

DHS nominee Mayorkas testifies before Congress as Biden unveils immigration plan

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Alejandro Mayorkas, president-elect Joe Biden's nominee for head of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), testified before the Senate in a confirmation hearing on Tuesday, the day before the inauguration of the new administration and the last full day of the Trump White House.

Mayorkas appeared before the Senate Homeland Security Committee during a process in which, during previous presidential election years, high-level national security nominations of the incoming administration would have been approved weeks earlier. Mayorkas' testimony accompanied an announcement by Biden that a new immigration bill would be presented to Congress on inauguration day.

Attempting to address the subject of the fascist assault on the US Capitol two weeks ago and the response of the Department of Homeland Security to it, Mayorkas said, "I will do everything I can to ensure that the tragic loss of life, the assault on law enforcement, the desecration of the building that stands as one of the three pillars of our democracy, and the terror felt by you, your colleagues, staff, and everyone present, will not happen again."

In responding to a question from Senator Gary Peters (Democrat from Michigan) about the growth of right wing violence in the US, Mayorkas said, "The threat of domestic extremism is one of the greatest threats the Department of Homeland Security confronts, and it has unique capabilities in confronting it."

While Peters focused on the "chaos, mismanagement and instability" at DHS over the past four years, neither he nor Mayorkas said anything about the role of numerous law enforcement agencies in assisting and sympathizing with the fascist Trump supporters who stormed the chambers of Congress in an attempted coup and threatened to kill Vice President Pence,

Speaker of the House Pelosi and others on January 6.

In keeping with the identity politics of the Democratic Party, much is being made of Mayorkas' ethnicity as "the first Latino and first immigrant secretary of homeland security," as stated by the *New York Times*. Mayorkas was born in Havana, Cuba in 1959 and his parents, who are both Jewish, brought his family to the US as refugees in 1960 following the Cuban Revolution.

Mayorkas served as Director of US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and then deputy secretary of DHS during the Obama administration between 2009 to 2016. As noted in a previous profile of Mayorkas here on the WSWWS, his selection by Biden is an indication to the ruling class that the policies of Obama—who earned the nickname "Deporter-In-Chief" for deporting more than 2.5 million immigrants from the US between 2009 and 2017—will be revived. The Obama administration laid the foundation for the crimes carried out by Trump against immigrants over the last four years.

When asked about Trump's border policies, including the construction of the US-Mexico border wall, Mayorkas said reversing the Republican program, "cannot be accomplished with just the flick of a switch on day one, it will take time to build the infrastructure capacity so we can enforce our laws." Mayorkas also said he would maintain Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the primary arm of the DHS used for intimidating, raiding and carrying out acts of violence against immigrants by the Trump administration.

Much of what Mayorkas said during his testimony was designed to appease the politics of extreme nationalism and anti-immigrant hatred pushed by Republicans in Congress. Senator Josh Hawley

(Republican of Missouri), who should have been arrested and removed from Congress for his role in the January 6 coup attempt, has indicated that he will move to block any attempt by the Democrats to swiftly move Mayorkas' nomination to a confirmation vote.

The *Wall Street Journal* wrote in December of Mayorkas' politics as having "garnered endorsements from an unusually broad range of groups, from liberal immigration advocates to conservative-leaning law-enforcement organizations including the Fraternal Order of Police."

Asked if he would dismantle Trump's reactionary border wall, Mayorkas related that when he was deputy DHS secretary, he was told by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) officials that a combination of barriers, additional agents and technology and equipment were needed as part of a "diverse approach to border security." In other words, Mayorkas thinks Trump was right, the southern border of the US with Mexico needs a wall and should be militarized.

In an effort to conceal the right-wing character of the incoming administration, the Biden team released an outline of its immigration policy on Monday. Dubbed a "sweeping overhaul" of US immigration laws by the pro-Democratic Party corporate media, the program calls for an "8-year pathway to citizenship for immigrants without legal status and an expansion of refugee admissions," according to the *Washington Post*.

The *Post* report reveals the kind of deal that is being worked out between Biden and the Republicans in Congress, where it says that the plan includes "an enforcement plan that deploys technology to patrol the border" as well as "a heavy focus on addressing the root causes of migration from Central America."

There have been numerous recent reports that a migrant caravan of 7,000 migrant workers is making its way to the US border from Guatemala. The *New York Times* reported on Sunday, "Guatemalan migration officials estimated on Sunday that about 6,000 migrants were corralled between Chiquimula and the border with Honduras, most of them Honduran. Hundreds more reportedly eluded the Guatemalan security checkpoints, with some reaching Guatemala City over the weekend, the local news media reported."

Since US imperialism is responsible for the conditions of poverty and violence in Central American

countries such as Honduras and Guatemala—that drive workers and their families onto the 2,000-mile journey north—this "key part of Biden's foreign policy portfolio" can mean only one thing: stopping Central American migrants from ever leaving their countries in the first place.

Although details of the 8-year citizenship path remains sketchy, it is clear that this timeframe—which only applies to those who were already within the US on January 1—is terrifically inadequate given the 11 million undocumented immigrants currently in the US, many of whom have lived and worked in the country their whole lives, and could be reversed or further restricted after just four years.



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