

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 4, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. President:

We write to express our outright opposition to your plan to cut national security funding that the Congress has appropriated to advance United States' foreign policy priorities related to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Your shortsighted decision poses serious risks to our national security and will damage strategic U.S. efforts to address the underlying conditions driving citizens in all three countries to flee their homelands and migrate to the United States.

Since taking office, you have consistently expressed a flawed understanding of U.S. foreign assistance. It is neither charity, nor is it a gift to foreign governments. Our national security funding is specifically designed to promote American interests, enhance our collective security, and protect the safety of our citizens. Our foreign assistance programs provide our government essential leverage to support reforms in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras that mitigate the root causes of migration to our southern border by enabling citizens from those countries to find security and economic opportunities in their communities.

By obstructing the use of FY2018 national security funding and seeking to terminate similar funding from FY2017, you are personally undermining efforts to promote U.S. national security and economic prosperity, including:

- Combatting Drug Trafficking: The State Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) work jointly with specially trained and vetted units in the Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran police forces to combat drug trafficking organizations and seize narcotics trafficked through Central America to the U.S. Your decision directly undercuts our ability to stop illicit drugs from entering our country.
- Countering Transnational Criminal Organizations: As part of their Transnational Anti-Gang (TAG) Task Forces, the State Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collaborate with prosecutors and national police forces in all three countries to address the violent crimes of MS-13 and other criminal organizations. By cutting U.S. foreign assistance to the region, you are depriving our government of key law enforcement intelligence needed to keep our citizens safe.

- Strengthening the Rule of Law: The State Department, Department of Justice, and the U.S. Agency for International Development work with the Attorneys General and judicial systems in each country in order to promote the effective application of local laws and hold accountable the perpetrators of violence, extortion, narcotics and human trafficking, and domestic violence. Your cuts will terminate efforts end the cycle of impunity that forces victims to flee their countries in search of safety in the U.S.
- Defending Human Rights and Democratic Principles: There are enduring challenges in the Northern Triangle countries related to government officials and security forces perpetrating gross violations of human rights and acts of corruption, which directly contribute to insecurity. By cutting USAID funding, you are weakening our support for citizens and civil society groups to hold their governments accountable.
- Advancing Economic Reforms: Extreme poverty and a lack of economic opportunity contribute to the unchecked violence and crime that Central American refugees are fleeing. Your cuts to foreign assistance deny the U.S. Government leverage needed to encourage Central American governments to take steps that improve their citizens' educational and economic opportunities and create the conditions for inclusive growth.


For the past five years, in a bipartisan and bicameral way, Congress has continuously worked to increase the effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance to Central America, instituting strict conditions on our funding in order to ensure consequential change. We have routinely been unsatisfied with insufficient efforts by Central American leaders and have limited funding to their central governments, but we remain convinced that continued engagement is the best option to promote meaningful change. To that end, your announcement marks a clear attempt to circumvent Congressional prerogative and obstruct the funding priorities established in bipartisan appropriations bills.


By cutting national security funding for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, you also appear to be overturning the consensus within your own cabinet about the need for a rational response to the growing number of migrants fleeing violent conditions in Central America. Mere days before your announcement, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen signed a regional security compact with officials from Northern Triangle countries building on cooperative efforts made possible by U.S. funding. Last month, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan expressed support for continuing funding to Central American governments in order to improve conditions in the region. And, at the 2017 Northern Triangle Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America, Vice President Pence stated, "To further stem the flow of illegal immigration and illegal drugs into the United States, President Trump knows, as do all of you, that we must confront these problems at their source. We must meet them – and we must solve them – in Central and South America."

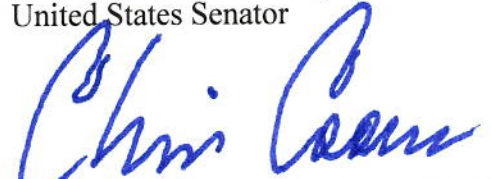
We encourage you to listen to members of your own Administration and reverse a decision that will damage our national security and aggravate conditions inside Central America. We look forward to working with you and members of your Administration to ensure that U.S. foreign aid continues to reflect our values and advance our national security interests.

Sincerely,

  
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

  
Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator


  
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

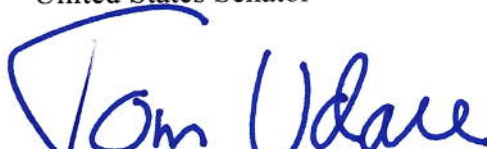
  
Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

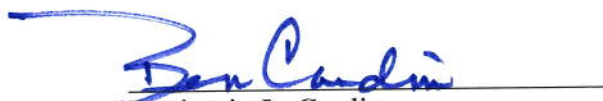
  
Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

  
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator


  
Tom Udall  
United States Senator

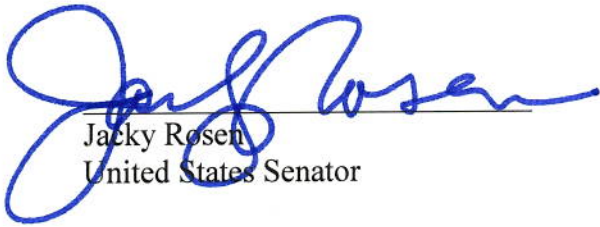
  
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

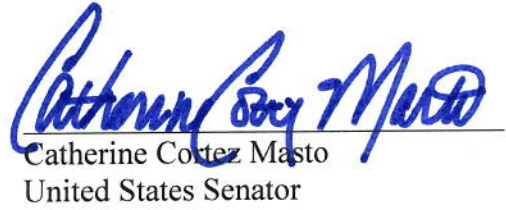
  
Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

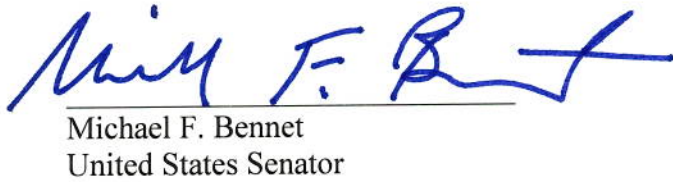
  
Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

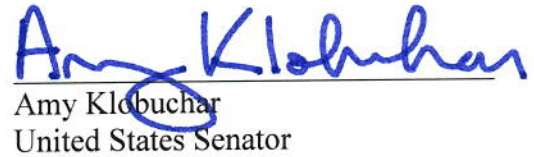
  
Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

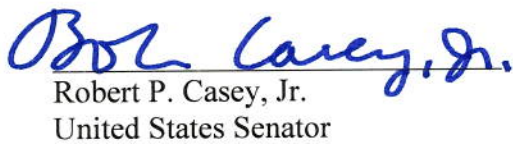
  
Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

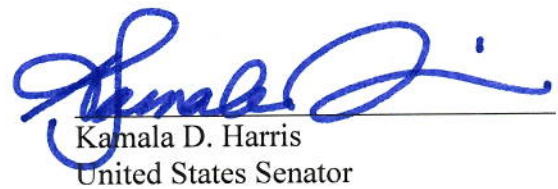
  
Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

  
Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

  
Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

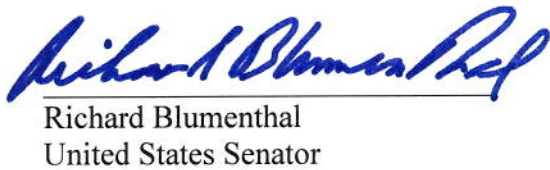
  
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

  
Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

  
Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

  
Jack Reed  
United States Senator

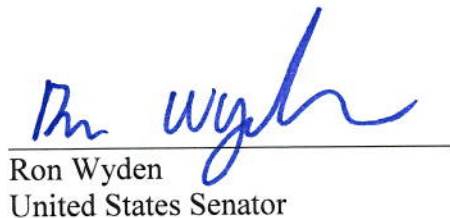
  
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

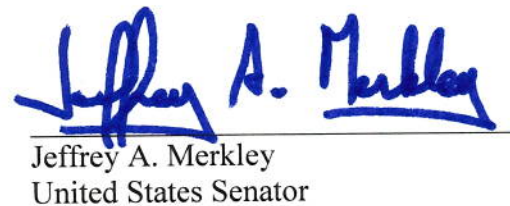
  
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

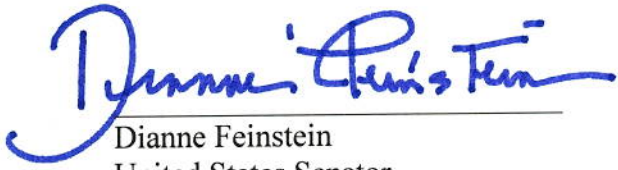
  
Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

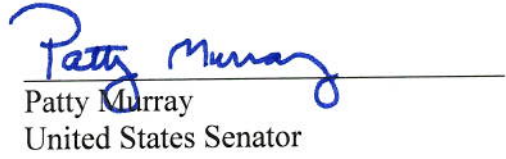
  
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

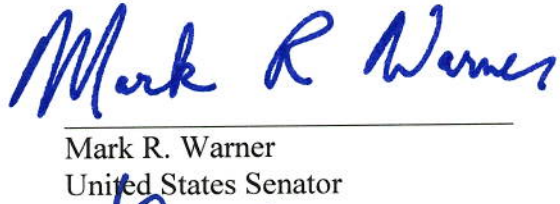
  
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

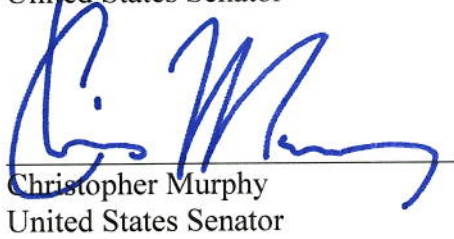
  
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

  
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

  
Patty Murray  
United States Senator

  
Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

  
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

  
Christopher Murphy  
United States Senator

  
Tina Smith  
United States Senator