

Tell the Senate that Colombia Aid Must Be Debated!

Contact Your Senators Before Oct. 23rd to Help Change US Policy Toward Colombia

October 17, Latin America Working Group — Slowed by debate over Iraq, the Senate has decided that it will not be able to get through the remaining eight appropriations bills-- among them the foreign aid bill-- before the end of the year. In order to pass the budget before they leave for recess, the Senate will have to roll all eight bills into one massive omnibus appropriations bill, which they will debate and pass all at once. Because the bill is so large, debate and amendments will be severely restricted.

While the Senate never planned to debate the over \$500 million included in the bill for Colombia-- the vast majority military and police aid-- the announcement of the omnibus virtually ensures that no discussion of US policy toward Colombia will take place. The US Senate hasn't debated Colombia policy for two years, instead approving the money with no discussion. This is despite the fact that the goals for Colombia policy that Congress set out three years ago have not been met-- and in many cases, things have gotten worse.

There is one opportunity to raise concerns about US policy toward Colombia during the omnibus debate, and we need your help immediately to make this happen. Before the debate on the bill begins, there is one hour of general debate when senators can raise any issue they like. **Please call or write your senators before October 23rd and ask them to make a statement during the general debate that raises concerns about US policy toward Colombia.** This effort will help educate other members of the senate and will send a message that such a major foreign policy issue deserves a thorough debate. A sample letter is included below.

Why should the Senate debate Colombia policy?

- A massive amount of money with a terrible impact. Our taxpayer dollars—over \$600 million this year, and more next year if the Bush Administration prevails—go to fund counterinsurgency and counter-drug operations and to protect an oil pipeline in Colombia.
- Funding the Colombian armed forces, who collaborate with brutal paramilitary groups, has accelerated the armed conflict in Colombia. In 2000, 12 civilians a day died violently in Colombia. That number rose to 19 a day this year, as paramilitaries, guerillas, and the Colombian military step up their side of the conflict and catch civilians in the crossfire.
- Dropping herbicides on land owned by small farmers has killed some drug crops, but has taken food crops with it. Water sources are contaminated and people go hungry, especially because most do not receive alternative development assistance afterwards. Many move elsewhere and plant coca again.
- Plan Colombia has not curbed drug abuse in the US, one of its main goals. According to the US Office of National Drug Control Policy, drugs are just as available on US streets now as they were three years ago.

The US House has had very strong debates on Colombia, and the votes get closer each year to cut military aid to Colombia's brutal armed forces. With so much at stake, we need to tell the Senate to follow their lead, and debate and change this policy!

Action Needed! Stop in to your senator's state office and meet with a staff member, or organize a fax or call-in campaign, asking you senators to speak out about US policy toward Colombia when the omnibus appropriations bill comes to the Senate floor. To find the phone number or fax number of your senators' state or DC offices, please see www.senate.gov. A sample letter is available below which can be modified and faxed to your senators at their DC offices. Put any faxes to the attention of the foreign policy aide.

Sample Letter to Your Senators on Colombia Policy

Date

The Honorable _____
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator _____,

I am writing as a constituent concerned about the impact of US military aid and fumigation in Colombia. I am also greatly troubled by the lack of debate taking place in the Senate over this issue. Please examine the impact of our massive military assistance package, and debate and change this policy when the 2004 omnibus appropriations bill reaches the Senate floor.

When the Senate passed Plan Colombia in 2000, the stated goal was to curb drug production. Last year, the US mission in Colombia expanded to include counter-insurgency efforts. Senator _____, I am concerned that US policy is spiraling out of control, and that US goals in Colombia are so broad and vague that it will be difficult to know when to stop. We have already given more than \$2.5 billion in taxpayer dollars to Colombia, with few tangible results; where are we going in Colombia, and how much more money is needed? These questions deserve serious debate.

We also need to ask why our approach is not yielding results. Drugs are just as available on our streets as they were three years ago, and our fumigation policy has moved drug production around, now back into Bolivia and Peru. According to the US State Department, the Colombian armed forces still collaborate with brutal paramilitary groups, who murder civilians, are involved in drug trafficking, and are on the US terrorist list.

I believe that there are positive ways for the United States to help Colombia, but not through fumigation or more military aid. I urge you to support drug treatment and prevention programs at home, and alternative development programs in Colombia, so that farmers can switch to growing legal crops.

Given all that is at risk in Colombia, the lack of debate over this policy in the US Senate is alarming. I ask that you speak out strongly when the omnibus appropriations bill reaches the Senate floor in favor of a new US policy toward Colombia. I look forward to your response, and to following the debate on the 2004 omnibus appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Name
Address