TRANSCRIPT

Event
“A Conversation with Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves”

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FEATURING
Rodrigo Chaves
President, Costa Rica

Richard R. Verma
Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, U.S. Department of State

Anne Neuberger
Deputy Assistant to the President, Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber and Emerging Technology

Nathaniel C. Fick
Ambassador at Large for Cyberspace and Digital Policy, U.S. Department of State

CSIS EXPERTS

John J. Hamre
President and CEO, and Langone Chair in American Leadership, CSIS

James A. Lewis
Senior Vice President; Pritzker Chair; Director, Strategic Technologies Program, CSIS

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
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Well, good morning, everybody. Welcome. Delighted to have you here. And this is – you know, I was terrified when I heard that we were going to be hosting a president of a country the last week of August. I thought, who the hell is going to be here? (Laughter.) You know, I mean, nobody comes to anything in the last week of August. And I’m so glad to see all of you here. And it’s really for very good purposes. This is a very important conversation we’re going to have today. And I’m just very flattered that we have this opportunity to host President Chaves. He’s well-known in Washington. He’s been here for so many years, but we welcome him back now as president.

And of course, one of his inaugural gifts was a cyberattack, you know, that all of a sudden clobbered Costa Rica and became a catastrophe in the making. And this became an opportunity. You know, crises frequently do become opportunities. And it became an opportunity for us to work more closely with a crucial ally. You know, this is a crucial partner country. And when they had a problem of this scale, we were honored to have the opportunity to work with them. And so, we’re delighted to have you here, president, and we look forward to it. You had a very good meeting yesterday with President Biden. And I don’t know if you’ll get a question or two to try to figure out what you said, but that’s up to everybody in the audience.

I’m going to just take a few minutes to also mention the other colleagues that are going to be a part of this program. I’m going to next introduce the Deputy Secretary Rich Verma. We’ve grown up together. I think it was 35 years ago when we first met. He’s held up a lot better than I have, OK? (Laughter.) But he’s had a fabulous trajectory – professional trajectory. Was our ambassador in India and now, of course, is the deputy secretary for management. And it’s a big, big job. I’ll put in an ad for him right now. We need to get a bigger Foreign Service. I mean, this is a – this is – with everything going on in the world, you know, more diplomats is the cheapest way for defense. And so, this is a conversation we’ll have on another date.

Nate Fick is an old friend. Nate, we met – I think it was 10 years ago when we last saw each other, unfortunately. But that’s because he went off and became rich. He went off to California to a venture capital company. (Laughter.) So now he can afford to be a public servant again, OK? But it’s great to have him here. And he’s at the State Department. He’s the ambassador at large for cyberspace and digital policy.

Anne Neuberger is – she’s is one of the most influential people in Washington these days because, you know, everything she spent her life grooming and learning at the NSA, she now has to operate and guide the country for. Anne, we’re delighted to have you here.
So, what we’re going to do this morning is we’re going to first hear from Deputy Secretary Verma and then President Chavez, Nate Fick and Anne Neuberger are going to come up for kind of a conversation with all of you, ok? So that’s the plan. So as soon as Secretary Verma is done, then these other three will just come up. And so right now give your warm applause to all three of them, and especially to Rich Verma, who’s coming up. Ok. (Applause.)

Deputy Secretary Richard R. Verma:

Well, good morning, everybody. And John Hamre, thank you for that generous introduction. We did meet about 35 years ago when I was working for the chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee in the House of Representatives. And every morning, he would say: Call Hamre. Call Hamre, we have a problem. John was the comptroller of the Pentagon then. And so, we’re still calling John Hamre. So, you’re an institution. And thank you so much.

Let me recognize, again, Anne Neuberger, our deputy national security adviser, who’s incredible; our two ambassadors who are here, ambassadors who are building the relationship between our two countries in such an incredible way; my colleague Nate Fick, who is doing an incredible job on leading our new Bureau on Cybersecurity and Digital Policy.

But most of all, let me offer my sincere gratitude to the president for being here, our distinguished guest, our extraordinary partner, and a critical leader for Costa Rica and our hemisphere. And it really was an honor to join you in the meeting with President Biden yesterday in the Oval Office and to see the bond and the friendship that the two of you have and that our two countries have – fidelity to democracy and human rights, our dedication to open society and open markets, our commitment to innovation and in our economies and our cooperation across the board in so many areas. It was a terrific meeting.

There is so much that defines the ties between the United States and Costa Rica, so much that touches on the building blocks of stability and security, economic development, public safety, migration, and, yes, cybersecurity. So let me just touch briefly on these, and I will speak quickly so you can hear from our group.

Let me start with economics. But our trade relationship is deep and robust, totaling over $17 billion in goods moving between our markets last year alone. The U.S. accounts for nearly three quarters of foreign direct investment heading into Costa Rica, and U.S. companies have helped create nearly 130,000 jobs there.
Meanwhile, exports from Costa Rica coming in our direction, especially in medical devices and semiconductors, are helping fuel our post-COVID recovery, economic recovery. And those bonds are only growing as we work to secure regional and global supply chains, combat corruption, engage in the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity, and collaborate even further in the technology space.

But steady economic growth rests on the cornerstone of our common security and public safety, a pillar that we reinforce every day. And to give one example, Costa Rica is an energetic partner in the State Department-led Sembremos Seguridad program, which brings government and communities together to identify social risks and prevent activities targeting the most vulnerable high-crime areas in the country.

This is part of an ongoing drive to improve citizen security in Costa Rica. And that push is intensifying too through our efforts to counter narcotic trafficking, to stop organized criminal networks from undermining the strong institutions that set Costa Rica apart.

And our deep cooperation on the fundamentals of a healthy society gives us the wherewithal to take on the toughest tasks before us today. And today that includes irregular migration and displacement, the record-breaking movement of people throughout our hemisphere, and how we better facilitate safe, orderly, and humane migration. And we’re grateful to the leadership of the president and the Costa Rican government for standing up the secure-mobility offices, which is a new initiative to create lawful pathways in the country.

And again, on this front, let me give credit where credit is due. Costa Rica has set the standard for leadership in supporting refugees and ensuring their access to protection, many embarking on a treacherous journey, many fleeing persecution and fear.

And finally, our countries are lockstep on the main topic of today’s event and the core focus of tomorrow’s generation – cybersecurity, the intersection between democracy and the digital sphere, the explosion of the emerging technologies reshaping the way we communicate and learn, collaborate, and lead, participate in our politics, and how we govern our people.

The United States and Costa Rica appreciate the immense power of this space, but also the potential pitfalls too. We know that sound and secure connectivity, a strong and growing advanced manufacturing sector, cyber, digital and tech talent and infrastructure are all key components of modern economies and a modern society.
We see how Costa Rica has started to build out its 5G telecommunications service and established itself as a regional high-tech leader with, for example, Intel’s only semiconductor assembly operation in the Americas, with thousands of jobs supported by Amazon, BEAR, and so many other companies, with a flourishing medical-device manufacturing hub. And we share an affirmative vision for the role of trusted and secure technology, technology for good. And we are clear-eyed about the need for vigilance, for capacity building related to incident response, for critical infrastructure protection, and for the development of the cyber workforce for identifying trusted tech suppliers.

Indeed, even with so much hope in emerging innovations, we recognize the drawbacks. We recognize the rising risks and frequency of cyberattacks; the uncertainty surrounding technology and platforms that are constantly developing, shifting, changing, evolving. And our job as public officials is to do everything possible to ensure that the accelerating pace of digital progress expands pathways to innovation without escalating the possibilities of danger – that cyberspace remains an avenue to empower citizens and connect communities, not incite violence, sow division, or foment fear; that the digital ecosystem is a secure, resilient, and rights-respecting avenue for pursuing our highest aspirations.

And Costa Rica is already ahead of the curve on all of these issues. You are among our closest collaborators in a series of coalitions and initiatives designed to protect access and to protect and promote human rights. And we are proud to stand with you, Mr. President, and with Costa Rica’s government in tackling the vast challenges that come with such giant leaps in cyber and digital revolution. And so doing this work is so critically important, and that’s why we have delivered on a $25 million package to further build Costa Rica’s digital defense capabilities in the face of malicious cyber activity as well as partnering in so many other areas, which I know the group will talk about today.

So doing this work and supporting cyber and digital resiliency within our countries and among our partners is an increasingly vital element of the United States’ foreign assistance portfolio. These investments are critical to the security of our citizens, our allies, our partners; to the strengths of our economies and businesses; to the enduring stability of the rules-based international order to a safe, open, reliable, and interoperable internet that will remain an unquestionable facet of life for decades to come.
And so here is the bottom line. Cybersecurity, digital diplomacy, emerging technologies – just like economic development, regional security, migration, and more – each hold a common thread. They all cross borders. They all impact the strength of our democracies. They all affect the lives of our people. And we can’t address any of these challenges alone. In fact, we have no choice but to tackle them together. For friends like the United States and Costa Rica, that comes naturally. And that coordination will continue between our presidents, our governments, and our communities.

Thank you very much. Thank you, John. Thank you, Mr. President. I hope you enjoy today’s conversation. (Applause.)

(Break.)

Ambassador Nathaniel C. Fick: Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for joining us. My name’s Nate Fick. I’m the ambassador at large for cyberspace and digital policy. Very pleased to share this stage this morning with my colleague and friend, our Deputy National Security Adviser Anne Neuberger; and, of course, President Chaves of Costa Rica.

Thank you, sir, so much for your generosity with your time. Thanks for your leadership. Such a pleasure to be with you today.

President Rodrigo Chaves: The pleasure is all mine, Your Excellency.

Amb. Fick: You’re very kind.

President Chaves: Thank you.

Amb. Fick: You are here in strength with an incredibly broad and diverse delegation from your government. I wonder if we might start just with hearing more on your goals for this visit to Washington.

President Chaves: Well, first of all, thank you very much, Madam Neuberger, Ambassador Fick. John, thank you very much for the kind introduction. Mr. Verma, that was a wonderful summary of what I think is the reality that we are facing as well as the common objectives of two countries very different in size but with great common objectives and shared values. There let be no doubt where Costa Rica stands in the world today. And we are a small country, but with a big voice, we think, precisely because of the things you said.

We abolished our army more than 70 years ago. That was a choice. Now defending our systems and information – the new oil today is
information – it’s an obligation. So, what are we trying to achieve here? Reaffirming the historical, long relationship between – whether we call a big light in the horizon, those famous words, we hold these truths to be self-evident. And we hold them as well in Costa Rica. And we have seen how those values are being deteriorated, are being eroded. The freedoms, even the openness to the world, in our neighborhood.

Costa Rica’s a great house in a neighborhood that has some complications. So, we are very concerned about our own security. We are concerned, obviously – as President Biden says, thanking the people because they are the ones who do the hard work in our country. And we took advantage of this very kind invitation to come, look at what are the common objectives that as societies we have in an increasingly complex world. I don’t need to tell people at CSIS how complex it’s getting. So that’s why we’re here. Very happy.

As Mr. Verma said, I enjoyed the meeting tremendously, not only because of the substance – the meeting with President Biden – not only because of the substance but, frankly, the connection that I was blessed to have with him yesterday. And it’s a connection based on what we want for our peoples. So that’s what we’re doing here, Mr. Frick.

Amb. Fick: Thank you, sir. It is a rare opportunity for us to sit on a stage in a public setting to have a conversation with a current head of state about a cyberattack. And so I think all of us would appreciate the opportunity to hear from your seat what it looked like, what it felt like, what you were thinking, what you were doing as you came into office and this attack was unfolding.

President Chaves: Well, I can tell you, it wasn’t nice. (Laughter.) It wasn’t a very nice inauguration present. Not at all. I would like to give you a little bit of context because, you know, there may be coincidences in life but we say in Costa Rica, think suspiciously and you’re likely to be right. (Laughter.) When I was elected, during the transition between being elected and inaugurated, as president-elect I said – and I believe I was the first one in Latin America to say it, actually – that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was illegal, was unacceptable and, frankly, I used the word “criminal.”

I was taken to court by some Costa Ricans – criminal court – saying that I have violated our perpetual policy of neutrality. It was very funny because the perpetual policy neutrality is military, and we ain’t got one. (Laughter.) And so how could you violate using – so there were all these details. And frankly, that was a frivolous action. And suddenly, very shortly after having been inaugurated, we were attacked.
And we were attacked, affecting the backbone of the functioning of the state – our tax system, our customs system, electricity, even meteorological services. We wouldn’t know it was going to rain. They are never right anyway – (laughter) – but they were attacked. Our ministry of transport, our social security, our health system was attacked. So it was ugly. And thanks to the collaboration of partners like the United States – obviously, at the forefront – and Spain, we realized this was coming from Russia. Coincidence? Possibly. Certainly possible. Probably, from a group named Conti. They began asking for ransom. We couldn’t pay ransom. We would need a special law. And we wouldn’t pay ransom. But the effects were very important: millions of dollars, hundreds or thousands of medical appointments.

But, well, here we are. We reconstructed. It was in a highest priority to the whole time at the beginning of an administration. But once burned, twice shy. And we are trying – I think you say that in this country, right? And we decided that the negligence of decades – obviously, everything is the fault of the previous administrations – (laughter) – but decades of negligence protecting our information, our tax systems, our computer systems had to come to an end. And you are helping us very much in doing that.

Amb. Fick: Thank you.

So, obviously, we’re more than a year later. That help now is organized and flowing. But in the early days, Anne, what did it look like from your seat in the White House as this attack was unfolding? Can you describe for us some of the initial support and then how you think about ongoing support to allies and partners like Costa Rica?

Anne Neuberger: Thank you, Nate.

So President Biden was deeply concerned when he heard about the cyberattack – the timing, the extent of the impact on critical services in Costa Rica, the ability of Costa Ricans to make medical appointments, to travel, et cetera. And he directed us to ensure we were providing immediate support. And of course, the ambassador and the embassy team – Ambassador Telles’ team was a strong advocate. We had an FBI team on the ground within 24 hours at your government’s request to work closely with your superb team and help quickly recover. And then, to your point, we looked together and said: What more is needed to ensure that Costa Rica, as a regional leader, can be a regional leader in cybersecurity as well?

So the support includes $25 million from the State Department to establish a security operations center, as well as a more immediate near-
term virtual security operations center to provide hardware and software, the right cybersecurity monitoring; an additional $10 million from the Department of Defense to provide and work on a security operations center for the Ministry of Public Security as well; and ongoing support to really put in place the cybersecurity protections and regime needed as a first step for ensuring that those critical services are protected moving forward.

And then, because of the link between cybersecurity and digital infrastructure, we started a conversation about your vision for 5G in Costa Rica and how to ensure that that 5G was also secure in the proper way. We’ve had an ongoing discussion regarding that to ensure that there are trusted providers available. You’ll talk more about that.

The second part of our support is a $300 million Ex-Im financing grant. So as Costa Rica makes this transition to 5G – and you’ll describe that a bit more – it can be with trusted providers to ensure that, building upon the first stage of cybersecurity protection, the nation’s core foundation digital infrastructure that everything rides on – that the economy rides on, that public safety and security rides on, and that access rides on; ensuring that there is equity, that every Costa Rican can access the internet, can do business online – is trusted, safe, and secure moving forward for the future.

Amb. Fick: Thank you for raising the 5G point. I think our perspective, of course, has been that technologies sit in ecosystems and risk federates across these ecosystems. And so, when we’re talking about cybersecurity, we have to think holistically – not only cybersecurity products and services in a traditional sense, but also cable and fiber and datacenters and wireless networks. President Chaves, your government has made some very welcome and bold moves in this regard recently. Can you share with us your perspective right now on 5G security and what comes next in Costa Rica?

President Chaves: Of course. Look, we learned the lesson, but that – we are going to stay the course. We want to develop connectivity, access, and speed. Why? Because we want more Costa Rica in the world and more world in Costa Rica. You know that we are opening up our economy at a time where some countries are thinking and not actually restricting trade access to foreign direct investors and the like.

We are attracting foreign direct investors as much as we can. They create fantastic jobs. We have 250-plus U.S. companies. As a matter of fact, I want to tell you a small anecdote or factoid. There are more Americans in Costa Rica living than Costa Ricans in America, according
to the United States. I don’t know many countries can say that in the neighborhood, right? And we are delighted with that.

So instead of, you know, throwing the baby out with the bathwater, we want to make sure that the cyber environment in general is conducive, is high-end, is state of the art. But then there is this little problem of security. So, after many decades, we bit the bullet. We are auctioning some of the frequencies for the private sector to actually come provide 5G from the private sector. We have a state-owned utility that provides telecommunications.

So, we have two steps in the development of 5G, our state-owned utility, building the infrastructure required to provide 5G to all its clients, and the private sector having the frequencies, and then, later on, making the investment to provide 5G generally.

We had issued – my minister of science and technology and I on Friday issued a government decree that basically requires that the countries where potential vendors and providers may actually be – because we are a transparent government – need to have adopted the principles of the agreement of Bucharest.

And you know what that means. I don’t need to go in detail. That means that Costa Rica, our state-owned utility or telecom company, and eventually all the providers, private and public, of 5G will be limited to purchasing equipment technology for 5G only from trusted vendors. Why? Is it because we like one and another?

Believe me, the price differences are huge if you were willing to take the risk. Potentially other non-transparent benefits could be very high. But that’s not what we are looking for. We’re looking at American companies, European companies, and tell them your security in this country, your connectivity with headquarters, with your clients, is going to be fast, reliable, affordable, and, above all, safe. And that’s a tough decision. You know what that entails, the type of pressures we received and will receive: another crisis. The day we sign it, there was a cyberattack on our children’s hospital. So – but we will stay the course. It has been done. There’s no way back.

Amb. Fick: This is an important point you make, that the decision is not only about price, but there are many other factors, including creating an attractive investment environment for technology companies to come and encourage the development of an indigenous innovation economy in Costa Rica.
And Anne, I think this is one of the arguments that has been a part of your vision as you’ve been advocating on behalf of trusted vendors around the world. Can you tell us more about the U.S. vision and campaign in this regard?

Ms. Neuberger: Absolutely. And it’s really President Biden’s vision.

And, President Chaves, you articulated every aspect of it beautifully, which is digital access is opportunity for every citizen. That every citizen, no matter where they live in the country – in a rural part of the country, at the center of a city – can have access to education, to jobs, and with speed, security, and safety. And that is both the president’s vision in the United States, and certainly with our closest international allies and partners.

And that has underpinned the approach to say we want to ensure that digital infrastructure – that the U.S. is a partner in making that available. And it’s really a whole-of-government approach. It includes using our financing tools, like the Export-Import Bank or Development Finance Corporation, to finance safe and trusted digital infrastructure. It includes the State Department advocating diplomatically on secure, responsible aspects of cyberspace. It includes USAID, who is doing training for open and trusted digital infrastructure around the world. And certainly it includes a discussion we’ve had about a workforce, and a technical workforce. And we’re very much looking forward to Costa Rica leading on that, regional, in the Americas for Economic Prosperity as well.

And I think, in that way, what’s so exciting about the security operations center in Costa Rica is Costa Rica is already a regional leader. You were a cohost of the Summit for Democracy because you are a regional leader on democracy and human rights, as you noted. And as a result, we’re very much looking forward to this security operation center being the first phase of becoming a regional security operation center where there are individuals from other countries sitting, learning on how to maintain a network, how to detect intrusions, how to detect concerning behavior, how to quickly push back and respond, as your team did so effectively even in the most recent cyberattack.

So, I think – and because it’s such a priority for the president from the White House, to Nate’s point, as he knows, as a key partner in this effort, we pull together all those elements. The financing element, the diplomatic element, the security aspect, making teams available rapidly if a key partner and ally has an incident, to ensure that we’re executing in that way to help and partner with key allies and partners to ensure their citizens have secure, open, and interoperable access.
Thanks, Anne. And thank you for raising the issue of talent and workforce. And, Mr. President, I think we would love to hear your perspective on how you attract – how do you develop technical talent? How do you attract that talent to government? And, maybe most importantly, how do you keep that talent in government?

Well, I don’t need to tell an American audience about the fight and war for talent. I seem to have read in some newspaper about one company giving 150,000 dollar bonuses to their engineers not to move to another company within the United States. That’s more than I make in a week, right? (Laughs.) And a bad one, right? That’s a sizable amount just to stay put, don’t move. We are all fighting to develop, attract, motivate, and retain talent.

The thing is that the government versus private sector, obviously the private sector has more agility and the ability to raise salaries competitively. We depend on – we are under a little IMF program. You know, that we inherited. We are straight-A students of that program. We have reduced our debt ratio by 14 points in one year and four months. That’s one percentage point a month. Ain’t bad, to be honest. But that doesn’t allow us to spend and hire as fast as we would like. That’s a big challenge.

We do have, like every other country competing in this space, a deficit of skills, in a rapidly rising demand environment for those skills. So we are deploying, trying to solve the structural issue, which is we need to produce more STEM skills in the country. And that’s a big fight internally with the public universities, with our national learning institute. We are doing it, and we are even finding little exceptions in our civil service rules to attract that talent. It’s not easy.

The private sector, I think, is having a better time now because of our efforts to produce STEM, or engineering, IT skills. But we are thinking about changing some of the civil service rules to attract these very specialized and scarce elements. But so far, so good. There are still some people who love, like here, public service. I think you have a higher opportunity cost today in the private sector than now serving your – knowing your CV and your background – than serving your country. But you chose to serve your country. And a different – I think the same about me, and obviously about you, Ms. Neuburger. But we like public service. And some Costa Ricans are enjoying working for the government. And I think – but there’s some structural problem that is common to every country.

Thank you for that. The policies we’ve been talking about this morning have been domestic policies inside Costa Rica. And yet, the challenges
that they are trying to address are transnational challenges. And the approaches that we take unfold largely in multilateral institutions, like the United Nations or the Organization of American States. How do you think about improving cyber and digital capacity and resiliency in Costa Rica, and its effect on your ability to lead internationally on these issues?

President Chaves: I used to have a very tough boss, the best boss I ever had. She was a lady who couldn’t have any patience for nonsense. And she used to tell me: Rodrigo, impeccable administration is a threshold question. If you cannot manage your shop, how could you change the world? There are externalities. How could we change the world if we cannot keep our beans well counted? I’m not a bean counter. It’s not something that I enjoy. But there are threshold questions, and this is one of them.

You cannot provide a safe environment for your data, for your information. Don’t try to play that you’re changing the world and improving people’s lives. That comes after. It’s a necessary condition. Not a sufficient one, but certainly a necessary indispensable one. So I think that what we would like to do, you know, you lead by example sometimes. And we are trying to be an example, as we try to be an example on democracy, protection of minority rights, that we are on freedom of the press.

I have a little parenthesis here. You know, we will have municipal elections in 2024. We adopted a law that says that every party that wants to postulate, nominate a major has to have half females, half males across the entire set of municipalities. We have a law about parity in Congress, half and half. There is no shortage of talent across genders. So this is the same type of bold action we would like to take. Let’s lead by example. And if given the opportunity to raise our voices and work together with the other countries in the region, we will be happy to do so. We will be happy.

We are telling people, look, issues of migration. We have to think differently, as Mr. Verma said. We’re not going to stop the flows. Let’s manage them. Wow, right? Some people believe that that type of approach is practical and pragmatic. But the same here. We want to be an example. If people consider our work and contributions are valuable, we’ll be happy to share them in cybersecurity and everywhere else. The United States does that. You try to improve your environment, to improve the world and the life of your citizens. And we think that, keeping proportions in mind, we can do the same.

Amb. Fick: Leadership by example.
President Chaves: And by action, if possible and required. Sorry.

Amb. Fick: No. And what are the regional, hemispheric, international opportunities that might now flow from Costa Rica’s leadership by example?

Ms. Neuberger: Absolutely. So taking a step back, Costa Rica is already a regional leader. It was the reason Costa Rica was a co-host of the Summit for Democracy, because, by example, Costa Rica showed that respect for human rights in a region like – as you said, where there are certainly complications.

In the arena of cybersecurity, there’s the credibility of having lived through a difficult experience, managed, and responded quickly. And I think that credibility, the establishment of this partnership, security operations center, the ongoing rapid response to cyberattacks, positions Costa Rica to be a regional leader in this space and to help be a channel through which we do capacity-building in the larger region where other countries may be less mature and have much to learn from Costa Rica and from the United States. So, we look forward to the standup, the ribbon-cutting of the security operations center, and building on that to make that a regional effort.

And then, certainly, as you noted, your courageous decision in the area of digital infrastructure and the way you’ve structured that to outline the requirements for bidding both for spectrum as well as for the tender, that is the second phase of regional leadership to show that it is possible to provide citizens secure, open access on the critical digital infrastructure they rely on.

And certainly, the number of American companies – and Rich ran through them – the number of American companies operating in Costa Rica highlights how much companies look to ensure their intellectual property is protected and that they can rely on secure, safe, and resilient infrastructure for critical business operations.

And I think certainly, to Nate’s question, your leadership on the regional-workforce issues potentially in the upcoming APEC discussion is one that will really uplift the broader region since everybody is trying to say how do we ensure the new job opportunities, the virtual training, the virtual jobs that our citizens can tap into, because that’s ultimately, as government, the core commitment we have, to lift up the lives of our citizens.

So, we truly appreciate both the courageous partnership and decision on 5G digital infrastructure, and we look forward to partnering with Costa Rica in taking on these three areas of regional leadership.
Amb. Fick: President Chaves, the last word is yours, sir.

President Chaves: Whoops. (Laughter.) Normally that means that you get the bill at the end. But that’s OK.

Look, it has been a great pleasure to come to CSIS. It has been a great pleasure to come back to Washington after four years, now in a different capacity.

Talk is cheap. We need to walk the walk. Now I’m using every line and saying that I may remember – (laughter) – in this difficult language. Costa Rica is walking the walk in every sense. You know of our efforts to fight international crime, unprecedented in the region; in stabilizing our ports of entry. You know our efforts now to provide security and be a safe place to do business for American companies. You know that looking at our actions. You see the eloquence of our people.

That has been very lucky, but to be very honest, abandon the straight and narrow path for a while, mostly because of negligence and lack of decisiveness of administrations, like every democracy does. But now we are a country with a renewed impetus to do well by doing the right thing. And that’s something that the United States has shown the world for many, many years. And that’s something that Costa Rica would like to think we’re also doing.

It has been a great pleasure and honor. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

James A. Lewis: Well, thanks, everyone, for coming out this morning. I’m Jim Lewis from CSIS. I’m kind of like the sanitation truck at the end of the parade.

So four quick points. First, a lot of people don’t know about this thing called the Counter Ransomware Initiative, which was involved in Costa Rica’s experience. This is probably one of the most important diplomatic and cyber efforts the U.S. is making, so it deserves more attention.

Second, as we heard today, Costa Rica is a model for a 21st-century digital economy. It’s just amazing – having been to Costa Rica many times over the past few decades, it’s an amazing example for others to look at.

Third, we didn’t talk about it much – Anne knows I’m going to say this – but we need to think about consequences when it comes from malicious action. And people ask: What happened to the Russians who did this? And I don’t know; maybe they had to trade in their Lamborghiniis or something.
But on that note, there’s more work to be done, clearly, but there’s been tremendous progress just in the last few years. We’re on a good path. Let’s think about what we can do in 2024.

President Chaves, Nate, Anne, Deputy Secretary Verma, thank you very much for coming to CSIS today.

Amb. Fick: Thanks. (Applause.)

(END.)