independent checks.

Mr. CARL. So we have people that are checking the bank system, correct?

Secretary YELLEN. I am not sure exactly what the reporting mechanism is on it, but we are certainly actively involved in the governance of the World Bank.

Mr. CARL. And I think that is where I am getting so many phone calls from my constituents, because we are not trusting the World Bank, that we need to know that our tax money is being used properly when it goes into that bank. And the only way we can know

that is to check it ourself, to have some type of measure that we can follow through.

Secretary YELLEN. Well, we have a governance mechanism for the World Bank. We have a board of directors with the largest shareholder and our Treasury very carefully monitors all that goes on in the World Bank.

Mr. CARL. Let me ask a simpler question. Have we, the U.S. Government, U.S. taxpayers, have we had anyone there onsite checking for the use of this money for us? Do we have people onsite that are checking the World Bank's use of this money?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, we have allocated the money and are simply channelling it through the World Bank.

Mr. CARL. Well, I understand that. But we have to make sure they are using it right, because now you are requesting for more money, and I have to go back and answer to my voters and tell them, you know, that we—with a clear conscious, that we have used this money properly. And I am asking you if we have checked the bank. You are telling me the bank is checking themselves basically. But I want to know if we have checked the bank.

Have we had anybody there checking their records on how they are using it?

Secretary YELLEN. I will get back to you on exactly what our oversight is.

Mr. CARL. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, sir.

By the way, before I recognize the gentlewoman from Florida, I did run into a mutual friend of ours who said hi, but I will give you that message later. I just didn't want to forget.

You are recognized.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Secretary Yellen, for your great service to our country.

I just want to emphasize what you have already said, that the President's budget will enable the Treasury to drive a strong U.S.-led international finance system that can take decisive action in combatting many of the global threats that challenge our security, whether it is climate change, the food crisis, the energy security, poverty, economic shocks of COVID, and Russia's war on Ukraine. And I think it is important for people to understand the connection between what we do to try to reduce these threats and our life here at home.

So first question I want to ask you is: What happens when people are hungry? How does that affect our security?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, people will do everything that they can in order to put food on the table, and they can respond in a variety of different ways. Of course, it is miserable and more people die in countries where there is deep food insecurity. But they also migrate, try to leave the country and find better lives for their families, which is one reason that we are experiencing so much immigration into the United States.

Hunger and poverty often lead to conflict and social instability in the countries where this is prevalent. And this has a variety of consequences that lead to social instability and migration as well and all over the world.

Ms. FRANKEL. You talked about helping small countries manage their finances. Why is that important to us?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, countries really need to be able to promote better lives for their populations. And in order to do that, they need to be able to invest in education, in health systems, in agriculture, so that they can reduce food insecurity, to build infrastructure, to be able to borrow responsibly, to foster improved living standards and development. And we provide, both through the multilateral development banks and other institutions, but also through our own technical assistance that we have asked for funding to increase.

We help countries put in place public finance systems that are sound, responsible, help them manage their debt, help them understand how to manage macroeconomic policy to hold inflation down, and create an environment in which private enterprise can thrive. And we and other investors around the world can come in and engage in investments that will foster development.

Ms. FRANKEL. You mentioned education. I think as a big concern, especially with the conflicts we have seen around the world of generations just losing education, I think there is an estimate of something like 244 million children and youth worldwide are out of school, just in 2021. I think we all just commonsense understand the consequences of when children don't go to school, because we know that when they do, their outcomes—they are healthier, more prosperous, their communities are safer, their communities are more prosperous.

Can you speak about the role that the multilateral development banks play to further U.S. foreign policy goals on global education?

Secretary YELLEN. The multilateral development banks play a really critical role in building human capital in developing countries. And as you mentioned, that is critical in the fight against poverty and inequality. The World Bank is one of the largest global funders of education. It works closely with other partners, like USAID, in other countries that engage in bilateral assistance. And this is really one of the most important investments in any country seeking to foster better lives for their citizens.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you.

And, Mr. Chair, if you would give our mutual friend my best. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I will. I am sure she will gladly hear that.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mr. LaTurner, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Madam Secretary. Thank you for being here today.

Roughly, 300 Americans will die just today of fentanyl overdoses. That is one death every 8.5 minutes. This deadly drug is killing more young adults than car crashes and suicides, as record amounts of fentanyl are being smuggled across our wide open border.

Over the past few years, my home State of Kansas has seen a 73 percent increase in fentanyl-related overdoses, one of the highest increases in the country.

While I believe solving this crisis must start and end by securing our southern border, your department also has a role to play. Just last month, your Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned several members of the Sinaloa cartel involved in the supply of precursor chemicals for fentanyl and methamphetamine production.

What additional efforts is your department undertaking to curtail the production and trade of fentanyl and other illicit drugs that are devastating so many of our communities? What support can Congress provide as well?

Secretary YELLEN. So I would certainly agree with you that fentanyl is a scourge, that it is essential that we address domestically and globally. Treasury Department has long understood that there is a huge threat from drug trafficking that is linked to money laundering. And we have been involved in really a multipronged strategy to try to address these threats.

Treasury is involved in mapping and understanding the financial networks of these transnational criminal organizations, putting in place sanctions that mean that financial institutions will report and address activity that enables the trafficking of drugs. We work with international partners to put in place effective anti-money laundering and CFT procedures.

And as you mentioned, we are sanctioning—looking to sanction suppliers of precursor chemicals and machinery that cartels use to produce synthetic opioids for the U.S. market. You mentioned the steps we had taken in Mexico. So those are some of the things that we are doing.

Mr. LATURNER. One of the most pressing threats facing our Nation today is the growing influence of the Chinese Communist Party and their unprecedented governance model of digital totalitarianism. American strength in leadership on the global stage is vital if we are to ensure the maintenance of the rules-based international order we all may have been taking for granted. China is often willing to provide funding for nations abroad without preconditions or oversight, simply to get them on the hook.

Are you concerned that China is beginning to catch up with the U.S. in influence among some international institutions?

Secretary YELLEN. Let me say I am very, very concerned about some of the activities that China engages in globally investing in countries in ways that leave them trapped in debt and don't promote economic development. We are working very hard to counter that influence in all of the international institutions that we participate in.

And I would say that our—one reason our support of the multilateral development banks, including the World Bank, is so important is because we promote, through those banks, quality infrastructure investment that is responsible and meets high-quality standards. And it counters when that funding is unavailable and China has a better opportunity to come in and offer—

Mr. LATURNER. I have one last—I would like to continue that conversation offline.

Secretary YELLEN. Sure.

Mr. LATURNER. Your department has followed in the footsteps of the previous administration in regards to sanctions in Nicaragua for those individuals, including President Ortega, who have been

perpetrating human rights abuses for years now, including your department sanctioning the Nicaraguan mining authority this past October.

However, just last month, Ortega sentenced Bishop Rolando Alvarez of the Diocese of Matagalpa to 26 years in prison for speaking out against these authoritarian excesses. At the same time, Nicaraguan exports to our shores have grown from \$3.2 billion in 2017 to \$5.7 billion last year, largely thanks to preferential trade status under CAFTA and loans from multilaterals, like IMF, without strong U.S. objection.

Why aren't we more effectively closing off the lanes to help Ortega? And will you commit to pursuing additional measures to ensure that we see justice in Nicaragua?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, we certainly have put sanctions in place, and agree that it is necessary to counter. I was—

Mr. LATURNER. Do you think more needs to be done?

Secretary YELLEN. Yes. I mean, I think it is a significant problem. And last year, President Biden expanded Treasury's authority to hold the regime response—to hold the regime that is accountable for these abuses responsible. And we look to use our sanctions authority to promote these goals certainly.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you.

Sorry for going over, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Important questions. Thank you, sir.

Madam Secretary, let me turn again to climate finance. As I noted in my opening statement, this request represents more than a 400 percent increase over the enacted levels. And just so the members understand, these requests are all for contribution to so-called Financial Intermediary Funds, most of which are administered by the World Bank.

Madam Secretary, here is what I don't see. I mean, do those various climate funds allocate funding according to shared criteria for measuring results and impact, including with respect to impacts on global temperatures?

Now I ask this question because a recent study concluded that there are, quote, "significant challenges at the systemic level," end of quote, for our ability to measure performance across those funds. And similarly, the report assessed that among these funds—I am reading from this report—there is no uniform reporting standard based on a common set of core impact indicators, making it impossible, it says, to assess value for money across these entities.

And so, to me, isn't it a huge problem if we can't determine whether these funds are actually being deployed efficiently, or if—we can't, frankly, figure out what the concrete results are. Isn't that a bit of a problem when you are looking at American taxpayer money?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, of course, it is critical that these funds be used efficiently. And in each of these institutions, there are established goals and standards in approving individual projects, but sometimes particular projects have multiple goals, including more resilient energy systems, adaptation to the impacts of climate change. So I wouldn't want to try to reduce this to one single metric that we apply across the board.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. No, and I get that. But, again, I think it is worrisome when, according to the report and what I have seen, there is no real way to assess value for money. And that is something that worries me, and it is something that I will continue to be emphasizing.

I also understand that more than three-quarters of climate financial intermediary funding goes to the public sector. The Peterson Institute for International Economics recently warned that, quote, There is a significant risk that the infrastructure projects where much of this climate financing will need to be targeted will be undermined by corruption, from bribery and kickbacks to fraud and embezzlement, they say.

So given the multiplicity of implementing agencies across these climate funds, how is Treasury seeking to prioritize governance, accountability, and transparency with respect to, you know, the obviously present challenge of corruption?

Secretary YELLEN. So I agree with you that it is critical, the governance, that there be accountability in the use of funds. And that is a core part of our mission in the work that we do with each of the multilateral development banks and the funds that we participate in and contribute to.

I would say, beyond public funds, we also prioritize bringing in private capital. We know that we are not going to be able to successfully address climate change without mobilizing large amounts of private capital order of magnitudes larger than public funds. And so that is also an important priority in working with these institutions.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Madam Secretary, that is an area—because I just always find a hard time figuring out what our money is buying and what the results are of what that money is buying, but that is an issue that we will continue to talk about.

Very briefly, there is strong bipartisan support in Congress for our democratic friend and partner in Taiwan. Many of us support efforts to strengthen that partnership, including through expanding trade and investment frameworks.

Now, despite our partnership, Taiwanese and U.S. businesses are double-taxed due to the lack of a formal joint tax agreement. Madam Secretary, do you think it is time to address this gap in our trade policy by potentially beginning negotiations towards that end with Taiwan?

Secretary YELLEN. So I do recognize that this is a very significant problem, that we really need to explore ways to deal with what the private sector has repeatedly pointed out is an issue, and we will do that work with the State Department to see if we can find a way to address it.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I appreciate that, and I will follow up also to make sure that—just so we know where we stand and what we need to do, if anything, also on our level to kind of push that.

Ms. Meng, you are recognized.

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Secretary, would proposed cuts back to fiscal year 2022 levels create opportunities for countries to look towards bad actors like China to have more of a leadership role and to look at bad actors like China for financing?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, absolutely, because the multilateral development banks provide a high-quality alternative. And part of the reason that China has been so successful in investing all around the world is because of limitations on the resources of the United States and our partners in providing a workable alternative.

Ms. MENG. Thank you.

And back to the World Bank, last month, the World Bank released its proposed roadmap for reform. Among the proposed reforms is a call for a capital increase so that the bank can better meet global challenges, a major demand of the Biden administration. President David Malpass said last week that World Bank reforms will let the bank lend an additional \$40 billion over 10 years.

Secretary Yellen, the U.S. has been pushing for this capital increase to increase its lending capacity. Are we satisfied with this announcement? And are there other specific reforms that we have asked the World Bank to make?

Secretary YELLEN. So let me be clear, we are spearheading an effort to evolve the multilateral development banks, and starting with the World Bank, to better address global challenges like climate change, pandemics, and fragility and conflict. And there are many different aspects to this proposal, including a desire to boost the bank's financial capacity. We believe they can do that as a first step by stretching existing resources and pursuing innovative measures to further increase lending.

We have not asked for a capital increase. That is not something that we are proposing at the time. We do want to see better mobilization of private resources alongside World Bank investments as well, but we are not requesting a capital increase at this time.

Ms. MENG. Great. I am going to take advantage of the 2 remaining minutes.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Absolutely do.

Ms. MENG. I wanted to ask about supporting women and girls globally. I am glad to see that the MDB Working Group on Gender has held several meetings to examine the prevailing gender gaps impacting women and girls, globally. The MDBs have an important role to play in expanding women's access to the workforce and minimizing the impacts of economic crises on women and girls.

Secretary Yellen, how do U.S. contributions to the MDBs further the goal of the Biden administration to close the gender pay gap? And do you see opportunities to leverage U.S. contributions to the banks to improve women's access to employment, globally?

Secretary YELLEN. So we certainly think that advancing the rights and economic status of women all around the world is critical to promoting economic growth and fair outcomes, and this is something we promote in all the development banks that we participate in. We make sure that the projects try to reduce barriers to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women. We lead U.S. participation in the Women's Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative, which is a financial intermediary fund at the World Bank that is intended to provide finance networks and training for women-owned businesses. And we really recognize that this is a way to contribute very meaningfully to growth and reduce inequality.

Ms. MENG. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Congresswoman Meng.

Yes, sir, Mr. Carl.

Mr. CARL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I had no idea we were having second rounds of questions, so I have got about 40 questions here that I have written down on my own, but they are not near as organized as my staff.

Madam Secretary, I am not one to buy into the climate change scenario that is being played out. It is used like a sword when it comes in the room. It just starts chopping up everything around it, and I just don't buy into that. And I will tell you my little dumb country way I came up with that idea.

I can take you in Alabama, and I can take you 300 feet above sea level, and we can pick oyster shells out of the side of an embankment, oyster shells. So at one time that was an oyster bed which is in the bottom of the sea or bottom of the ocean.

I can take you the other direction, and 40 miles out in the Gulf, we can dive and go down and look at a petrified forest. This forest was one time dry land. So it is just the opposite of what we see today.

So climate change, in true definition to me, means that the climate does change. We go from 300-foot of oyster shells to 40 feet below sea level with trees. That is a change, and it is going to continue to change long past our lifetime.

So for us to use climate change for everything that we feel like needs to be addressed I think is very unfair to the taxpayers. I think it is unfair to the taxpayers to a point I think we are going to break this Nation if we keep using that as a reason.

This administration—and I do have a question on this. I am sorry. But this administration will—I have got a joke around the office. They will drag an engineer, an oyster shell, or a screaming seal puppy into the room to make their point so they can get their money. As a taxpayer, that offends me. I want to know the truth. I want to know exactly where this came from.

Can you provide to me or do you know any research on your own to justify this drastic climate change that we have to do today or the next 4 or 5 years this world is going to come to an end? Can you show me where you got that idea from?

Secretary YELLEN. There is just an enormous amount of research—

Mr. CARL. Where?

Secretary YELLEN [continued]. Summarized by the IPCC, which is a body that is convened by the United Nations, groups of scientists that have shown that climate change—

Mr. CARL. The United Nations makes a lot of money off the climate change scenario.

Secretary YELLEN. I am sorry. There is a strong scientific consensus and enormous body of research that shows that climate—

Mr. CARL. Yes, ma'am. But that is what I am saying. Climate change exists under the true definition, but the way it is being used now it is like a trojan horse. Everything you want to use it for to get into the conversation is climate change related.

California is a good example. You know, they have gone through droughts. They are using water to push the smelt back out at sea

when they should be using it on the farms, so on and so forth. Now they are covered with snow. So now all of the sudden it is climate change that has caused just the opposite.

Secretary YELLEN. We are seeing enormous increases in the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We have—

Mr. CARL. Where in America are we seeing that? Where in America are we seeing that?

Secretary YELLEN. It is a global phenomenon that is not just in the United States. And the increase that we are seeing in hurricanes and—

Mr. CARL. But, ma'am, hurricanes—the strongest hurricanes happened back in the 1800s. I am from a hurricane area. Trust me, that is what I am getting at exactly right there. Every time you want to make a point—anybody wants to make a point on climate change, they want to pull this sword out and start chopping everything up and start making up facts that are just not true. They are not true.

We will always have hurricanes. We have worse hurricanes now because of dollars and cents, because we build more on the beach, and they are going to be worse. They are going to affect more people and more damage just because of the pure population that is growing there.

So that is exactly what I am talking about, and it disturbs me when I see us spending all this money overseas—climate change. We have got to help climate change.

I went to Egypt, and you can't see your hand in front of you. I have been to a lot of these countries that it is so thick with smog you can't get in there. How about America?

Secretary YELLEN. Smog is something different. Our climate change, I believe, is an existential threat, and we will leave a world to our grandchildren and great-grandchildren that will become uninhabitable if we don't address climate change. We have let decades pass in which we have understood that this was a problem and not taken meaningful action, and it is essential to do that.

Mr. CARL. And my time is about up. Ma'am, I totally—I disagree with you for the simple fact we can't afford it.

Secretary YELLEN. I understand. We can afford it.

Mr. CARL. So when it is time to be—we cannot afford it the way it has been.

Secretary YELLEN. We can, and we can't afford not to fix it.

Mr. CARL. Mr. Chairman, I yield my time. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you. I think you bring up—so are you telling me that the climate changes, Mr. Carl? Is that what you are telling me, that climate changes?

Mr. CARL. Sure, it changes. If you can go from 300 feet oyster shells down to 40 foot below sea level with trees, of course, it changes.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I think—

Mr. CARL. That is the true definition.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And I think—

Mr. CARL. And the definition that is being used now is just—it chops everything up, and it makes it today, today, today. This world will be here long after we are gone.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Let me just reclaim my time.

I think the frustration is that there is the feeling by many people—we know the climate changes, but that the billions of dollars that we are spending will have zero to negligible affect on changing the temperature. And I think that is potentially the issue.

Having said that, it is always a privilege to recognize Mrs. Torres.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you.

And, once again, thank you, Secretary Yellen.

As a Californian, I can tell you that if we don't take control and do more to address the issue of climate change, we will continue to spend even more money at trying to harden our communities to be able to sustain it. We now have tornado warnings and tornadoes in the Inland Empire where I live, which is unheard of, where we have fires that have their own atmosphere, are where we have these atmospheric rivers that are flooding what was a community that had been in a nearly 10-year drought.

So thank you for your work, Madam Secretary. I cannot let you leave here today without expressing my sincere gratitude to your staff, the OFAC team, for its engagement with my office and their commitment to work with the State Department to increase the quantity and effectiveness of sanctions in the Northern Triangle.

Earlier this year, the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned an MS-13 gang leader based in Honduras and an MS-13 associate based in Nicaragua, who are both heavily involved in drug trafficking, in violence, murder, extortion, and money laundering. These are the types of sanctions that have an immediate impact in communities like mine, States like mine. And we have not even begun to talk about how sanctions—effective—sanctions have assisted us against Russia, even dealing with Venezuela and Iran.

The majority is asking for an across-the-board 30 percent cut to your budget. What kind of impact would this cut have on the great work that you are doing addressing the issues that we have with gang members and drug pushers?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, our Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, and particularly OFAC that imposes sanctions, their work with such cutback would be really threatened. They have imposed sanctions to address the issues you have mentioned that are beginning to be effective, and they enforce the sanctions and are constantly investigating ways to strengthen these sanctions.

This is the group that is responsible for putting in place the sanctions program that we have on Russia. And this would be threatening this work very, very greatly.

Mrs. TORRES. Is there anything else you would like the committee to know?

Secretary YELLEN. Well, thank you for that opportunity. I believe that the funds that we are requesting are critically important in allowing the United States to play a leadership role in the world to address global challenges like climate change that I believe threaten our very existence on this planet and to address global challenges affecting the world that will promote—the money will go to promote reduction in poverty.

We had made progress. And in recent years, the combination of the pandemic and Russia's brutal war against Ukraine have re-

versed the progress that we have made. These are critical funds to enable us to help countries develop, to address health challenges that threaten them and also threaten the global community. So I believe these funds are critically important for the United States to play the leadership role it should.

Mrs. TORRES. Once again, thank you for being here with us.

And I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you very much.

Madam Secretary, thank you again for appearing today before our subcommittee.

Before I close, I must implore the administration to please stop avoiding negotiations on the debt ceiling until the last minute. I think it is, really irresponsible for the President to not sit down with House Republicans, because everybody knows, that a straight lifting of the debt ceiling would never pass either the House or the Senate. It is important in a democratic process that we sit down and negotiate, and I think the sooner the better.

With that, members may submit additional questions for the record.

And, with that, Madam Secretary, thank you.

This concludes today's hearing. The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs stand adjourned.

Thank you so much.

[Questions and answers submitted for the record follow:]

**U.S. House of Representatives
 Committee on Appropriations
 Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
 "Fiscal Year 2024 Request For The Department Of The Treasury International Programs"**
March 29, 2023

Responses to Questions for the Record

Ranking Member Barbara Lee

Question 1: Madam Secretary, in 2021, you spoke to the value of an allocation of new IMF Special Drawing Rights to “enhance liquidity for low-income countries to facilitate their much-needed health and economic recovery efforts.” Many low-income countries are still struggling with the impact of COVID and the associated economic disruptions. The World Bank estimated in October 2022 that “the pandemic pushed about 70 million people into extreme poverty in 2020, the largest one-year increase since global poverty monitoring began in 1990. As a result, an estimated 719 million people subsisted on less than \$2.15 a day by the end of 2020.”

SDRs have the potential to create significant liquidity for job creation and poverty reduction in developing countries. Some Members of Congress have raised questions about how a new allocation of SDRs might also benefit China.

- **1a. What is the potential impact of a new allocation of SDRs for low-income countries, particularly on poverty and job creation?**

Answer: While the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and spillovers from Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine continue to impede economic development in low-income countries and exacerbate food insecurity, we do not consider another SDR allocation to be an appropriate solution to the current set of challenges. The current global environment calls for more targeted solutions, including IMF lending with policy conditionalities, progress on sovereign debt restructuring, and robust financial, policy, and technical support from the multilateral development banks. While a new SDR allocation could create some short-term policy space for some low-income countries, it could also enable the delay of needed adjustment, thereby preventing long-term growth that can best contribute to poverty reduction and job creation. Further, with the increase in interest rates, it is costlier for a low-income country to exchange its SDRs for hard currency than to borrow under a lending program from the IMF’s Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust.

- **1b. What potential impact would a new allocation of SDRs have on US export potential?**

Answer: During significant global downturns, when many countries around the world risk entering significant recessions and financial conditions tighten, the additional liquidity provided by an SDR allocation can help vulnerable economies, including by reducing the likelihood of a systemic global slowdown that would have spillovers on the U.S. economy and impact our exports. We are not at this point right now. The IMF projects that global growth will reach 2.8% in 2023, with growth for emerging markets and middle-income economies projected to reach 3.9% and growth for low-income

developing countries projected to reach 4.7%. Given current economic conditions, we do not see another SDR allocation to be the correct solution at this time.

- **1c. What impact would a new allocation of SDRs have on the finances of the People's Republic of China, within the context of the overall scale of the PRC's economy and government finances?**

Answer: A new allocation of SDRs would increase the amount of SDRs held by the People's Bank of China as part of its foreign exchange reserves. However, this increase would be small relative to the total amount of foreign exchange reserves held by the PBOC. Moreover, China would have an equivalent liability to the IMF equal to the amount of the SDR allocation to China. China received about \$41.4 billion worth of SDRs from the 2021 allocation, but it already held about \$3.3 trillion in reserves at the time, so the SDR allocation only increased its reserves by about one percent. As of end-March 2023, China held approximately \$2.5 billion more SDRs than it did after the 2021 allocation, meaning that it has not, on net, exchanged SDRs for usable currency.

- **1d. What has been the impact of the earlier SDR allocation (2021)?**

Answer: The 2021 SDR allocation played an important role in providing needed liquidity to enhance financial and economic stability in some key countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing countries to build a cushion ahead of other shocks such as the fallout of Russia's war in Ukraine. Those countries have generally used SDRs for three broad purposes: building their foreign reserves, budget financing, and payment of IMF obligations. Additional foreign reserves provided an important buffer for many countries against heightened external volatility. The budget financing enabled by the allocation provided space for pandemic response and social protection spending in other countries. Countries that used the SDR allocation to repay IMF obligations were able to preserve fiscal space for other priority measures.

- **1e. What does the Treasury Department assess the benefit of authorizing use of these SDRs into PRGT and RST to be to Russia or Iran?**

Answer: The Administration is currently requesting authorization to lend to the PRGT and RST in dollars, not SDRs. We do not assess any potential benefit to Russia or Iran from a U.S. loan to the PRGT and RST. Neither Russia nor Iran is eligible for loans from the PRGT. Further, the RST will only be available to countries that obtain a full-fledged, Board-approved IMF program. Thanks to U.S. efforts, the IMF Board would not consider a full-fledged IMF program for Russia or Iran, and as such, neither of these countries would be able to receive a loan from the RST either.

In accordance with applicable legislative mandates, the United States uses its voice and vote to oppose lending to countries whose policies run counter to U.S. national security interests, including any lending from the PRGT and RST. All normal U.S. safeguards that apply to multilateral lending would apply to our loans to the PRGT and RST, which include restrictions on U.S. support of financial assistance to countries whose

governments engage in gross violations of human rights, do not comply with human trafficking standards, or are determined to be state sponsors of terrorism. The Administration has proposed legislative text to make all of these safeguards apply to the PRGT and RST explicitly in U.S. law, such that any and all legislative restrictions that apply to voting on funding at the IMF would apply in the context of these loans.

Rep. LaTurner

Question 1: In our March 29 budget hearing, you agreed that we must be doing more to hold the Ortega regime accountable for their ongoing human rights abuses in Nicaragua beyond the sanctions currently in place.

- **What additional measures do you plan to pursue under your existing authority to ensure that justice is done in Nicaragua?**

Answer: On April 20th, 2023 OFAC designated three Nicaraguan judicial officials involved in human rights abuses conducted by the regime of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and the broader oppression of Nicaraguan citizens who oppose his government.

The three individuals designated are judges or presiding magistrates in the Managua District Court of Appeals, the Second District Trial Court in Managua, and the First Criminal Appeals Court of Managua. These courts affirmed decisions that revoked the citizenship of more than 300 Nicaraguan citizens.

The United States will continue to support the Nicaraguan people as they strive to restore democratic institutions

Question 2: Would you consider removing their preferential trade status under CAFTA or advocating for limiting support through IMF loans?

Answer: On removing preferential trade status under CAFTA, Treasury defers to USTR who leads on trade agreement decisions.

On limiting support through IFI support, Treasury is fully committed to implementing the RENACER Act and to using our best efforts to deny financial assistance to the government of Nicaragua.

Rep. Fleischman**Question 1: Civil Nuclear Energy Exports**

By the end of this decade the United States will have a revitalized domestic nuclear industry. Moreover, there are robust export opportunities of both traditional light water designs and new advanced reactors over the coming decades.

Russia and China are the current leaders in global civil nuclear energy exports, as is our ally South Korea. Civil nuclear contracts are inherently geopolitical given the sensitivity of the technologies and the length of the contracts necessary to operate traditional light water reactors.

The Energy and Water Subcommittee is working to strengthen our nuclear technology development and commercial development. However not only Energy, but Treasury and other financial institutions such as the Export-Import Bank will have to be involved if we are going to successfully compete with Russia and China.

- **How is the Treasury and the multilateral development banks (MDBs) under your purview working with industry and the Department of Energy to promote civil nuclear power exports? What can we in Congress do to assist in this effort?**

Answer: Treasury is supportive of using all available technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and find alternative clean energy solutions. MDB managements and many shareholders are resistant to the MDBs taking on nuclear energy investments due to the high cost as well as political and safety risks. Today, all of the MDBs have policies that explicitly prohibit supporting new nuclear energy investments. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)'s policy allows for funding of safety improvements of operating plants as well as for radioactive waste management and decommissioning of nuclear facilities. The EBRD has played a prominent role in cleaning up and transforming the Chernobyl nuclear site, for example.

Treasury has historically been cautious on MDBs considering financing nuclear technology, though we agree with the Department of Energy that new technologies, such as small modular reactor (SMR) technology, may merit reconsideration of this position.

Exploring such changes would create friction with other shareholders (such as Germany and Japan) who are opposed to nuclear energy and present many practical and policy challenges. Multiple policy and administrative hurdles would have to be overcome before the MDBs could responsibly and effectively finance nuclear energy investments, including acquiring relevant staff and technical expertise. Next, while SMRs may have lower costs than traditional nuclear, the financing requirements would still be very large.

From a U.S. point of view, per existing legislation, the United States applies the highest environmental and social standards to all MDB projects; given the large risks and significant due diligence required for an SMR project, it is possible that these projects would not be able to pass our standard screening. Most importantly, we would need to

find tools to manage nuclear proliferation concerns and risks that suppliers from countries such as China and Russia would win procurement contracts.

Question 2: Global Energy Geopolitics

The Russo-Ukrainian War has once again starkly demonstrated the centrality of energy to national power. While the United States has been blessed with abundant energy sources and we enjoy world-leading entrepreneurs and companies developing new energy technologies from nuclear to natural gas, we still live in a global marketplace, particularly in oil. We are all supportive of alternative energy sources, but oil remains foundational to global energy consumption.

The West has exhibited incredible solidarity with our sanctions regime targeting Russian energy exports, although we all recognize there is still significant leakage of Russian sourced oil and natural gas into Western markets. However, we have also seen much of the rest of the world continue to purchase Russian energy.

We have thus effectively created two market prices, which have the unfortunate consequence of essentially subsidizing Chinese energy costs.

Since the end of World War II, we have been the guarantor of global energy flows, and acted before to ensure our allies and partners are not beholden to our adversaries.

- **What is this administration doing to ensure our nation and our allies and partners are not excessively disadvantaged by this growing divergence in global energy markets? And has the Treasury done any contingency planning and discussions both internally and with other governments regarding the disruption to energy markets of a potential conflict in the Western Pacific?**

Answer: The United States, Europe, Japan and our G7 partners committed to cut off imports of oil from Russia to avoid directly providing resources to Russia as it continues to illegal war. At the same time, we avoided cutting off Russian oil exports to other countries, as full shut in of Russian oil could lead to volatility in energy markets with knock on effects for the global and U.S. economy.

The United States and our partners have also put in place a ‘price cap’ on Russian oil, which prohibits service providers in the G7 and Australia from facilitating Russian exports above a set price. This price cap effectively reduces the amount of revenue that Russia receives, while promoting stability in global energy markets by allowing Russian oil to flow.

The U.S. and partner country import bans of Russian oil means that Russian oil trades at a steep discount to other sources of oil. The fact that importers of Russian oil pay lower prices is a feature of the price cap, not a bug. The goal is to impose costs on Russia, and lower energy costs for the rest of the world is part of that penalty for Russia. A total ban on purchases of, and services for, Russian oil would have significantly increased the

prices paid by all market participants and particularly harmed vulnerable populations that are sensitive to food and electricity prices.

Many actions taken by the administration will increase U.S. resilience to international oil price swings. The IRA promotes electric vehicles, sustainable aviation fuel, and hydrogen. The bipartisan infrastructure law expands the network of charging stations. And proposed regulations from the EPA will continue support for renewable fuels and further the growth of electric vehicle sales. All those actions will reduce U.S. dependence on international oil markets. Technologies developed and cost savings realized in those markets will spill over globally, including to our allies.

A potential conflict in the Western Pacific would not only have a deleterious effect on energy markets, but the entire global economy. This message is a key part of all our national security engagements as well as Treasury and interagency planning meetings.

TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2023.

**FISCAL YEAR 2024 REQUEST FOR THE UNITED STATES
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

WITNESS

**HON. SAMANTHA POWER, ADMINISTRATOR, UNITED STATES AGENCY
FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DIAZ-BALART

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs will come to order.

Administrator Power, thank you so much for being here today to discuss the fiscal year 2024 budget request for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Before I get into the details of the budget, I want to take a moment to thank the men and women of USAID, including the Foreign Service nationals and the staff of your implementing partners as well, for their effort to make the world, frankly, just a better and a safer place. We don't say it enough how much we appreciate their service and yours, Administrator Power.

So please, if you would, convey those thanks on behalf of our subcommittee to all of those amazing human beings that, sometimes in very difficult circumstances, serve our country.

Now, I want to turn to the budget. The President's request includes 32 billion dollars in USAID fully or partially managed accounts, which represents a 10 percent increase over fiscal year 2023 enacted.

I want to share with you what I also said to Secretary Blinken and also Secretary Yellen last month, which is the following: Proposing increases of this magnitude yet again to a Republican House when the President's own party has rejected this level of spending every year is just totally unrealistic. It also sets untenable expectations abroad, and it hurts, I think, U.S. credibility.

We only need to look at the President's brazen climate pledges in 2021 to see the impact of what happens when Congress is not consulted, and frankly, overcommitments are made to the rest of the world.

In absence of the appropriations in support of these pledges, the administration attributes funding from many unrelated development and health activities to climate change. Not only is this sure to disappoint the climate advocates that the President is trying to appease, but, even worse, it also makes foreign aid much more controversial and difficult to defend to the majority of Americans.

This is because, as you and I have discussed, most Americans know that throwing money at climate change will do nothing to reduce global temperatures, since the world's largest CO2 emitters, like Communist China, are doing whatever they want.

In reviewing the USAID request, I had hoped to see a strategic focus and clear priorities in support of our top foreign policy and development challenges. Instead, this request appears to be an everything but the kitchen-sink approach. And I hope this hearing will help us drill down on priorities and areas where U.S. funds are demonstrating measurable, impact.

We cannot, with a straight face, say that all U.S. economic and development dollars are yielding positive results, obviously. So what I am really interested in and what my team is working on as we speak is identifying what is working and what is not. If it is not working, well, we can no longer afford to fund it. It is as simple as that.

We also should not be funding controversial programs that tarnish the American taxpayers' view of foreign aid and of USAID.

So again, let's get back to basics: Promoting American values of freedom and democracy is not partisan. Supporting a family's ability to provide for themselves, to send their kids to school and stay safe and healthy, that is not partisan.

I am so proud of the work our country has done through USAID to support communities and families in times of disaster and humanitarian crises, and in the face of authoritarianism and threats to freedom and democracy by demonstrating the generosity and the compassion of the American people. Again, this should not be partisan.

There are clearly great needs, but we must recognize fiscal realities and be realistic about what the U.S. can and should accomplish and where the private sector or other donor countries can play a role.

As former President Reagan said, "the size of the Federal budget is not an appropriate barometer of social conscience or charitable concerns."

So I would ask you, Administrator Power, to get back to the basics. Get back to the basics and focus on the core mission of USAID. We want to be strong partners in this work, and there is certainly so much to do around the world.

So again, I appreciate the work that you have done over your long career. You have served this country for many, many years, and I look forward to working with you, and I look forward to your testimony.

And, with that, now I yield to Ms. Meng for her opening remarks.

OPENING STATEMENT OF MS. MENG

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And let me also add my welcome to USAID Administrator Samantha Power. Your agency is America's lead international development agency, supporting people around the world to build safe, prosperous, equitable, and inclusive societies. The talented, knowledgeable, and passionate professionals at USAID work on the front lines every single day to help save lives and advance human rights and dignity.

We are all watching the unfolding events and increasing violence in Sudan, a place where USAID has been engaged for a long time, and call on all parties to protect civilians and return to dialogue.

I want to add my special thanks for the tireless work that you do, constantly traveling the world to some of the most challenging places, serving as the face of the American people. You bear witness on behalf of all of us to the women, children, and families that are experiencing devastating tragedy, loss of loved ones and livelihoods, and, frequently, hope itself.

This morning, we will discuss the administration's fiscal year 2024 budget request for USAID. I hope you will share with us the impact of this budget in addressing the basic needs of the world's most vulnerable people, as well as the work being done to build resilience for the next disaster or conflict. This mission is as much part of our national security as any armament or missile. Creating a peaceful and stable world deserves our robust investment.

I have long argued that our foreign assistance is critical to achieving the sustainable development goals, especially in terms of eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and promoting peace and prosperity. Achieving these goals by 2030 has been made even more difficult, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its many secondary effects: the conflict in Ukraine, rising food prices, as well as ongoing climate shocks and disasters.

To address these needs, the United States requires an international development agency that is nimble, accountable, and properly staffed. This subcommittee has strived in recent years to ensure that you have the resources to meet the agency's human resources and diversity goals, and I hope you can give us an update on your progress in these areas and what resources are still required.

The fiscal year 2024 budget request includes notable increases for humanitarian, global health, climate, and accountable governments programs. It also makes a bold commitment to gender equity and equality.

I look forward to hearing from you how USAID works to lift up women and youth through both its programs and policies. This includes addressing access to family planning and reproductive healthcare.

According to the World Economic Forum, more than 60 percent of Africa's population is under the age of 25. How we include these youth in the future of their countries as well as the international community will be critical to future stability. I appreciate the hard work USAID has undergone to update its youth and gender strategies in recent months. Ensuring that our programs respond to the needs of these groups is critical.

I would also appreciate hearing about USAID's efforts to prevent the next pandemic. Congress has provided increased resources to address global health security in recent years. I hope you can share some of the lessons we have learned on pandemic preparedness, even as COVID-19 falls off the front page.

As we are painfully aware, the United States will only be as prepared as the weakest global link. In particular, I am concerned about the continuing commercial trade in and markets for live wildlife and the risk posed to human health of the potential for zoonotic spillover of such wildlife.

And finally, I hope you will update the subcommittee on the agency's work to prioritize locally led development. I agree that, to

be enduring, our development efforts must be defined and led by local actors. I hope you will update us on the progress made thus far and what roadblocks you are encountering.

This is why I am so concerned about discussed cuts to the SFOPS bill back to the fiscal year 2022 level. Such cuts would threaten much of the progress made to build capacity to deal with new infectious diseases, prevent the procurement of malaria nets for 4 million people, and will leave 13 million fewer children vaccinated. New staff brought on to deal with oversight of health, governance, and humanitarian programs would be endangered.

Such a proposal comes at a time when many countries are looking for partners to improve their economies, build infrastructure and social services, and improve access to electricity. If the United States is not able to respond vigorously, countries will have no option but to turn to others for that kind of investment, creating new economic and security challenges for the U.S.

Administrator Power, I hope you can better explain how these decisions would impact the work of the U.S. overseas.

Thank you for being here today and for your tireless work to improve lives and human dignity around the world.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I want to thank the gentlelady.

Madam Administrator, your full written statement will be placed in the record, and obviously feel free to summarize your statement.

Again, thank you for your service. Thank you for being here. You are now recognized.

OPENING STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR POWER

Ms. POWER. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Let me also thank Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lee, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished members, both of the subcommittee and the broader committee. And I am really grateful to those of you who are here. I know there is an awful lot going on up here, so I am told, so I read in the newspaper.

Special thanks to Congresswoman Meng for your remarks. Of course, your dedication to this set of issues and for subbing in for Ranking Member Lee, who I had a chance to speak with last night—we had our own minibudget hearing, so I answered numerous questions already, feel well-prepared for today.

I also want to just single out the subcommittee and committee staff, with whom our team works with every day. You could not have a more knowledgeable, more dedicated group of individuals. There is nothing that USAID does out in the world that we could do without actually those engagements. They really make us better every day.

As both of you have indicated and is fairly obvious, the challenge the world faces today is clear. The decades of development gains that successive administrations and successive Congresses work together to secure and that have laid the foundation for an era of relative peace, relative stability, relative prosperity, those gains are seriously imperiled.

During our lifetimes, the United States has helped accelerate tremendous progress in reducing extreme poverty; in fighting disease;

in addressing hunger; getting kids, including girls, into school; and fueling democracy's rise over several decades.

As you all know, many of these trends are now heading into reverse. The pandemic decimated health systems, leading to a resurgence in diseases ranging from measles to tuberculosis.

The pandemic also battered many countries' finances. After a decade of heavy borrowing—and perhaps we will talk a little bit more about that—and, more recently, rising inflation, exacerbated by Putin's war, 60 percent of the world's poorest countries are at or near debt distress. This is a very new dynamic in so many of the countries that we are working.

Natural disasters, as we know also from here at home, are increasing in frequency and intensity, leading to a sharp rise every year in humanitarian needs.

The upshot of all of this is stark. For the first time in decades, literally since the 1950s, human life expectancy is on the decline. I mean, that is a stark, stark fact. And extreme poverty is on the rise.

At the same time, democracies everywhere are under attack. Our rivals are using transnational corruption; digital repression; disinformation; and in Ukraine, of course, actual artillery and missile fire to undermine freedom, to elevate autocrats, and to curry favor.

It is a daunting list of challenges, and I know that some question whether the United States should be taking on these challenges through our development investments, or whether the scope of this range of interlocking challenges is too great to make a meaningful difference.

But the fact is, our national security, the security of the American people, hinges on this work. Deprivation and indignity abroad can fuel resource competition, political fragility, and extremism that endangers us here at home.

Disease outbreaks, we well know, can cross oceans. And recessions in foreign markets can threaten our own economic growth. We are connected. In 2023, we are most definitely connected.

If we don't lead efforts to take on these challenges, the People's Republic of China and Putin have proven ready to step in, whether through opaque loans on unfavorable terms, or with mercenaries in tow.

An international order that values democracy and human rights and that respects international borders is not a given. Indeed, authoritarian actors are challenging and aiming to reshape the order. We have to invest in the stable and the humane world that we all need.

USAID is immensely privileged to have a leading role in tackling the most significant challenges of our time in close coordination with our interagency partners who are advancing diplomacy and defense. We are immensely grateful to the American people and to you for giving us the resources to make a major difference.

That said, we know that to drive progress on the scale we need, we have to bring other donor countries, the private sector, multilateral institutions, foundations, and local organizations in our partner countries along with us. We have to be catalytic—ever more catalytic.

So USAID has set a new reform agenda aimed at delivering progress beyond our development programs; using our expertise, our convening power, and our advocacy to draw others in; to leverage the resources that Congress provides us to spark innovation and to inspire broader movements for change.

The Biden-Harris administration's fiscal year 2024 request of 32 billion dollars for USAID's fully and partially managed accounts will allow us to make more of that transformative impact. We will invest in countries experiencing democratic openings, of whom there are several very notable examples: helping them show that democracy delivers tangible results for citizens, economic results, as well as political results. We will work with nations to attract private-sector investment and drive broadly shared economic growth.

We will support countries that are rebuilding their decimated health systems, and we will meet growing humanitarian needs not just with emergency assistance, but with longer-term investments in resilience.

And finally, we will crucially invest in our workforce to carry out this ambitious agenda.

Since 2019, our operating expense funds have increased at half the rate that our programming has grown, giving us more to do with fewer people and resources. But this budget will help us invest in the people and systems that we need to power an agency that is nimble and that is responsive.

We know that with the United States leading the way, the world can drive meaningful progress against our toughest challenges, because we have decades of gains in global health, in education, and decades of prosperity to prove it. It is on us now to resume that progress.

A few months ago, President George W. Bush posed a question: What is the role of a great country in the world? Is it to look inward? Is it to think about how to solve big problems?

As he said, we all decided to work together to solve big problems. I hope we can continue that legacy.

Thank you.

[The information follows:]

**Testimony of USAID Administrator Samantha Power
FY24 Budget Request for USAID
April 18, 2023**

Thank you Chairman Diaz-Balart, Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lee, Ranking Member DeLauro and distinguished members of the Committee.

The challenge the world faces today is clear: The decades of development gains that have laid the foundation for an era of relative peace, stability, and prosperity are at serious risk.

During our lifetimes, the United States has helped accelerate tremendous progress in reducing extreme poverty, fighting disease, addressing hunger, getting kids in school, and fueling democracy's rise.

But now, many of these trends have moved into reverse. The pandemic decimated health systems, leading to a resurgence in diseases from measles to tuberculosis. It also battered many nation's finances. After a decade of heavy borrowing and the resulting inflation—exacerbated by Putin's war—60 percent of the world's poorest countries are at or near debt distress. And natural disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity, leading to a sharp rise in humanitarian needs. The upshot of it all is stark: For the first time in decades, human life expectancy is on the decline—while extreme poverty is on the rise.

At the same time, democracies everywhere are under attack. Our rivals are using transnational corruption, digital repression, disinformation—and in Ukraine, actual artillery fire—to undermine freedom, elevate autocrats, and curry favor.

It's a daunting list of challenges. And I know some question whether the United States should be taking on these challenges through our development investments, or whether the scope of the challenges is too great to make a meaningful difference.

But the fact is our national security hinges on this work. Deprivation and indignity abroad can fuel resource competition, political fragility, and extremism that endangers us here at home. Disease outbreaks can cross oceans, and recessions in foreign markets can threaten our own economic growth.

And if we don't lead efforts to take on these challenges, the People's Republic of China and Putin are ready to step in, whether through opaque loans on unfavorable terms, or with mercenaries in tow.

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The Biden-Harris Administration's FY 2024 request of \$32 billion for USAID's fully- and partially-managed accounts will allow us to make more of that transformative impact.

Alongside our partners, we'll invest in countries experiencing democratic openings, helping them show that democracy delivers tangible results for citizens. We'll work with nations to attract private sector investment and drive broadly shared economic growth. We'll support countries that are rebuilding their decimated health systems. And we'll meet growing humanitarian needs not just with emergency assistance, but long-term investments in resilience.

And, crucially, we'll invest in our workforce to carry out this ambitious agenda. Since 2019, our operating expense funds have increased at half the rate that our programming has grown—giving us more to do with fewer people and resources. But this budget will help us invest in the people and systems we need to power an Agency that is nimble and responsive.

We know that, with the United States leading the way, the world can drive meaningful progress against our toughest challenges—because we have decades of gains in global health, education, and prosperity to prove it. It's on us, now, to resume that progress.

A few months ago, President George W. Bush posed a question. "What's the role of a great country in the world? Is it to look inward? Is it to think about how to solve big problems?" As he said, "We all decided to work together to solve big problems." Let's continue that legacy.

Thank you.

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Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Madam Administrator.

Congresswoman Meng and I just were talking allowing me to have a little bit of flexibility, there are a lot of hearings and members have to come in and out. And so we will start with the gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. FRANKEL. Oh, here we go.

Well, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Madam Ranking Chair.

People don't think we get along, but actually, some of us do get along.

Ms. FRANKEL. Okay. Administrator Power, thank you for your service and for your testimony, and it is always good to see you.

You said in your testimony, or your written testimony, the world faces a daunting list of challenges: extreme poverty, disease, the global food crisis, shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Putin's war in Ukraine, and getting children in school or back in school, attacks on democracy in the world.

And thank you. The U.S. international assistance and the USAID just does such critical work tackling these challenges.

I am alarmed because what I have read—no inside information, but I have read that the House Republicans have committed to cutting the budget levels to what could actually be a 30 percent cut to U.S. international assistance.

I hope that is not true, Mr. Chair, but who knows?

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I want to keep you on your toes.

Ms. FRANKEL. You will keep me on my toes. That means ominous.

So I would just like to bring, or focus attention to an issue—a subject matter that has always been important to me and wondering what this means for what I consider an already marginalized group of people in many places in the world, the women, the girls and women of the world, because if I look at the facts and the figures and the cuts to USAID's family planning could cause many, many more maternal deaths, children starving, children not getting into school, and as you said, the potential of health—I will call it health hazards around the world.

So let me ask you some—maybe you could expound on some of those concerns.

First of all, what would these budget cuts mean to the girls and the women of the world if it was a 30 percent cut, or a 25 percent cut?

Ms. POWER. Thank you, Madam Congresswoman, for raising this and for allowing me to try to concretize this.

First, I will just take the 22 percent cut, as the 30 percent, I can't even wrap my head around, but certainly, we have been hearing about proposals along these lines. This would take USAID back to—and the State Department back to budget levels not seen since the year 2010. So that was 13 years ago. You can imagine what we know, cost of living and how far a dollar goes now compared to then, so a cut—whatever the cut is, you can extrapolate from there.

With regard to the populations that you have described, let me just say, in terms of emergency assistance, our humanitarian experts say about 80 million people—fewer people that we would be

able to feed—in a sense, to keep alive, because this is life-saving food.

When it comes to maternal and child health, this would mean about 20 million dollars less for that programming. That would mean about 19—19,000 maternal and newborn child deaths, but also 13 million fewer kids getting vaccinated. And that, of course, will mean, over the long-term, about—at least 115,000 more deaths.

I would also just draw attention to the kinds of issues that affect all of us, like pandemic prevention. If these kinds of cuts went into effect, our global health security budget, of course, would be massively affected. We are now working with 50 countries to try to enhance their surveillance capacity, their lab capacity, to be able to spot a pandemic before it becomes something of the scale that kills millions of what we have just gone through.

We would actually have to cut the number of countries that we are working in by a fifth. So, again, if something happens to happen in those countries, we would not be in a position to work to strengthen that ability to spot early.

Those are just a few examples.

Ms. FRANKEL. All right. Well, with that, I will sadly yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

And, members, thank you. The Congresswoman has to step out, so thank you for allowing me to work with everyone here so that we can stay on track.

Madam Administrator, the state of chaos and misery that this administration left in Afghanistan continues to worsen, frankly, hard to believe. This unforced error has particularly been horrific to women and to girls, frankly erasing decades of hard, hard-won gains. A number of us met with a group of women from Afghanistan just to listen to their stories. It is heartbreaking.

Now, we have recently learned that the ban on women's participation in NGOs has now been extended to include the U.N., and yet, you recently issued a statement declaring our aid will continue to flow.

Now, even more concerning is the business-as-usual language you are seeking in the President's budget request. And let me just go through some of these aspects.

You, for example, asked for language to provide assistance in Afghanistan without any restrictions, also called "notwithstanding authority."

Also, permission to directly fund the Taliban if it is in the, quote, "in the national interests."

Also, authorities and purposes for funding that were carried in the State, Foreign Operations bills, in some cases, for over a decade. It is exactly the same kind of language.

And I am, frankly, truly at a loss to understand this request. It is as if the fall of Afghanistan never happened and the Taliban were not in control. And more importantly, it is—I don't know how to say it in another word. It is completely—a complete insult to women in Afghanistan.

So here are a number of questions: In what scenario would direct funding to the Taliban be in the national interests—in our national interests? And how can aid be administered with humanitarian

principles intact if women and girls are entirely cut out of the process?

Ms. POWER. Thank you. I am actually—I am a little taken aback by the line of questioning, because our work has so fundamentally changed in Afghanistan. You know, we have gone from helping such a vast number of girls, particularly the young people generally get educated, from cutting maternal mortality in half, from working hand-in-glove again in areas that had been controlled by the government where women were able to work and get educated, to really, now, yes, still being the largest humanitarian donor to Afghanistan to try to avert large-scale famine because of the gross mismanagement and repression by the government, by the Taliban government, but not being able to do any of those core development programs that we had been able to do before.

We do not work directly with the Taliban. We do not—our programs do not provide benefit to the Taliban. We do not fund the Taliban.

So I will get back to you in terms of this—the specific—I mean, the way you worded it, as if we were asking for authorities that would be with an eye to working with the Taliban. That is not our objective. That is not what we do. We work through trusted international partners who themselves, right now, have had to put a lot of programming on hold. And that means that we as well, because we are funding these organizations, have to figure out what it means to do health work if women can't be part of the provision of health services.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Correct.

Ms. POWER. What it means to provide humanitarian assistance if women cannot come and be beneficiaries or be part of the distribution.

So, we are far from business as usual, and we, of course, like you, roundly condemn something that is not only immoral, not only antithetical to human rights, but also totally impractical from the standpoint of meeting the humanitarian needs—

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Which—

Ms. POWER [continuing]. Of the Afghan people.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. I agree with what you just stated. But, if you look at the language, some of those authorities haven't been carried in the state, foreign operations bills for, frankly, over a decade. And the language that I just mentioned is in that request. So I would ask you to respectfully look at that.

Again, what scenario would be to funding directly to the Taliban would be in our national security interests?

And, again, I will tell you I was taken aback. We are not legitimatizing the Taliban's claims that women and girls are not needed, are not even to play a key role if we are just going to, again, directly fund them. And so, is this administration turning a blind eye to these—Taliban's barbaric practices?

I know that is not your intention, Administrator, but if you look at the request, it is literally as if the Taliban were not in control of Afghanistan, which is just—you say that my question kind of, caught you a little bit off guard. Well frankly, when I read the request, it is shocking. So I would ask you to respectfully look at that, and we will continue this conversation.

Ms. Meng, you are recognized.

Ms. MENG. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to go back to a little bit of what, Administrator Power, you were discussing with Ms. Frankel's question about the impact of potential cuts, which the statistics and stories obviously behind them would be devastating.

And I wanted to ask a question more about softer power. What would be the impact on America's standing influence and leadership in the world if these proposed cuts were to go into place? And how would these cuts affect our USAID staffing and its ability to manage all these global programs?

Ms. POWER. Thank you, Congresswoman.

Well, let me say already, because the needs in the world have driven an increase, for example, in emergency humanitarian assistance, as it stands right now, a USAID contracting officer manages annually five times the amount of contracts in terms of money than his or her DOD counterpart.

So already our ratio of staff-to-resource, you know, sent out into the world to do good and to advance our interests is way out of whack, and it is something we are trying to address, again, working with your—the subcommittee's staff and the committee staff. I think we are making inroads in that.

But to cut back further the resources in operating expenses—and I think it would be about a \$400 million cut—that would just be devastating. And we are really trying to revitalize the workforce at USAID. Seventy percent of the 18,000 people who work at USAID—and talk about sneaking up on us—are actually contractors rather than direct hires, 70 percent. They are wonderful. They are, you know, out there doing work that Chairman Diaz-Balart spoke to at the beginning.

But, you know, in many cases they don't have life insurance, they don't have equity in a whole range of ways. They aren't able to supervise direct hire employees. They don't have career tracks in many cases.

So we are in the midst of a significant workforce revitalization effort that is going to make USAID, again, much more responsive and nimble and make these investments more sustainable over time. To make cuts to all of that, to actually have to cut back on those plans really would be devastating.

And then, when you talk about the sort of soft power, you know, loss, I mean, to first talk about the soft power dividend of always being the first country to show up with humanitarian assistance, of being the leading donor, you know, in the Horn of Africa, in Somalia, and Kenya, when they suffer their sixth straight failed rainy season; of showing up for Venezuelan, you know, people who are being repressed or, because of economic mismanagement, driven from their homes. What would it mean not to be that country that is always there first, that is always there with the resources to help people in need? It would be a very different America.

So, again, I said at the beginning, and I have committed—and I think, if you look at our reform agenda, you will see that, day to day, I am carrying this forward. We have to be catalytic. Even with the generous resources that you all have provided, our resources are going less far because the problems are so much more signifi-

cant and interlocking, and we are just not getting a break, whether with an end of—every day, there is a new conflict that starts, like that in Sudan, which you mentioned in your opening remarks, or new climate shocks or extreme weather events.

So we have to be more catalytic and bring in the private sector and really change the way we do business, but we actually need to resource that investment in order to be in a position to do it.

Ms. MENG. Okay. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you very much.

The gentleman from the great State of Alabama, Mr. Carl, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. CARL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Administrator Powers, thank you so much for joining us.

Just for the record, I have been down in Central America, visited four countries. And I was very impressed with staff and what you are doing down there. And I will come back. Hopefully, we will get a second question or maybe even a third question, I can ask you some more questions.

But I want to start with the U.S. Merchant Marine fleet. My father, who was actually a merchant marine in World War II, and spent his entire life as a merchant marine, so this is kind of close to my heart.

The U.S. Flag Merchant Fleet is critical to our Nation's national security. I think it is important we make sure that the U.S. Fleet remains healthy so they are ready when we call on an emergency or in wartimes. USAID's cargo is not only critical to the community around the world, but also keeps the U.S. Flag Fleet ready.

My question, Administrator, is, can you talk about the role U.S. Flag Fleet plays in the USAID delivering goods to Yemen?

Ms. POWER. Well, first of all, the role that U.S. Food plays and that those who transport that food is invaluable. In Yemen, in places like Somalia, we have a hybrid approach. We also use cash, because we want markets to work. We want, you know, people to be able to access, you know, that means of livelihood as well. And I think cash has proven very cost effective.

But, you know, the long trek that these men and women take on behalf of hungry people, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of the Middle East, is a critical component of what we do.

Thank you for—to those that—that do that.

Mr. CARL. So we are not using flagships to go into Yemen, some of these our countries?

Ms. POWER. We are—maybe I am misunderstanding the question, but—

Mr. CARL. Okay.

Ms. POWER [continuing]. U.S. flag vessels, we are as a component, because of the cargo preference requirements.

Mr. CARL. Okay. Into Yemen?

Ms. POWER. I believe that we—U.S.—well, I am not actually sure which countries U.S. flag vessels are traveling to at this time. I was more speaking to where we provide food assistance.

Mr. CARL. That wasn't a trick question. I was—

Ms. POWER. Yeah.

Mr. CARL. I was trying to see if you had a clear answer on—

Ms. POWER. Yeah.

Mr. CARL. I would also like to take just a moment and thank all of our merchant marines for all they do and the hard work of getting goods from here to wherever there is in a timely manner.

In my travel to Central and South America, again, I was very impressed with the work that I saw down there. I will tell you, my life will never be the same when they bring a 9-year-old girl out and you stand there holding her hand, and you find out later she has been raped multitudes over many days from Venezuela all the way to the American borders, to be turned around and sent back and being held in one of these homes until they can find someone back in Venezuela.

You know, my life will never be the same. And those are the stories that we need to be talking about. We—this administration is encouraging that this flow of human trafficking that is coming through there. And, as I went to these facilities that you all do a great job of managing and running, the pimps were outside the front door heckling and hollering at the girls to come join them. This is with military presence with us. I have never seen anything like it in my life.

You have got me on that part. What can I do to help?

These temporary facilities that are helping these children, I think there is a whole lot more that we can do in the way of transportation. I spent time in Panama. I talked to the Panamanian Government. They need help transporting these children and women primarily—I think I saw one man in this entire group—transporting them back to Venezuela. They have got families that will take them back, but they can't get them back.

I would like for us to focus and maybe think more out of the box on how can we help these people get back to their countries, because what most people don't realize is they walked away—especially the women. They have walked away from everything. They have sold their land. They have left their families for a better dream in America because they hear the borders are open.

They turn around and they go back. Their families don't want them. They don't own any land. They have nothing to return to. And it is sad stories.

And it is easy to say, Oh, well, it was their choice. I get that. I think we—this administration needs to take some responsibility for that and find a way to help them get back in.

With that said, I appreciate your ear.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, Mr. Carl.

Mrs. Torres, you are recognized.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Administrator Power, thank you for being here with us. I very much appreciate the work of your team, what you are doing, not just in our hemisphere, but abroad.

I want to share also my concern with what is happening in Sudan. I was there last year. I traveled with the U.N. to the region. And I am just appalled at what is happening to the children that are starving in that region, and now having to deal with civil war. So anything that we can do to help alleviate and continue the food programs in that region, very much appreciate your work there.

I want to, go back to what has been happening in the Northern Triangle, a region that you know I had been very focused on, starting with when Vice President—when it was Vice President Biden and the work that we were doing there, creating opportunities and partnerships with those country leaders at the time.

I have great hopes that we could advance with the commissions, the anticorruption commissions, and working with attorney generals in those regions that were committed to the rule of law and committed to dealing with public corruption.

But then, we lost that administration, and we enter, four turbulent years of simply looking the other way and ignoring for the purpose of political gain and, you know, a talking point here in the U.S. about the region. We failed to continue to push forward on the work that had been started, unfortunately by administration of an opposing party, but it was good work nonetheless. I am extremely disappointed with what has happened, and I don't know how to get back those 4 lost years.

So my priority—my budget priorities this year is to defund all three countries completely of all programs. And the reason for that is I don't know how we can look at a U.S. taxpayer in the face and say what we have—what we are doing is preventing people from coming north. We continue to see a rampant system at our southern border. It is a symptom of what is happening in these countries.

We have a former President of Honduras in a New York court that is being prosecuted for narco trafficking—who boasts about creating nonprofit organizations to launder U.S. assistance back into the hands of corrupt officials.

In El Salvador, we have a President that recently announced that he is canceling taxes for the rich. So how does a U.S. taxpayer continue to pay taxes and continue to provide funding for countries that are not committed in helping their own people?

And I would much rather focus on prioritizing those dollars in working with our partners in Mexico, in working with our partners in Panama, in Costa Rica, Colombia, Chile. There are a number of countries that are committed in helping asylum seekers and helping to save their lives. And I hope that, you know, through a process, we can work with those countries to realign funding.

I strongly oppose the Republican cuts—budget cuts to your budget, because I know that you are doing some great work. But, in this region, we have to figure out how to refocus that funding.

Ms. POWER. Thank you. Well, I know I don't have a ton of time to respond. But first, I would appeal to you before getting too entrenched in this position, or this goal, to allow me personally or our team with your staff to walk you through exactly what we are funding in these programs, because—sorry—in these three countries.

You know, we are talking about gang reduction programs. We are talking about, you know, in areas of high out migration, significant investments in education. We are talking about gender-based violence, combating gender-based violence in a manner that is making a meaningful difference for every individual who is touched.

And we are also—causality is multifactoral, but we are also seeing reductions—double-digit reductions in Guatemala and Honduras in the intention-to-migrate surveys. As you well know, the complexion of who is arriving at our southern border, who is flowing north, including through the Darien Gap, which Congressman Carl was talking about, where horrific abuses occur, that is such a different demographic now than we have seen in the past, which isn't to say that Hondurans, Salvadorans, and the Guatemalans are not part of the flow, but it is to say that I think our programming is making a difference.

We also provide not \$1 to the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala, which you mentioned. We invest in civil society that are holding those governments accountable, including independent media, including anticorruption organizations who are actually documenting the very corruption that you are describing that then, in some cases, is being prosecuted.

And we are just making, finally, an intense push to invest in local organizations, you know, which will actually be at the community level, providing the kinds of services that the governments don't, in many cases, care about, including for indigenous communities in Guatemala.

Mrs. TORRES. I would love to continue this conversation.

I apologize to the chairman and the rest of the members. I know that—

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Well, no apology is needed. It is an issue that I know that you care deeply about.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. So thank you.

And thank you, Administrator.

Administrator, let me speak a little bit about Cuba. And you and I have had multiple conversations over the years. I know where your heart is. But I would like to ask you about your vision of the Cuban democracy programs, whether you plan to stick with traditional democracy building in Cuba, such as by supporting political prisoners and their families, promoting labor rights for Cuban doctors and other professionals, and encouraging independent media in human rights.

That is kind of one liberal open-ended question, but one of the things that I have always found interesting about the administration—this administration is their infatuation with so-called entrepreneurs in the island. You very well know it is a closed Communist economy. All of these entrepreneurs that the administration keeps focusing on are prescreened, preapproved by the regime.

And, you know, an example, there are no former political prisoners or anybody connected with opposition or any of the folks who have hit the streets who have ever gotten a license from the regime. And so would you not agree that, when you are dealing with these preapproved-by-the-regime entrepreneurs, they are not independent?

So, two-part question. If you would care to try to address that.

Ms. POWER. Thank you, and thank you for always standing up for the rights of the Cuban people who continue to suffer, again, economic mismanagement and repression at a horrific scale.

I would say in the first—always welcome your ideas in particular, and those who are very knowledgeable about Cuba on the approach to democracy support. But, yes, I think that, through dialogue, that is sort of the range of programs that USAID supports. With so many political prisoners, with so many roundups, the vulnerability of those families is still something that I think we are very—feel very privileged to have a hand in trying to support getting information, supporting those who are trying to get information as well to the Cuban people given how difficult it is to do that. I think that is something that is very important. Again, if there are adjustments, would love to talk to you about that.

I mean, I guess I would come back to your opening comments, which I very much agreed with, about, you know, looking at what works and what doesn't work and, you know, trying to—you know, ultimately, we are looking about the impact on the ground. And I think, you know, the programs that you are referencing that go beyond traditional democracy programs, you know, I think the question for the administration as a whole is, you know, is there something different that hasn't been tried that might, you know, somehow change the dynamics on the ground, which are only heading in the wrong direction for the Cuban people?

So, you know, I hear you. And absolutely it is a stifling society, and the ability to start a business or do anything else, the government, you know, again, interferes where it can. But I think our goals in administration is, again, to look to see those actors who might be change agents. And that includes, of course, those political prisoners who are currently jailed for their values and for their voice, but also looking at a broader array of societal actors.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. And, again, I look forward to working with you. But you would agree that these licensed entrepreneurs, folks, there has never been somebody there that—again, the regime licenses them. The regime decides who they are. All you have to do is go to YouTube and find the videos of those who are trying to be entrepreneurs, you know, they get beat up, they get imprisoned.

So, you would agree that those are associated with the regime, right? And I get where you are going, but I think we need to understand that those licensed by the regime are not folks that are, you know, change agents; they are licensed by the regime. And I think you would agree with that part.

Ms. POWER. I would want to, again, talk about specifics and—you know, this is a little bit more general, but, I mean, certainly the state is omnipresent in societal life, in providing permissions to operate in a range of ways. At the same time, you know, simply getting a permission doesn't—doesn't mean that an entrepreneur may not have something to contribute and—when it comes to technologies or, you know, bringing new ideas, you know, to some sector, to some community that may not, you know, ultimately have some beneficial effect or some liberalizing effect.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Well, to be continued. But, again—and bear with us as far as allowing us the flexibility to go to different members. Ms. Meng, I think we are going to go to Mr. Fleischmann now.

Mr. Fleischmann, you are recognized.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Madam Administrator, for being with us today.

My question involves private industry partnerships. USAID currently has its largest ever contract under public tender, a set of 10-year contracts worth 17 billion dollars to distribute health commodities to last-mile communities around the world. This is a continuation of a 10.5 billion dollars contract, which was a continuation of a 2.5 billion dollars contract. The agency has been investing and operating the same way since aid programs were developed in the 1960s.

My question is: As the U.S. competes with other aid programs, like those sponsored by China, what is USAID doing to ensure we are getting the most effective results from our aid dollars? How is the agency working with private-sector companies and organizations located and invested in aid-recipient countries to create momentum toward self-sustainability and less reliance on foreign aid?

Thank you.

Ms. POWER. Thank you so much. I am going to try to be brief. I have a lot to say on this question, and it is an excellent question.

So first, we have set a goal as an agency to dramatically increase our assistance to local organizations. The numbers that you describe, which are multi—I presume multiyear contracts, are reflective of a broader phenomenon, which is a tendency to rely in large measure for U.S. assistance to go principally to large, often U.S.-based contractors or large international organizations.

I don't—I think, over time, the sustainability of those investments when the contract ends, one has reason to question. I mean, our contracting partners work hard to try to ensure they are sustainable. They often have subcontractees who might be local, but we are trying to get, by 2025, for 25 percent of our assistance to go directly to local organizations.

And second thing I would say is at the heart of your question, I think, is about—it is the objective of self-reliance. And I think that is a true distinguishing feature of U.S. assistance and our objectives versus that of the PRC.

We are trying—and my predecessor, Mark Green, of course, even the defining animating principle for the agency was journey to self-reliance. I very much agree with that goal of countries wanting to work themselves out of assistance relationships, out of dependence relationships. The PRC approach is debt, saddling future generations for years.

The PRC is 9-to-1 loan to grant. USAID is 9-to-1 grant—or U.S. Government—U.S. assistance, 9-to-1 grant to loan. And that is very much in keeping with this idea of, you know, countries wanting to work from aid to trade as expeditiously as possible.

You know, the vast majority of our 12 largest trading partners, eight of them were previously foreign assistance recipients. And that is what other countries know about that. They give us that statistic and say, We want to be in that category that become trading partners to the United States where our trade relationship dramatically exceeds which—what we ever did in the assistance space.

So I will say, just lastly, the—even though it sounds so easy to go from these large contracts to smaller partners on the ground who are rooted in communities, it is more staff intensive because, to do \$100,000 grant or contract or \$1 million grant and a contract

can sometimes take the same time to meet all the compliance requirements at the same accounting, the same lawyering on the part of the partner. So we are trying to build out our dedicated, almost SWAT team capacity to work with those who would like to compete.

Lastly—very last thing I would say is that our numbers this year for contracting with small and disadvantaged businesses, we met our target and exceeded it, I believe, by over a percent. And we are going to continue to raise the bar on ourselves in that area as well.

Mr. FLEISCHMANN. Thank you for your answers to those questions.

And, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, sir.

Mr. LaTurner, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Administrator Power, thank you for being here today.

Ms. POWER. Thank you.

Mr. LATURNER. As we continue to engage with the people of Afghanistan to provide humanitarian assistance, I believe it is important to understand the continued risk to ensure the Taliban are not legitimatized. And I appreciate the chairman raising these concerns about the situation on the ground as it has continued to develop over the last 2 years.

The situation for women and girls in Afghanistan has become dire. In December, the Taliban banned women from engaging in humanitarian and development efforts. And I would like to reiterate the chairman's concern about the lack of safeguards to ensure aid does not flow to the Taliban.

Related to this specific ban that the Taliban has put in place, how does this affect assistance distribution?

Ms. POWER. Thank you.

Well, we—USAID, from the minute the initial ban was announced for NGOs, came together with other donors to try to align our position so—in the hopes of having maximum leverage of course with a regime that seems not to care at all what anybody thinks about it or does. But nonetheless, we have sort of leapt together under a broad set of U.N. guidelines.

In certain provinces, it is clear that, notwithstanding the fact that the Taliban rules everywhere, officials have been willing to allow women to continue to work, for example, in the health sector or in the distribution of humanitarian assistance.

In places where that has not happened, the U.N. has—that is, where the leadership is insisting on the ban, we have paused many—with many of our partners anything other than food assistance. So, you know, we were beginning to do a little bit of livelihoods work. Obviously the education support that we are able to provide is much more limited. We are doing mainly online support so that girls, you know, from home can continue to try to learn.

So we are—as the United Nations or as the United Nations engages and seeks to reverse the ban, we are trying to concentrate assistance in places where women have been—have continued to be able to work.

Your point about safeguards is very well taken. That is why we are—notwithstanding my exchange with the Congressman just be-

fore about wanting to work more with local organizations, it really is organizations like the World Food Program, UNICEF, and others, who we know have those safeguards built in and understand what the consequences would be if the Taliban were to benefit from our assistance. That is why we are overweighted, you know, compared to what we would like to do in other countries, toward international organizations with that kind of infrastructure for compliance.

Mr. LATURNER. Have you identified all the current and former partners or aid recipients who are at risk of harassment or harm by the Taliban?

Ms. POWER. Well, let me distinguish two things. We are—we certainly have a mapping of all of our—of USAID's former partners and staff over the 20 years that we had a very, very fulsome portfolio there.

Separate—overlapping with that, a subset of those individuals, of course—a large subset have either gotten out of Afghanistan, or want to get out of Afghanistan. And so what we have done is we have set up a special task force at USAID, notwithstanding the fact that the big flurry of arrivals to the United States occurred in the immediate wake of the collapse of Kabul and the Taliban takeover, we are still in touch and attempting to work with the State Department to push through cases of those implementing partner associates of USAID or those who implemented U.S. assistance to basically help them navigate what can be a very difficult process to be able to gain status, or an SIV, or some other means of coming to the U.S.

It is a very slow process. We are also very focused on our Foreign Service nationals. 100 percent of the Afghan staff that we had, which was more than 100, before the collapse, 100 percent of those who wanted to come here are here, but some of their family members are still behind, so we are also very focused on family reunification.

So we have invested at USAID in a kind of permanent unit for as long as it takes to continue to track these cases and try to support those who did so much to advance U.S. objectives over those years. Is it perfect? No. Is it moving as quickly as we would like? No. But are we still, you know, very, very alert to the risks and are we still standing with the people who, again, advance—whether girls' education or maternal health or food security, we still consider those individuals part of the extended USAID family.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you, Administrator.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you, sir.

Congresswoman Meng, you are recognized.

Ms. MENG. Thank you.

Ambassador Power, I wanted to ask about a topic that is dear to my heart.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been particularly focused on the importance of safe and sustainable access to water, sanitation, hygiene, WASH, in healthcare facilities. Access to safe WASH in healthcare facilities is critical to a strong health system to prevent the spread of diseases, to address the growing challenge

of antimicrobial resistance, and to ensure quality care and the safety of patients and health workers.

Yet a recent World Health Organization, UNICEF report cited that, globally, one in five healthcare facilities does not have access to basic water services. And, every year, 17 million women give birth in facilities without adequate WASH.

How can USAID strengthen its existing global health efforts by incorporating and sustaining WASH into those programs, thereby strengthening pandemic preparedness and response and improving overall health outcomes?

Ms. POWER. Thank you, Congresswoman. And thank you for always being so focused on this issue, which, in the development community and in the humanitarian community, I think, does not get enough attention.

So just to distinguish, in the emergency space, you know, it is our Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs that focuses on ensuring, along with the food that we might be transporting from the United States to a crisis area or the food that cash is allowing individuals to buy, that we not neglect the importance of water and sanitation.

I mean, imagine in our own lives, yes, as a mother, you of course want to feed your family, but imagine that, you know, not being able to provide clean water or access to basic sanitation.

So, under the humanitarian umbrella, WASH, along with protection, you know, to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, along with food, along with health, that has to be seen as a package. And our humanitarians take a share of the emergency assistance you provide and push it in that direction, as do our colleagues at PRM, who offer support for refugees.

In the development space, we have—you know, the—our commitment to the letter and to the spirit of the Water for the World Act and especially making investments in those countries, as you say, that need water and sanitation the most. So about 50 percent of our water funding goes to our 22 highest-priority countries in Asia, Africa—sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. We—and we have probably briefed you on this, or your staff on this in the past, but it is a rigorous data process, because we can't be everywhere. There is need everywhere. We are absolutely not going to able to meet all of the need.

But really trying to identify where the need is the greatest, where we have partners, you know, who we think are reliable or have the political will as well to make those kind of structural investments, whether in health systems or in infrastructure, sanitation systems, and—and, you know, we are making inroads, but the challenges related to water in light of, again, changing weather patterns and growing drought are growing more, not less immense in some of those most vulnerable countries.

So we have our work cut out for us. And that is why it is so important for other donors as well to become more active in this domain, because it—no more than in food security with Feed the Future, you know, can USAID sustain, you know, being as well the sort of lead on WASH? We really need other countries to take sectoral ownership of this as well.

Ms. MENG. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mr. Carl, you are recognized.

Mr. CARL. We are moving right along here, Mr. Chairman.

Administrator Power, you know, I want to support the Ukraine dilemma that we are in over there. The Ukrainians have continued to fight to win in the face of the wretched, brutal invasion. Congress has stepped in to face this historical attack on Ukraine's sovereignty to provide equal historical levels of economic and humanitarian assistance.

Every dollar—and I truly mean every dollar—must be accounted for. That is the pushback I am getting from my constituents. And they are very frustrated and very tired. All they see is everything going out and no answerability for it.

We owe it to both the Americans and to the Ukrainians, people who are fighting this war, to make sure every dollar is used properly.

Will you please describe in detail the layer of monitoring and oversight requirements for our assistance to Ukraine?

Ms. POWER. Yes. Thank you so much, Congressman.

So your constituents' demands, their questions are questions that every American has every right to ask, every Member of Congress has every right to ask, and that, from day one, we have known, even, you know, with the—what—we have known that we would be accountable to answer those questions.

So the systems that we had put in place from the beginning have put us in a position now where, as you know probably from engagements with the inspector general at USAID or those for the State Department, notwithstanding the vast sums of money that have flowed in direct budget support to the government of Ukraine, up to this point, there has been no evidence that any of our assistance has been misappropriated.

And that is, in part, because the system we have set up is one where it is about reimbursement for verified expenses. We do this—we channel the direct budget support through the World Bank. They have an established mechanism with safeguards internal to their system.

As the Secretary, I think, testified here, there are about 50 people at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, especially now that our staff presence has ramped back up, who are—have a hand in overseeing how this assistance is spent. That wasn't enough for us or for me personally knowing, again, that these questions would legitimately get asked.

We hired Deloitte as a third-party monitor to be able to do spot checks, to do a gap analysis also into the Ukrainian ministries systems and their, again, verification systems.

I think you saw with the housecleaning that Zelenskyy did several months ago, of course, that there was corruption, and it didn't involve USAID assistance. But you saw a systemic response.

And what I would also just point to, which is not well-known, I think, up here or by the American people, is the investments that you have enabled us to make over 10 years in Ukraine's anticorruption institutions, including its prosecutor general's office, its special anticorruption bureau, and its independent media—and it is the independent media who first surfaced, indeed, the allegation that the deputy minister of the interior was using funds inappropriately.

Just last week, I announced an additional \$20 million, thanks to some of the resources in one of the more recent supps—supplements in order to fund another verification effort, another organization coming in and providing a check upon a check. And of course, our inspector general at USAID is going to be ramping up their physical staff presence on the ground.

But, you know, again, up until this point—and, please, if anybody finds anything that is brought to their attention, we have a hotline that has been set up where people can report anything that they see—you know, see something, say something, so we can smother it quickly. But, as of yet, I think the system has worked.

Mr. CARL. So you brought up another question for me. Understanding the security situation and the safety of our staff, which is very, very critical, are we conducting in-person monitoring by the U.S. Government personnel?

Ms. POWER. We have—we are working primarily through implementing partners, like Deloitte and like the new entity that we will be bringing online. That is how USAID works generally. We work—we hire implementing partners, or contract out implementing partners to perform whatever the task is at hand. Here, it is verification and monitoring.

We do have 47 Ukrainian staff—70 percent of USAID's workforce overseas are nationals of the countries in which we work, and they have been present in Kyiv, even as the U.S. presence drew down in Kyiv and in other parts of Ukraine. And they are also active in the ministries and physically, you know, staging visits and so forth.

But that is different, I think, than what you are talking about, which is sort of being right seat, left seat with the people—

Mr. CARL. Right.

Ms. POWER [continuing]. Who are spending the money. That is done through implementing partners.

Mr. CARL. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mr. Carl, thank you for continually bringing this up.

Administrator, I will tell you that this is a question that Mr. Carl has been asking. And you are the first person who has actually answered it in a detailed, concrete way. And so I thank you for doing that. It has been kind of our frustration, and I am sure Mr. Carl shares this, that he has not been able to get a straight answer until today. So thank you for, like, a specific, concrete, straight answer.

I am concerned by the administration's encroachment of climate change and emission reductions into almost every country in every sector; and, you know, particularly when many of these programs will have no measurable impact on the global temperatures, and are frankly at odds with the development mandates of USAID.

This is particularly true, for example, developing countries in Latin America and across Africa, where there is zero plausible scenarios that their emissions have any impact whatsoever on the climate change.

For example, Power Africa, a bipartisan initiative whose authorities mandate all power generation is on the table, has been frankly lobotomized and replaced with carbon-free objectives, making it im-

possible to meet the Power Africa power generation and connection goals by 2030.

Again, imposing these restrictions on countries whose emissions simply do not matter under any scenario just strikes me as deeply hypocritical since U.S. reduction in emissions with an all—we reduce our emissions with an all-of-above approach. So to impose such restrictions on these countries for a negligible at best effect on climate change and which will, frankly, hamper the development and USAID's efforts to lift them from poverty seems highly counterproductive.

So, again, do you agree that this is contrary to the Power Africa mandate and limits the economic growth potential from power generation? Let me start with that one.

Ms. POWER. So, first of all, you and I had a version of this exchange, I think, in your office and stipulate that I think no scientist is saying that the steps that we are taking is going to bring about cooling. It is about how much worse will it get and whether we can limit how bad it gets.

So I do think it is important to note that every contribution to limiting emissions, again, aggregated, because we need countries all around the world, as you—you make this point often. PRC is such a colossal emitter. India is a huge emitter. United States, all of us together need to act in order to limit the damage. So this is not, sadly, about undoing the damage.

Secondly—I will come to Power Africa in just a second, but the second thing is, as we have discussed, this is—I would say the two asks that I hear about more often than anything else right now are jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs. We have so many young people, something Congresswoman Meng often asks about, and how are we going to actually employ them? You know, or can you help us with trade, can you help us on economic growth and development, and then help us adapt to the changing climate?

And so—I will come, again, in just a second to Power Africa, but the demand for drought-resistant seeds, the demand for drip irrigation, the demand for disaster-resilient infrastructure, you cannot travel to a developing country and not hear about what extreme weather events—droughts, floods, whatever—and the projections are doing to development gains that we all work so hard to secure.

With regard to Power Africa, you know, now that renewable energy is so much cheaper, we are actually, again—you know, you and I might have had a different exchange about this maybe 3 or 4 years ago at the tail end of the Obama administration, but countries also want to do things quickly, and they want to leapfrog prior phases of development, because often popping up a bunch of solar panels in the middle of nowhere can be a way of securing rapid access to energy. I saw this in Lebanon in a recent trip.

So we are working with our partners on the ground, and I think what you have seen is, because of Power Africa, you know, the amount of electricity going to impoverished communities and communities that would have otherwise had to wait years, if not decades, is way up.

And, you know, there are exceptions that can be made, you know, but fundamentally what we are hearing from the countries that want to electrify and want to do so efficiently is that now,

given private-sector investments and given what the price levels are, that the preference is for renewables, by and large.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. But I think you would agree that countries cannot develop without large-scale power? I mean, you mentioned some potential small-scale things. But I think everybody would agree, without large-scale power, there is no development.

And program data appears to document a significant drop in gas projects under this administration, and so we will continue to talk about that. But, again, my concern is that we are, frankly, kind of going backwards on our goals in a bipartisan program, such as the one that I just mentioned.

I don't want to go beyond my time.

Ms. Meng.

Ms. MENG. Thank you.

Administrator Power, since you mentioned youth, I have been focused on making sure that the voices of young people are integrated in U.S. foreign policy. And in countries facing conflict, it will be young people who will bear the burden of sustaining peace over generations, leading their society from reconciliation to prosperity.

I am especially excited to see that the number of laws, policies, or procedures adopted or implemented with Federal assistance designed to promote youth participation is now a standard indicator. However, it is not clear how USAID accounts for engaging young people as partners in peacebuilding and humanitarian activities in its 2024 budget request.

How will USAID prioritize the role of youth in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery efforts, recognizing that youth are the majority population in conflict-affected countries, and have a unique role to play in long-term peace and stability?

Ms. POWER. Thank you. If I might just add one other thing that I—on the renewables front, and make up the time hopefully. But just wanted to note that the PRC is investing more in renewables than any other government. Last year, 546 billion dollars, four times that of the U.S., half the world's spending on renewables. I do think, even in the realm of economic and geopolitical competition, that that is something that we should take note of.

On education in conflict-affected areas, probably our most noteworthy investment is in Education Can't Wait, which is an initiative that you know well probably, created by UNICEF, which really took account of the lost generation, and particularly it started, I think, with an eye to Syrian refugees, who were in no position to be able to go home, and ensuring, again, that they could continue their education if living in refugee camps or if displaced internally. So that is something, I think, that we have requested in this budget, 25 million dollars, to continue to support. And it is immensely important.

I think, there is our dedicated youth programming, and then there is what we need to do, because so much of the developing world is young and under 35, which is that all of our programming should be youth programming, just like all of our programming should be, you know, overcoming barriers for women and girls.

And so, you know, I think you have seen our youth policy which came out last year. I think you and I have had an exchange about that. But really, if we are designing programs that don't have

young people in mind or even central in mind, we are likely going to miss out on the kind of development outcomes that we seek.

And so, we have a new—we have just started a new Office of the Chief Economist at USAID and building out our ability to use evidence to do randomized control trials. We have measurement learning and well-established programs, but this will really enhance, I think, the rigor of our ability to know what works, back to Congressman Diaz-Balart's comments at the beginning.

In the youth area, I also just want to make sure, as you note, that we are measuring specifically what the impacts are on young people since those are fundamentally going to be the individuals who, dictate the development trajectory for decades to come.

Ms. MENG. And, to piggyback off of that, last year, Representative Frankel and I got language included in the fiscal year 2023 omnibus to encourage USAID to allocate resources through the international disaster assistance account to provide access to safe, inclusive, and quality education for refugees and internally displaced children.

What is the Biden administration's plan to support education and flexible learning opportunities for displaced children through this fiscal year 2024's request?

Ms. POWER. Thank you.

I think—I will get back to you if there is more to add, but I think it is this \$25 million request for Education Can't Wait. It is UNICEF that is operating on the front lines with displaced persons. And, again, under our humanitarian rubric versus our development rubric, I think that has been the best vehicle for that support. But I will get back to you or your team if there is more.

Ms. MENG. Okay. Great. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you very much. So I feel like a ping pong ball today going back and forth to another committee, but thank you again for being here.

I want to just follow up on this whole issue of education, because I think this is something I think we all can agree, is that an educated population means a more prosperous and peaceful population. And I think we are all very worried about almost generations losing access to education, especially in some of these conflict areas.

We heard—Mr. Chair, if you remember, you had a very compelling committee meeting where we heard some—from some of the women in Afghanistan, and we have heard what happened to education there.

I met recently with women from Ukraine. And, also, I heard their sad tales, and, you know—so I am sure you are well aware.

So what my concern—again, I want to go back to the budget cuts. And what would be the effect of a—you are saying a 22 percent. I am saying maybe it is a 30 percent—both are alarming—cuts in terms of educating, or making sure children of the world are educated.

And how does that affect the security of the United States, because I think that is what our folks want to know?

Ms. POWER. Well, you know, if you look at, let's say, a 22 percent cut to our—the education budget that we had over the last year, you know, you are talking about \$300 million or so, if not more, going to basic education and higher education. I mean, some of the—you know, we have all had the experience of meeting ministers from other countries who, you know, credit the inflection point of their career being a USAID-provided scholarship, you know, back when they were younger.

I was at the American University of Beirut. We are still supporting that. The American University of Afghanistan, which is now operating, you know, based, of course, not in Afghanistan. I mean, these are investments in stability and safety. At the basic education level, we are reaching, this year, about 12 million girls with our education programming, which is, you know, only a small fraction when you think about the level of need, particularly post pandemic.

We aim to increase that to 15 million. If—with a 20 percent budget cut, depending on how we would allocate the cuts, you would be looking at, you know, 3 million fewer girls getting reached by U.S. basic education support.

And in terms of the costs of not being educated, just makes you very susceptible to all the wrong things. And we know in—particularly in growing swaths of sub-Saharan Africa and West Africa, you know, how extremists have come in and exploited the diminishment of livelihoods, that the drying up of large lakes, you know, has caused, as fisher people go out of business, as pastoralists lose their livestock to drought, then what? Who shows up? What do they offer?

Well, if you can't move to a city and, you know, potentially, you know, get access to some kind of skilled, you know, labor opportunity, then maybe when that extremist comes along and that recruiter for Boko Haram or ISIS or whatever the latest deadly monstrous movement is, you know, maybe that becomes a more appealing choice.

So that is why Education Can't Wait, what we just talked about, in conflict areas and crisis areas is so important, but that is why our basic investments across areas that are suffering really steep economic headwinds—you know, Kenya now, they are calling it this—instead of Silicon Valley, the Savannah Valley. You know, they are producing more tech professionals, more engineers than most advanced economies. And that is, in part, because of these investments that we have made.

In Nepal, not long ago, I went to a school that USAID supported, and I asked, you know, what everybody wanted to do, and every single girl and boy alike raised their hand and said they were going to be an IT professional or an engineer. And that is, in part, because they have gotten exposure through USAID basic education and gotten the skills that they need to put themselves in a position to apply to universities, not only in Nepal, but anywhere in the world they can compete. And that is an investment in prosperity, which is, in turn, an investment in our stability.

Ms. FRANKEL. So, as I see—and we have a few more minutes, but as we think about these budget cuts, just from your perspective,

what is your biggest fear as to what happens to America's, or United States' place in the world?

Ms. POWER. Well, I mean, it is no secret that the—we are not alone in making development investments, and the PRC's investments are ones, again, as we have discussed, that emphasize dependence, not independence. They are much more extractive in nature, fueling their own economy on the backs of, you know, taking minerals out or other natural resources. And they are elite-to-elite, and not investments really in the people. Indeed, often, as you know, the PRC brings in its own workers, and even the job benefits are quite limited of these large infrastructure investments.

So for us not to be involved, to be scaling back at a time when the economic headwinds have grown much worse, when we have seen the first drop in global life expectancy since the 1950s, I mean, that is—is that a moment to cut back, when life expectancy is going down?

When we see the good that a program like PEPFAR did, not only for the 25 million people who got access to lifesaving treatment, but to U.S. standing in communities that were affected by PEPFAR, you see how it changes forever the way that America is seen.

And, when we call on countries and urge them to join us, let's say, in a sanctions effort or to open their doors to an American company, that matters. That standing matters. The regulatory environment, the enabling environment that USAID has worked with countries to help shape for, with American businesses and private-sector investment in mind, that matters.

So we do not want to cede this terrain to those that don't want to create more openness, more transparency, more, again, entry potential for American businesses any more than we want to cede the terrain to extremist recruiters.

Ms. FRANKEL. And like China?

Ms. POWER. Like the PRC.

Ms. FRANKEL. Okay. I yield back.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

I just want to thank you for your efforts and your commitment. I would just—Ms. Frankel, I just want to point something out, that, in the President's budget request, they are requesting a 23 percent below fiscal year 2023. So your beef isn't with me. I think this is a conversation you need to have—

Ms. FRANKEL. My beef is with who?

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Well, it is always with me. Your beef is always with me, but that is a separate issue. But, on the issue of basic and higher education, I know that is something that is near and dear to you. Again, the administration is suggesting a 23 percent reduction over last year.

Mr. Carl.

Mr. CARL. Mr. Chairman, before we start, can I ask a question? You may have just answered it, but where are we getting this 22 percent, 30 percent decrease in your budget? Where are those numbers coming from? Did you send out a memo that I didn't get? Has there been something issued to the press I haven't seen, because I am unaware of any of these numbers that keep flying around? Where are they coming from?

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. That is a very good question, because obviously we don't have an allocation yet, so—

Mr. CARL. Okay. So this is just something fictitious that has been laid out there. It is another one of these things, the sky is falling, the sky is falling. Everybody is supposed to respond.

With that said, Ms. Power, really quickly, you talked about China. You talked about what China is doing. I was in Central America. I physically saw what China is doing.

I have run businesses my entire life. I understand—when it comes time to cut, I understand when it is time to make the budget work, because we all hit highs and lows in our business lives. So does the government, and we are there. So we are looking. We are trying to figure out what we can do with, what we can do without. That is the whole focus of these meetings.

But my question to you, in Central America, I see China coming in, building additions to the Panama Canal. They are doing stuff in Mexico—a couple of the ports, I understand.

So my question to you is: If China is getting ahead of us here—and we all admit they are getting ahead of us here. And they spend their money in all the right places obviously. Why are we—why is the Americans focused on spending 86.3 million dollars towards LGBTQ issues and not towards power plants, as you said, are so important?

Ms. POWER. Thank you. Well, as you know, the budget request also includes very substantial investments in Power Africa. The USAID administrator is the vice chair of the board of the Development Finance Corporation. I think—

Mr. CARL. But the real question is LGBTQ.

Ms. POWER. I am going to come to that, but—

Mr. CARL. Why are we spending our money there?

Ms. POWER. I think to reduce a substantial budget request that, in multiple sectors, you know, really would demonstrate—would not only bring about development gains, but would demonstrate significant contrast with the PRC model along the lines of what we were just—I just established—

Mr. CARL. How does 86 million dollars put us—

Ms. POWER. Because—

Mr. CARL [continuing]. Ahead of China?

Ms. POWER. Because United States stands up for marginalized people, and we stand up for human rights. We stand up for girls who are being persecuted by the Taliban, and we stand up for transgender people who are being murdered or who are being denied access to healthcare.

Mr. CARL. But and when comes power plants and—

Ms. POWER. No, this is not about overcoming. This is why we have a multisectoral budget request that has come to you and is very deliberate about the range of areas that we are investing in.

But again, to be clear, you have more than 60 countries who criminalize same-sex status. You have the death penalty for same-sex couples or same-sex—LGBTQI individuals in 10 countries. The death penalty. You have a bill pending in Uganda right now that now already has individuals reporting on their neighbors in order to be able to comply with the law that they think is coming. And you have, in our PEPFAR programs, people actually not showing

up for treatment because they are so worried that they will be jailed—

Mr. CARL. I—again, I apologize. This is my time, so let me recall it here real quick.

So—but what I am getting at here is we have to figure out—we have to figure out what is the most important thing to do today?

Ms. POWER. We cannot turn our back on people who are—and I think we—

Mr. CARL. Okay. So you will put—

Ms. POWER. America's stance—

Mr. CARL. You will put that ahead of China's—

Ms. POWER. It is not put ahead of anything.

Mr. CARL [continuing]. Chemical plants and China's—

Ms. POWER. I am not putting it—I do think it is a distinguishing feature of U.S. assistance that we support vulnerable people, and we believe that no individual—

Mr. CARL. The world has always—

Ms. POWER [continuing]. Should be discriminated against—

Mr. CARL [continuing]. Had vulnerable people—

Ms. POWER [continuing]. Or killed—

Mr. CARL [continuing]. And we do our best or do—

Ms. POWER [continuing]. Or attacked—

Mr. CARL [continuing]. As much as we can—

Ms. POWER [continuing]. Because of—

Mr. CARL [continuing]. But we can't do it at the—

Ms. POWER [continuing]. Who they love.

Mr. CARL [continuing]. Price of our children in the future.

Ms. POWER. We are not proposing that, and that is why we are proposing extensive investments, which it sounds like you would support, in a range of sectors that will allow us to compete with China. But we cannot forget that standing up for human rights and standing up for vulnerable and marginalized people is a major point of distinction with the PRC, as well as a major reason that the United States has the standing it does around the world.

Mr. CARL. So how much of this 86.3 million dollars is going towards—let's break it down—transgender issues?

Ms. FRANKEL. Oh, my God.

Ms. POWER. We—I can—

Mr. CARL. Ma'am, I would appreciate—

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Let's just please—

Ms. POWER. So, when we make budget requests—

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. The gentleman—it is your time. It is—

Mr. CARL. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART [continuing]. Mr. Carl's time.

Ms. POWER. When we make budget requests, that is in order to secure an envelope of funding that we would then work through, you know, sort of what the programming would look like in specific places.

A lot of it would come on the basis of demands from our more than 80 missions around the world and where the need is the greatest, where the vulnerability is the greatest.

So I wouldn't have those specifics at this time, prior to you authorizing the 86 million dollars.

Mr. CARL. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I return my time. Thank you.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Thank you.

As we know, the members may submit additional questions for the record.

I want to particularly thank Ms. Meng for—we have tried to be flexible to make sure that we deal with people's schedules.

And, Madam Administrator, I want to thank you again for your time.

I do want to bring in one more issue, just because of the Power Africa. If you use the EPA's model, there is no measurable change in temperatures if we brought emissions in Africa to zero. And so that is the point that I wanted to make there.

I thank every member for allowing Ms. Meng and I to be flexible.

And, with that, that concludes today's hearing. Thank you so much.

Ms. POWER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, all.

The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs stand adjourned.

[Questions and answers submitted for the record follow:]

**Question for the Record Submitted to
Administrator Power
Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
House Committee on Appropriations
April 18, 2022**

Question:

Maternal Child Health and Vaccines: Administrator Power, during the hearing you were asked what a 22% cut would mean for women and girls. You responded saying, "When it comes to maternal and child health, this would mean about \$20 million less for that programming. That would mean about 19 -- 19,000 maternal and newborn child deaths, but also 13 million fewer kids getting vaccinated. And that, of course, will mean, over the long-term, about -- at least 115,000 more deaths." In FY22, the Administration requested \$900,450,000 in maternal child health, which includes \$290,000,000 for GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance. In FY24, the Administration requested \$900,000,000, which includes \$300,000,000 for GAVI.

With such an assessment, and merely small incremental increases requested in prior years, why did the Administration not ask for funding to adequately meet these needs in the areas of maternal child health and vaccinations in this and prior fiscal years?

Answer:

The Administration's FY24 budget request for USAID's Maternal and Child Health programs, including the robust sustained support for Gavi, will enable us to implement our revised Framework to Prevent Child and Maternal Deaths in high mortality-burden countries, and make continued progress towards our maternal and child survival goals.

Last year, the Agency undertook a thorough review of its maternal and child health programs and developed the revised Framework to Prevent Child and Maternal Deaths to sharpen our focus on coverage, quality, and equity to measurably improve health outcomes for women and children. In 2021 alone, USAID's maternal and child health programs helped more than 91 million women and children access essential, often lifesaving, care, and since 2001, USAID's contributions to Gavi have helped immunize approximately one billion children and saved 23 million lives. Any significant cuts in funding for USAID could result in millions of children not receiving life-saving vaccines to reduce vaccine-preventable deaths, hundreds of thousands of women not receiving care during pregnancy, and highly vulnerable newborns not receiving essential post-natal care.

Question:

Basic Education: Administrator Power, you were asked about potential cuts to education and responded saying, "With a 20 percent budget cut, depending on how we would allocate the cuts, you would be looking at, you know, 3 million fewer girls getting reached by U.S. basic education support." The Administration's own FY24 request proposes a 23% cut in basic education funding from FY22 levels. Further, despite describing Education Cannot Wait as "immensely important" and "one of our most noteworthy investments" in education in conflict-affected areas, the FY24 request does not include funding for Education Cannot Wait.

- How does the Administration assess its own proposed cut of 23% and the impact these cuts would have on basic education?
- How does the Administration assess the impact of its own request to not provide funding in FY24 to Education Cannot Wait?
- How many children will not attend school as a result of the Administration's FY24 request?

Answer:

As the largest bilateral donor to basic education in the world, USAID is uniquely positioned to continue to support learners, educators, and education systems to expand access to quality education and improve learning outcomes in partner countries, building on the strong foundation set by the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education. In fiscal year 2022, USAID basic education programs reached 28 million children and youth in 56 countries, including 31 countries affected by conflict or crisis.

USAID will use funding in the fiscal year 2024 request to build on existing programs, and importantly to leverage additional resources through partnerships with bilateral and multilateral partners, the private sector, and external stakeholders. Through USAID's role on the Board of Directors of the Global Partnership for Education, U.S. funds are pooled with resources from other donors to leverage domestic resources for education and maximize impact. USAID's programs will work to increase the resilience of partner country education systems, expand access to quality education so that learners acquire foundational learning skills, and equip youth with the skills they need to lead productive lives, gain employment, and positively contribute to society.

The United States is proud to continue to partner with Education Cannot Wait in ensuring that the most marginalized children and youth in countries experiencing emergencies and protracted crises have access to lifesaving and life-sustaining education services. In addition to the financial contributions made to date, USAID provides significant support to ECW in its role to coordinate donors, private sector stakeholders, and humanitarian and development actors

to collaboratively support education in conflict and crisis-affected contexts for learners in need of assistance.

Question:

Fentanyl: Administrator Power, I believe Fentanyl is one of the top global challenges in terms of American deaths.

Understanding that other agencies are in the lead when it comes to counter-narcotics programs overseas, how is USAID aligned with the rest of the Administration to leverage its tens of millions of dollars in taxpayer funds in Mexico to help in our overall national security imperative to counter fentanyl proliferation into our hometowns?

Answer:

Intensifying efforts with international partners to disrupt the illicit fentanyl supply chain is a top priority for public health and national security. While the State Department and law enforcement agencies are leading on this issue, USAID agrees that this is an issue of shared responsibility. For our part, USAID is working to address issues of gang violence by supporting youth engagement programs to provide alternatives to gangs and off-ramps to those who have come into conflict with the law through recidivism programs. USAID responds to increasing substance use in at-risk populations and helps justice operators to increase case resolutions for small-scale drug-related crimes and focus resources on high-impact crimes that are often linked with transnational criminal organizations.

For example, as part of our rule of law work, USAID has helped state-level justice operators to:

- Increase the rate of resolution of small-scale drug possession and dealing case;
- Increase use of alternative case disposition and closeout mechanisms to focus resources on high-impact crimes that are often linked with transnational criminal organizations that traffic fentanyl, such as homicides and disappearances; and
- Set up task forces on prosecuting criminal organizations, homicides, and other high-impact crimes.

USAID also strengthens Mexican security and justice institutions at the state level to foster the rule of law in key, targeted areas of Mexico to reduce impunity and violence. For example, USAID coordinated with the Mexican federal government to support 33 municipalities in 12 states to implement the National Civic Justice Model, a violence prevention-focused community court system that identifies high-risk youth and directs them toward tailored services and treatment. As a result, only 9 percent of youth recently released from incarceration and who participated in USAID programs committed new crimes, as compared to the national average of 60 percent.

Question:

Colombia: There is great concern that a softer approach towards illicit drug interdiction and prosecution could create opportunity for synthetic drugs to build a stronghold in their production marketplace.

How will USAID ensure funds aren't wasted in the effort to lessen the prevalence of drug production in Colombia, and why should anyone on this Committee see Colombian President Gustavo Petro as a good-faith partner on this issue?

Answer:

Our partnership with Colombia is crucial to advancing a peaceful, prosperous, democratic, and inclusive hemisphere. The March 2023 High Level Dialogue between our two countries made clear that our shared interests far outweigh our differences; that the bilateral relationship remains robust, particularly at the technical working levels; and that we can and must continue to work together even in areas where we may differ on approaches, such as reducing illegal drug crops. Senior US officials have emphasized to the Colombian government that reducing coca cultivation will require improved law enforcement, eradication of coca leaf, and interdiction of cocaine.

USAID, along with the State Department, has been direct with the Petro Administration on the need to remain committed to rooting out illegal coca cultivation and combating drug trafficking and how certain proposed policies, including on counternarcotics, would impact our cooperation.

USAID will continue to work with the State Department International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Bureau (INL) and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to engage on counternarcotics policies and programs.

Question:

Ukraine has a vibrant and capable private sector that is eager to play a role in responding to immense needs caused by Russia's invasion and future reconstruction needs.

What is USAID doing to leverage these resources as part of efforts to support Ukraine?

Answer:

Through USAID's engagement with the Ukrainian private sector, we are building dynamic, mutually beneficial partnerships with companies and investors to address many of the challenges that Ukrainian businesses and the country have faced since Russia's full-scale invasion. USAID's Economic Resilience Activity (ERA) was designed to foster Ukrainian economic

resilience in the face of Russian aggression. ERA supports displaced Ukrainian businesses and individuals, including in the newly liberated areas of Ukraine, to rebuild their lives and livelihoods and capitalize on entrepreneurial opportunities. The activity also supports local institutions to rebuild a resilient post-war economy.

ERA is one of the implementers of the Agricultural Resilience Initiative - Ukraine (AGRI-Ukraine) to bolster Ukrainian agricultural production and exports and to help alleviate the global food security crisis exacerbated by Putin's brutal war on Ukraine. The Ukrainian private sector has been pivotal to the AGRI effort. In March 2023, USAID announced three new AGRI-Ukraine private-sector partnerships with Ukrainian based companies. USAID, Grain Alliance, Kernel, and Nibulon will make combined investments of more than \$36 million to support storage and infrastructure expansion in Ukraine's agriculture sector. The investments are projected to increase Ukraine's grain shipping capacity by more than 3.35 million tons annually, bolstering Ukraine's economy and bringing much-needed grain to the global market.

The Office of Economic Growth within USAID's Mission in Ukraine also implements the Economic Stability and Recovery Initiative (ESRI), focusing on keeping and creating jobs and helping small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Ukraine's private sector to survive and grow during Russia's invasion. USAID has supported more than 7,000 SMEs in the agricultural, information technology, and manufacturing sectors. These initiatives help secure access to financing and attract and facilitate investment for SMEs. This assistance supports workforce development and has resulted in more than 70,000 jobs being created or retained.

USAID also has two active private sector development projects ongoing in Ukraine: the Competitive Economy Program (CEP) and the Competitive Markets Program (CMP). The CEP advances a strong, diverse, and open Ukrainian economy by supporting business startups and SMEs to become more competitive in domestic and international markets. The CMP strengthens Ukraine's competition law and policy, ensuring they are in alignment with EU requirements.

Question:

Central America: The numbers at the southern border speak for themselves as a progress report on this Administration's Central America strategy. The lifting of title 42 on May 12th will make the situation even worse. Yet, the FY24 request includes significant resources to continue more of the same programs.

- Can you clearly articulate what the strategy is?
- What is new and different in this request about how we are addressing the root causes of migration?
- How are we monitoring this assistance, and can you give us any indication that investments are yielding any demonstrable results?

Answer:

The Root Causes Strategy (RCS) was announced in July 2021 with the objective to address the long-term underlying drivers of migration. The RCS operates in concert with the Collaborative Migration Management Strategy (CMMS), which provides a humane approach to migration. Through the RCS, USAID is enhancing access to safe and legal pathways to the United States, supporting returning migrants to reintegrate in their communities, and providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable. We need to be honest about the headwinds in the region, particularly democratic backsliding in El Salvador and Guatemala, and an uncertain trajectory in Honduras, that are dampening the impact of these strategies. However, despite the governance challenges, there are clear signs of progress where we see some clear results.

For example, in FY 2022 USAID supported nearly 8,000 private sector firms in northern Central America, which helped create and sustain more than 90,000 jobs and generate more than \$300 million in sales. USAID also supported increasing productivity and incomes of more than 60,000 agriculture industry producers in Guatemala and Honduras.

The FY 2024 Request continues USAID programming through the RCS focusing on the five pillars of that strategy:

- Pillar I: Addressing economic insecurity and inequality
- Pillar II: Combating corruption, strengthening democratic governance, and advancing the rule of law
- Pillar III: Promoting respect for human rights, labor rights, and a free press
- Pillar IV: Countering and preventing violence, extortion, and other crimes perpetrated by criminal gangs, trafficking networks, and other organized criminal organizations
- Pillar V: Combating sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence

New in the FY 2024 Request, USAID seeks to expand programming through USAID Central America Regional to strengthen regional prosperity and economic resilience by promoting inclusive economic growth through:

- Facilitating trade by strengthening regional integration and supply chain resilience;
- Reducing barriers, time, and cost, to trade and implement transparent processes that increase regional and international trade and advance member-state commitments under the Central American Customs Union;
- Increasing climate finance and mobilizing capital to diversify trade and strengthen cross-border supply chains;
- Increasing investment and access to finance, including in renewable energy; and

- Promoting nearshoring activities that expand regional capacity to supply higher value-added products to U.S. businesses that seek resilient sourcing options.

Through USAID Central America Regional, USAID also will continue to strengthen safe, legal pathways for Central American nationals and reception and reintegration efforts for returned migrants. In addition, USAID will provide services for migrants and internally displaced persons, and community-based assistance for socio-economic integration and migrant receiving communities.

The Department of State and USAID have created an interagency RCS Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan, designed to track outcomes associated with the U.S. government's collective foreign assistance, diplomatic, and other efforts to address the root causes of irregular migration. As part of the RCS MEL Plan, USAID and State track a set of performance and context indicators linked to expected RCS results. The Department and USAID provided analysis of these indicators in a July 2022 progress report to the Congress. In addition to the positive trends in migration intentions, post-pandemic economic recovery, and historic declines in homicide rates mentioned above, a forthcoming RCS results report notes that U.S. government departments and agencies frequently saw increases in reported results (compared to the previous year) and often met or exceeded programmatic targets. On 15 of 20 key performance metrics, U.S. departments and agencies saw increases over the previous year, and 12 had results greater than corresponding annual targets.

Question:

Democracy in the Western Hemisphere:

What is your vision for democracy programming, particularly for the dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere?

Answer:

Combating authoritarianism and closing civic space represent top priorities for USAID. We are deeply concerned about the rise of autocracy, repression and human rights violations in the region. We are particularly concerned about the dictatorships in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela which continue to repress their citizens and deny them their most basic human rights. And we are watching closely as other countries in the region take steps to close democratic spaces.

Against this backdrop, the assistance provided by USAID is in complement to other tools of national power (primarily sanctions and diplomacy). We are focusing our aid on strengthening democratic guardrails, standing in support of the region's courageous pro-democracy forces,

and bolstering the countervailing sources of power that check dictators. We are focused on raising the costs to authoritarians by advocating for human rights, promoting a free media, and supporting civil society activists.

While much of our work supports citizens to drive change from within, we also aim to mobilize international partners in the defense of democracy. These include fellow OECD partners, multilateral bodies and allies from the Global South. Not only do we aim to garner their support in the defense of democracy, but also to make available to the international community the data and evidence that partner nations and international organizations use to unmask dictators and show them for what they are. For example, USAID-supported human rights NGOs in Venezuela have built fact patterns that show crimes against humanity, and have also gathered and preserved evidence that can be used to investigate the Maduro regime and hold them accountable.

In countries that partly or fully adhere to democratic standards, the Agency seeks to show that democracy delivers by improving citizen-responsive governance and the delivery of basic services, increasing local government capacity, supporting fair and transparent elections, protecting civic space and fostering a strong civil society, ensuring the inclusion of marginalized groups in political processes, strengthening the rule of law, fighting corruption, and reducing crime and violence.

In Cuba, USAID supports human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democratic values by strengthening independent civil society and human rights activists, providing access to information for Cubans through independent media, and providing humanitarian assistance to political prisoners and other victims of political repression and their families. USAID programs also help document human rights violations against Cuban workers and freedom of religion advocates, and support domestic and international advocacy efforts. USAID's Cuba programming is in line with the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Libertad (Helms-Burton) Act of 1996.

In Nicaragua, USAID's long-term strategy builds on the important work of protecting the rights and freedoms of Nicaraguans – such as democratic consensus-building, supporting civil society and the documentation of human rights abuses, and strengthening independent journalism – as well as working to foster resilience and inclusive approaches at the grassroots, community-level through civic engagement, youth capacity-building, and local problem-solving. This includes strengthening digital security of civil society organizations and independent media to be able to operate safely and disseminate information online despite intensifying surveillance.

In Venezuela, USAID's democracy and governance work is focused on preserving and strengthening remaining democratic institutions, protecting human rights, and promoting opportunities for participation. These include the 2015 National Assembly and the Unitary Platform's primaries process, as well as civil society and independent media outlets. USAID support promotes documentation of clear cases of human rights violations to the Venezuelan public and international audiences.

USAID is also committed to supporting pro-democracy forces where democracy is backsliding. For example, in Guatemala and El Salvador, USAID is an integral part of broader US government strategies to uphold the rule of law, combat corruption, and protect civic space. In addition to coordinating within the interagency on enforcement actions related to corruption and human rights abuses, USAID helps to safeguard individuals, organizations, and outlets targeted by governments and their proxies for efforts to promote transparency and accountability. This includes legal and psycho-social assistance, digital and physical security, and - when necessary - relocation assistance. Increasingly, USAID is supporting civil society organizations and independent media to foster and work within diverse networks that better meet the needs and reflect the views of traditionally underrepresented populations and provide peer to peer support; to prepare for and undertake strategic investigations and litigation; and to better understand and replicate the narratives and communication strategies that reinforce or increase public support for democratic principles.

A year ago, to help bring focused attention and resources to closing civic space throughout Central America and to support the goals of the Root Causes Strategy, USAID Administrator Samantha Power announced the launch of the interagency Voices (Voices) initiative. The initiative brings together all of the U.S. government's tools—public and private diplomacy, foreign assistance programming, and enforcement authorities, among other elements—to protect, defend, and promote civic space in Central America. The Voices initiative includes a focus on the following: promoting digital democracy and countering digital authoritarianism; promoting freedom of expression and strengthening independent media; and countering criminalization and providing protections for those who are targeted.

Finally, we are all seeing how democracies and democratic transitions are very fragile. It is critical that USAID supports efforts to create strategic alliances and share successful experiences in countering backsliding, as well as deliver both quick-win dividends and longer-term reforms. That is why strengthening democratic forces has become one of our priority areas. USAID is allocating robust funding and leveraging its relationships with the private sector and multilateral bodies in countries that have renewed their commitment to democratic principles, such as the Dominican Republic and Ecuador, to solidify those gains and ensure democracy is able to deliver to its citizenry.

Question:

Democracy in the Western Hemisphere:

Do you plan to work with grantees that support the pro-democracy opposition, assist political prisoners and their families, document human rights abuses, and foster independent labor, diverse political parties, independent media and the free flow of information?

Answer:

USAID will continue to work with grantees that support the democratic actors to foster openings, especially in the region's most authoritarian systems. For example, since 2018, USAID has invested more than \$6 million in support to Nicaraguan and international human rights defenders to monitor, document, and report on human rights abuses. This documentation helped form the evidence base used by the UN Human Rights Council's Group of Experts in Nicaragua, which in March 2023 released an influential report concluding that the human rights violations by the Ortega-Murillo regime amount to crimes against humanity. In Nicaragua, USAID also supports the survival of independent media by helping outlets improve the quality of investigative reporting, adapt to a non-permissive environment, and improve their digital security to counter censorship.

Since 1996, USAID has supported human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democratic values in Cuba by strengthening Cuban civil society and human rights (including religious rights) activists, providing access to information for Cubans through independent outlets, and providing humanitarian assistance to political prisoners and other victims of political repression and their families. USAID programming is in line with the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Libertad (Helms-Burton) Act of 1996.

Overcoming Venezuela's humanitarian and migration crises is only possible via a return to democracy. USAID's central goal in Venezuela is to help Venezuelans restore their democracy and reclaim control over their country's future. USAID continues to support the Venezuelan opposition as they work to turn the public's widespread resentment toward the Maduro regime into pressure for democratic change. A critical step is supporting legitimate opposition primaries in the lead-up to what will likely be an unfree, unfair, but critically important electoral process in 2024. USAID supports democratic civil society and independent media organizations in holding the regime accountable. USAID will continue to support human rights defenders that valiantly document the regime's repression, advocate for political prisoners and their families, who – in the absence of an independent and functioning justice system under Maduro's dictatorship – are obliged to seek recourse outside the country, including through the UN High Commission on Human Rights and the International Criminal Court.

USAID continues to support regional activities supporting human rights and freedom of expression. For example, USAID has significantly expanded its regional support for both short- and medium-term protection for human rights defenders, journalists, and other activists and advocates. USAID also supported a pilot multi-country public outreach campaign to humanize the plight of political prisoners in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela, and to call for their release. The campaign materials and coverage in digital and social media have had more than 3.3 million views.

Question:

Maternal Child Health in the Dominican Republic: The fiscal year 2022 and 2023 Omnibus agreements noted concern about the lack of quality prenatal, neonatal, and maternal care in Haiti and directed USAID to submit a report on proposed resources and programs to improve access to needed services for women, as well as assistance for impacted communities. The report the Committee received in March misses the mark. There is no discussion of resources and the only programs described are for those in Haiti and some along the border in the Dominican Republic for Haitian migrants. While it is critical that these maternal health services be improved in Haiti, the report does not include any discussion of how resources and programs will support impacted communities and facilities in the Dominican Republic.

- How much funding is USAID allocating in FY23 for prenatal, neonatal, and maternal care in Haiti?
- How much funding is USAID allocating in FY23 for prenatal, neonatal, and maternal care in the Dominican Republic?
- Is the funding level for the programs in the Dominican Republic being increased at appropriate levels commensurate with the increase in Haitians relying on the Dominican health system?

Answer:

USAID's maternal and child health funds are allocated to countries with the highest burden of maternal newborn and child mortality combined, with Haiti and other USAID-funded countries having a higher combined burden than estimates for the Dominican Republic. According to the World Health Organization, the 2020 estimated maternal mortality ratio in the Dominican Republic was 107 deaths per 100,000 live births (an estimated 222 maternal deaths) compared to 350 per 100,000 live births in Haiti (an estimated 950 deaths). The UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality estimate for neonatal mortality in the Dominican Republic is 22.9 per 1,000 live births (4,700 deaths) compared to 24.3 per 1,000 live births in Haiti (6,500 deaths). The UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation for under-five year child mortality in the Dominican Republic is 33 per 1,000 live births (6,800 deaths) compared to 59 per 1,000 live births in Haiti (15,800 deaths). The FY 2022 allocation for Maternal and Child Health was \$14 million for Haiti and zero for the Dominican Republic. The process for allocating FY 2023 resources by country and directive is underway, and we look forward to engaging with you moving forward as we finalize allocations.

**Question for the Record Submitted to
Administrator Power
Ranking Member Barbara Lee
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
House Committee on Appropriations
April 18, 2023**

Question:

Please provide an update on efforts to improve diversity and inclusion at USAID, including the recruitment, promotion and retention of minority staff?

Answer:

USAID is working to attract and retain a workforce of the brightest minds that at all levels reflects the diverse composition of the United States. The Agency is implementing its Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) strategy and working to increase the employment and retention of diverse constituencies within the workforce.

Recruitment:

- Through its Global Development Partnership Initiative (GDPI), USAID plans to grow its permanent Foreign Service (FS) workforce to 2,500, the Civil Service (CS) workforce to 2,250, and the operating expenses-funded Cooperating Country National (CCN) staff, known as Foreign Service Nationals (FSN), by an additional 206 by FY 2025.
- To support the recruitment of Persons with Disabilities, USAID has joined the Workforce Recruitment Program through the Department of Labor and prioritized the use and awareness of the Schedule A and Disabled Veteran non-competitive hiring mechanisms.
- USAID now has six Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) to create talent pipelines and leverage the expertise of MSIs in international development. USAID also established a second MOU with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) to foster short-term faculty fellowships and improve collaboration on engagement and outreach opportunities with Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).
- USAID hosted three MSI conferences during the 2022-2023 academic year. This includes conferences for HSIs, Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
- USAID is also focused on efforts to expand recruitment efforts and reduce any potential barriers to employment. Two ways we accomplish this are through USAID's

Development Diplomats in Residence (DDIR) and the Donald. M. Payne International Fellowship program.

- DDIR are members of our senior FS who conduct outreach to a number of colleges and universities for career fairs and faculty consultations country-wide. The DDIR Program also establishes partnerships with career development centers in universities and colleges, primarily Historically Black Colleges and Universities and HSIs. USAID also used its DDIR Program to collaborate with faculty and university leadership to redesign curricula and increase the competitiveness of prospective candidates for employment at USAID. In FY 2023, USAID plans to expand the DDIR program from two to four regions. DDIRs also serve as mentors to Donald M. Payne Fellows.
- The Donald M. Payne International Development Fellowship Program recruits highly competitive candidates from underrepresented backgrounds to join USAID's Foreign Service. In FY 2023, the program doubled the number of fellows from 15 to 30 annually to support USAID's DEIA strategy. Applications for the FY 2023 cohort of Fellows increased by 42 percent percent from the FY 2022 cohort.
- By providing paid internships to qualified students and recent graduates, USAID provides invaluable professional development opportunities to the next generation of international development professionals. They also enable USAID to more effectively recruit students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, who may not otherwise have the financial resources to explore a career in public service.

Promotion:

- USAID implemented a redesigned FS promotion process beginning in 2018 and continuing into 2020. Part of the redesign process involved providing extensive guidance and "how-to" documents so that all FS employees have easy and equal access to information that will help them be competitive in the promotion process.
- The Agency has a career path for mid-level CS employees to transition to the FS as mid-level FS employees. Over the past ten years, 45 percent of participants have identified as ethnic/racial minorities. In the past five years, 50 percent of the participants in this program identified as ethnic/racial minorities.
- USAID hires Backstop 85 (BS-85) Regional Legal Officers at mid-level (as FS-02). Recent process changes to BS-85 hiring incorporated the same processes used in all other FS hiring, including ensuring diversity in review and hiring panels and unconscious bias training for panel members. BS-85 candidates during the recent hiring surge reflect 63 percent racial/ethnic minorities.

- Once a General Schedule (GS) employee reaches the full promotion potential of their position, they cannot be noncompetitively promoted to the next GS grade and are only eligible for step increases within that grade. To be promoted to the next GS grade, they must apply for a new position at that grade.

Retention:

- In support of the global workforce, USAID is working to expand and strengthen leadership, learning, and professional development opportunities; build on the successes of Staff Care services that promote well-being, work-life balance, and organizational resilience; and strengthen human resources operations and systems. Underpinning all of our efforts is a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.
- In October 2022, the Agency successfully launched the inaugural DEIA survey with a 60 percent participation rate and 70 percent with a favorable approval of the Agency's DEIA efforts. The survey included data points on expanded demographics and identity categories. This is also the first DEIA survey to capture information across all hiring mechanisms.
- We know that at least 60 percent of all CS vacancies are filled by internal hires. While the internal hires demonstrate opportunities for career growth at USAID, it also increases the hiring workload to backfill the position that is left vacant and does not immediately increase the overall amount of onboard staff. This trend also negatively affects the diversity of our workforce in the short-term as we are not attracting new talent from diverse sources.
- USAID's Staff Care program, now in its 11th year, offers a broad range of counseling, health and wellness programs, assistance with day-to-day life responsibilities, organizational and individual resilience support, and much more.

Question:

What progress has USAID made towards its own recommendations in the Agency's Equity Action Plan?

Answer:

The Equity Action Plan (EAP) is centered around five recommendations to integrate equity into Agency policies, strategies, and practices. USAID is tracking progress along each one:

Recommendation 1: Continued development of the WorkwithUSAID platform

Progress to Date:

- USAID has approved more than 4,100 partner profiles, and of those partners, more than 3,000 have completed the pre-engagement assessment. Additionally, more than 235,700 users have visited the website, making up more than 2.2 million pageviews.
- Of the 4,100 organizations in the partner directory, over 80% are new to USAID and 63% would be considered “local partners.”
- USAID has redesigned the navigation and home-page based directly on user feedback, leading to greater accessibility of the website to new partners.
- USAID launched the Sub-Opportunities portal, which allows organizations to find sub-contract and sub-awards with prime partners.
- We have translated the top 20 resources on the platform into French, Spanish, and Arabic.

Recommendation 2: Enhanced implementation of USAID’s nondiscrimination for beneficiaries policy, development and implementation of an Independent Accountability Mechanism, and advancement of Title VI protections at USAID**Progress to date:**

- Leadership has made USAID’s Inclusive Development e-learning module (which covers USAID’s nondiscrimination for beneficiaries policy) mandatory for all staff. To date, more than 11,200 USAID staff have completed the training. Training started for the Nondiscrimination and Inclusive Development for Implementing Partners course; to date all partners at 17 missions have been trained.
- The Agency has conducted informational webinars, internal and external consultations, and consultations with program participants at the mission level in order to develop the Beneficiaries Bill of Rights currently known as the “Know Your Protections” document based on feedback from partners, beneficiaries, and staff. The Agency has formed a working group, and hired a new advisor on social impact to lead the development of this effort with a contractor supporting document finalization and roll out.
- An Independent Accountability Mechanism that allows program participants to notify USAID of adverse impact caused by development programs will launch in Fall 2023 and a new Officer was hired to lead these efforts. Internal and external stakeholder consultations are currently taking place.
- The Office of Civil Rights has established the External Civil Rights program covering Title VI and other relevant civil rights authorities, and is currently seeking to staff the program with the necessary personnel to conduct complaints processing and compliance reviews. An SOP for complaints and compliance is pending, as is a website with additional information for internal and external stakeholders.

Recommendation 3: Reduced internal and external barriers for USAID awards, to include reduction of administrative burdens that negatively affect partner capacity.

Progress to date:

- USAID launched the updated Acquisition and Assistance (A&A) Strategy in FY23 Q2, incorporating DEIA principles such as: improving efficiencies through A&A planning and reducing administrative burden; and engaging US small businesses and underserved US partners more equitably.
- The Management Bureau identified and created a cadre of training, tools, and resources to streamline proposal and evaluation processes. The training focuses include Phased Acquisition, Oral Presentation, Streamlined Evaluation/Selection Criteria, Request for Information (RFI), and Releasing Draft Solicitations for Industry Comment.
- The Management Bureau created the Business Process Improvement (BPI) initiative which serves as USAID's central location for resources and tools that the A&A workforce can easily access, know how to use, and set the Agency-wide standard for documentation and procedures for A&A business functions.
- The Management Bureau also surveyed its A&A workforce to identify priority regulatory issues and introduce solutions. Because many of the regulatory challenges faced by local partners are related to federal vs. agency-specific regulations, USAID is exploring ways to expand existing flexibilities. Similarly, USAID has proposed additional flexibility to accept alternative accounting standards (e.g., International Financial Reporting Standards) instead of U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).
- USAID updated Agency policy to remove a previous \$5 million cap for award values under restricted eligibility based on pre-approved conditions, making it possible to issue larger awards to local organizations in markets with sufficient capacity.
- USAID implemented a number of measures to address the burden related to the requirements for partners to obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and register in the System for Award Management (SAM). The transition to UEIs has been a challenge for partners, with SAM registration often taking up to several months to complete. USAID developed escalation procedures to support urgent UEI/SAM registrations, updated guidance for Agency staff and partners on the registration process and available exceptions, and processed a temporary class deviation to provide an additional exception for acquisition awards.
- USAID also engaged in inter-agency dialogue to seek additional flexibilities related to the NATO Commercial and Government Entity (NCAGE) code, a prerequisite for SAM registration. These inter-agency efforts led to the removal of the NCAGE code from the SAM registration process for entities that are only pursuing assistance opportunities. This streamlined the registration process for entities seeking assistance awards from USAID, as well as reduced the burden on Agency staff supporting those entities.
- An A&A Innovation Community of Practice was identified to provide staff a platform to share innovative practices and systems to streamline procurement processes.

Recommendation 4: Designate an Inclusive Development (ID) Advisor at each Mission and procure inclusive development mechanisms managed through the Agency's ID Hub.

Progress to date:

- USAID procured the Inclusive Development Activity for Mission Support (IDAMS) mechanism in September 2022, which provides research, analysis, technical assistance, and monitoring/evaluation support to advance inclusive development.

Recommendation 5: Implement a consistent approach to incorporate racial and ethnic equity and diversity into policy, planning, and learning.

Progress to date:

- USAID issued a new overarching Policy Framework for the Agency that features DEIA as a core component of organizational change and achieving inclusive development gains.
- We are also revising our operational policies (ADS chapters 200 and 201) that guide how we formulate and implement development and humanitarian assistance policies and country strategies, and how we design programming to better reflect DEIA equities.
- USAID updated its Youth Policy and released the new Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy in March 2023. USAID is currently revising and developing Disability, Strategic Religious Engagement, Mental Health, and LGBTQI+ policies.
- USAID recently announced the launch of the Racial and Ethnic Equity Initiative and teams are conducting assessments and collecting data from Missions to build a knowledge base of programming that has successfully advanced equity, social inclusion, and racial equity.
- USAID technical offices are guiding Missions on how to apply diversity, equity, and inclusion in the CDCS and activity design processes. Missions and independent offices are now required to report on a new key issue narrative capturing racial and ethnic equity. They also must annually report on the percentage of completed evaluations with at least one local expert on the evaluation team.
- USAID is making continued progress in developing a strategy for strengthening local evaluation capacity. USAID continues to provide guidance to contract holders, and monitor the Agency's commitment to utilize local evaluation experts on evaluation teams.
- The draft Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning (KMOL) policy went out for public comment from April 26-May 10. The draft KMOL Policy clearly articulates that USAID will promote the investment in local knowledge systems to support locally led development. This includes recommendations and tools for supporting the transmission and use of Indigenous knowledge and combating systemic stigma and discrimination against Indigenous identities and unique knowledge systems.

Question:

What humanitarian assistance have we been able to provide to the communities in Artsakh?

Answer:

USAID does not have active programming in Nagorno-Karabakh, although it has supported displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh who are currently in Armenia. Humanitarian access to Nagorno-Karabakh is currently extremely limited, with only a single international humanitarian organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), approved by all parties to operate in the region. ICRC, funded by the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), is providing humanitarian assistance inside Nagorno-Karabakh, including the delivery of food and medical supplies, family reunifications, and medical evacuations.

USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) staff conducted two trips to the region to meet with a range of stakeholders, including UN agencies, international organizations, and government officials to discuss the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh – one to Armenia in January 2023 and one to Azerbaijan in February 2023. The trips were driven by BHA's concern for the humanitarian context and lack of information about needs inside Nagorno-Karabakh. USAID plans to conduct another round of field visits to the region in late May. USAID has also pressed the UN to conduct an assessment of humanitarian needs in Nagorno-Karabakh, and we understand that the Government of Azerbaijan has been in discussion with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to facilitate this.

In Fiscal Year 2023, USAID plans to provide more than \$1 million to help communities in Armenia prepare for disaster, including by developing early warning systems, training locals to provide aid, and pre-positioning essential supplies. The funding will enhance local response capacity to coordinate assistance, including the provision of emergency supplies, in the event of displacement into Armenia.

Since September 2020, the U.S. government has provided more than \$21 million in humanitarian assistance in response to the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, including for direct assistance inside Nagorno-Karabakh. This supports a range of activities, including the provision of emergency food, health, and water, sanitation, and hygiene services, as well as winterization activities and family reunification programs.

Question:

What are the obstacles to being more active?

Answer:

U.S. government personnel have not been permitted access to the area to conduct needs assessments or monitor programs despite requests made to the Government of Azerbaijan (GoAz). Russian peacekeepers have also been providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. As of April 18, protesters, believed to be backed by the GoAz, are blocking the Lachin Corridor. Neither the Russian peacekeepers nor the GoAz are working to open this access route. The GoAz has offered to allow assistance into Nagorno-Karabakh via Azerbaijan; it is unlikely that the population in Nagorno-Karabakh would accept such aid, and it is unclear if the GoAz would actually allow aid to pass via this route.

Question:

What current USAID programs are helping at-risk Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh? (please include program descriptions, partners, and funding amounts)

Answer:

USAID does not have active programming in Nagorno-Karabakh. The agency recently conducted humanitarian assessments in Armenia and Azerbaijan and continues to monitor the humanitarian situation in the territory in coordination with non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, and other local and international stakeholders, including with contacts inside Nagorno-Karabakh.

Question:

USAID has set metrics to ensure 25% of USAID's assistance is implemented by local entities by the end of 2025. Where is USAID in regard to these metrics? Will this target be achievable by 2025?

Answer:

In FY 2022, direct local funding to individuals, organizations, or corporations based and legally organized in a country where USAID works reached nearly \$1.6 billion, or 10.2 percent of obligations. This is the highest level and percent of Direct Local Funding in at least a decade. USAID Missions and other overseas units led these efforts, directing 18 percent of attributable

acquisition and assistance obligations to local partners. In addition, in FY 2022, USAID provided \$57 million to partners working regionally and another \$199 million in government-to-government assistance. USAID's first progress report on our localization effort will be released in the coming weeks. It contains additional detail on USAID's progress in providing direct local assistance.

As Administrator Power noted in her recent testimony before Congress, it will be challenging for USAID to reach the 25% direct local funding target. USAID is currently undertaking a target-setting process to evaluate the Agency's expected progress toward the 25% direct local funding goal. Some Missions have responded with targets of 80% local awards by 2025. But context matters, and not all Missions see an opportunity to engage as robustly with local organizations. Furthermore, we include Washington-based regional and pillar Bureaus in how we calculate our overall performance. Their role is to advance global and regional efforts that complement Missions' bilateral programming, provide technical expertise and support to Missions, and advocate for Mission, regional, and global interests in the interagency. Because of this, their abilities—and opportunities—to enter into and manage direct awards with local partners are often more limited, though they are targeting expanded local engagement.

As USAID implements reforms supporting localization, we can expect to see some of these constraints ease. The Policy Framework, updated A&A strategy, and Risk Appetite Statement will all help Missions reorient around prioritizing locally led development, including direct funding to local partners.

Question:

What additional authorities or support does USAID need from Congress to implement the Agency's localization vision, especially at the country level?

What obstacles—whether budgetary or not—might affect USAID's ability to meet its goals?

Answer:

USAID is grateful for the support we have received from our partners and advocates in Congress for advancing a more localized approach to development and humanitarian assistance. We look forward to working with Congress to tackle the many needed reforms and associated constraints involved with scaling up localization, including those based on current statute or regulation.

USAID's Centroamérica Local initiative, which is allocating \$300 million for activities with local organizations in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras over five years, is a prime example of our collaboration with Congress because USAID was able to work with Members of Congress on legislative language to support this effort to expand our localization work. We are very

appreciative of the flexibility to utilize up to 15 percent of directed funds for locally led development in the region for the higher administrative and oversight costs associated with an increased number of direct local awards.

Related to cost recovery, many of our local partners also struggle with financial management and audit requirements related to compliance with U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). Given that GAAP is not used widely outside of the U.S. we are interested in gaining the flexibility to allow for the use of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), or equivalent international or local accounting standards, in lieu of GAAP in our contracts with foreign organizations.

Another constraint in scaling up localization is staffing. In order to provide the necessary support to and oversight of local partners, USAID will need additional U.S. direct hire and other staff, including Foreign Service Officers, and Foreign Service Nationals at the Mission level and Civil Service employees, especially in 1102 series (contracting officers) for headquarters support. This means we need additional operating expense resources or authority to use program funds for these administrative expenses, like we have currently for Centroamérica Local.

We hope that future legislation can support Washington-based efforts such as the New Partnerships Initiative, Local Works, and Minority Serving Institutions. In addition, we hope that any new legislation will institute reforms that will help us apply a localization lens to all of our work so that we can embrace this new way of working across all of our programmatic priorities, including climate change, global health, food security, gender, and education. USAID looks forward to continued dialogue on the specifics of these reforms in the coming months.

Question:

Please explain the Agency's plans for the increased family planning funds. Why are such funds necessary?

Answer:

U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) leadership in family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) is critical to ensuring countries meet the FP/RH needs of their people. Our investments in international family planning have had significant impact in recent years. The Agency's FY22 contribution of \$575 million has helped reach 27 million women and couples, prevent 11 million unintended pregnancies, and avert 18,000 maternal deaths. However, funding for international FP/RH has remained flat for the last 13 fiscal years and not kept up with population growth and inflation. In fact, adjusting for inflation, the purchasing power of the appropriated FP/RH funds has decreased by nearly \$140 million in constant FY

2011 dollars, while the number of women of reproductive age in USAID-assisted countries has increased by 24 percent over the same period.

Increased funding levels for bilateral family planning and reproductive health programs would bolster the United States' leadership in expanding access to lifesaving FP/RH programs and address the needs of more than 200 million women and girls in developing countries, who want to avoid or delay pregnancy, but are not using a modern method of contraception. These investments not only save and improve lives but are also highly cost-effective. Every \$1 invested in meeting the unmet need for contraceptives yields \$120 in accrued annual social, economic, and environmental benefits. Additionally, family planning and reproductive health programs contribute to our shared global health, development, and foreign policy goals, including empowering women and girls, advancing gender equality, reducing maternal and child mortality, and combating gender-based violence.

Question:

What is USAID doing to ensure that all partners and stakeholders understand that the global gag rule is not currently in effect? How is the agency working to proactively rebuild partnerships and communities that may have been harmed by the global gag rule?

Answer:

- USAID is committed to continuing to partner with governments, the private sector, and international and nongovernmental organizations to improve health outcomes and the empowerment of women and girls so that they can realize their full potential.
- USAID regularly communicates with Missions and partners on the longstanding requirements and statutory restrictions applicable to their programs. In addition to communicating the revocation of the Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance (PLGHA) policy through several avenues, we continue to conduct outreach through annual phone calls, the Agency website, and a widely utilized e-learning course to ensure awareness of these requirements in global health programs.

Question:

In the Administrator's opening remarks, she noted that the FY 2024 request would help invest in the people and systems USAID needs to be nimble and responsive. Is USAID seeking any new authorities to advance its workforce reform agenda? Why are these proposals important and how will they better position USAID to tackle critical challenges such as democratic backsliding, countering PRC influence, and the many humanitarian crises around the world?

Answer:

USAID's FY 2024 budget request includes key requests for authorities to ensure that the Agency is appropriately staffed and equipped to meet the challenges of our time:

- **Independent Personal Service Agreement (PSA) authority** for USAID. The PSA authority would enable USAID to greatly improve the hiring, position management, retention, and professional development opportunities of local staff who make up over a third of USAID's total workforce and 70 percent of our overseas workforce. Critically, this would also help the Agency reduce administrative workload on critical contracting officer staff overseas who must currently manage contracts for these staff members.
- **Continuation of the Crisis Operations Staffing (COS) authority**, which Congress provided in the FY 2023 Omnibus Appropriation Bill, to ensure that USAID can continue to hire and retain diverse talent, at the right time, in the right place, for the right duration to address complex crises. This authority does not mandate adding new positions, but allows USAID to use existing funds to do this hiring.
- **Support for a more robust Operating Expenses (OE) Account** to keep up with increased funding on the programming side. The OE account is authorized as the sole account to fund U.S. direct-hire Civil Service and Foreign Service positions, with very limited exceptions. As USAID's programmatic funding levels have increased to address global challenges, the Agency has not experienced a commensurate increase in the OE level and has instead predominantly relied on a program-funded contracted workforce. The FY 2024 request includes a request for an additional 105 Civil Service, 125 Foreign Service, and 33 Foreign Service Nationals as part of the Global Development Partnership Initiative.
 - If an increase in the OE account is not possible, authority to use USAID's program accounts to cover U.S. direct hire staffing and administrative costs is essential to the Agency's ability to continue effective foreign assistance implementation and oversight given current demands.
 - The requested Acquisition and Assistance working capital fund allowing for program funds to be used for U.S. direct hire (i.e., federal employees) contracting officers is an example of such an authority tailored to a critical current staffing gap.

- **Authority to provide emergency dependent back-up care.** This important program will help balance immediate family needs while supporting USAID's operational needs, including crisis response and other high-priority programming.

Achieving our long-term mission depends on confronting the greatest impediments to development today. Marshaling action to address them demands new, inclusive, and ambitious partnerships; investments in our people; and the streamlining of our processes. USAID must make critical investments in, and reforms to, our organization. These investments must guarantee that we have the people, resources, and tools necessary to rise to today's challenges and remain effective and relevant in the decades to come. We cannot drive lasting progress beyond the life of any particular program without investing in a larger and more diverse workforce, communicating our work effectively, grounding our work in solid evidence, and cutting the bureaucracy and red tape that hamper our effectiveness.

Question:

How much is USAID requesting in FY 2024 to provide specific support to LGBTQI+ communities?

Answer:

The FY 2024 Request includes \$6 million specifically for LGBTQI+ programs. However, we would note that as support to LGBTQI+ communities is a cross-cutting issue that can be programmed across multiple sectors, USAID expects to program more than \$6 million in FY 2024 resources towards LGBTQI+ activities across portfolios.

Question:

In addition to any specific funding requests for LGBTQI+ programs, how does USAID plan to integrate the participation and protection of members of the LGBTQI+ community into other sectors including, but not limited to, democracy and health programs?

Answer:

USAID recognizes that to effectively advance the inclusive development of LGBTQI+ individuals, it is important to support both stand-alone and integrated programs. To encourage the integration of LGBTQI+ individuals and communities into cross-sectoral programming, USAID has developed several resource guides, including *Integrating LGBTQI+ Considerations in USAID's Resilience and Food Security Programming Sectors* and *Integrating LGBTQI+ Considerations into Education Programming* (and an accompanying e-learning module). USAID also plans to develop and provide additional sectoral guidance and accompanying training and technical

assistance in other sectors, such as economic growth and sustainable livelihoods, in FY 2024. Additionally, the first-ever USAID LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy, planned to be launched in 2023, will support the integration and institutionalization of protections for LGBTQI+ individuals in sectors including democracy, health, and others.

Examples of how USAID integrates LGBTQI+ activities in democracy and health programs, among other programs include:

- The Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Center will continue to fund activities related to support for LGBTQI+ through the DRG Center's annual Human Rights Grants Program (HRGP). In 2022, the HRGP received the most LGBTQI+ focused expressions of interest (EOIs) in the program's entire nine-year history. USAID plans to fund five Missions/Operating Units to support local organizations that work with the LGBTQI+ community to more effectively advocate for their human rights and engage with their governments and to increase access to mental health services.
- In the Caribbean, USAID Gen Dev supports Being LGBTI in the Caribbean initiative, a regional program that aims to enhance knowledge, partnerships, and capacities of LGBTI communities and governments, with a specific focus on employment, skills building, and social services. In partnership with the U.K. Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, USAID/GenDev also funds "What Works 2.0," a seven-year initiative to improve the evidence base for effective prevention and response to gender-based violence, including violence against LBTQ women.

**Question for the Record Submitted to
Administrator Power
Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
House Committee on Appropriations
April 18, 2023**

Question:

Update on the Tracking of Funding for Children and Youth

The FY 2023 omnibus joint explanatory statement directed a reporting requirement on the tracking of funding for programs targeted to youth and children, particularly those under school age.

How does USAID disaggregate programs by the age of child, by sector (e.g. preventive healthcare, education, social protection, and nutrition), and by policy development, systems funding, or research?

Answer:

U.S. foreign assistance is categorized using the Standardized Program Structure and Definitions (SPSD). The SPSD includes a listing of program categories that provides common definitions for the use of foreign assistance funds, around which the majority of U.S. foreign assistance programming is organized. The SPSD includes the following categories:

- Peace and Security (PS)
- Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DR)
- Health (HL)*
- Education and Social Services (ES)*
- Economic Growth (EG)
- Humanitarian Assistance (HA)*
- Program Development and Oversight (PO)

In fiscal year 2016 the State Department Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources (State/F), in concert with stakeholders from State and USAID, updated a series of standard foreign assistance indicators to promote the collection of consistent data across Operating Units. The indicators are mapped to the SPSD. Standard foreign assistance indicators are required as applicable. The categories marked with an asterisk above include programming that most directly reaches children ages 0-5 (i.e. Health, Education and Social Services, and Humanitarian Assistance). The FY 2023 SPSD spread will be included in the forthcoming FY 2023 653(a) report. Illustrative indicators for children ages 0-5 tracked by USAID include:

- Number of children under 2 (0-23 months) reached with community-level nutrition interventions through USG-supported programs (HL)
- Number of children under 5 (0-59 months) reached with nutrition-specific interventions through USG-supported programs (HL)
- Number of learners in pre primary schools or equivalent nonschool based settings reached with USG education assistance (ES)

Question

What efforts are underway with partner countries on changes in policy or co-funding opportunities to prioritize the needs of children from ages 0-5?

Answer:

The Global Child Thrive Act of 2020 (Thrive Act), which USAID is in the process of implementing, calls for federal departments and agencies to support inclusive early childhood development in all relevant sector strategies, and to improve coordination with foreign governments and organizations regarding official country policies and plans to improve early childhood development. This applies to children from ages 0-8.

Programs, policies and services across multiple sectors provide the “inputs” for strengthening early childhood development outcomes, both directly and indirectly. The Thrive Act broadly conceptualizes an early childhood development program as any program in health; nutrition; child protection; water, sanitation, and hygiene; or education that ensures conditions for healthy growth, nurturing family-based care, protection from violence, or early learning opportunities. USAID supports programming across each of these sectors, all of which contribute to early childhood development outcomes.

This is aligned with the *Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity: A U.S. Government Strategy for International Assistance (2019–2023)*¹ (APCCA Strategy) Objective 1 “Build Strong Beginnings” which states that the U.S. Government aims to promote nurturing care for the most-vulnerable newborns and young children, starting before birth, by funding and supporting comprehensive and integrated programming in early-childhood development to provide for children’s health, nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving for social and emotional well-being, and opportunities for early learning.

¹ <https://www.childreninadversity.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/apcca-strategy-final-web.pdf>

Question

How do the efforts to target infants and children under school age compare to other age groups of school age children and youth?

Answer:

USAID's [Youth in Development Policy](#) defines youth as the period of physical, cognitive, and emotional development between ages 10-29. The following age bands within this range reflect an "age and stage" approach to youth development that takes into consideration the developmental appropriateness of program interventions.

- Early adolescence (10–14)
- Adolescence (15–19)
- Emerging adulthood (20–24)
- Transition to adulthood (25–29)

While U.S. foreign assistance and supported programs are not all disaggregated by the age of beneficiaries, USAID's Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation has proposed a new draft indicator for FY 2023 reporting to collect information on children and youth supported by our programs, with age (0-4, 5-9, 10-14, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29) and sex disaggregation.

**Question for the Record Submitted to
Administrator Power
Representative Jerry Carl
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
House Committee on Appropriations
April 18, 2022**

Question:

Why has USAID not shipped at least 50 percent of all government-impelled cargoes to Yemen on US-flag vessels?

Answer

USAID takes its role in supporting maritime readiness seriously and complies with Cargo Preference Act requirements by ensuring that at least 50 percent of all tonnage is shipped on U.S. flag vessels. Cargo preference compliance is calculated by vessel-type across **all** Title II shipments globally each fiscal year and is not specific to certain countries or regions.

Question:

What is USAID's reason for excluding US-flag vessels from the Yemen program?

Answer

USAID does not exclude U.S.-flag vessels from commodity shipments to Yemen. USAID shipped commodities aboard U.S.-flag registered ships to Yemen under the BHA program during FY 2022. In fact, approximately 20 percent of cargoes transported to Yemen via liner (container) ships in FY2022 were transported on U.S.-flag vessels.

USAID works through NGO and UN partners to respond to urgent needs throughout Yemen. Every month, food provided by the United States reaches approximately 10 million Yemenis in need. However, the conflict in Yemen that drives food security, malnutrition, and significant economic impacts for the people of Yemen also make the location particularly challenging for U.S.-flag bulk ships.

USAID notes that the Maritime Administration has had advisories in place for the past three years, advising U.S. flag ships to avoid Yemen and Saudi Arabia's territorial waters, due to risks posed by the ongoing conflict, including from missiles, rockets, projectiles, mines, and small arms. These advisories have likely impacted the number of offers that USAID receives when seeking support for Yemen-bound cargoes and the ability of U.S. flag carriers to deliver cargoes. Given the scale and urgency of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, any delays in the shipment of

life-saving U.S. agricultural commodities can have significant negative ramifications for populations in need.

The few bids from U.S.-flag ships that USAID has received to ship bulk commodities to Yemen were significantly more expensive, which would reduce the amount of U.S. commodities purchased and would ultimately reach fewer people in need in Yemen. In addition to the negative programmatic implications created by the high transportation costs, poor past performance of these vessels and the ongoing security concerns in the region, led to USAID determining that it was in the best interest of the program to select offers that provided the best value for the U.S. government while minimizing the potential for security-related delays or diversions in delivering those cargoes.

More broadly, in FY22 the average ocean shipping rate per metric ton (MT) was \$185/MT for U.S.-flag vessels and \$125/MT for foreign-flag vessels – representing a 48% higher cost to ship on U.S.-flag vessels. If all commodities had been sent on foreign flag vessels, USAID could have bought and shipped approximately 61,148 additional MT with the \$41 million+ in savings, which translates to feeding an additional 3,668,898 people in any given month. This is a significant cost differential, especially for a humanitarian operation working to keep pace with unprecedented levels of global hunger.

USAID's humanitarian mandate is to deliver lifesaving assistance to the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach people. While USAID ships cargoes on U.S. flag ships wherever possible, we must also ensure that lifesaving assistance reaches beneficiaries in a timely fashion, something that is made more difficult by the fact that there are only four US-flag bulk ships. For example, in FY 2022, USAID did not receive U.S. flag offers on over 800,000 MT of bulk grain cargoes across seven countries throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

In FY22, USAID complied with cargo preference requirements at a rate of 100 percent for bulk vessels and over 53 percent for liners.

Question:

Is it true that USAID has an internal memorandum documenting its reasons for excluding US-flag vessels which it has refused to release to the public? Can we have that memorandum?

Answer:

In order to ensure the safe, timely, and efficient delivery of commodities to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) has relied on notwithstanding authority to waive the Cargo Preference Act as it relates to Title II in-kind food assistance shipments to Yemen. BHA documents reliance on notwithstanding authority via an internal memorandum. While the memo is an internal document, we would be happy to discuss it with you or your staff separately.

USAID works through NGO and UN partners to respond to urgent needs throughout Yemen. Every month, food provided by the United States reaches approximately 10 million Yemenis in need. However, the conflict in Yemen that drives food security, malnutrition, and significant economic impacts for the people of Yemen also make the location particularly challenging for U.S.-flagged bulk ships.

The few bids from U.S.-flagged ships that USAID has received to ship bulk commodities to Yemen were significantly more expensive, which would reduce the amount of U.S. commodities purchased and would ultimately reach fewer people in need in Yemen. In addition, delays to re-route these vessels due to ongoing security concerns in the region led to USAID determining that it was in the best interest of the program to select offers that provided the best value for the U.S. government while minimizing the potential for security-related delays or deliveries.

Question:

When USAID ships government-impelled cargo on foreign-flag vessels pursuant to either its “notwithstanding” authority or a “non-availability” waiver, does USAID count that cargo as having been shipped on a foreign-flag vessel for the purpose of calculating compliance with cargo preference?

Answer:

USAID’s cargo preference compliance status is determined by calculating the percentage of the total metric tonnage shipped on U.S.-flag vessels after subtracting cargoes subject to a determination of non-availability (DNA) (i.e. when no U.S.-flag bids are offered that meet the terms and conditions of the freight solicitation) and – in rare cases where using U.S.-flag vessels would be too dangerous or costly and reduce the amount of emergency assistance that can be provided in a timely manner – notwithstanding authority.

Metric tonnage subject to a DNA or notwithstanding authority is not counted as shipped on a foreign-flag vessel, it is removed from the calculation’s denominator.

Due to the statutory three-year waiting period, there are currently only four U.S. flag dry bulk vessels eligible to participate in the food aid trade. In fiscal year (FY) 2022, USAID accepted 100 percent of all bids received from U.S. flag dry bulk carriers and did not receive U.S. flag offers on more than 800,000 metric tons of bulk grain across seven countries throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

When factoring in all FY 2022 cargoes for which U.S. flag bids were received, USAID complied with cargo preference requirements at a rate of 100 percent for bulkers and more than 53 percent for liners.

**Question for the Record Submitted to
Administrator Power
Representative Grace Meng
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
House Committee on Appropriations
April 18, 2022**

Question:

A large majority of UN humanitarian appeals in 2022 failed to reach at least 75 percent of total funding needs. Nearly half remained funded at or marginally above 50 percent. What is the Administration doing to both directly and multilaterally address these immediate humanitarian needs, without drawing resources from elsewhere? How is the U.S. engaging other international donors to do the same?

Answer:

With the compounded impact of new and protracted conflicts, natural disasters, and climate change, humanitarian needs continue to outpace global public resources to respond. USAID targets its assistance to reach the most vulnerable populations, and engages with the UN, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and other donors to raise funds and pursue reform efforts to better prioritize scarce resources.

USAID, alongside the State Department, continues robust engagement at all levels with established and emerging humanitarian donors, including the private sector, to ensure increased humanitarian financing, and to advance understanding and adherence to the norms which underpin humanitarian assistance. For example, USAID and Irish Aid's partnership accelerated last year after the USAID Administrator's call to action on child wasting – the most life-threatening form of malnutrition – and the subsequent Pledging to Save Lives event during the UN General Assembly 2022. In July 2022, USAID announced an unprecedented additional \$200 million to UNICEF to scale up access to wasting treatment for children in the face of the massive global needs resulting from climate change, the war in Ukraine, and the global food crisis. The subsequent challenge to other donors ultimately raised an additional \$330 million, including a significant 50 million EUR contribution from Ireland. Six months since this pledge, this support has both met the needs of millions of children and set the stage for ongoing partnership and leadership on addressing child wasting.

Private sector engagement has been another important part of USAID's strategy to increase support for global needs. For example, over seven years of investment into the UN Connecting Business Initiative (CBI), which USAID co-founded, has proven to be pivotal – mobilizing over \$91 million of resources from local businesses after multiple sudden onset disasters. CBI's work with national and regional networks paid off in 2023, as CBI's Turkish private sector network contributed well over \$11 million in response to the February 2023 earthquake, part of over

\$125 million for this response from the global private sector. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the private sector globally provided over \$1.8 billion in cash and in kind donations to the response.

In addition to private sector engagement, USAID is seeking joint partnerships with new and rising donors to fill funding gaps and provide much-needed assistance that is principled and based on need. For example, USAID is working toward additional opportunities with the Qatar Fund for Development to address the most pressing nutrition needs in Somalia.

Finally, we are also working to bring more attention and collective donor action to ensure that Multilateral Development Banks remain active in fragile settings to help alleviate pressure on humanitarian funding and allow humanitarians to focus on the most urgent, lifesaving needs in humanitarian crises.

Question:

How will USAID ensure the U.S. is a global leader on funding education in emergencies for children affected by conflicts and crises around the world, including for internally displaced children? What is the current plan to scale up such support amid record levels of need and displacement for children?

Answer:

Global Leadership: As the largest bilateral donor of basic education development assistance in the world and by building on the strong foundation set by the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, USAID will ensure the U.S. is a global leader uniquely positioned to support learners, educators, and education systems in partner countries to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises quickly and efficiently. In fiscal year 2022, USAID basic education programs reached 28 million children and youth in 56 countries, including 31 countries affected by conflict or crisis.

USAID's programs, leveraged with resources from bilateral and multilateral partnerships, the private sector, and external stakeholders, will continue to help partner countries to strengthen the resilience of education systems, mitigate disruptions to education, prepare for heightened uncertainty and instability, provide safe spaces to learn, and improve educational outcomes.

Education in Crisis and Conflict Affected Environments: As the number of crises and conflicts rise globally creating high levels of need and displacement of children, USAID education programs will continue to provide safe learning opportunities for students and teachers, rebuild education systems, and prevent and mitigate further conflict and crisis through conflict-sensitive education programs, community engagement, and disaster-risk reduction activities. Programs also work with national government leadership in the education sector to support integration of refugees into host country systems, serve internally-displaced children and

youth, and support external coordination groups to increase coherence between humanitarian and development efforts in education. In addition, the U.S. is an active supporter of Education Cannot Wait, which works to unite global and national organizations to increase access to education for children and youth affected by conflict, natural disasters, and disease outbreaks. The U.S., through USAID and the Department of State, provides annual funding contributions and serves on the High-level Steering Group and Executive Committee.

Partnering with Humanitarian Assistance Programs: USAID supports child protection and education in crisis and conflict along the humanitarian development continuum with both International Disaster Assistance and Development Assistance funds. USAID's International Development Assistance funding is intended to save lives, alleviate human suffering, and reduce the impact of humanitarian crises. In some cases, as part of USAID's prioritization of child protection in humanitarian response, USAID supports education in emergencies.

USAID recognizes education is protective and life-saving in crises. Humanitarian child protection programs will continue to support education in emergencies through the Safe Healing and Learning Spaces methodology, psychosocial support and coping tools for caregivers and teachers, temporary shelters to enable damaged schools to resume education, and contextualized learning materials for displaced children. USAID child protection and education in emergencies experts collaborate closely to maintain continuity across the humanitarian-development nexus.

Question:

One in five women report experiencing sexual violence in humanitarian emergencies. The insecurity of the crisis in Afghanistan, coupled with displacement and disruption of family units, puts women and girls at high risk for sexual exploitation, early and forced marriage, human trafficking, and domestic violence. Programs like Safe from the Start are designed to ensure that GBV is addressed at the onset of humanitarian emergencies. How will the U.S. government use initiatives like Safe from the Start to ensure that GBV incidents do not increase in Afghanistan?

Answer:

USAID has prioritized centering humanitarian responses on the needs of women and girls. This is particularly critical in Afghanistan, given the extent of needs and severity of restrictions on reaching and supporting women and girls.

In its humanitarian response in Afghanistan, USAID is committed to responding to the needs of Afghan women and girls, including systematically integrating GBV prevention and response, as well as supporting a safer environment to mitigate the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). In line with Safe from the Start objectives, USAID is encouraging and supporting partners

to continue, and where needed modify, GBV prevention and response programming. Since 2021, USAID partners have been consulting with beneficiaries, staff, community elders, and local authorities on what adaptations are needed to continue GBV programs within the evolving context. For example, GBV services are offered to women through family centers and through health or nutrition facilities, instead of the more common humanitarian approach of offering services through women's and girls' safe spaces. To strengthen this approach, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) is also working closely with all partners to build the capacity of other-sector staff to provide support to GBV survivors and safely refer to qualified services. As the participation of women and girls is essential in ensuring that humanitarian aid is inherently safer, more accessible, and more appropriate to their needs, USAID Afghanistan program staff routinely liaises with partners to discuss how they are identifying and implementing concrete actions to meaningfully engage women and girls.

Also in line with Safe from the Start objectives, and in light of the highly permissive environment for SEA in Afghanistan, USAID is supporting its partners to ensure accountability to women and girls and prioritize the implementation of more robust mitigation measures to address and mitigate GBV risks, including risks of SEA, in their programs.

USAID also supports the work of the Afghanistan Task Force on Protection from SEA, Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, and Accountability to Affected Populations Working Group; these groups are led by UN agencies, international NGOs, and the Afghan coordinating body of response actors. They are collaborating with humanitarian actors across Afghanistan to issue a joint set of minimum standards for safely engaging women in the assessment, design, and implementation of humanitarian assistance. These minimum standards are expected to be integrated into all programs to hold humanitarian actors accountable for ensuring a safer environment for women to access aid, for including the voices of the most vulnerable, and for considering modalities that are most accessible and appropriate for women and girls.

When USAID stood up a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) in 2021, the Agency immediately activated a Protection Advisor as a member of the team to guide the DART in modifying and initiating new GBV awards to adapt to the spiking needs and quickly changing environment. Even after the DART in-country assignment concluded, the advisor continued to provide remote support. Following the 2022 edict banning women NGO staff, USAID deployed three experts, including the Protection Advisor, as well as Safe and Accountable Programming Advisors, to support the DART in managing the GBV portfolio, analyze the adjustments made by partners to reach women and girls, and advocate for increased coordination among the international actors in the country. The advisors continue to support the Afghanistan portfolio by reviewing every NGO proposal for measures that mitigate the risk of SEA and GBV. The Protection Advisor, Advisors for Safe and Accountable Programming and Gender, Age, and Social Inclusion Advisor all continue to provide regular support to USAID Afghanistan response to ensure that USAID remains a champion of women and girls in Afghanistan.

Question:

According to the most recent U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, girls are more likely to be out of school than boys, and the problem is especially challenging in conflict-affected countries where girls are 90% more likely to be out of secondary school than girls in stable countries. In the last five years, how have USAID programs increased access to education for girls in both conflict-affected and stable countries? How many girls are currently out of school in USAID-funded countries and how do current rates of out of school girls compare to the rates over the last five years? What best practices has USAID identified for increasing enrollment rates in both conflict-affected and stable countries?

Answer:

Progress in Reaching Girls and Women through Education Programs: USAID remains committed to advancing gender equality in and through education around the world, and to strengthening resilient education systems that reach the most marginalized. In FY2022, more than 60 of USAID's Missions, Regional Bureaus, and other teams worked to advance gender equality in and through education, reaching over 11.8 million girls and women across the education continuum.

USAID is committed to this programming and has pledged under the 2021 G7 Declaration on Girls Education and the USAID's Implementation Plan for the National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality to reach 15 million girls and young women across the education continuum with education assistance by 2025.

Examples of USAID's programs that have increased access to education for girls in both conflict-affected and stable countries over the past five years include:

- **Pakistan:** In September 2022, USAID launched the Improving Girls' Education Activity to support public-private partnerships that will improve school management in public girls' schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, boost school enrollment, and strengthen the quality of education. On March 7, the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan also announced 500 university scholarships for flood-affected students, with 50 percent of the scholarships reserved for women.
- **Mali:** USAID's Girls Leadership and Empowerment through Education program was launched in April 2018 and created tangible opportunities for adolescent girls to pursue their academic goals. It decreased educational barriers for adolescent girls, improved their safety in schools and communities, and increased knowledge of positive health behaviors amongst them and their families. Programming provided accelerated learning to girls, and supported their transition to Mali public schools to continue their formal education.

- **Mozambique:** USAID's Advancing Girls' Education activity was launched in April 2022 and empowers adolescent girls and promotes girls' school attendance in Zambezia and Nampula where girls' school enrollment is low. The activity equips learners with literacy, numeracy, social, and life skills to eliminate gender-based violence against girls and young women, including sexual violence, child, early and forced marriages, and early pregnancies. The activity also expands girls' safe access to quality education and improves learning outcomes by educating learners about malnutrition, menstrual hygiene management, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

Out of School Rates: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 129 million girls were not enrolled in school globally. According to a 2023 World Bank report, the number of youth neither employed nor enrolled in education or training increased substantially due to COVID-19. The report also found that across developmental stages—early childhood, school age, and youth—the impacts of the pandemic were consistently worse for children from poorer backgrounds.

Best Practices: Through education, girls gain the foundational learning skills to advocate for themselves and others, challenge harmful gender norms, and create more just societies. USAID prioritizes foundational skill-building in our education programs as a long-term strategy for empowering girls and women and transforming societies. The relationships learners form with peers and educators can also be protective, particularly when there are high levels of violence or instability in the community or home. Safe learning environments can provide essential services such as school feeding programs and support for survivors of gender-based violence. USAID recognizes that safety is a prerequisite for learning, and works to ensure that all learners and educators are treated with dignity and respect.