



## State Department's Air Wing and Plan Colombia

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**MR. ERELI:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to a special briefing by the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Robert Charles.

There are a couple of reasons for today's briefing. I think, first of all, there has been a lot written recently about the Air Wing program, which is managed by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. Much of what has been written is exaggerated or inaccurate. I said last week that we're very proud of our program and we're proud of our people and we're happy to talk about it. So that's one reason for having this briefing today.

The second reason is because we have a new Assistant Secretary, Robert Charles, who was sworn in on October 6th, who brings with his new responsibilities a vision and some ideas that he wants to share with you not only about the Bureau but about America's efforts to eradicate coca production and reduce consumption and deaths in the United States of drugs. So he has some good ideas that we're going to talk about today.

Robert Charles, as I said, was sworn in on October 6, 2003. He has an extensive background in law enforcement, security and counternarcotics issues. He served from 1995 to 1999 as the Chief Counsel and Staff Director to the U.S. House National Security, International Affairs and Criminal Justice Subcommittee, and Chief Staffer to the U.S. House Speaker's Task Force on Counternarcotics. He also taught during this period, and subsequent to that, government and cyber law at a Harvard University extension school.

He was previously Deputy Associate Director of Policy Development in the Administration of George H.W. Bush from 1992 to 1993. He has a legal background. He has clerked on the U.S. Court of Appeals, practiced law in New York and Washington, and, also of note, served on the Commission on the Future of Colombia that is co-chaired by Senator Bob Graham and General Scowcroft.

Obviously, a man well versed and well prepared to talk about the issues we have before us today.

Thank you, and Assistant Secretary Charles.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Thank you, Adam. And -- is this on? It is on. Okay.

I just wanted to really say thank you for everybody for coming today. This is a bit of a, sort of an introductory session for me, and not only because it's the first time I'm standing here, but because I really wanted to introduce myself and some of the priorities that I believe in for INL, and then to field your questions and also give you sort of a feeling for where I think the future may lie, or at least where I'd like it to lie, if we could get there.

Just a big -- sort of big, big picture overview. I'm sort of an oversight guy. That's been my background, and I believe very heavily in transparency, I believe in competitive contracting, I believe in moving things forward, the ball down the field, and letting everybody work together to the same end. And that's really been my M.O. in time. I'm very mission-focused, I have a very clear view of what I'd like to get done here, and I also want everybody to see what we're getting done on all the different levels.

So let me start with management. I want to just -- I want to start there because I think it's an important part of how you get -- how you get things done determines a lot whether you get them done. I have already ordered a 90-day, top-to-bottom review of all programs, did that within the first week of getting here. And I've only been here three weeks and two days, so you'll forgive me if there are some things I don't know.

But I really believe heavily in the idea of knowing where every dollar goes, and the only way you're going to know that is to take every program and do a top-to-bottom review. And that is what I am doing, starting with the top nine, and I have asked our comptroller to just take the lead and begin moving heavily in that direction.

I believe in performance measurement. I've believed in it for 15 years, even before GIPRO. Performance measurement and quantifiable results are the only way you know whether you are getting what you've asked for, I'm getting what I've asked for, the United States Congress is getting what it's asked for, and the taxpayer is. And performance measures can be very detailed. I think they can probably be more detailed than they are now, and they should attach to outcomes, they should include outcomes, not just outputs, and certainly not just inputs.

I am intensely interested, again, in transparency. I have actually separated out three functions already -- program managers, contract monitors and contract re-competition program project managers -- because I think that's an important step in the direction of accountability. I believe that some contracts, if possible, should turn into, if we can, multiple contract awardees. I think that on the Air Wing, which I think you'll see in a minute, we have what I think are very solid results, more than solid results; they imply to me that there is a more definite future out there and that it's a very positive one. And I'll get into all of that in a moment.

But on the management side, I've sent a cost review team to Patrick Air Force Base to assure that Air Wing support contract extension is -- which is, incidentally, an interim measure before there's a full re -- the full re-competition is complete, that it's completely transparent and that it's completely competitive.

Program Assistance and Evaluation Division -- I've put one of those in place because I think that it's important to have people who are actually the

experts and to bring some more in behind the idea of performance measurement. It is my view that sometimes new blood makes a big difference, and that's what I'm counting on here. They are explicitly dedicated to improving the management controls.

I'm sending a team to Bogota, Mexico City and Lima to examine how our back office financial management works, and to determine whether there are some improvements that can be made there. Because I think just because you change it here in Washington, doesn't mean that you've been able to change it and follow it to the ground. And that's what I -- again, I think is the only way you're going to get real accountability.

I believe in best practices. I won't go into great detail and bore you on what I think the best practices are. But, suffice it to say, that there are others, I think, in this building who have done a very good job on that. And I'd like to -- I'd like to believe that in time INL gets recognized as a bureau that has really been proactive, a word I believe in, on the management side, as much as I do on the substantive side.

And to that end, again, I've really pushed that, and everybody on our team knows this. This is not something that just the press is hearing. They've heard it in almost every meeting. They're probably getting inclined to believe this is the only thing that I talk about, but I really -- I have things I want. Meetings have already begun that are very specific, working down through sets of questions to get to that end game.

And I guess that's the last point is just that the whole team, I think, is on board with it, and I think they understand the significance of it, and I think they understand it will affect not only how they do their jobs, but -- and how they're perceived as doing their jobs, but also it will affect the end results, the things that they produce that they get measured by, and that I get ultimately measured by.

On the substantive side, I want to get into Plan Colombia, and I want to get into the Air Wing with you. I think those are very good news stories, and I think that they provide for the American people a good news story. I want to talk for maybe two minutes here about why I think this is such a good news story. I want to talk for a minute about my philosophy on the drug war.

I have worked on this, again, as Adam said, I worked in the Bush White House on OPD in these issues. I worked for almost -- even though I did a stint as a litigator, I also worked for almost five years doing oversight of all of these programs -- INL was just one of them -- with the Speaker.

I have always believed that there could come a point, and we almost got to that point in the late 1980s, when we dropped coca consumption in this country by 72 -- cocaine consumption by 72 percent, and we dropped marijuana consumption by two-thirds, and we -- heroin purities began to drop dramatically, price began to rise. We almost got to that tipping point then.

But I believe we are at a point right now, where if you look at the real numbers, and you look at the charts -- and I'm going to walk you through some -- does everybody have the charts that I -- that I offered? Okay. We'll walk through them in a minute.

But before we get to those, just a philosophical observation. And you can agree with me, disagree with me, question me on it, but I believe it. We are at a point right now, which is similar in the drug war, I believe, to points that the American people have been at in different areas over time, and I think of them as tipping points.

You don't know that you're in a tipping point, where success or failure is around the corner, but particularly success, because the forces are often invisible that bring you there. In 19 -- I'll give you a few examples. In 1985, '86, we had no clue that by 1989, there would be no such thing as the Soviet Union. The forces were already at work to make this happen, but we were not predicting that.

In 1955 or '56, you would never have found an American who believed that, by 1969, we would be standing on the moon, maybe Werner von Braun, but most of us not. Nobody believed that in 1940, by 1970, the very definition of a civilized country would be human rights, that human rights and that the criteria that attached to human rights would define what we consider to be a civilized country. We -- no one would have guessed in 1980 that, by 1995, we were wired -- we would all be wired to something called the Internet. I was at college at that point and I worked off a typewriter, and IBM Selectric, never a thought that computers would dominate life and communications and change things.

So where does that put us now? My view is that things that made those particular events occur are two. It was always -- it's always the case that with tipping points there are two significant things: one is human leadership; and the other is circumstance. And in the drug war right now, internationally, we have a constellation of human leadership that is unprecedented, objectively unprecedented. We have a President in Colombia in President Uribe who is willing to take risks that no one has taken in that country, who has a vision and a commitment that we have not seen before.

In tandem with that, we have President Fox and, really, his attempt at a paradigm shift, which we are highly supportive of. And in this country, we have President Bush and a commitment across a number of fields with a number of lieutenants and some new people who are dedicated to the proposition of really moving the ball, however muddy the field, moving it up the field and making something significant happen.

So that's the human leadership side. The tipping point in the drug war, I think, internationally in particular, is also defined by circumstance, and there are at least four circumstances that, I think, put us uniquely in this moment.

The first is the post-9/11 terrorism component. We are attentive now, more than we ever have been, I think, to the links between narcotics and terrorism and to the significance of the narcotic component of -- of that overall effort. I am a believer that it doesn't do anybody any good to either overstate or understate that link, but I am a believer based on the numbers, and all of it is open source that needs to be, that there is a real significant link there. And it's causing us to be more attentive. It's causing Colombia to be more attentive, people in South America, in this -- North America, and I think even worldwide.

The second is what I would call, to coin maybe a phrase, regional self-interest. I think there is an emerging regional, possibly even hemispheric self-interest that we haven't seen in a long time. And it's partly, again, a reflection of human leadership, but it's also partly a reflection of circumstance within that whole idea of regional self-interest. I think I won't, again, go into great detail of it now, but I think it's -- there's a lot of hard evidence for it.

The third is technology. Technology helps us to get an edge on intelligence, both collection and sharing and use, and it also allows us to get a better end game than we've had before. And you've seen that recently in some other areas, I think, if you -- if you follow this.

And the final one is, sort of, the raw and most passionate fact, and that is that the CDC this year put the number at 21,000 American -- kids, largely, although Americans, generally -- who have died at the hands of drug abuse. To my view, that is an unconscionable number. It is something that should cause us all in the dark of the night to stop, and to figure out what we are not doing that we need to do, and what we have -- and what we have that we can do that will -- that will get that number down. Last week, when this number was discussed with Secretary Ridge, he paused and said, he said -- and actually, it was 19,000, was the number discussed with him -- he said, "My God, that's --" something like, I'm paraphrasing, but he said, "That's -- that's

six twin towers in a year."

That's a powerful number, 19,000. And 21,000 is even more worrisome, because it shows that we're not -- that in terms of domestic, we need to do more domestically, as well.

I want to take you very quickly through what I think are the numbers that support that tipping point. And then I want to show you a video, which I think illustrates what we're doing, what the Air Wing is doing down country, and then I'm more than happy to take as many questions, really, as you like.

If you've got the handouts that I've got in front of you, allow me to just walk them through -- I hope they're all in the same order -- walk you through them, and I'll show them to you as we go.

The first is the coca growing areas, 169,800 hectares in 2002. You're seeing here in Colombia what the hectareage was in 2002, which is a high point, and what this represents, in my view, is bad news. This represents a significant undertaking that many of you who followed this know, but we ran from not having seedbeds to having seedbeds, to moving to higher alkaloid coca, and -- and that was the bad news day.

Then I want you to look at the next one, which is -- and in particular, the 2001-2002 components of this, the triangles represent the annual survey of hectares of coca -- that's a CNC estimate -- and the blue stars represent the coca eradication effort of INL, in particular, in the Air Wing.

What you see is a very direct correlation between the spraying that's being done very aggressively, and the hectareage -- and it's coming down. As the coca eradication went up dramatically, from '01 to '02, and it looks like there's a slight lag time, maybe as much as a year lag time, which means that the news should be relatively good in the coming year as well, you see a direct downtick in the coca hectareage.

The third one I want to show you is, again, what I think illustrates a significant indication of a trend line or a tipping point. You can see that in Colombia, as attempts earlier on were focused on Peru, which used to be the number one producer, and Bolivia, Colombia got a foothold and began to produce higher alkaloid coca -- originally lower alkaloid, then eventually higher alkaloid -- and now you have -- the tipping point, I think, it illustrated again by this chart -- you have the potential cocaine production dropping dramatically from '01 to '02.

If you look at the next one, I want to -- I want to make a very clear point here that we're not just talking about coca. There is some extraordinary good news in coca, but I am -- perhaps because of my past prejudices, I believe that heroin poppy is equally important, and I think if you talked with Elijah Cummings in Baltimore or you talked with anybody up and down the Eastern seaboard, you would find that they believe that, too.

So I want to show you -- these are the poppy growing areas. They don't show up so well here probably in this light, they're green. But this is the high-altitude poppy cultivation in 2000, 6,540 hectares; again, what I would call a baseline, sort of, bad news story.

But then, look again at the next chart. And this is what we've got for Colombian poppy estimates in 2001, 2002. Again, you see a very direct causal relationship between what's being produced, in particular, the hectares of poppy -- again the estimate by CNC, through their means -- and the poppy eradication. As we have been more aggressive at poppy eradication, the poppy hectareage is definitely falling. And if this trend line continues, it will not be that long before we have it down below a minima, in both categories, that is maintainable over time.

Now, you may say to me, "We will never win the drug war because we can never completely eliminate coca, or we can never completely eliminate poppy." And I would tell you that if that's the way you measure whether we've won, then you're probably right, but we don't measure that in any other area of criminal activity or any other activity.

We have crime in New York and in Washington, in Los Angeles, but you bring that crime level down, you bring that production and distribution level down to a minima that makes it significantly smaller than it has ever been, and you bring it to a level where it can be maintained at that low point. You put in deterrent, if you will, elements that are law enforcement-related. INL is very heavily into that, as well, as most of you know.

You also put in the alternative development that backfills this and gives them -- and it's not just theory, it works. If you backfill it with legitimate crops, all of a sudden you begin to move people. The disincentives are high enough that they stay out of coca, and they stay out of poppy, and we can go region by region.

In the Putumayo -- they have virtually wiped out in the Putumayo in the last, what, year, 18 months; and, as a result, you're seeing the backfilling of the positive news. The same thing can be shown in Peru and in the past. I mean, we can go region by region, if you want.

I want to look also here at another tipping point chart, another thing that illustrates my point. The opium gum production -- again, the CNC estimate -- down dramatically as a result of the chart that I showed you just a moment ago, from '01 to '02.

And, finally, I want to bring it home because -- I said this in my confirmation hearing, and I absolutely believe that there is a direct linkage between what we do abroad and what we -- and what happens here in the United States.

And I grew up in a little town in Maine. And I'll tell you it is true there, it's true in Lawrence and Lowell, Massachusetts; it's true in New York City; it's true in Baltimore, Chicago, you name it. What we're doing down there has a direct effect up here. Yes, it also affects terrorism and stability, and regional stability, and economic development and a number of other things.

But on the drug issue, all by itself, there is direct correlation, and these last two charts show you that in dollars. I want you to see what INL has delivered to the American people just in the last year, and what I'm hoping we will accelerate in delivering. The wholesale street value of cocaine eradicated in 2001 and 2002. And without getting too detailed, as you look at this chart, the riveting fact is that INL's program took \$5 billion worth of cocaine, at street value, off the streets of the United States last year. And we are clearly making significant -- that's down by 25 percent from what it was a year ago.

So this is -- are we at the tipping point? I don't know. I'm advancing the theory that I think we may be. And I also think, incidentally, on coca and on poppy and on a number of other things, tipping points are characterized by the fact that if you push the extra effort, if you go the extra mile at the moment when it's needed, you get the tip. If you don't, often you get backsliding or you don't get the tip, and it just continues to stay at a steady level.

I want to show you poppy eradication. The poppy eradication dropped by, what, maybe 40 percent here; \$200 million worth of heroin did not get to the streets of American because of what this Air Wing does and because of what the INL programs in Colombia do.

So, my short, sort of statement to you is, I am very mission-focused. I believe we can do better. I believe in significant management reform. I believe that will produce substantive changes that are good for all of us. But I also believe that people don't understand what the Air Wing does, I think. They don't understand what INL does. They don't understand the comprehensiveness of what we do, and I am here to be at your -- at your disposal and to constantly reinforce that and to give you added thinking on it.

Before we go to Q's and As, what I'd like to do, just so you get a feel for where the program is right now, is to give you, what, a six-minute video that was created by the NAS down country, so that you see what this is. And the point I would ask you to take away from this is:

Number one, this is what the Air Wing really does, day in and day out, an incredibly dangerous operation. These guys are brave, and they are doing something that very few other people would do or could do.

The second thing is, this is not willy nilly. This is not throwing darts at a board. It is extremely methodical, and that's why you're getting the results that you're getting here.

So if we could just have this run and bring the lights down, so people could see it.

(The videotape entitled, "The Aerial Eradication of Illicit Crops in Colombia," is played.)

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Thank you.

So I just felt it was important, since I had seen this -- I actually just saw it myself, recently -- that people understand what the Air Wing really does, because a lot of people don't.

So, with that, I welcome questions.

**QUESTION:** Adam, when introducing you, alluded to some of the recent press coverage, and I imagine he was partly referring to the Robert Novak column of late September. The column, as I'm sure you're well aware, quotes from a memo from Mr. McLaughlin, who I believe was then director of the program, and it quotes him -- it quotes his memo saying that the Air Wing is "now at its lowest state of readiness", and it then paraphrases his memo to say that pilot training has been curtailed, safety has been impaired by reduced staffing, there is worsening structural fatigue, and there has been a failure to adequately protect air crews from ground fire.

Since one of the reasons why you decided to call this was to talk about some of those press reports, can you specifically address each of those points? And if you don't think that any of those allegations is accurate, why did the man who run the program write such a memo, and then, somehow, find its way into the media?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Excellent, and well-articulated question. Yes, I will. I'll address all of them that I can. I've been at this job for all of three weeks. But, obviously, I read Bob Novak, as much as I do anybody else, and I know about the column. And I -- it concerned me, and it was one of the reasons I did this because I just think that the story out there has to be accurate, and I think there have been a lot of inaccuracies.

I won't address Mr. McLaughlin himself because I really don't know him, and I don't know, you know, what motivates him to write, but I do feel very conscientiously -- I feel my job is to be extremely conscientious about assessing any problem areas, fixing them and getting on with it.

I want to stress upfront, front-end that this program is delivering -- it is delivering. It is delivering incredibly difficult to attain results. At a time when the threat is rising, these brave people who fly these flights are -- and those who help support them -- are doing so. And, essentially, they're civilian -- they're a group of civilians flying in what amounts to a hostile and combat environment.

And I think that one always has to keep that in mind when you're talking about whether or not the program is good/bad, whether it's generated the results that it's supposed to. Let me talk about each of those, in turn, if I can remember them. And if I miss one, let me know.

On safety, I think it's important to remember that, as they fly in a difficult environment, I am very concerned about safety. In fact, I would say the three things that I am most concerned about in the overall Air Wing are safety of the pilots, accountability of the program, and the generation of the results that we have this program for, namely, on the ground.

On safety, I have asked internally, just so you know, one of -- I actually asked for the program review and had it in mind to ask for it before Bob Novak's column. But having said that, it will be a part of the overall program review from top to bottom, and the Air Wing will be reviewed just like everybody else, both on the accounting and cost side, and on the functional side, and on the safety side.

This is an Air Wing that I think it's important to keep in mind -- and I'm not sure that anybody who's writing about it now goes back this far to know about it. But it's been in being for quite a long time, I think 16 years. Its mission has increased dramatically. The requirements placed upon it have increased dramatically.

In 2001, out of, I think, something like 17, the experts will tell me, but 17 civilian air programs reviewed for a number of factors, including safety and maintenance, it was the number one program. It won an award in that regard. But in terms of the specifics now, safety, this -- every spray plane that goes out, goes out with a safety package, and we're always increasing this, and I have already put it out that we need to do even more. If there is anything more to be done, we should be doing it, in terms of safety.

It goes out with a package of one SAR, search and rescue airframe; it goes out with two helicopter gunships, which are Colombian; and it goes out -- also goes out with CMP-2, basically, troop carriers that include 10 to 15 fast reaction forces, including EMTs. So they do not go out unaccompanied; they go out very clearly with a set of protection that accompanies them.

There are also -- and this is one of the great values of having better and better intelligence, and we've just -- I've just asked before recent -- you know, basically, as soon as I got in here because it was one of the things I wanted to do -- I've asked that we do an even better job on intel fusion down there. That includes Colombians to the embassy; it includes within the embassy. In some of my past lives, intel fusion, I have noticed, is a very important thing.

Actionable intelligence is how you make good decisions and how you protect people, and actionable intelligence is intelligence which is timely and accurate. It's a continuum. There's no such thing as getting to a magic moment where you know you have a sufficient amount of intelligence to get at

something or you don't have enough to deploy.

But if you can improve the processes by which people communicate, the speed of communication, the flow of intelligence, you will absolutely improve the safety of the missions. So that's one of my priorities, as a general matter.

With respect to the individual airships, they have almost -- in fact, all of them fly with -- you've got multiple, let's call them, layers of an onion of protection within the actual airframe. You've got Kevlar protection, as an under-armor. Some of them got very thick steel, I think up to half an inch in some of them. You have ballistic plate protection.

You have pilots who are all given bulletproof vests. They're also given a bulletproof blanket, which they can use however they please. They can put it under them. It doesn't -- there a number of ways you could use that. Pilots have aviation life support equipment down to -- down to their boots. They have survival radios. They have a weapon.

I'm still -- actually, one inquiry I made yesterday was, exactly what weapon do they have? But they have -- I mean, it's a firearm, but they have weapons, they have signaling devices, they have strobe lights, they have everything that we would -- in my other life, I'm a Navy guy, and I will tell you that, you know, Navy pilots fly in high-risk environments. This is also a high-risk environment. You make preparations for that. You put SAR Missions in place, you put gunship protection in place for them, and you make them as heavily armored as you can.

There is no such thing, just so you may know, there is no such thing as a gap-free airframe. A-10 Warthogs, flying against tanks, are not gap-free. Things can penetrate. And -- but my view is -- and part of this is my military side -- I believe we have to do absolutely everything we can to protect those pilots, so safety is important.

Again, on intel, as I mentioned a minute ago, I think it has to be actionable, timely and accurate. I have looked at -- I've looked at that letter, I've looked at the column, I've looked at other things -- I do not see, at present, systemic issues that make me deeply worried. I see things where we can improve, and I have ordered already that we do all those things that I can see that we need to do.

Let me talk about this business about fatigued airframes. The United States military, a lot of the civilian world, fly airframes that are older. What matters is whether it has integrity, and that has to do a lot with the -- it has to do a lot with how you -- how you've updated them or modeled them. It has to do with -- airframe integrity has to do with how old it is, but it also has to do with whether or not it is being properly maintained. I have pushed that the O & R rates should be the highest possible -- operation-readiness rates -- that we should be, again, a model bureau. In terms of this, I think, historically, this Air Wing actually has been, and it's -- it's disappointing to see something like that written by someone who ran it because I think, ultimately he did a very good job running it up through, and that's how he won the awards.

But let me say, no performance -- and I'll come back to you on this -- but no performance-related, i.e., airframe performance-related issues have I seen that -- the reason that aircraft have been lost have been hostile fire, not, from what I can tell, anything connected to stress or performance measurement. And I have again asked that the airframe every, every -- I love whistleblowers. I lived on whistleblowers for five years when I worked for Congress. I think anybody who can point out a problem in this Air Wing should come forward, or in any other program, and I will work to try to resolve those issues. But I have not seen that systemic issue yet.

And let me say one other thing. A lot of these -- the reason we fly OV-10s, is you've got a two-engine plane over the triple canopy jungle, and two engines make a huge difference. Ask anyone who's lost one. And I think that the point here is, we chose to do that. Often that -- that airframe, the AV -- the OV-10, is flying at maybe up to five times the cost of a cheaper airframe. But we're doing that for safety reasons, so that we end up with a safer airframe and pilots -- and actually, it's a two-pilot plane.

But I hope I addressed most of them. The bottom line is, every single criticism that I can get my hands on, I am acting on. And I -- looking at this Air Wing, I am very confident in it. It is a great group of people flying a very important mission, generating significant results, without, what I can tell, to be systemic problems. But I'm doing a top-to-bottom review.

**QUESTION:** Just to be very succinct --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** So you do -- do you or do you not believe the safety has been impaired by the things that he mentioned, or are you just not sure and that's why you're reviewing it?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Well, I am reviewing it not because of that article or because of that report. My job -- I see myself as sort of a fiduciary for the American people and also, frankly, for the pilots. And I have to understand whether these airframes are safe. And so I am looking at that. It was one of the things I asked from the very get-go. I do not believe that it is an unsafe -- I believe it is a risky mission, but I think the integrity of the Air Wing is completely intact.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, but what about the failure to adequately protect air crews? Do you believe that you adequately protect the air crews and --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Yes, I do.

**QUESTION:** Great. And then, two other just quick questions -- and I'm sorry to have asked so many --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Sure. It's okay, I'm here for that.

**QUESTION:** The -- the Novak article, the McLaughlin memo apparently suggests that somebody else should take over oversight of the program. It suggests that diplomats can't be expected to fully comprehend the complexity of the task of, you know, flying planes over jungles --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Well, as -- you go ahead.

**QUESTION:** -- and then it suggests the Department of Justice. It's not clear to me that they have that much more experience in flying over jungles.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Yeah. Right.

**QUESTION:** But, one, is there any consideration being given within the Bush Administration to moving the program's oversight any place else?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Well, let me go to all three of those points. First, as an attorney myself, I can tell you that I'm not sure I would trust attorneys to fly planes, either, so maybe the Justice Department wouldn't be the best spot at the front end. But I say that -- I know of no initiative to move this Air Wing, and I see no basis for moving it. In sort of objective, looking at -- if you were looking at this from outside, is there any basis or reason for moving it.

Lots of agencies do things that are not part of the -- the majority of what that agency does. We used to have the United States Coast Guard at the Department of Transportation, the ATF within Treasury. There are a number of instances where you have people doing things outside what is viewed as the, sort of, public perception of what that department does.

I think this Air Wing has an incredible story to tell, and that's really why I'm here on the Air Wing issue. It is the truth that this Air Wing has generated an incredible product, and in -- in a risky environment that has become ever more risky, think about these numbers. This year, it's gotten -- I think there have been 300 -- it's something like 350 hits from hostile fire this year. Last year, it was -- I mean, 339, I think is the actual number. People in the back are nodding, so it's 339, but last year, it was 194 hits. And it was less than that the year before.

So flying -- and why is that happening? That's happening because we are hurting the FARC and those who grow drugs for their revenue, and they are reacting to that. And I will tell you, in some ways, there's no greater measure of success than how loud your enemies howl, and I think that is what we are doing. If we can kick the feet of the stool out from under it, and revenue is the feet of that stool, we will be able to take significant new -- sort of a magnitude leap ahead.

And I -- I guess my ultimate statement here is, not only do I think no other agency or department is particularly well-suited to do this -- in fact, I don't think they are -- I think the mission focus has always been here; it has done very well here over 16 years. It is doing very well in a hostile environment. And I know of no initiative anywhere to actually take it away. I think it's, you know --

**QUESTION:** Why wouldn't the -- why wouldn't the Pentagon logically want to run this, or why wouldn't the Government logically want the Pentagon to run it, given that -- given all the issues that you described from flying in a hostile (inaudible) environment?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** I have an answer for you. The answer is really -- this is a diplomatic -- this has to be -- the State Department, in particular, INL, works all of the diplomatic -- it's an international program, and while the Defense Department has a different way of handling international issues, we work them diplomatically, and we work them very closely with the host government. There is no other agency in the Government that can do, in the authority that's been given to them by Congress, or historically is the department placed to make that -- make that agreement to work with the host country on this.

DOD -- I mean, DOD is well-stretched in other areas, and I've never heard anybody at DOD step forward and say they'd like to run this program, and I don't think they would.

**QUESTION:** If I could just follow up.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** I mean, you just said before that these people are being faced with a -- it's a heavy combat zone.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** It is a --

**QUESTION:** So I mean, do -- you know, at a point when they're facing heavy combat, I'm sure that, you know, diplomatic niceties and the -- diplomatic rules of engagement are different than combat.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** This is a very carefully tailored program. I mean, law enforcement agents who work in a hostile environment on foreign soil also carry firearms. There is a -- this is an environment in which it's carefully worked with the host country -- in particular, the countries here. On eradication, it's always going to be the case that you're working extremely closely with the host country to make sure that you have troubleshot the issues that are going to confront them, for sovereignty and other reasons.

It is also the case that diplomacy is extremely important because we work within the law, and the law has made it very clear that the State Department, and in particular the Bureau of Inter -- INL, is the bureau that has gone and is intended to go and to make these agreements.

Hostile fire, if you probably -- I take it very seriously because I think that we have to protect every pilot to the greatest extent possible. We will never be perfect in preventing bad things from happening, whether that's accidents or whether that's, you know, commercial, civilian, whatever.

But I think that at the end of the day there can be no question, when you look at a sort of a catalog of what it takes to run one of these programs, that INL is exactly where it belongs. And one of the proofs of that is that, as it has resided here, it has done an exceptionally good job.

And, again, DOD has a different set of missions. We coordinate very closely with DOD, and having done the oversight of both DOD and INL for almost five years from outside, I can tell you that coordination isn't always perfect. But I don't think there would ever be a clamoring to do this there. It's a not a dip -- it's not a mission that matches the requirements of what you have to do in order to make this program successful. And really, the only place you can do that is INL. And I've said that to some of the critics very directly. I mean, I've said to them you can't articulate an alternative that would ever take us to the point we're at right now with INL. And that's really what you want to do.

**QUESTION:** Can I ask one other question?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Yeah, yeah.

**QUESTION:** There's been a lot of controversy over the spraying and how it's harmful to the people --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Glyphosate.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. And the environment. Could you talk a little bit about where that stands in terms of, I know there's been, you know, an ongoing dialogue with the Colombians on it.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Well, again, maybe I'm a new sheriff in town and I do things differently, but my view is you want to know exactly what the facts are, and then you want to act on them, and then you want to communicate them. And that's why I want to be in regular dialogue with all of you.

My understanding of glyphosate is that it is safe within all of the constraints that have been applied both domestically in this country and in Colombia. I think we are also complying with a very specific request by Congress that there be a triple layer of checking on that, both within our own EPA, within the Colombian Government, and then deeper into the Colombian Government.

I think that the ultimate fact is no one is disagreeing -- I think there is a court case domestically in Colombia that I don't know the resolution of and I don't even know the status of -- but I think that the reality is, on the science, it is absolutely safe for the purposes it is used. And as the video pointed out, it is often used domestically here in exactly the same way.

I also think it's important to point out, and I have never heard anybody point this out, that the use of glyphosate, the use of spray, for whatever incremental -- I mean, whatever incremental harmful anything that someone wants to attach to it in terms of the environment, if you look at the proportional decrease that is caused by the use of glyphosate in the harm that comes from drug production -- in other words, if you look at how you've reduced drug production and then look at the environmental harm that correlates to drug production -- it is a huge force multiplier.

In other words, when coca labs in the field and maceration pits are used -- and I don't know how many of you have gone down to see them, but it's very worth seeing -- there are disgusting, frankly. They are on the waterways. There are thousands of them across Colombia and South America broadly. They're damaging the watershed. That is what drug production does. It significantly damages the watershed.

And so if you can -- with what we're doing with glyphosate, which, again, I think has no problems associated with it that aren't being properly discussed, examined and independently looked at, you are ultimately reducing the overall environmental damage very significantly because you're getting at this. And if -- and if you -- I mean, I think there are hard numbers out there that show this, and if you haven't seen what the damage done by drug production in the field is, it's well worth a look.

**QUESTION:** Sir, I'm not an expert on airplanes, but from the video you showed and from the pictures you've got in here, it seems to me that a number of these planes, especially the fixed-wing, are single-engine.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** There are both single- and twin-engines.

**QUESTION:** You referred to twin-engines.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Correct, correct.

**QUESTION:** Is the safety issues the reason that you don't use twin-engines on fixed-wing?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Excellent question, and let me try to be as clear as I can about what I know and what I believe is what we should be doing, and that's what we're doing.

The twin-engine planes are the safer, the more expensive, and the more expensive to operate. When we have an environment which is highly dangerous, more dangerous, let us say, based on anything that, you know, objectively, historically, those are the planes that you would typically be more likely to use in that environment. You have single-engine planes that you're using, two different types. You have your 802s and you have your T-65s. And those are used, again, in an environment where, I think as a safety matter, we would not anticipate having additional safety -- in other words, you deploy them where you thought they could safely operate.

Having said that, all of those other safety provisions that I gave you, all of the other things that are done, are pilot-specific and plane-specific, and we protect every single air frame. We're not protecting just the twin-engine air frames.

What I'm telling you is that if you were to lay in additional layers of security, like we do on a civilian airliner -- in a civilian airliner, we lay in additional levels of security post-9/11, but we also did pre-9/11. For example, there are redundancies in the system. We are doing that and deploying those assets to try to match the environment. We're improving intel so that we know what we're flying into.

And one thing I didn't mention, which I probably should, is that every one of those grids is a hundred square miles. A hundred square miles -- it is very difficult to know exactly what's everywhere. You can know about the crops because you have the technology that shows you that, but you can't know that there isn't one person sitting out there with hostile fire waiting. We will never be able to create an air frame or an environment where you can be absolutely sure you will not encounter hostile fire. It just can't be done.

So what I'm going to say to you, and I'll take a follow-up, but what I want to say to you is that we are doing everything possible to protect, and I think we're doing a pretty good job, frankly. And I think we're going to do an even better job if we can find ways to do it, to protect them, and to have troop strength on the ground that will be proximate, as quickly or beforehand, to make sure that you've done everything that you can do legitimately to take people out.

But if you're talking about 100 square mile grid -- I think, in one of the recent instances, we had folks within -- we had 250 or 450 troops within five miles. Think about that grid. It's big. And you cannot know that there is not independent hostile fire waiting out there somewhere. We do everything we can to protect that.

**QUESTION:** Just a quick follow-up.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** I take it as the bottom line that it's the cost factor that drives you to use single-engine?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Actually, no. I'll give you one additional fact to put into your -- to put into your story, and hopefully you will; and that is that in FY '04, we asked for more money to reinforce what we think is a good mission and put us beyond that tipping point. And I suspect in FY '05, although I haven't seen any of the numbers, people definitely want to see more.

You will not hear me ever say that we should do -- do -- that we should do without something we need. And I just would tell you that I want to see evermore spending on the Air Wing until we get to that point. And, of course, the Air Wing does other things worldwide, this isn't the only thing it does.

But I would like to see us do even more with a good news story. If you know that you can do it well, you should do more of it. If you know that you're not doing it well, you should get out of the business. But we are doing it well, and we're going to do it even better. And, you know, we fly single-engine airplanes, even the military does, into lots of environments where it's even more hostile than it is there.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Can I ask you (inaudible) -- on this page, Colombian coca estimates?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** Unless I'm reading it wrongly, it appears to me the annual amount of hectares increases every single year of the program.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** It is important to -- you're talking about number two?

**QUESTION:** -- was last year.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Number two, right?

**QUESTION:** Yeah, page 2.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Yes. Historical context is very important. There's this balloon effect that people talk about, and I'm happy to talk about it if people want to, because I think -- I think we're addressing it now, and my plans ahead -- bless you -- are to address it more directly.

But what happened, essentially, if you look back over the last ten years, is that -- and I don't want to go too deep in the weeds on this unless you want to. But there was something called PDD-14, which triggered more and aggressive work in source countries to knock down -- this was early in the '90s -- to knock down coca in particular and eventually also poppy.

What you saw was a transition from Peru, which was a very high producer, the highest in the world, and Bolivia, who was number two, over to Colombia. And the reason is that the growing regions actually were better in Peru and Bolivia. But ultimately, they went over and they went to lower alkaloid -- they had to actually put seedbeds in. You never really had seedbeds in Colombia.

And, basically, what happened is we succeeded very well in Peru and very well in Bolivia, and you got a shift here over toward increased production in Colombia.

Having said that, Plan Colombia's resources -- Plan Colombia was -- I think it was '99, summer or fall of '99 -- but Plan Colombia, articulated by the Administration and by Congress, bipartisan support, kicked into being. A comprehensive plan, address Colombia, look over the horizon and see what's going to happen.

Those resources didn't actually begin to come online significantly until you begin to see this change in '00, the middle of '00. So, and now you're seeing even more of those resources kick in in '01. So what you're seeing is, historically, people did not -- I mean, one can always say we should be further ahead of the curve. If you look at methamphetamines in California and the West, you could say domestically, "Why didn't we see that meth was going to take out crack as the next big problem? Why didn't we see that ecstasy was going to come over the horizon?"

But as soon as we saw that this was happening, and even before that there was actually a very bipartisan and strong effort to address it directly, and I would say over the more or less what I would project out as maybe -- I mean, you could reasonably say that within six years from the start of the program you should see sort of ground-pounding, significant results that show that we did the right thing and that we brought it down.

But no, you're absolutely right. The trend lines early on in Colombia, as they reflected success elsewhere and as they also reflected no Plan Colombia, called out, in a sense, screamed out, for a real response.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** You said that you've done extremely well in these situations, and the Director of the Air Wing says that diplomats are ill-equipped for this operation, according to Novak's column. How can you have such different opinions? I mean, you've just arrived to the Bureau and he's been there for much longer.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** I don't want to address him directly because I think the most important thing I can do is actually look underneath every stone and look at the program. And as I look at the program and I look at what happened while he was there, and I look at what happening now -- there's a new Air Wing director -- and I go back and I look at what can be done that we haven't done, I'm telling you objectively that, on the numbers, this program is delivering, it has perhaps more safety components than any program out there, it is running into risks that most people don't anticipate, but it is producing exactly the results that Congress and two administrations have asked be produced.

And what motivates people is always interesting, but not always material to whether or not it's actually being done. And my statement to you is: Measure by the results and measure by what's being done. I'm a measurement guy, and I think we are, in fact, producing the results. And if I am successful in this job, I will produce even better results in time. I want to see it migrate that way. The trend lines, the tipping point, is real to me, and I want to make that happen.

Yeah. No, go ahead. I'm going to give time to everybody, so don't

**QUESTION:** Going back to the tipping point and the balloon effect, there have been some changes in Bolivia, a new government, and the government that was thrown out was very much supportive of your policy on drugs there.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** True.

**QUESTION:** Balloon effect, there's been an uptake in Bolivia. Can -- what are your concerns for Bolivia now? What are you saying to the new authorities? What kind of contacts have you had with them? And are you optimistic that you'll be able to control drug production there?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Well, I think -- you know, I don't say the balloon effect with any defensiveness. I say it because I -- as I said to several of the senators privately, even before the government changed in Bolivia -- proactive is everything. And what you want to do is shrink the balloon and ultimately pop the balloon, and get it down below this minima, where, at a certain level -- the end game is, in Bolivia, Peru, everywhere in this hemisphere, if you can get the production down to a point where it's sustainably low -- it's only going to -- it will never get up to the industrial level again, then you will win.

In Bolivia -- let me say several things. First, obviously, of concern, we've watched it closely, I've watched it closely -- I haven't seen anything that suggests backtracking yet. And I think that my perception of what was happening in Bolivia is that you had a broad-based concern about the government itself, and I don't think that it was specific to wanting to backtrack or reverse, by and large, to reverse progress made.

The second thing is, obviously, we will continue to talk directly about how important it is to sustain these programs -- and when I say these programs, I don't just mean eradication. I mean eradication and alternative development. Bolivia is a country that could benefit greatly from -- does benefit greatly from the alternative development that directly flows from having taken out of marketability or disincentivized people from growing the coca, the illegal coca.

And I think that, you know, my view is, you watch closely, but -- and you are attentive, and you are proactive -- but I am hopeful, let's put it that way, that we will continue to see strong cooperation and that as I move forward with greater and greater bilateral contacts, and as we work to regionalize this effort, that they will see that their greatest self-interest, despite others in the country who may see it differently, that their own greatest self-interest is actually in staying strongly the course against narcotics.

**QUESTION:** Just to follow that up. The President himself, Sanchez de Lozada, said that there was a risk that some kind of narco-republic would be established in Bolivia. Do you see that risk as happening?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** I think that anywhere that you have a combination -- and I don't think we do in Bolivia -- but where you have a combination of narcotics production, narcotics -- growing in large quantities, production, and ultimately some criminal elements that are, you know, terrorism, as you do see in Colombia, you have an issue where you have to watch very closely.

I don't -- my view of Bolivia is that it has nothing but a brighter future ahead, and I think that we will work closely with them to make sure that that happens. I don't -- that's not a word that you would ever hear coming out of my mouth, because I think of Bolivia in a much more developed and much more proactive way than that. That's the way -- I see their future as -- there's a change of government and we'll have to see where that takes us, but I don't see any backtracking yet, and I hope it won't happen. I'll come back, but yeah, directly behind.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. If this (inaudible) is so safe, so secure as you mention, why governments or neighboring countries, such as (inaudible) Venezuela, were always against such a programs? And I just want to know if you need the cooperation of the neighboring countries.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Well, I can't speak for any neighboring country, so why they're against it or for it, I would ask you to ask them. But I would tell you that it has a great track record. It is always important -- I could give you endless examples of good things done that were not well-communicated, just, you know, a whole range of issue areas. I think you have to communicate well what you're doing. I think you have to have people understand what you're doing. And when new things happen, like eradication and glyphosate is out there and people don't know what it is, their worst fears sometimes become the reality because they're thinking that it's worse than it is.

My view is that this program is highly successful; it will become ever more successful. And in response to the second part of your question, absolutely. Regional -- regional efforts are, again, a priority. They have to be a priority. And they're seeing it. I think that we can get more cooperation from people than we have, and I think that that should be a continuing priority, that within the region and ultimately as we can facilitate that, we do everything we can to get them all to understand that greater self-interest, our -- we have a -- there is a regional self-interest, and it's getting drugs out of the region permanently, and getting terrorist elements out of the region.

**QUESTION:** Just to follow up. Are -- do you plan to have some meetings, some talks with the Venezuela Government to reach this cooperation (inaudible) like Colombia?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** You know, I haven't even -- I have to confess to you, my schedule has been totally dominated by coming up to speed here in Washington, and I haven't even given thought to it. But I will just emphasize that I think regional efforts are terribly important, I'm highly supportive of them. You will never hear me say that I am not supportive of them. Some people tend to view things as bilateral only. I tend to think that the multilateral component is -- it's not a silver bullet, but it is, it is something that will help every one of us to do better. And I believe we're going to get to a point when it will become almost self-evident that what is working is working, and that we can compress this problem down to a level where it will -- it will stay and be manageable, maybe even manageable by each of those host governments and their regional effort by itself, with very little U.S. input, you know, discontinuing assistance, but not at a level that we're at right now.

Yeah.

**QUESTION:** I had a safety question. Mr. McLaughlin, in one of his letters, alludes to the search and rescue in February when a Defense Department plane went down. It says there was a critical delay that may have caused an opportunity to be lost, and I'm wondering if you can address just what is the procedure, who -- there are so many agencies -- who has the lead on that, and how does it work, and was there a possible problem here?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Well, I have to tell you, I have not reviewed the specifics of that incident. I know the incident you're talking about, it's obviously been in the press, and it's a -- you know, it's a significant one and it's something that I want to learn more about. But having said that, we have a SAR capability, I know. I can't speak for the other -- for the other departments, and I know that when I asked a question similar to the one you just asked, I was given a timeframe -- I actually did some training myself on -- in a different life on SAR packages that seemed very reasonable, in terms of its response time.

I don't know the specifics of that incident, but I do -- I will tell you this. A SAR package has to be ready, always to get in there, in an environment where you think there could be a problem. My understanding is that -- that a response was, was timely, and again, I don't know the details on this, but -- and that it -- and that we were a part of that response.

I don't know what others do and I will actually have to find out, because it, you know, I think, just as I push for regionalization, I think inter-agency cooperation is critical. And it's critical in all situations, but it's especially critical when you have a life and death environment. And so you will hear a priority from me for the indefinite future on that topic.

**QUESTION:** But, just one follow-up, I mean, would the Colombian Government be making that order, or would it be a U.S. order, to actually (inaudible).

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** In order to do what?

**QUESTION:** To take off.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** To take off.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible.)

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** I have to confess, I don't know. I'll have to go back and look. I -- pardon? Colombian. Okay, I'm told Colombian.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Can you talk at all about the next phase of Plan Colombia, if that's the term for it still, in terms of what you envision budget-wise, time-wise, emphasis-wise, whether it's more military -- more anti-narcotics or more anti-insurgency, the division along those lines and about training of commandos going after FARC leadership. (Inaudible.)

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Well, I can't speak -- yes, I can. I'll give you what I know, and I'll probably know more in the future than I know now. But I will tell you everything I know.

First of all, I can't speak for DOD. I don't know what they're doing, and I haven't yet been over there to sit down with them on details for the future. We believe -- I believe that the counter-narcotics mission is primary. It's primary because we are having great success there, because when you put your assets on those targets and you ultimately get rid of the revenue stream that supports the terrorists, whether they're AUC, or FARC, or ELN or any of the others -- but particularly, those three, and particularly, you mentioned -- I think that ultimately you're doing the best possible good with the asset.

Having said that, we have a system in place now that is working very well, actually. In fact, I don't know of any situation that has arisen in which this system has not worked, in which, if you have a CT target, and they come to the embassy and they say, "We need the resources to do this", that they aren't, essentially, using resources that can be used without detriment to the CN mission to address that issue.

I think over the horizon, what I see happening, is you're reaching, essentially, a tempo, after which you begin -- ultimately we will begin to reduce our commitment, but right now we're at a tempo where we can't possibly -- we should not reduce our tempo, or our commitment. In fact, if anything, we should increase it, because we are -- we are seeing the kind of success that we have always hoped and wished for, and that democrats and republicans together, back in '97, '98, dreamed about when they thought about the possibility of getting -- even before 9/11 -- of getting at the combination of terrorists and narcotics traffickers.

So I don't -- I mean, I can't tell you for sure what it will look like, but I think that what we will see is a continued, sustained commitment, and the truth is, what you most need, whether it's for the Air Wing, or for Plane Colombia, generally, is sustained commitment with an end game. And that's what I think we're going to have.

How about these two? They've waited patiently. Two. In the very back, first, and then the other.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. In -- would you please give us some concerns, if any, on the anti-drug policy in Peru? And the second question is about this commission you are sending to Bogotá, Mexico, and Lima, but it seems that you -- maybe you're meeting some cities, especially Bolivia. Why did you give this -- this commission only to visit those three cities?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Okay. First, you make it sound much more important than I -- it's not that it's not important, but it's not really a giant commission, it's just people who are going to come back with answers for me, because I'm very interested in those answers. And frankly, those answers occurred before -- or that missions -- my decision to send them occurred before events in Bolivia. So it's no -- no prejudice at all to Bolivia, and I want those same answers from each of the countries in which we have programs. But I am starting right now with those, basically, that I just thought right off the top I needed to have quick answers on.

With respect to Peru, the counter -- how can I address that? I think that Peru has potentially significant problems downstream, but if you are proactive about looking at what's going on in Peru, whether it's heroine poppy, or whether it's coca, and the leadership and working closely with that country, I think you get on top of those before they become the kinds of problems that make it -- it's always easier to keep the horses in the corral than it is to get them back and put them in the corral and I think we're very attentive to that.

I think that, you know, the concerns that people have recently voiced, if this is what you're driving at, between the 5 to 700 shining path that may be their intent, and with the drug revenue, is certainly something that we have to watch for, we have to be closely helping the host government to address, but I don't -- I think as long as we are conscious of how real the potential threat is, and as long as we're working tightly with them, to push them to hit benchmarks that we think are significant, we are, in fact, working closely with them to try to do more fusion of information so that we will all know better what is actually happening the skies and around the country, I think we will ultimately have the kind of proactive stance that we have to have. If we were not proactive, if we were not watching this and trying to be proactive about getting them to hit benchmarks, I think we'd have a concern. But I think that it's just something we'll have to keep focusing on.

And I know time is short here. Last question, yeah.

**QUESTION:** You mentioned that one of reasons for getting close to this tipping point on the war against drugs was leadership, and you mentioned

specifically President Uribe in Colombia and how determined he is in doing so.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** That's correct.

**QUESTION:** This weekend, in Colombia, it appeared that he had really (inaudible) one reason, Colombia selected in a lot of cities leftist candidates for principal posts, which, by nature, oppose eradication efforts in Colombia, or at least that concept of the war on drugs. And (inaudible) he was also defeated in the referendum where he was planning to draw the money he needs for the fight against drugs also.

So are you concerned at all that this events that happened in Colombia might undermine that determination you praise so much about President Uribe?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** I see two questions in your question, and I'll hit them both. First, I don't think it undermines, or will undermine, from what I know of him, his conviction to be aggressive in the programs that he has pursued. And I hope it won't and I look forward to working with him on making sure that we can support him in his convictions.

With respect to the individual issues, both of them that you raised political, the mayoral race, in some ways I guess maybe I see the silver lining on things, but my view is that Colombia is enjoying the fruits of democracy, and democracy is something where not -- one party does not dominate everything. And I think, frankly, one of the problems that has occurred is that people have chosen historically, most recently, violence over joining the political process. And I think that to the extent that you have someone who is not his party and is leftist, as you describe mayor, someone who is able to show that the democratic process is vital and has high integrity, I think that's not necessarily a bad thing.

With respect to the individual referendum points, the two points that, you know, it's interesting how we claim or say in this country that something has won or lost, or how the media reports it, or how we talk about it. You know, what I understand happened -- and you may have more recent information -- is that the two components of the referendum did not get the 25 percent required to have them count, in effect. And the two components were the shrinking of the size of the Colombian congress and the freezing of federal salaries.

And I guess my two thoughts on that are, first, that if that kind of a referendum were held in this country, we'd probably have a massive turnout, and I'm not sure what that says. And the second is that I don't see that as, in any way, a defeat of his substantive strong convictions on counternarcotics. I think that it is a very clear -- he's -- his view is very clear, his vision is very clear. And, quite frankly, I am inspired by his vision because I am just amazed time and again at the level of commitment. And I think that his personal popularity demonstrates that, and I think that's what I would look at to see whether or not he has the kind of support he needs to do the things he wants to do. And, again, I'm encouraged by that.

So I want to open a future dialogue just so people know. I know that time is short here. But I want -- you know, I may not always lift the phone myself, but I want to be available to you. A new day has come. I am a new sheriff in town. I'm an oversight guy. I don't owe anybody anything. I'm here to get the job done. And if you want to talk to me, you can talk to me. I know that's probably anathema, but that's what I'm -- that's what I --

**QUESTION:** One last thing?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** What do your (inaudible) tell you (inaudible) and have they been going up or down?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHARLES:** You know, I don't know. It's a good question, and one of the things I'm sure I'll find out. Thank you.

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