

Gary Tomasulo ([00:00](#)):

Thank you, Anja. Good afternoon. American's been a proud partner of the Aspen Security Forum for many years and we look forward to hopefully having many of you fly with us when the forum's held again in Aspen next summer when it returns to Colorado. It's an honor to be here to introduce the final session of today's forum, Protecting the Homeland in a New Era. At American Airlines, we are committed to our customers and team member's safety and security both in the sky and on the ground, and we work closely with a host of government leaders to do just that, including one of the esteemed gentlemen you're about to hear from, Secretary Mayorkas from the Department of Homeland Security. Secretary Mayorkas previously served as Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security from 2013 to 2016, and as the Director of the US Citizenship and Immigration Service from 2009 to 2013. During that time, Mayorkas led the development and implementation of DACA, negotiated cyber security and homeland security agreements with foreign governments, and led the department's response to Ebola and Zika, and helped build the administration's blue campaign to combat human trafficking.

Gary Tomasulo ([01:30](#)):

Mayorkas began his government service in the Department of Justice where he served as Assistant US Attorney in the Central District of California. There's one thing I wanted to highlight today. I wanted to take a moment to commend the efforts of Secretary Mayorkas and his team at DHS during the recent humanitarian airlift evacuation of US citizens and refugees from Afghanistan. American Airlines was immensely proud to have a hand in bringing evacuees from Afghanistan to safety and security here in the United States. It was a herculean effort by all involved, and I know from talking to a number of our team members, that the experience carried a great deal of meaning to each of them.

Gary Tomasulo ([02:20](#)):

I want to thank Secretary Mayorkas for your tireless dedication to that cause and for the collaborative spirit that you displayed as we work to operate each and every mission successfully. Now, to guide today's discussion, I'd like to introduce our moderator David Sanger. David is a White House and National Security Correspondent as well as a senior writer for the New York Times. In David's 38 year career of reporting for the Times, he's been on three Pulitzer Prize winning teams. Most recently in 2017 for international reporting. David, the floor is yours.

David Sanger ([03:11](#)):

Thanks. Well, thank you very much for that introduction. Thank you all for what's been a really fascinating couple of days. Anja, your team has once again done remarkable things. I want to thank you Secretary Mayorkas for coming to join us. We've known each other since your last service at DHS and I want to thank you for coming here to be the closing act and thus proving by your place in the agenda that at the Aspen Security Forum, we always save the best for last time.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([03:43](#)):

Thank you David, thanks so much.

David Sanger ([03:45](#)):

So DHS is a vast place, a lot more vast than I think we first imagined when the law was passed. It created the department out of the the wreckage of the post-9/11 era. And I think if, at that time, we thought that we would all be spending so much time discussing border issues, the political hot button of course

is your job, I think we all would have been shocked. And I don't think that we could have even imagined the complexity of the problems of running CISA, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, now led by Jen Easterly.

David Sanger ([04:25](#)):

So my plan for today is to ask you a bit about the border, since that's always first on people's minds, talk a bit about cyber and the lessons we've learned this year. It's an issue I spend a lot of time on. Talk a little bit about domestic extremism and hear a little bit about the DHS workforce and then we're hoping to open this up to some questions from everybody. But let me start here. You're of course famously from an immigrant family, you yourself came to the United States as a young baby from Cuba. Clearly that's given you a different perspective. So just tell us briefly about your family and then if you can, you and I had a remarkable conversation a few weeks ago about a very moving story about when given your history, you went to go meet a mother who had been separated from her children in recent years in their attempt to enter the US.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([05:25](#)):

Thank you David and it's a pleasure to be here. So to speak of my family, the first thing that comes to mind is of course my parents. And I speak of them actually at the Department of Homeland Security because they have very much influenced how I seek to manage and lead the organization and what type of colleague I aspire to be. My parents shared values but they had very different approaches to life. My father's favorite expression, or one of them was, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks. This is who I am, take it or leave it. Love me, hate me, everything in between." My mother, and both had suffered displacement in their lives. My mother from that displacement actually had a philosophy that every day is a new life. That something tragic can occur, something magnificent can occur, and by reason of that, we have an obligation to make ourselves better today than we were yesterday and better tomorrow than we are today. And in that regard I am more my mother's son than my father's, and I look at the organization of which I am privileged to be a part and I say I am more my mother's son and we have an obligation at DHS to be better tomorrow than we are today and we have to drive to that betterment. And so it's very much influenced how I am as a government employee.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([07:10](#)):

About six, eight weeks ago, I actually met virtually with seven parents, six mothers and one father who had suffered separation from their children as part of the zero tolerance policy of the prior administration. And one woman's account really shook me because we had successfully reunified all of these parents with their children but this mother spoke of the separation that she continued to suffer from her teenage daughter. Her daughter is 16 now and though they have been united physically, there still stands a great emotional separation between the two of them and she was struggling to repair that.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([08:08](#)):

And it just speaks to, in my mind, the cruelty of the policy. The fact that the separation of families is not just purely physical and what an obligation we have to restore those families and that's not just a matter of physical reunification but we also have to take a look at that family unit and what we can do to restore. I don't use the term compensation, I don't find that to be apt but restorative.

David Sanger ([08:40](#)):

Well, I'm glad you mentioned that because the phrase compensation did come up at the White House yesterday. I was in my White House role for the Times, I was over with a group of reporters who saw the President mid-afternoon and a Fox News Reporter asked him about reports of possible payments, compensatory payments up to \$450,000 has been the report for separated parents. I got the impression the President had not heard about these reports before but he said that's not going to happen even though of course he's the one who had said during the campaign that the separation of these families was shameful and intolerable and not who we are. So how should the government navigate this? I understand that compensation is not DHS' role but still.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([09:35](#)):

So they're two different efforts and the President has adhered with orthodoxy to the words of the past in terms of it's shameful and it's not who we are. The figures of compensation that is being handled by the Department of Justice is in the context of the Claims Act. Cases as distinct from the Family Reunification Task Force that we in the Department of Homeland Security operate and bringing those families together.

David Sanger ([10:11](#)):

There are other things you could do though for these families. Can you imagine a situation where a migrant family separated by the zero tolerance policy under the Trump Administration might receive a pathway to citizenship for the harm inflicted?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([10:28](#)):

So in terms of really providing status for those parents or children who are brought back to the United States, ultimately it's really going to require legislation, but that doesn't mean that an individual might not otherwise qualify if there is an existing avenue for relief. So for example, if a parent who was separated and returned to Guatemala, returns to the United States might they have a viable claim for asylum by reason of what they've experienced in Guatemala, that might provide a path. But absent some existing avenue, legislative reform would be required.

David Sanger ([11:09](#)):

And would you, based on your experience as Secretary, a quite emotional discussion you seemed to have had with separated parents from a few weeks ago, would you support such a thing.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([11:24](#)):

I would.

David Sanger ([11:25](#)):

You would you think we owe them, at minimum, a shot at actually coming into the United States and...

Alejandro Mayorkas ([11:33](#)):

I take a holistic view to restoration and so we talked not just about physical reunification about what is the trauma that those families suffered. I view us as having a responsibility to address that trauma and I think one of the key ways of addressing it David is to provide stability.

David Sanger ([11:57](#)):

Okay, so you're in your position is not necessarily that we owe them financial compensation, which as you point out is under the Federal Tort Acts, but that we do owe them something here for the suffering we put them through.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([12:11](#)):

I do think that and whether or not compensation is a part of that is something that's clearly under discussion.

David Sanger ([12:20](#)):

Let's talk for a moment about the other bane of your time in dealing with the border issues here as Secretary which is Title 42. The regulation's not put in place by DHS but actually coming out of the pandemic that have prevented people at the border from even applying for asylum because there is an order in place that basically says in time of pandemic, we don't want anybody coming in. There is an argument, a legal argument to be made, that this violates the International laws and understandings that people are able to go file for asylum.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([13:12](#)):

So those legal arguments are actually being made. Our use of Title 42 is being litigated. Let me say with respect to family reunification, I consider it a privilege to be a part of that effort. So me let me, if I can, take a minute to explain Title 42. Title 42 is not a matter of immigration policy, it's a matter of public health. And actually that Title 42 of the United States code is an authority that rests with the Centers for Disease Control. Let me explain why it is so vigorously opposed from an immigration policy perspective because our asylum laws provide that if an individual has a fear of persecution by reason of their membership in a particular social group, by reason of their group could be sexual orientation, it could be a particular a tribe in a particular country, that if they have a well-founded fear of persecution they qualify for asylum under our laws. And the initial threshold to make an asylum claim is to make a claim of credible fear, credible fear of persecution by reason of one's membership in a social group.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([14:41](#)):

Under Title 42, one doesn't get to make that claim. And that credible fear standard is purposefully low as an initial threshold. So we as a country that takes pride in being a country of refuge do not exclude someone who might in fact have a viable claim, we would rather be inclusive rather than exclusive of somebody who has suffered persecution. So it's a deliberately low threshold. Under Title 42, one doesn't even get to make a claim of credible fear, one is expelled. And that is why as a matter of immigration policy it, is so vigorously opposed, and quite frankly why we do not embrace it as a matter of immigration policy. But on the other hand, when someone crosses the border in between the ports of entry and makes a claim for relief, they are taken to a border patrol station.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([15:39](#)):

And if one has not been to a border patrol station, I have said before publicly, it is certainly not a place for children for any length of time and it is not a place where people can remain for any period of time by reason of it being a congregant setting. They are very condensed areas and they prove to be areas of a super-spreader event in a time of COVID. And therefore the CDC made a decision that as a matter of public health imperative, they will exercise their Title 42 authority. So it is a public health imperative and not a matter of immigration policy, and we have employed it under that paradigm.

David Sanger ([16:25](#)):

So do you have any concerns about a Texas Court that decided recently the administration can no longer waive Title 42 for unaccompanied minors? I know this is something that you're fighting through appeals but if you're forced to turn away children, unaccompanied minors, might you then be forced to basically lift Title 42 for everybody?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([16:52](#)):

So I think that's a very profound question that we're going to need to wrestle with. We would respectfully disagree with the Texas Court's decision in that regard. We believe our exercise of Title 42 has been lawful. We made a decision that we can manage the public health responsibility and not exercise the Title 42 authority with respect to unaccompanied children.

David Sanger ([17:20](#)):

Okay, so where things stand now is the courts ruled that you can no longer do that waiver, you're appealing it.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([17:28](#)):

So unless the court has ruled today...

David Sanger ([17:31](#)):

I don't believe they have.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([17:33](#)):

That is a decision that we are expecting, we are awaiting the Texas Court's decision with respect to our use of Title 42 as specifically...

David Sanger ([17:43](#)):

For this.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([17:44](#)):

For the...

David Sanger ([17:45](#)):

But they have not yet ruled on that.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([17:47](#)):

Not to my knowledge.

David Sanger ([17:48](#)):

Okay, that's why I think I got out a little bit ahead of you there. Could we reasonably expect that a year from now, Title 42 will still be in effect?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([17:59](#)):

It is my hope that it is not because that would mean that the arc of the pandemic has dramatically changed.

David Sanger ([18:07](#)):

So you think if the arc stays on its current pathway you will hit a moment where the CDC will lift this.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([18:15](#)):

Yes, because what the predicate of the exercise of Title 42 is the state of the pandemic in this country, it impacts the communities into which the migrants settle temporarily during the pendency of their cases, it impacts our workforce, and it impacts the migrants themselves. So taking a look at that, the CDC makes its decision. If the pandemic is in a different place, x period of time from now then our enforcement of Title 42 will be different as well.

David Sanger ([18:53](#)):

One more on this and we'll move on to other topics. The administration's often talked about how the key to really relieving pressure at the border is addressing the root causes of migration, including corruption. This is what the vice president has spent her time doing in her trips. Almost as soon as she left Guatemala, the Guatemalan President, according to many reports we've had, has continued to intimidate the anti-corruption offices there. Can you find anything to point to that shows that we're actually having some success in addressing this issue?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([19:39](#)):

Sure. So it is not an approach of only addressing the root causes, it's a multi-prong approach. Fundamentally, and for the long term, one has to address the root causes. The economic desperation, the level of violence, the level of corruption. And there is a way of addressing root causes that navigates through the corruption that does indeed exist in certain countries. Then there is the component of building safe, orderly, and humane pathways. A migrant resource center in Guatemala that not only safely resettles Guatemalans who have been returned but also screens them to see whether they might be entitled to relief in the United States or elsewhere in the region. That migrant resource center is a model that needs to be replicated and we are certainly working on that, The Central American Miner's Program, where miners can apply for relief in country and be brought safely to the United States. And then there's rebuilding our asylum system here in the United States as well as hopefully legislative reform which regrettably seems quite elusive.

David Sanger ([21:01](#)):

You've recently issued a new memo to repeal the migrant protection protocols from the last administration, that's the Remain in Mexico Policy. The courts have ordered the administration to continue to implement this policy. Is the administration any discussions with Mexico on how you might implement this?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([21:21](#)):

We most certainly are, we have been, and we anticipate or we hope I should say to conclude those negotiations in the coming days. It is our plan to implement Remain in Mexico because we are required to under court order as soon as possible.

David Sanger ([21:38](#)):

Well, of course you'll remember that the concern during the Trump years was that migrants who remained there were subject to kidnappings, to rape, to assault, what would be different this time?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([21:49](#)):

So we have been working with Mexico. One of the elements of our discussions has been actually the safety and security of the individuals who are remaining in Mexico during the pendency of their proceedings here in the United States so we're very focused working with international organizations, the Government of Mexico, non-governmental organizations, on addressing the needs of the migrants during the pendency the proceedings.

David Sanger ([22:17](#)):

And you think you can come up with something that actually will provide that protection.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([22:20](#)):

Again, I think that we must. We must also provide for better access to council during that time as well as reform to the asylum proceedings so that they are not six years in duration, and we have a number of efforts in that regard as well. Immigration courts dedicated to the asylum claims as well as a new asylum rule that we hope to roll out before the close of the calendar year.

David Sanger ([22:50](#)):

Well, let me turn you, as promised, to cyber because if the border is insoluble aren't you glad you also got under your purview something as easy to deal with as the range of cyber threats to the US. We already heard from General Nakasone yesterday, he was kind enough to come and so he talked a bit about the efforts at the National Security Agency and Cyber Command. But let me start you with two things that have happened just in the past 24 hours. You issued some new regulations yesterday that required government agencies, with the exception of I think DOD and some of the intelligence agencies, right?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([23:29](#)):

Intelligence agencies, yeah.

David Sanger ([23:31](#)):

Who are not under your purview, to take a series of steps to seal up their systems against known vulnerabilities. I looked at the list. These are not vulnerabilities that are exactly new. How was it that you ended up inheriting a federal government that wasn't looking at these vulnerabilities three, four, five years ago, maybe even pre-Trump time?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([23:59](#)):

So I think there is, and you know this so well David, a compelling need with urgency for the federal government to enhance its cyber security. I think that's true of course not just the federal government but we have to lead by example. And of course by reason of the sensitivities of our possessions, we have an a special obligation to enhance our cyber security. Are we ahead of the curve? We most certainly are not. And therefore, the binding operational directive that comes from the Department of Homeland Security, CISA, that drives that cyber hygiene, it is binding and we have tremendous support across the

interagency and are very grateful, quite frankly, for the White House's leadership under Anne Neuberger and Chris Inglis in this regard.

David Sanger ([24:53](#)):

But you would agree these are holes that should have been addressed years ago.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([24:58](#)):

I think that we are not where we need to be and we better get there fast.

David Sanger ([25:05](#)):

So the other thing that happened just a few hours before we took the stage here is that the State Department issued a reward for \$10 million for any leaders, the names and locations of leaders of the Dark Side Ransomware. This is a group believed to be based in Russia that was responsible for the Colonial Pipeline Ransomware among others. Basically it was treating them like organized crime leaders. Tell us how this fits into your overall strategy? General Nakasone referred yesterday to the efforts that he, the FBI and others have been making to try to disrupt these groups. But give us sort of a holistic view of what you're doing to to make their lives miserable.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([25:55](#)):

So if you want a holistic view, there's the disruption, there's the response framework from an accountability perspective, right?

David Sanger ([26:08](#)):

Identifying who it is.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([26:09](#)):

Identifying who it is, attribution, a consequence regime with respect to nation state actors. There's the indictment in the effort to apprehend and there was a successful apprehension recently and an arraignment. And then there's also the strengthening, getting back to your point of the binding operational directive, but quite frankly, increasing the cyber hygiene of critical infrastructure, the federal government, businesses small, medium, and large in our community as a whole.

David Sanger ([26:44](#)):

So you had a real trial by fire here even before Colonial Pipeline. When the President was still in transition, came the discovery of SolarWinds. Probably the most sophisticated hack I have ever seen, this got into the update functionality of network management software that was used by federal agencies. Most of Fortune 500.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([27:09](#)):

Ingenious in its perpetration.

David Sanger ([27:11](#)):

Wildly ingenious. The code went in a very unseen way, got transmitted just before it was translated from the source code to the machine code so you wouldn't be able to see it. And getting something into

the update, well, think how often you update your phone because Apple tells you to go do that every week or so, right? And none of us examined the code that Apple is putting into our iPhones nor would anybody have examined the code that was going into the SolarWinds Orion software. This was, as you say, highly ingenious, very damaging. The government told us that they would do a full lessons learned from this. I haven't seen one published.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([27:59](#)):

So I think that one can... The binding operational directive may be tied most discreetly to the Colonial Pipeline action but everything we do is informed by the landscape of threats that we have seen, whether the threat is materialized into a successful intrusion or otherwise. And so I think everything we do in the cyber security arena and CISA is really the quarterback on the civilian side for the federal government. What we do is informed by all of the threats that we see. And this is why the architecture is really built on information sharing, for the private sector to share information with us with respect to an intrusion that has been suffered so that we can disseminate information more broadly is really one of the distinguishing factors of cyber security. It's not only the extent the depth and breadth of the damage that it can cause but how easily a harm can be replicated.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([29:08](#)):

In the bank robbery world one has to go into one bank, rob it, and go into another. In the online environment, in the cyber arena, if one can hack into a company and it can prove successful the ability to replicate that remotely from the same computer in the same part of the world is quite facile.

David Sanger ([29:30](#)):

So you and I have had this debate before and you've heard me argue for this is a case where the government's insistence on classification, and much about cyber is classified, is actually getting in the way of both our ability to teach the lessons and our ability to create some sense of deterrence. And I'm wondering whether you see any movement inside the US Government to move to a presumption against classification here so that you can disseminate more rapidly, so that you can publish the lessons of SolarWinds and Colonial Pipeline? Because as you've noted, this is information that is vital maybe only for a few weeks or a few months.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([30:18](#)):

Right. So I would answer it in this way because I don't know if there's a readiness to presume a lower classification level. The classification is based on the confidentiality determination or assessment. But two things I think are underway. Number one and to move backwards, number one is how quickly can we declassify. Sometimes classification is quite time sensitive so how quickly can we declassify, number two. And number one, and we've heard this concern from the private sector in the information sharing context, information sharing is valuable but we also need intelligence sharing to your point. And so we are looking at how we can better share intelligence. Can we actually provide security clearances to critical individuals in critical infrastructure so that we can engage in intelligence sharing as well as information sharing and I think that's an effort underway.

David Sanger ([31:34](#)):

General Nakasone made the argument yesterday that there was actually a significant success in his mind in the SolarWinds case because it was picked up of course by Mandiant, who's he's publicly credited for this. So one way to look at it is the sensors set out in the private sector all rang and that enabled them to

warn the government. The other way to look at it is if our efforts, called persistent engagement and so forth, were really working to push this forward into the countries where the attacks emanate, we might have seen this before the attack was launched. Take us a little bit into the inside discussion of how you deal with that.

Alejandro Mayorkas (32:23):

So I will defer to General Nakasone's expertise which is far greater than mine in terms of chalking this up as a success as opposed to otherwise. I will say this. Tomorrow, there's going to be a cyber attack that's going to teach us new things that's going to prove whatever defenses we have built that are advanced over that which we had to be inadequate. That's just the nature of the world, the dynamism of the landscape is extraordinary. The fact is in an ongoing crime, there's going to always be debate whether if one has discovered it while it's ongoing and not yet complete, is that a success or should you have prevented it in the first instance? I just think the reality of this landscape is such that the level of sophistication is going to grow, we're going to learn new things and interrupting in process is not as successful as prevention but is more successful than not stopping the damage before all of it has occurred.

David Sanger (33:32):

Well, that takes me to the last topic I want to do before we get a few questions from the audience and that is domestic extremism, another issue that you've been taking up. I know you've issued a department-wide review in July to identify any potential employees espousing extremism beliefs in DHS. It's always a little fraught because you don't want to have tests of people's beliefs when they're working at DHS but can you provide us with an update? Have any members of extremist groups been identified? Have you found any members of DHS who participated in the January 6th events?

Alejandro Mayorkas (34:14):

So that investigation is underway. I'm actually scheduled to receive the results in pretty short order now. Just inquired about that yesterday in fact. So I do want to say, it's not an issue of beliefs. Remember, domestic violent extremism is the connection between an ideology of hate or an adherence to a false narrative and violence. So we are very mindful of First Amendment Rights but it's the connectivity to violence that causes us to engage.

David Sanger (34:57):

Last year...

Alejandro Mayorkas (34:57):

As well as, if I may, and this is where it gets complicated. As well as when one expresses one's beliefs, what is one's responsibilities as a government servant? And does the expression of one's beliefs in any way impugn the integrity of one's service? So for example, if I am in a back office in CISA and I express a xenophobic view, might the consequence of that be different than if I'm a front-line immigration enforcement agent who expresses a xenophobic view? Does one impact more objectively the integrity of my work and the public confidence in my work than does another? And I think that is a matter of employment and standards I think is a very material question.

David Sanger (36:06):

In the final years of the Trump Administration, DHS began publishing an annual threat assessment, became controversial because of this very question of domestic extremism. Last year it was issued in October. What's the status? Are we about to see one?

Alejandro Mayorkas (36:24):

Yes, we are working on that, we will see an annual threat assessment but not at the expense of reporting on a regular basis when the threats stream supports it. So we have issued a National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin, we have issued quite a number of alerts, we are publishing threat information as the data warrants in a much greater cadence than precedes us.

David Sanger (36:54):

Okay. Well, I have many more questions for the Secretary but no reason I should have all the fun here. Why don't we start right here with the young lady with her hand up, yes. Wait just a moment I think a microphone is coming to you.

Trudy Rubin (37:16):

Thanks. Trudy Rubin from the Philadelphia Inquirer. Mr. Secretary, do we assume that criminal hackers operating out of Russia or the former Soviet space are actually run by, or at least with the knowledge of the Kremlin? And if so, how do we deal with that? Does it make any sense to talk to President Putin about it or is that a failing idea?

Alejandro Mayorkas (37:53):

Well, I don't think there is a presumption, I think it's a fact specific, it's a hack or threat specific analysis. President Biden has spoken quite clearly about this that countries have an obligation to address cyber crime that is emanating from within their boundaries. He did in fact speak with Putin and in fact there's an experts group that has been established to address this. The cyber security expert, Dmitri Alperovitch, who you know is really a thought leader in this area, he said, "We don't necessarily have a cyber problem, what we have is a Russia, China, Iran problem. That the cyber security attacks that emanate from those countries that are indeed nation-state actions really have to be viewed in the context of the bilateral relationship and the broader geopolitical context." And I think that's a very compelling point.

David Sanger (38:57):

With her mask on, I had not recognized my friend Trudy but let me follow up on her question. So that meeting in Geneva took place in mid-June. Have you seen significant results from that conversation that would suggest that Mr. Putin has suddenly decided that there really are ransomware groups operating on his territory and is he's ready to turn them over? I know I've reported that just a few weeks ago we gave a fair bit of data to the Russians with names and addresses.

Alejandro Mayorkas (39:30):

I think that President Biden has put it very appropriately, actions speak louder than words, and I think we're going to see what happens.

David Sanger (39:38):

Great. Question over here.

Patrick Wilson ([39:45](#)):

Good afternoon Mr. Secretary.

David Sanger ([39:46](#)):

Good afternoon.

Patrick Wilson ([39:47](#)):

I'm Patrick Wilson from MediaTek, we're a semiconductor company and I'd hate for you to be in a room full of lots of technology companies without having this question. We're all focused right now on growing to deal with the incredible surge in demand for technology and connectivity, and one of the biggest problems we have is actually high skilled immigration companies who want to invest in the US, we have to compete for talent and a lot of those immigration decisions also reside at your agency and I'm wondering what focus you have on trying to expedite the approval of particularly high skilled immigration applicants to deal with our workforce shortages here in the US?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([40:25](#)):

So my response is twofold. One, we're very focused on legal immigration pathways and the backlogs that exist. Actually my answer is going to be threefold. The agency, US Citizenship and Immigration Services was on the brink of bankruptcy, it's a fee-funded agency and it is by virtue of that every two years it promulgates a fee rule to recalibrate the cost of applications according to the cost of operations. And it has not promulgated a fee rule for I think now over six years and so we have a real challenge on our hands, we're going to be issuing a fee rule. So we really have to strengthen that agency financially to be able to hire the talent to address the backlog, number one.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([41:28](#)):

Number two, I find some of the high skilled processes to be in dire need of re-engineering. The random lottery to me is not an optimal way of serving the market needs. And the third point I would make is we've got to do a really good job of developing homegrown high skill talent.

David Sanger ([41:51](#)):

Let's see, we have time for just one or two more, Josh? Josh is one of the rising leaders of the Aspen Security Forum and the Aspen Strategy Group, a group of young leaders who've come in to spend a year with the group. He's just back from the Arctic, do I have that right, Josh?

Josh ([42:11](#)):

Yes sir, that's correct. Secretary, I'd like to pivot to our border that's further north that doesn't get as much love as maybe the southern border does.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([42:20](#)):

It gets love, it just doesn't get as much attention.

Josh ([42:22](#)):

That's correct, sir, and as you know, we're currently in the process of building three polar security cutters that are supposed to be able to come out over the next decade. The three that we currently

have, two are operational and both are aging and very old. How do you anticipate the Coast Guard and DHS' roles changing in the Arctic? Do you feel that we're prepared to respond to those environmental changes?

Alejandro Mayorkas ([42:43](#)):

So it's a great question it's a question that doesn't get enough attention is the Arctic strategy and how critical an area of the world, an increasingly critical area of the world that is. We are woefully far behind in our fleet. I just had a meeting a couple weeks ago with the Coast Guard with respect to capitalization and the need to really drive our fleet of cutters. We have two I would say respectfully elderly and they're aging. And is it Russia has 51? What is the number or is it China that has 51? China is 50.

Josh ([43:32](#)):

China has [inaudible 00:43:33]

Alejandro Mayorkas ([43:34](#)):

No, but we're outpaced and outresourced in terms of our Arctic capacity and we're playing catch-up and we're working on budget requests for the out years to address that very need.

David Sanger ([43:55](#)):

Well, we have many more topics to take up but unfortunately we don't have more time to go do it, but I want to thank you Secretary for as long as I have known you have always been willing to sit and take questions whether they are uncomfortable or not and address them directly and I can't thank you enough for coming and doing that once more with the Aspen Security Forum, thanks so much.

Alejandro Mayorkas ([44:21](#)):

Thank you David, thank you all,

Anja Manuel ([44:41](#)):

Wow. Thank you everyone for being with us for these two days. We're coming to our conclusion and I just want to end briefly by coming back to General Powell, Secretary of State Powell, who I invoked yesterday morning when we started and whose memorial service is tomorrow. I have three favorite sayings of General Powell's. One, "The ties that bind us are stronger than the stresses that divide us." Two, "Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier." And three, "Wars should be the politics of last resort." These are three great reminders for all of us here in this room and I want to reflect on how this conference actually dealt with each of these three.

Anja Manuel ([45:30](#)):

So first, "The ties that bind us are stronger than the stresses that divide us." I have to say one theme that went through almost every discussion we had is that Xi Jinping managed to do what no one else in Washington has and that is bring Republicans and Democrats together. So when we heard the supply chain panel and many others representative Slotkin and McCall talking about their bipartisan work on supply chains on the Chips Act on the endless frontiers act you just heard over and over again that we are united in wanting to manage responsibly the rise of China. Ben Sasse told us, Senator Sasse that when he's home in Nebraska people care much more about their common humanity and kitchen table issues than what we're talking about here with reconciliation and taxes et cetera, et cetera. And Amy

Walter and Arthur Brooks reminded us that perhaps we should all start our conversations not with politics which divide us but with our children and love and all of the things that we have in common and then maybe there'll be more room for compromise.

Anja Manuel ([46:35](#)):

Second, "Optimism is a force multiplier." And we heard some real optimism here even though our challenges are profound. One, We heard from Secretary Kerry that he's optimistic. The world is lumbering towards solving the biggest national security crisis we face and that's climate change. He talked about the world recommitting to sticking to 1.5 degrees of warming, to stop reforestation, to stop financing coal, fired power plants around the world, let's hold them to it. The speakers lauded the success of the Abraham Accords. We didn't talk about the Middle East very much but I heard several people say, "Wow, companies from Israel, the UAE, Bahrain are now working together in a way that was unheard of two or three years ago. General Nakasone and Condi Rice, others commended the human capital that is there in our all volunteer force. And Mike Brown from DIU and others reminded us that the United States is still the technology superpower and that hundreds of private sector companies are standing by to help if we only make it easier on them to participate in our national security.

Anja Manuel ([47:50](#)):

It can sometimes feel like the US is in a defensive crouch but we've been through worse. We've been through the Great Depression, we've been through World War II, we've been through the upheavals of the '60s and '70s, I think what you heard today is optimism that we can get through this as well. And third the most important one that, "War should be and is the politics of very last resort." Everyone you heard from in the past two days firmly believes that the United States prepares for conflict precisely so that it doesn't become necessary to put our women and men in harm's way. Dambisa Moyo and several other economists discussed all of the efforts being made to get the global economy and the trading system humming again that unites all of us and that can help prevent war.

Anja Manuel ([48:43](#)):

Many speakers emphasize that diplomacy should lead and always does and the Commander of Special Operations Forces reminded us that so much of what SOCOM and others in our military do is keep our embassies safe so our [inaudible 00:48:58] can operate respond to earthquakes in Haiti, other natural disasters things that promote peace. And Secretary of Navy Del Toro reminded us that signaling with and communicating with China is one of the most important things that we can be doing so that we don't inadvertently slip into a conflict that nobody wants.

Anja Manuel ([49:20](#)):

And finally I want to end with Secretary Mayorkas' admonition from his mother that we should all strive to be better tomorrow than we are today. That's the business we're collectively in here at Aspen and with all of you. We're jointly creating a better, safer, more peaceful world. And it's a mission for all of us, not just the speakers that you heard from up here on stage, if you're in the US Government, you're in the Executive Branch in Congress, you're on the front lines of these issues. So I want to thank you for doing the hard work of our nation and in ways that are often unsung.

Anja Manuel ([49:58](#)):

Our friends in the room who are journalists, please keep reporting on these issues of such importance with nuance and with understanding it's very important that the American people understand what's at

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stake here. And all of us in the private sector, as Chris Lynch reminded us, please show up. If you're a technology whiz, don't wait to be called, help out, design the AI algorithm that's going to help our national security. Do something else, use your expertise to be useful to the mission of this country.

Anja Manuel ([50:30](#)):

And to our rising leaders, to the Yale fellows, all the others who are here who are just beginning your career, your ideas matter. They're fresh, they're new, we heard from some of you, not all of you unfortunately, please make your ideas heard and please, please commit at least some part of your career to public service.

Anja Manuel ([50:52](#)):

So on behalf of Joe Nye and Condi Rice, our chairs and Nick Burns, our Executive Director, I want to thank all of you for being willing to learn about the most important issues and contribute your talents. I want to thank our sponsors again for making all of this possible. And most of all I'd like you all to join me in a round of applause for our amazing and tiny team. Neve, John, Deb, Kathleen, Leah, Emily, John Purvis, Maya, Marco, all of the volunteers from the Aspen Institute, the audio visual team and everyone at the Intercontinental who has just been fantastic and made all of this possible. Thank you and good night. Thank you.