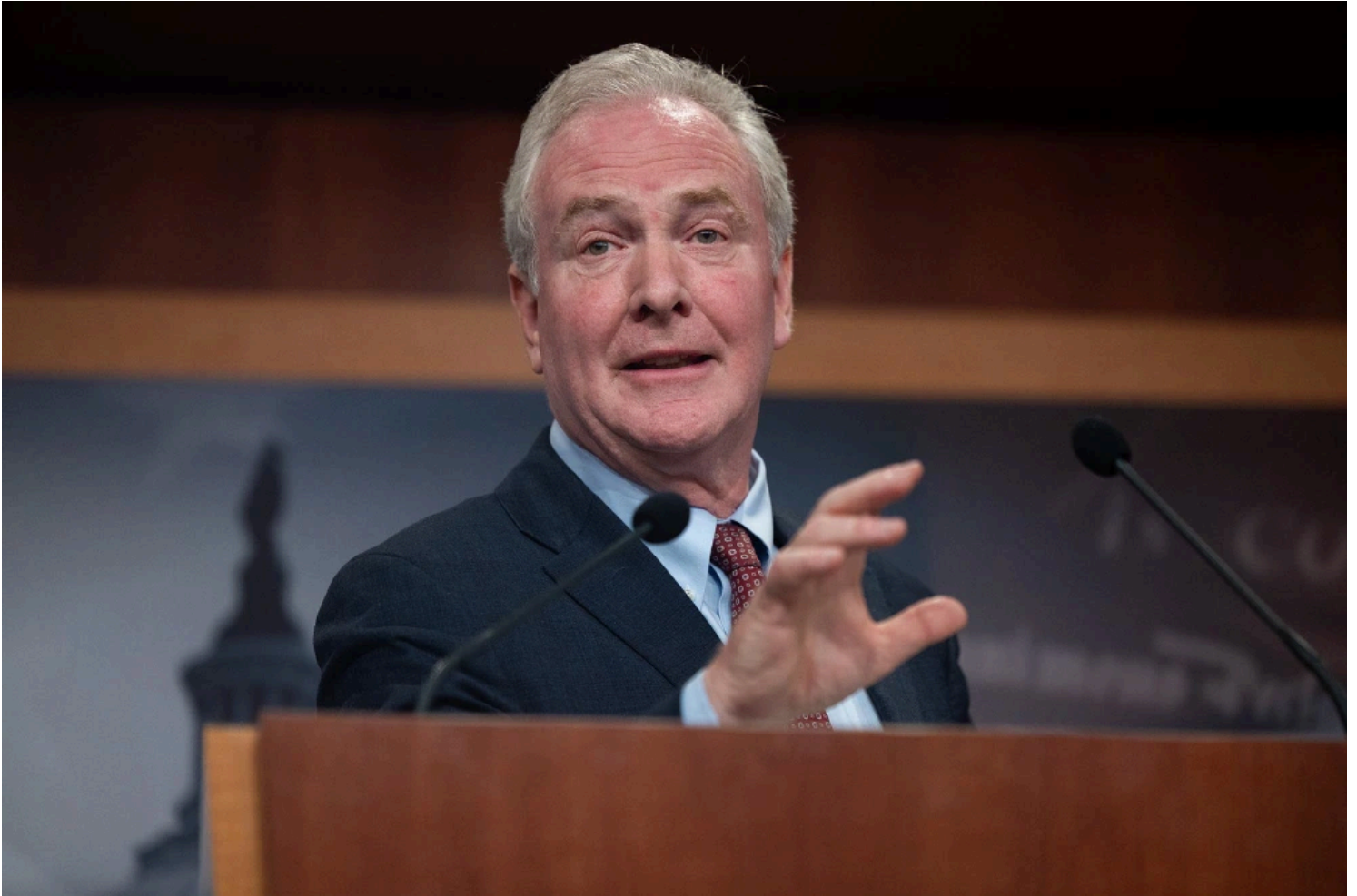


CONGRESS

Democratic lawmakers say they'll travel to El Salvador to push for Kilmar Abrego Garcia's release

Sen. Chris Van Hollen said if the Maryland man whom the administration acknowledged mistakenly deporting was not back in the U.S. by 'midweek,' the senator would travel to El Salvador.



— Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., speaks in Washington on March 26.

Nathan Posner / Anadolu via Getty Images file

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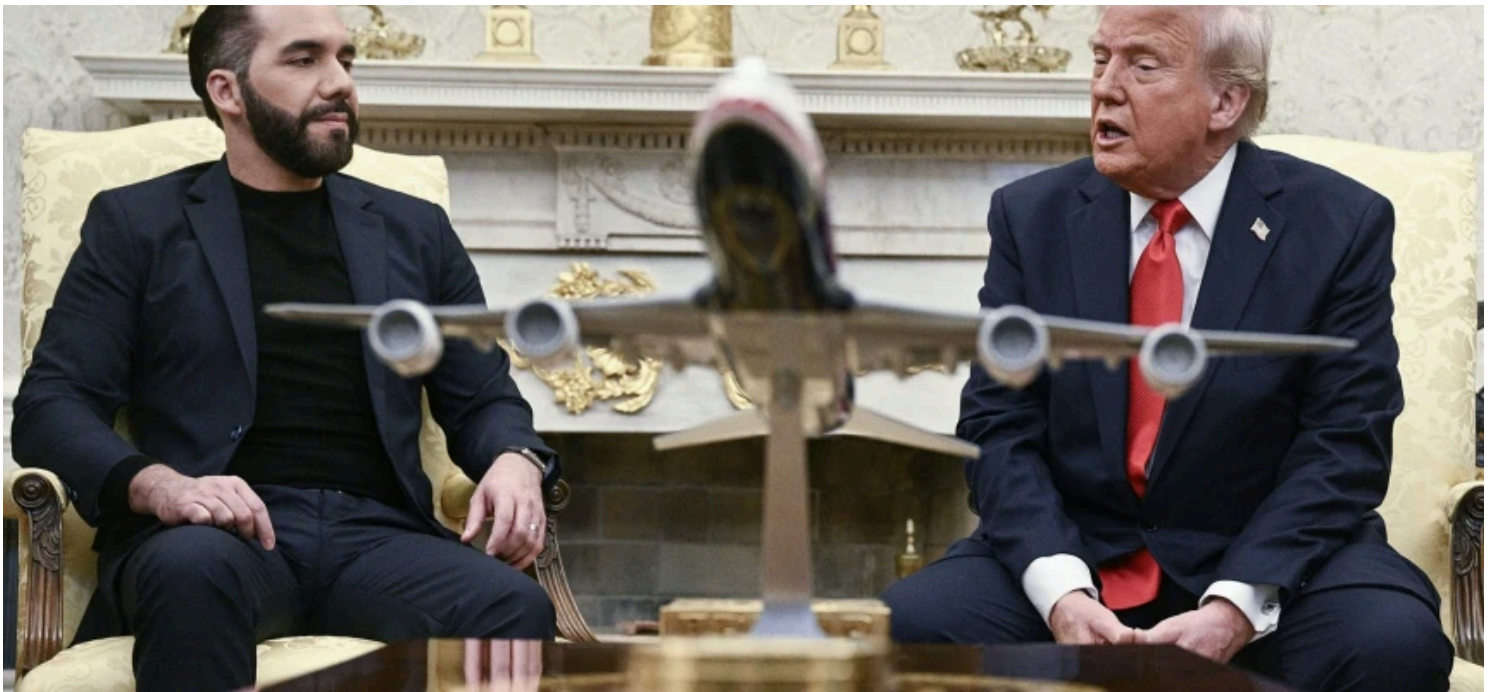
By Megan Lebowitz and Frank Thorp V

WASHINGTON – Democratic lawmakers led by Sen. Chris Van Hollen say they are willing to go to El Salvador to seek the release of a man who the Justice Department says it mistakenly deported there – a plan that has gained steam after the country's president said during a visit to the White House that he would not send the man back to the U.S.

Van Hollen, D-Md., sent a letter Monday to El Salvador's ambassador in the U.S. requesting a meeting with the country's president, [Nayib Bukele](#), who said in meeting with President Donald Trump later in the day that he "of course" would not send Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Maryland resident, back to the U.S.

Trump mulls imprisoning US citizens abroad: 'Homegrown are next'

02:17



In a statement on Monday, Van Hollen said if Abrego Garcia was not in the U.S. by "midweek," he would "travel to El Salvador this week to check on his condition and discuss his release."

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The idea gained support from several Democratic lawmakers, who said they would be willing to join Van Hollen on the trip.

"We must all stand as a united front against the kidnapping and illegal detention of Kilmar Abrego Garcia in El Salvador," progressive Rep. Maxwell Frost, D-Fla., said in [a post to X](#), tagging Van Hollen. "Senator, I am willing to join you and help Organize other members of the House to do the same."



— Kilmar Abrego Garcia. CASA via AP

Rep. Yassamin Ansari, D-Ariz., [reshared Frost's post](#), writing that she was "ready to join" her colleagues in traveling to El Salvador to demand Abrego Garcia's release.

The push to return Abrego Garcia to the U.S. began after Justice Department officials acknowledged that he should not have been sent to El Salvador because of a 2019 order from an immigration judge, who barred him from being sent to the country because he might be subject

to persecution. In a decision last week, the Supreme Court [told the administration](#) to "facilitate" his return.

Trump administration officials have argued that the situation is out of their hands now that Abrego Garcia is in the custody of another country. During Bukele's White House visit, the Salvadoran leader called the question of returning the Maryland man "preposterous."

"How can I return him to the United States? Like if I smuggle him into the United States?" Bukele [told reporters](#) on Monday. "Of course I'm not going to do it."

The White House has shown no signs of pushing for Abrego Garcia's return to the U.S., and Trump has repeatedly touted his controversial push to deport alleged gang members to El Salvador, where they have been transferred into a notorious prison. The administration has also deported people using the rarely invoked [Alien Enemies Act](#), though the matter is now tied up in court.

Van Hollen said after the leaders' White House meeting that he believes Bukele "will reconsider when he understands the full story of this illegal detention."

"I don't think he wants to essentially be the president who's kidnapped the United States citizen," he added.

The senator told reporters on Monday that his request to meet Bukele has been received by the Salvadoran embassy, but noted that he has not heard back. He reiterated to reporters that if Bukele cannot or will not meet, the senator would travel to El Salvador this week to "seek a meeting with the president or other government officials, because it is, it is absolutely unjust and illegal to have this Marylander detained one more day in a notorious prison in El Salvador."

During Bukele's White House visit, Trump [also floated the idea](#) of deporting U.S. citizens, a move that immigration advocates and law experts panned, with one law professor calling the idea "pretty obviously illegal and unconstitutional."



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