

## Rothman Discusses U.S Assistance To Colombia With President Uribe

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Focus On Anti-Terrorism Efforts, Reduction In Crime

Washington, DC – As part of his continuing effort to strengthen the relationship between the United States and Colombia, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) met recently with President Alvaro Uribe during the leader's visit to Capitol Hill. Rothman is a key member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, which allocates all U.S. foreign assistance. President Uribe provided Rothman and the subcommittee members with an update regarding the current state of affairs in Colombia.

"I was pleased to have another opportunity to discuss with President Uribe the important relationship between the United States and Colombia," said Rothman, who last met with Uribe in September. "The people of Colombia have been fighting terrorism for decades, and I was happy to hear President Uribe outline several recent areas of success."

Uribe spoke about the reduction of illegal drug crops being planted in Colombia, a new economic program that provides families with assistance when they commit to alternatives to planting illegal drug crops, and his recent discussions with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez about Colombian guerrillas and paramilitaries seeking safe haven in Venezuela.

"I have also been impressed with President Uribe's commitment to law and order in Colombia. The citizens of a great nation should be able to live in peace without the constant threat of terrorist attacks," Rothman said. "I specifically used this meeting to question President Uribe about how the United States can help reduce violence in his country."

Uribe responded to Rothman by noting that the number of terrorist attacks in Colombia has decreased during the first four months of 2003. Fewer Colombian citizens have been killed by guerrillas and paramilitary forces and attacks on Colombia's economic infrastructure have also decreased. The President specifically noted that attacks on the nation's critical oil pipelines were down 80 percent since he took office. Kidnappings, a terrible fact of daily life for Colombians, are also down 33 percent for the first four months in 2003, according to the President. Uribe contends that this reduction in violence is attributable to a more effective police presence, the determination of the government and the people of Colombia to rout out terrorists, and assistance from the U.S.

Over the years, Rothman has used his position on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations to advocate for U.S. assistance to help win the drug war that has ravaged Colombia. This year alone, Colombia will receive over \$600 million in counter-narcotics, military, and development assistance from the U.S.

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