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Addresses efforts to assist South American nation fight drugs and terrorism

Washington, DC - In an effort to effectively aid and support the Colombian government in its war on drugs and terrorism, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) this week spoke one-on-one with newly elected Colombian President Alvaro Uribe during a closed door meeting in the United States Capitol Building. As a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, which allocates all of the foreign aid from the United States government, including funds directed toward Colombia, Rothman spoke in depth with Uribe about how the leader plans to administer the assistance.

“The United States has a moral obligation to help the people of Colombia overcome the dangerous climate of their homeland, which sadly has been dominated by drug cartels and terrorists,” said Rothman. “I look forward to building on my relationship with President Uribe to help him and his government effectively protect the Colombian people from the violence and terrorism that plague Colombia on a daily basis.”

Rothman spoke with Uribe about how the security situation in the democratic nation of Colombia has deteriorated to such dangerous levels. Rothman further questioned Uribe as to the changes needed under his new Administration to enforce the rule of law and develop a realistic budget that reflects the growing need for action against the guerrilla and para-military groups.

Uribe responded to Rothman that the quickening deterioration of the rule of law in Colombia is very much influenced by money from growing narcotics sales, and that his goal is to restore security and authority to Colombia. The Uribe Administration is attempting to restore power to a weak judicial system, increase the number of enlisted soldiers in the military, and create a million person civilian guard force to assist the military, similar to a neighborhood watch group. Uribe also signaled that Colombians are committed to doing whatever is necessary to restore authority and eliminate the violence that currently dominates the country.

“Terrorism is terrorism regardless of where it occurs, and the United States is committed to putting an end to it around the world,” Rothman said. “I am very pleased that the newly elected leader of Colombia, President Uribe, is ready to take such strong action to defend the people of his country and to restore order and the rule of law.”

The House Appropriations Committee recently approved \$731 million in aid to Colombia to help them fight their war on drug trafficking and terrorism and to reform their economy. These funds are a continuation of President Clinton’s “Plan Colombia,” which Rothman helped pass and provided over \$1 billion to Colombia in counter-narcotics and economic assistance.

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