

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2006

The Honorable R. Nicholas Burns  
Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Department of State  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Under Secretary Burns:

In an April 26, 2006, *Miami Herald* op-ed entitled "Stunning recovery warrants continued U.S. support," you described Colombia's progress under President Uribe in glowing terms and just weeks before the Colombian presidential election.

We agree on the need to support Colombia in combating drug trafficking, terrorist violence and corruption. There has, indeed, been progress on some issues, such as improved highway security, increased eradication of coca crops, and a reduction in the homicide rate. But the situation in Colombia is complex and there are reasons to be seriously concerned about whether our current policy can achieve its goals.

The U.S. has spent more than \$3 billion on what we were told would be a five year initiative, and is now in its sixth year with no end in sight. Much of Colombia remains under the control of drug gangs and terrorist groups. Drug production numbers remain extremely high, and there is no reliable evidence that the price and purity of cocaine on America's streets have changed significantly over the past six years. The Colombian presidency's intelligence service is embroiled in a scandal over its apparent infiltration by paramilitaries, including possible involvement in political assassinations. The outcome of the paramilitary demobilization remains far from certain, and it may enable Colombia's top drug lords to strengthen their position and avoid extradition to the United States.

The human rights situation is also far from satisfactory. The rate of "disappearances" is increasing. The International Committee of the Red Cross verified 317 disappearances in 2005 alone. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, extrajudicial executions by security forces have also increased over the past year. At least two million Colombians have been internally displaced, and more are being forced to flee their homes every day. Impunity for atrocities remains the norm, due to death threats against witnesses and the serious inadequacy of the Fiscalía's budget to conduct timely and effective investigations and prosecutions.

Your op-ed on the situation in Colombia did not contain a full and accurate description for the American people, who are paying for this policy. We urge you to provide a balanced analysis of the challenges confronting U.S. policy with respect to Colombia so we can ensure that U.S. assistance is being used effectively to address these serious problems.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

  
PATRICK LEAHY  
United States Senator

  
CHRISTOPHER J. DODD  
United States Senator

  
BARACK OBAMA  
United States Senator