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## Advance Briefing of the Secretary's Trip to Colombia

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**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Good morning to all of you. Appreciate the fact that you all are here today. Very briefly, I'm Tom Shannon, the Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs. And I have with me Dan Sullivan, the Assistant Secretary for Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs. We will be accompanying Secretary Rice on her trip to Medellin, Colombia. We want to make a very brief statement and then open it to questions.

Again, as you know, the Secretary will be leading a congressional delegation to Colombia. We'll be visiting the city of Medellin, leaving tomorrow, Thursday, January 24<sup>th</sup> around eleven in the morning from Andrews Air Force Base, traveling directly to Medellin, spending the evening in Medellin and also spending most of Friday, January 25<sup>th</sup> in Medellin, leaving in the very late afternoon and returning again to Andrews Air Force Base.

We'll be traveling with ten members of the House of Representatives -- all Democrats. It's going to be a -- I think it's a great delegation. This is going to be a good opportunity for the Secretary and the members of the Delegation to be on the ground in Colombia and to see the impact of President Uribe's democratic security policy in a city, Medellin, which has suffered both at the hands of drug cartels, the FARC, the ELN and paramilitaries, but that the citizens of Medellin, working with President Uribe, working with the armed forces and law enforcement organizations of Colombia and the elected officials of Medellin have constructed a vibrant, dynamic metropolitan area that shows what people can do when they have courage and faith and hope in themselves and in their democratic destiny, but also highlight the importance of the economic and commercial relationship between the two countries and show how important our free trade agreement will be for the continuing development of Colombia and its ability to meet the social and economic development needs of the Colombian people.

During our time in Medellin we'll have an opportunity to meet with trade unionists, both those in favor of the free trade agreement and those who oppose it. We'll have an opportunity to meet with businessmen operating in Medellin. We'll have an opportunity to meet with local elected officials, such as the mayor, meet demobilize combatants, tour some examples of industries that benefit from trading relationships with the United States, also meet with the Attorney General of Colombia, who's playing such an important role in addressing human rights abuses and especially violence against trade unionists, and then finally meet with President Uribe and members of his cabinet.

This is a rich agenda for us. It's a compact agenda, but it's one that will allow the Secretary, as I mentioned, and the ten members of Congress to really get a very good, very tactile feel and understanding for the changes that have taken place in Colombia. And the continuing role that the United States can play in this very positive story through our economic and trading relationship and especially through successful consideration by our Congress of a free trade agreement.

Let me turn this over now to Assistant Secretary Dan Sullivan, who will make a brief statement and then we'll take your questions. Thank you very much.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Thank you, Tom. I'm going to give a little bit more of the context on the economic side. Particularly given that I don't have the chance and the opportunity to brief this distinguished group, I'm going to bore you with some -- a little bit of economic facts, so you can have a bit more of the granularity of what his FTA actually means for both sides, which I think will be beneficial if someone in particular traveled on the trip tomorrow.

You know, we often talk about the FTAs, our FTAs, as win-win propositions. This one clearly from our perspective is. On the U.S. side, you have what is a significant difference in tariff levels. The average U.S. tariff on a Colombian import because of our preference programs, is about .1 percent. The average Colombian tariff on a U.S. export is in the range of about 13 percent. So this free trade agreement, as you can imagine, will significantly open the Colombian market to U.S. exporters and there's been -- the ITC has done a study that's essentially saying that the benefits -- no industry in the United States -- you often hear that sometimes on free trade you have industries that are affected -- virtually no industries are affected negatively. This would be -- the result from the U.S. side would be a pretty substantial increase in exports given this tariff differential.

But on the Colombian side, you also have obviously very significant benefits of what will accrue from the passage of the FTA. Probably one of the most important is obviously to lock in a permanent long-term economic relationship from Colombia's perspective with the largest market in the world. But another one that doesn't get a lot of attention that we think is also particularly important is the opportunity for the Colombian Government, President Uribe, to lock in what has been a very significant and very successful economic reform program that he has undertaken independent of this FTA.

So things that Colombia has done, the World Bank has last year noted they were the top reformer -- economic reformer in Latin America, they've signed a bunch of other free trade agreements, particularly EU, or they're working on one with the EU, Canada, Central American countries, privatized state-owned companies, increases in investment protections, transparency. And what this program under President Uribe has done, it's been pretty dramatic in terms of what it has achieved both in terms of GDP growth -- about 5 percent average a year since 2000, 8 percent last -- first quarter of '07, which from what we can tell, highest GDP growth on a quarterly basis in Colombian history, significantly increase foreign direct investment, doubling foreign exchange reserves. But the two big ones from our perspective, unemployment from 2002, 15 percent, down to 9.4 percent last year, and poverty reduction 56 percent, down to 45 percent -- 11 percent decrease since the President took office.

So from our perspective the FTA provides the opportunity to lock in these reforms and move the relationship, which has been one on the economic side from a preferential relationship -- one way benefits under the ATPA -- to a more mature relationship based on mutual economic benefits and commitments.

Finally, just one thing that I wanted to mention. This is actually part of -- the Secretary's trip is part of what really is an unprecedented effort in terms of outreach by the Administration to the Congress over the next several weeks with regard to the Colombia free trade agreement. So the Secretary will be taking a CODEL. There were -- there are scheduled CODELs by Ambassador Schwab, Secretary Gutierrez, who's probably on his fourth one, Secretary Paulson. The Acting Secretary for Agriculture Chuck Connor is scheduled. So in the next six, seven weeks you are going to see a very significant focus on this FTA, and that obviously touches on the importance of this both as I mentioned from an economic perspective, but also more importantly really from a foreign policy perspective.

If you haven't seen it, we have copies of the Secretary Rice's OAS speech that she gave essentially focusing on the FTAs and their importance with regard to broader

foreign policy interests that she gave in October. And so I thought it would be useful for you to know that this is part of an administration-wide effort given the importance of the FTA that everybody from the President on down sees in passing this FTA for Colombia. Thanks.

Okay, questions.

**QUESTION:** Some of the congressmen who opposed this say that the -- basically the FTA should not be approved until the Uribe government deals with impunity by paramilitaries against unionists -- labor unionists and that sort of thing. I was wondering how do you assess the Uribe government's record in this area?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** From our point of view, President Uribe and his government have made significant strides in the fight against violence, against human rights abuses, and in the larger effort to end impunity and create a culture of justice within Colombia. Anyone familiar with Colombia will know and understand the impact that Uribe's broader policy of democratic security has had, but also the impact institutionally that has taken place during the years that President Uribe has been in office. Nearly all the indicators of violence are down and indicators of prosecution are up.

There's still a lot of work to be done. The -- Colombia has a history of violence, which is disturbing, but it is one that the Colombians themselves have been dealing with in an important way. And as we engage with the Uribe government, as we engage with the Colombian people, what has become evident to us is that as the state expands its control over its national territory and as its economy grows and -- towards the end, people that historically have been kind of outside the formal economy, the basis for political stability and the basis for a -- the rootedness of a culture of justice expands.

And therefore, we see the FTA not just as a trade policy with Colombia; we see it as part of a broader social and economic development policy and as necessary for consolidating the democratic gains that Colombia has made.

**QUESTION:** I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about this congressional delegation that is going to the trip? Are these representatives that are in favor of the agreement or -- I mean, all of them? And also, are you going to give us an idea what are the state of the negotiations with Congress with regards to this FTA? I mean, do you have any idea when it will -- there will be a vote or something like that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Well, I am not going to characterize how the different congressmen feel about the FTA at this point in time. I'll leave that to them. But as I mentioned, we will have 10 members of Congress travelling with us, all Democrats, beginning with Eliot Engel, the Chairman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, followed by Jane Harman, Solomon Ortiz, Alcee Hastings, Jim Moran, David Scott, Rick Larsen, Melissa Bean, Ron Klein, and Ed Perlmutter.

We're happy to have these 10 members with us. The fact that they're prepared to take this time and travel with the Secretary we view as positive. It means they understand the importance of the relationship with Colombia, they understand the kinds of struggles that Colombia is facing right now, and they want to go down and take a look for themselves to see what the impact of President Uribe's democratic security policy has been and what the impact of our free trade agreement can be.

I don't know if you want to talk about --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Yeah, just with regard to the process, it's important to recognize that the discussions between the Administration and the Congress have been ongoing for months now. You may recall that on May 10<sup>th</sup>, there was a pretty significant agreement between the congressional leadership and the Administration with regard to the free trade agreements, different elements within the agreements that we agreed to, including in the FTAs and all our FTA partners. We're interested in doing that and that was done as part of what we thought was an important outreach to Congress, because these agreements are viewed as not only important from our perspective, but also from the congressional perspective. And we think that is actually bearing fruit. These ongoing discussions -- clearly, it bore fruit with regard to the vote on the Peru FTA that occurred last fall and had significant bipartisan majorities in the House and Senate approving that.

So the focus right now is to continue the outreach, to continue the positive discussions between the Administration, congressional leadership, and to continue these kind of CODELs which, in the fall, there were also several -- again, I mentioned Secretary Gutierrez, I think is either on his third or fourth CODEL to Colombia. And we think that this is a positive way -- as Tom said, when members get down there, see the issues on the ground, they can have a positive effect on the way in which they're thinking about the Colombia FTA vote.

**QUESTION:** Hi, Doug Palmer with Reuters. Well, I just wonder, I mean, have you -- you said that discussions are ongoing with leaders of Congress. But, I mean, I haven't been able to detect any indication that they want to vote on this agreement. In fact, when you ask, they sort of indicate that they'd rather not, that the issue would just go away. And I mean, the -- you know, the most I can hear is that they're saying that there has to be some dramatic change in the dynamic that would allow them to bring that up this year and they continually talk about the impunity issue among other things. Is the Administration, you know, working with President Uribe, telling him that he needs to do more on that front? Or are you simply arguing that they've already done enough and Congress should approve it as is?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** It's evident. I mean, our -- we've had the same conversations with our Congress that you've had and so we're well aware of the concerns of some members of Congress and so is President Uribe and his government.

And one of the reasons we do these trips, you know, is to allow people to see for themselves what's going on in Colombia, to give them an opportunity to speak directly not only to Colombian Government officials such as President Uribe, but also people who live, you know, in that part of Colombian society that has been most affected by the violence. It's one of the reasons why they're going to meet with demobilized combatants, they're going to have an opportunity to meet with trade unionists, they're going to have an opportunity to visit industrial sites and talk to people who have jobs today and are parts of the formal economy because of our trading relationship with Colombia. And so in that sense, you know, we see this as an educational experience that will allow us to make our argument more concrete when we meet with members on the Hill.

At the same time, when it comes to ending impunity and building this culture of justice there's always more that can be done. There's always more that has to be done. And we understand and respect the concerns of our Congress in this regard. And, therefore, we are always looking for more that we can do, and I'm sure President Uribe and the Colombians are also.

But in terms of how we approach the issue in our own Congress, we recognize and understand that these are tough votes for everybody. Trade's a sensitive issue, but it's an important issue for us. As Dan has noted, you know, it drives our economy and it drives the economies of the countries that we deal with.

But as we look at Colombia, and Dan can expand on this, it's not just about our relationship with Colombia, even though that's very important. Colombia's a strategic partner of ours in a tough region and we have gained a lot through our relationship with Colombia. But if our Congress successfully approves the Colombian free trade agreement and the free trade agreement with Panama, it will create an unbroken string of free trade agreements along the Pacific coast of the Americas from Canada to Chile. This is a remarkable accomplishment. It is a string of free trade agreements that covers about two-thirds of the GDP of the region, not including the United States. It covers about one-third of our global trading. And it creates a strategic platform not only to jump across the Pacific to some of the most dynamic economies of the world, but also to have I think an interesting discussion with MERCOSUR and other countries in the region that have yet reached a moment in which they're prepared to explore larger free trade talks with us.

So as Dan noted, you know, this has a strategic component to it which is bigger than Colombia, it's bigger than us, it's about how we relate to the Americas. And it's how we begin to consolidate an understanding of democracy and an understanding of free trade that is certainly in our interest.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Just one quick point, on the process, again, I think you -- we've been very focused with regard to reaching out to the Congress,

with regard to reaching out to the leadership, and there has been an interest. I mean, you see 10 important members of Congress heading down tomorrow with the Secretary, so there is an interest in the education component of this FTA, what it means for Colombia and what it means for the region. And one statistic that I failed to mention but the Colombia Government estimates that just with regard to ATPA there's about 660,000 Colombian jobs directly related to that trading relationship with the United States. And to have members of Congress go down and meet these people, talk about how this benefits them and how it could be expanded through a free trade agreement, we think is very important and it's really the focus of the Administration right now with regard to its outreach to Congress which is continuing on these CODELs from, as I mentioned, a variety of different cabinet members.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. I would like to know, do you expect any impact concerning the current situation between Venezuela and Colombia, that these events are going to have any impact on the decision to pass the free trade agreement with Colombia?

And the second one, if you can comment. Are you going to make the same efforts with the free trade agreement with Panama?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** In regard to relations between Colombia and Venezuela, luckily those are the domain of Colombia and Venezuela, and I will happily leave them to the foreign ministries of those two countries.

However, I think the -- it does underscore that Colombia lives in a tough neighborhood. And as I mentioned, you know, we are kind of working with partners in the region to build economic and commercial networks and networks of political cooperation that consolidate and make concrete our common political values -- democracy, respect for human rights, open societies -- and make concrete a common understanding of what generates economic opportunity and prosperity.

And therefore, we believe that this free trade agreement will actually enhance stability, will enhance dialogue across nation states and across boundaries because it will strengthen a network of interests and common values that really form the basis of peaceful interaction and dialogue. So this is a long way of saying at the end of the day, these free trade agreements enhance stability and enhance cooperation and dialogue.

**QUESTION:** Do you have any indication that members of Congress might be leaning toward a vote sometime before the Administration leaves office? And secondly, what -- I mean, is it part of the purpose of this trip to give Uribe some political backing in that region that you described as so tough, especially considering Chavez's actions in recent months?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** I'll take the first one real quick. I think with regard -- again, with regard to the congressional element here, the Administration clearly wants to have a vote on the Colombia FTA and all the pending FTAs at some point during this year. And that's a goal and the focus has been, as I mentioned, to continue to work with the leadership and with different members on both better informing them on the different aspects of this, and we think these CODELs are a very, very critically important way to do that, and then to continue to work with the leadership on the issue with regard to timing of a possible vote.

So the focus right now, though, is on these CODELs and on continued discussions on possible timing, but the Administration's goal is to move forward on votes during this final year of the Administration.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** In regard to the second aspect of the question, we spend a lot of time in Colombia. The President has traveled there, the Secretary's been there numerous times, other cabinet members have cycled through there. So our outreach is constant and it's frequent. And you know, we're always looking for ways to show support for our partners in the region, but more importantly, it's not just a show of political support for the Administration. It's not just a political -- a show of political support for President Uribe; it's a show of support for the Colombian people and also an acknowledgment of what they've accomplished, which is really remarkable.

Again, I don't know how many of you are familiar with Colombia or have traveled to Colombia over time, but I have, and this is a country that's transformed itself. And it's transformed itself with the help of extraordinary political leadership. But that political leadership would not have been able to do what it has done without the courage and without the vision and the determination and the perseverance of the Colombian people. And we want to find a way to highlight that.

**QUESTION:** Hi, Kirit Radia of ABC News; a question for Secretary -- Assistant Secretary Shannon on Mexico, if you'll indulge it. Could you tell us whether you're happy and satisfied with the level of cooperation you've received from the Mexican Government in the search for the missing Marine that's believed to be south of the border?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Well, we want the perpetrators brought to justice. And so, you know, we'll declare ourselves happy and satisfied when the perpetrators have been arrested and are being prosecuted, you know, for the brutal murder of a border patrol officer. But I will say that the Mexicans are cooperating and they've been cooperating from the very beginning. The day of the event, I received a telephone call from the Ambassador of Mexico. I believe that Secretary Chertoff also talked with the Mexican Ambassador. Our embassy was in immediate contact with Mexican authorities in Mexico City and the Government of Mexico pledged its full support to finding the perpetrators of the crime.

**QUESTION:** I just want to make sure I was talking about the same -- this is the one who was accused of killing the pregnant Marine.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were talking about the border patrol --

**QUESTION:** No, a different case.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** -- officer. Okay. Ask me the question again.

**QUESTION:** Sure, absolutely. He was apparently on the run in the U.S. and has apparently fled to Mexico where he has family. He was reportedly seen in Guadalajara. I wanted to know if you had -- whether you were satisfied with the level of cooperation you received with the Mexican Government and what level that cooperation that might be.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Well, again, I mean, our law enforcement officials are in touch with Mexican law enforcement officials. This is a serious crime and I'll repeat what I said previously. We'll be happy and satisfied when the gentleman is apprehended, wherever he is, whether it's Mexico or the United States.

**QUESTION:** Could you tell us whether there's an FBI team down there at this point? Do you know anything about --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** I'm afraid I don't know that.

**QUESTION:** Thanks.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Nestor.

**QUESTION:** Yes. Nestor Ikeda, I'm an Associated Press reporter for Latin America. I have a question for Mr. Shannon. And Mr. Shannon, you have (inaudible) the answer for some questions in regard to the security aspects of the Secretary Rice trip to Colombia. And I'm going to ask you a question in other way. So when she starts this trip to South America, what is the main concern for the U.S. Administration in South America? Political or in other fields?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** In regard to her trip to Colombia?

**QUESTION:** Yes.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Well, the primary purpose of the trip is to take important members of Congress to Colombia, show them what's happening on the ground in Colombia in the hope that afterwards, these members of Congress will understand the importance of passing the free trade agreement. So that's priority number one.

Priority number two, as I mentioned, is highlighting the important role that Colombia plays in a larger U.S. approach to the Americas, a broader kind of strategic approach to the Americas, which -- I've talked about it at length before and don't want to go into all the details now, but it's about how you link democracy and development. It's about how you show the democratic state can deliver the goods of social and economic development while providing the security that all of our citizens want and need in order to be able to lead peaceful, productive lives. And in this sense, we believe that Colombia plays a critical part in building this larger kind of strategic network of countries in the region.

But we also believe, looking to the future, that a successful Colombia changes the face of South America and it changes the face of the Andes. This is a remarkable country filled with remarkable people. And the degree to which they can gain control of their national territory, the degree to which they can have an economy that connects to the world and connects to the region, the degree to which they have the level of investment that they need to generate economic growth, it will be a remarkable success story. And given Colombia's kind of geopolitical position, kind of sitting at a kind of a connecting point between Central America, between the Andes, between the Caribbean, the Amazon, and looking across the Pacific, you couldn't ask for a better placed partner. I hope I didn't avoid that question. (Laughter.)

**MR. GALLEGOS:** We can get a couple more and then we'll wrap it up.

**QUESTION:** I just wanted to ask about the preference program. It was mentioned here today as -- this would be a successor to the preference program, but the current preferences expire at the end of February, so -- and it sounds like you're not expecting a vote before then, but maybe you are. But -- so my question is, should Congress renew those in the short term and provide another six-month or one-year extension? Or should those just lapse and everybody focus on passing the free trade agreement?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** The answer is we are working with the Congress with regard to making sure that particularly, the countries that we either just passed a free trade agreement with, Peru, or Colombia, looking for passage soon, is that that duty-free trade continues uninterrupted. So the answer is yes with regard to passage on a relatively short-term basis and that's something that the Administration is working with Congress on.

With regard to Colombia and Peru, as you know, the ATPA is four countries and there have been some issues with regard to investor issues in Ecuador and Bolivia where we think further discussions between those governments, the Administration, and discussions with the Congress on how those benefits under ATPA would or should or could be extended is something that we are looking at right now.

**QUESTION:** Can I follow up on that after you? Well, I mean, you seem to imply that the Administration will not ask for the renewal for Bolivia and Ecuador, that there could be a lapse there. I mean, is that -- can you clarify that a little bit? There could be a lapse of time for those preferences for those countries?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** I'll let Assistant Secretary Shannon clarify.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Yeah -- no, we're not implying anything at this point in time. All we're saying is that, you know, in our discussions with Congress -- and ultimately it's a congressional decision. You know, because we passed a free trade agreement with Peru and because we're in the process of trying to pass one with Colombia, the importance of extending benefits are obvious. There's no doubt that ATPA has had a huge positive impact in Ecuador and in Bolivia and has met significant U.S. interests, including kind of enhancing trading relationships, but also building small- and medium-sized enterprises that create jobs. And this is something we're aware of, it's something we look at very closely.

But as Assistant Secretary Sullivan noted, there are some issues related to the statutory criteria of these agreements that we're looking at closely and discussing with Ecuador and Bolivia and that we have an ongoing discussion with our own Congress on. So we're -- we weren't intending to imply anything. We want to underscore the importance and, from our point of view, the success of ATPA as a preference program. But we have due diligence that we still need to do.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** And just to add to that point on not implying anything -- looking at ways to deepen the economic relationship across the board in the hemisphere is something that we have been very focused on and as Assistant Secretary Shannon mentioned at the outset, have actually achieved a record of success on doing so throughout the hemisphere in a way that Colombia, Peru will add to that and our focus on the preference programs has been an important component of that record of deepening our economic integration and relationship with all the countries of the region.

**QUESTION:** Do you expect to be making any -- can you tell us anything, give us any sort of guidance in terms of do you expect to be making any kind of announcements during the trip, anything specifically new that you anticipate coming out of it? And also will the Secretary be raising the issue of human rights in any way with President Uribe, and if so, in what way?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Well, I think this is the first time a Secretary of State has ever been to Medellin, so that's something new.

In terms of announcements, again, the purpose of the trip is to bring important members of our Congress to Colombia and -- so that's going to be the focus. I mean, we'll see what happens in the course of our discussions there, but for us that is the primary purpose of the trip.

I'm sorry, what was your second question?

**QUESTION:** The second question is, will she be raising the issue of human rights with President Uribe?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Oh, yeah. It's a constant part of our dialogue with the Colombians, so she certainly will be.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Let's wrap it up. Elise.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, there were some critics of the situation with -- and this is a little bit kind of off topic from the congressional delegation, but other CODELs that have been down there. There's been a lot of kind of action recently about congressmen that have said that they'd be willing to talk to the FARC in terms of allowing -- trying to get some of these hostages out. I mean, what is your thought on this? There are some critics that say that they're going there to try and make noises about, you know, cracking down on companies that are sponsoring paramilitaries and things like that. What's the Administration's kind of response to these overtures? And do you think that these kind of congressional members getting into that, if you will, with the FARC has any effect on, you know, your efforts, a free trade agreement, alternative crops, those kind of things? I mean, do you think that there's any danger of the two intersecting at all?

I'm not articulating it very well, but --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** Yeah, I get it. Very quickly, first of all, you know, we're committed to the safe return of all the hostages, the three Americans, but

also the others that the FARC hold and they hold hundreds of kidnapped individuals. We support President Uribe's efforts to fashion some kind of humanitarian accord with the FARC in order to guarantee the safe release of the hostages. And third, we welcome efforts by third parties that are coordinated with the Government of Colombia to help secure the release.

The gentlemen you're talking about are very careful about how they approach the issue of the hostages. They're committed to the release of the hostages, especially focused on the release of the three Americans. We appreciate that. We understand it. We respect it. And their activities have been coordinated with the Government of Colombia.

**QUESTION:** Is there any money going to these -- when you talk about third parties, is there any U.S. money going to these third parties?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** I'm sorry, by money what do you mean by -- I mean, the third parties involved -- historically that have been involved in these kind of activities, efforts to free hostages, have been countries like France, Spain, Switzerland, some of the Nordic countries, and most recently Venezuela, and we haven't been paying any of those countries. (Laughter.) I don't think.

**QUESTION:** No, but I mean, there were some charges -- I'm not saying they're substantiated, of course, but that you've been paying kind of, you know, these kind of intermediaries or front companies or -- so, I mean, there have just been a lot of --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** That the United States has?

**QUESTION:** Yeah. There have been like a lot of heavy charges lately that, you know, in an effort to get these hostages out, there's a lot of funny business going on.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON:** No, no.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** All right. Thank you all.

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