

RESPONSES TO  
QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO  
MICHAEL P. BOTTICELLI  
DIRECTOR  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY

FOLLOWING NOVEMBER 17, 2015, HEARING ENTITLED,  
“DRUG TRAFFICKING ACROSS THE SOUTHWEST BORDER AND OVERSIGHT OF U.S.  
COUNTERDRUG ASSISTANCE TO MEXICO”  
SENATE CAUCUS ON INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL  
UNITED STATES SENATE

**The Honorable Charles Grassley**

**1. Merida Pillar 4: Strengthening Communities**

Pillar 4 of the Merida Initiative strives to strengthen communities by implementing job creation programs, engaging youth in their communities, expanding social safety nets, and building community confidence in public institutions. While initially U.S. assistance through the Merida Initiative focused on training and equipping Mexican security forces for counternarcotic purposes, it has shifted toward addressing institutional reforms and societal problems that allow the drug trade to continue to thrive in Mexico.

U.S. funding for the Merida Initiative was initially focused on providing training and equipment for Mexican security forces. However, more recently, the Obama administration shifted its focus to funding Pillar Four, which is described as building strong and resilient communities in Mexico.

**Question:**

- In some of these areas, I understand the United States can lend critical expertise, like training judges. But in others, it's not clear to me why the United States is paying for these programs. For example, some of these community-building programs involve outreach to at-risk youth in Mexican border communities. But we have plenty of at-risk youth **here in the United States** that need help. Mexico has a top-15 economy in the world. Why aren't these types of programs something that Mexico can pay for itself?

**ANSWER:** Pillar 4 of the Merida Initiative reflects a broader strategy and U.S. commitment to building strong and resilient communities. The United States and Mexico are working together to reduce the impact of heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana throughout communities in Mexico and the United States. The lucrative nature of the illicit market, including demand for drugs in both countries, have made the Mexican cartels the most powerful trafficking organizations in the Americas. Pillar 4 programs are proactive, with goals addressing the root causes of crime and violence. At-risk youth are targeted as recruits for the gangs and cartels, especially along the U.S. border with Mexico. Many of the

programs in the United States and Mexico focus on decreasing crime and violence, while increasing jobs by promoting education and life skills at or along the border. Improving the communities along the border directly benefits the United States through reduced vulnerability to drug traffickers and criminal enterprise. These outreach initiatives, focused on at-risk youth, are an important part of Merida's fourth Pillar. Most of these U.S.-funded programs operate concomitantly with a Mexican governmental organization or an international nongovernmental organization.

## 2. Efforts to Combat the threat of Drug Trafficking Organizations

Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are poly-drug organizations that traffic heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, and marijuana throughout the United States, using established transportation routes and distribution networks. They control drug trafficking routes across the Southwest Border and are moving to expand their share of US illicit drug markets, particularly heroin markets. The organizations use violence and intimidation to increase control of routes which spills over to the general public.

According to the 2015 National Drug Threat Assessment, Mexican DTOs remain "the single greatest drug trafficking threat to the United States." I also understand that these organizations have ties to gangs in cities across the United States to facilitate their illegal operations.

### **Question:**

- Given that drugs like methamphetamine and heroin continue to come across the border in *ever greater numbers*, what *specific steps* is ONDCP taking to address this problem? Do you believe that the current allocation of resources between the four pillars of the Merida strategy need to be adjusted in order to get this problem under control?

**ANSWER:** There are several critical aspects of methamphetamine control which the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the U.S. interagency are working to address. The most significant element is to reduce the production and transshipment of methamphetamine precursor chemicals from China into Central America and Mexico. The United States has actively engaged with the Chinese Government on the specific issue of "pre-precursors" that do not include pseudoephedrine, ephedrine, or combination products containing these substances – since these traditional precursors have for some time been effectively controlled. China suggested it will take domestic scheduling actions to regulate additional methamphetamine precursors and make additional legislative changes that will help reduce transshipment to our Hemisphere of precursors used to manufacture methamphetamine destined for our communities.

After numerous engagements with China on synthetic drug issues, including those held under the auspices of the U.S.-China Joint Liaison Group on Law Enforcement Cooperation, we are seeing some important progress regarding New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) as well. In October 2015, China controlled over 100 NPS and changed its legislation to streamline its

processes for controlling future NPS. ONDCP and other Federal partners such as the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of State are working closely with China to support their efforts to reduce the production and transshipment of precursor chemicals and NPS.

To synchronize ongoing efforts targeting heroin supply, in October 2015 the ONDCP Director, in coordination with National Security Council staff, created the National Heroin Coordination Group (NHCG), a multi-disciplinary team of subject matter experts focused on Federal efforts to reduce the availability of heroin and fentanyl in the United States. Since the creation of the NHCG, ONDCP has intensified its partnering, engagement, and information sharing with both Mexican government officials and U.S. embassy officials in Mexico City focused on counter-narcotics operations. The ONDCP Director and the Associate Director for the NHCG have travelled to Mexico City for engagements with Mexican officials on the issue of heroin and have met with the Mexican Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington, D.C. Further, the Associate Director has launched regular video teleconference meetings with U.S. Embassy personnel in Mexico City to help drive bilateral actions centered on reducing the availability of heroin and fentanyl in the United States.

Continued Merida funding would support Mexico's efforts to locate and destroy methamphetamine laboratories; disrupt importation and movement of methamphetamine precursor chemicals; interdict finished methamphetamine product moving to the illicit market; and disrupt methamphetamine and related chemical trafficking organizations. Flexibility in the current system to adjust Merida funding as the drug trafficking organizations change is imperative to our current efforts to disrupt, degrade, and dismantle these criminal organizations and reduce the supply of illicit narcotics to the United States.

### **3. Intelligence Sharing**

The United States and Mexico have signed numerous bilateral agreements and declarations to deepen cooperation and collaboration in the areas of enforcement, planning, information and intelligence sharing, joint operations, and trade facilitation along the Southwest border. The first strategic objective of the 2013 National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy is to enhance criminal intelligence and information sharing capabilities and processes associated with the Southwest border. The United States and Mexico continue to work for the expansion of coordinated intelligence sharing and joint strategic, intelligence-driven plans.

#### **Questions:**

- What new programs are being developed to expand intelligence sharing?
- What problems has your agency encountered in coordinating intelligence and information sharing both with other U.S. agencies and with the Government of Mexico?

**ANSWER:** ONDCP does not manage programs to expand intelligence sharing among U.S. agencies or with the Government of Mexico, but works with the Office of the Director of

National Intelligence to encourage sharing within the U.S. Government and with the Government of Mexico. The details of these efforts are classified. Similarly, ONDCP does not share information or intelligence directly with the Government of Mexico. ONDCP works to expand information and intelligence sharing within U.S. Government agencies.

## The Honorable Dianne Feinstein

### 1. Focus on High Value Targets

It is my understanding that since the Mérida Initiative was launched, Mexico, with assistance from the United States, has captured or killed 92 of 122 high value criminal targets. While I firmly support efforts to bring cartel leaders to justice, I am concerned that very few have been successfully prosecuted in Mexico and that extraditions to the United States are limited.

Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest this strategy has seriously impacted drug trafficking to the United States or violence levels in Mexico, especially as some experts suggest that the strategy of targeting high level cartel leaders has actually resulted in an increase in the number of violent cartels in Mexico – from four in 2006 to more than 20 today.

- a. *What are the benefits of targeting high level cartel leaders? From your view, has this resulted in a reduction of drugs bound for the United States or violence in Mexico?*
- b. *Is the focus on high value targets primarily driven by the United States or Mexico? Do you believe this strategy should and/or can be adjusted?*

**ANSWER:** Targeting high-level cartel leaders can disrupt the entire cartel. Many Mexican cartels use strict hierarchical management and organizational styles. Disruption of the senior levels of the criminal cartel through seizures of narcotics, illicit proceeds, and other cartel assets, managed both directly and indirectly by cartel leaders, effectively impedes narcotics trafficking. While we know that cartel leaders are often replaced by others in the organization, the disruption of the business model through arrest, indictment, and extradition of senior cartel leadership does impact the overall illicit trafficking marketplace. Dismantlement of the senior management layers in the cartels breaks supply chains, trafficking routes, and movement of illicit proceeds. These marketplace disruptions have a direct effect on distribution to, and in, U.S. markets.

### 2. Demand Reduction in the United States

Drug trafficking is a shared problem for Mexico and the United States. Violent Mexican criminal organizations are ultimately motivated and funded by the enormous profits derived from drug sales in the United States. Any successful effort against them must involve reducing the insatiable demand for drugs in the United States.

- a. *What programs is your office currently running to reduce demand for illegal drugs in the United States?*

**ANSWER:** The Office of National Drug Control Policy currently funds two grant programs: the Drug Free Communities (DFC) Support Program and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Program.

The DFC Program is a Federal grant program that provides funding to community-based coalitions that organize to prevent youth substance use. Since the passage of the Drug Free Communities Act (Pub. L. 105-20) in 1997, the DFC Program has funded more than 2,000 coalitions and currently mobilizes nearly 9,000 community volunteers across the country. The philosophy behind the DFC Program is that local drug problems require local solutions. With a small Federal investment, the DFC Program doubles the amount of funding through the DFC Program's match requirement to address youth substance use. Recent evaluation data indicate that where DFC dollars are invested, youth substance use is lowered. Over the life of the DFC Program, youth living in DFC communities have experienced reductions in alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use.

The HIDTA Program funds law enforcement collaboration among Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement agencies have substantial experience in implementing problem-oriented policing strategies and are well-positioned to promote and participate in community-based drug prevention programs. To take full advantage of this, the HIDTA Program collaborates with educational, social service, and community-based organizations to provide science-based community prevention programs throughout the HIDTA regions. These programs are conducted in schools, community coalitions, civic organizations, and faith-based organizations. Information sharing sessions, symposiums, public forums, and prevention conferences are held for law enforcement professionals and their coalition partners to improve prevention strategies within their respective communities. The HIDTA Program has also funded targeted, local media campaigns to promote anti-drug messaging.

Through our authorities to coordinate and oversee the drug policy functions of the interagency, we also help carry out the President's efforts to stop drug use before it starts through a multitude of grant programs, research projects, and public awareness efforts.

*b. Are there steps Congress can take to assist you in expanding successful prevention, treatment, and recovery programs to reduce drug consumption in our country?*

**ANSWER:** The President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Budget includes \$15.8 billion to support prevention, treatment, and recovery programs. It includes \$1.1 billion in new funding to help states, localities, and individuals address the opioid epidemic affecting the Nation, which includes funding for prevention efforts through prescriber education and public awareness; expansion of medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorders; overdose reversal; and data collection to support further policymaking. This includes \$1.0 billion in new mandatory funding for FY 2017 and FY 2018 and over \$90 million in new discretionary funding for FY 2017.

*c. Do you believe that the Federal Government allocates enough resources to prevention that is aimed at stopping drug use before it starts? Please explain.*

**ANSWER:** Prevention continues to be a key priority of the Obama Administration, since we recognize that preventing substance use is a cost-effective way to spend our Federal resources. For this reason, the President's FY 2017 Budget includes \$1.5 billion for prevention, demonstrating the Administration's commitment to funding effective prevention programs,

research, and outreach. As our ongoing research efforts show us more about what works, we will continue to pursue science-based prevention activities.