

**Remarks as prepared to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee
on the Western Hemisphere
Testimony**

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Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sires, Members of the Committee, I am pleased to speak with you about the Administration's priorities in the Western Hemisphere. I appreciate this subcommittee's support for U.S. assistance and our policies and engagement in the region.

The Western Hemisphere is a vitally important region for the United States. It is home to robust democracies and our closest trading partners. The Americas are at the center of the world's new energy map and many countries are becoming increasingly relevant actors on the global stage. And the converse is also true: the United States remains the most influential and essential partner for virtually every country in the hemisphere.

I am well aware of the critique that the United States is not paying enough attention to the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, during my nearly thirty-year career at the State Department, I cannot recall a time when an administration that I served – under both Republican and Democratic presidents – was not accused of paying Latin America less attention than it deserves. Today the United States faces an increasingly complex international environment with no shortage of foreign policy challenges – which means that the hard work of our many talented diplomats to build and maintain critical, productive partnerships in the Western Hemisphere often do not lead the news cycle or make the headlines. But that marked progress is itself newsworthy and should be seen as a sign of the hemisphere's positive trajectory and the success of more than 20 years of U.S. policy.

At the same time, this Administration has maintained a remarkable level of engagement on hemispheric issues by the President, the Vice President, and members of the Cabinet. The President returned recently from his fifth trip to Mexico and met in the last year with the leaders of Central America, Haiti, Colombia, Peru, and Chile. The Vice President has made seven trips to the region, four of which he's made in the last year. And these are more than just trips and

meetings – this high-level attention has allowed us to advance a pragmatic, well-integrated, results-oriented agenda. We are building on shared values and goals to address the big challenges that still impede far too many of the hemisphere's citizens from reaching their full potential. Almost every available metric – public opinion polls, levels of trade and investment, cultural and family ties, security cooperation, and the lively democratic debate in many countries – supports the view that the United States engagement and influence in the hemisphere is not waning – but on the rise. And when I say U.S. engagement, I am not speaking merely of our official bilateral relationships. There are indeed places, like Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, and others where we have less than the full and productive government relationship we would like. But at the same time, the people in these countries admire and respect the United States for who we are, for our values, for our social mobility, and for our diversity.

Let me discuss in more detail a few of these challenges in the hemisphere. The quality of democracy is about much more than elections; it's about an approach to governance and respect for diversity of opinions that reflects a genuine commitment to democratic values. We are particularly concerned by the deteriorating situation in Venezuela, where the United States has forthrightly called on the Venezuelan government to respect the human rights and the rule of law and begin a peaceful inclusive dialogue that alleviates the current tension. President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary Kerry have each made clear our view that political prisoners should be released and steps taken to halt the violence, including by government-backed groups. I know that this committee shares our concerns, and we welcome your strong support for democracy in Venezuela.

Several countries in the region see threats to democratic governance and freedom of expression. We defend human rights activists and fundamental freedoms around the world, including in challenging environments like Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Cuba. Our commitment to democracy and human rights is unwavering and remains the center of gravity for our strategy in the region.

Even as we work for a peaceful end to the crisis in Venezuela, we are actively promoting our core priorities throughout the hemisphere -- creating jobs and prosperity, expanding education and innovation, promoting energy cooperation, and defending democratic values.

We have placed our economic engagement at the center of this strategy. With the successful passage of the Colombia and Panama Free Trade Agreements, there are twelve free trade partners in the hemisphere. Our current efforts are focused on

concluding the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations that include our NAFTA partners plus Chile and Peru. At the North American Leaders' Summit in Mexico, President Obama and his Mexican and Canadian counterparts highlighted a shared continental vision, provided new opportunities for job creation and investment, and deepened global cooperation. We have a sustained economic policy dialogue with Brazil and are strengthening our ties with Pacific Alliance members Mexico, Chile, Colombia, and Peru. Our effort to promote a more economically integrated Central America recognizes that only by working together can these nations succeed. More broadly, while millions of people have benefited from Latin America's economic progress, millions more have been left behind – and we must ensure they too can benefit from the rising tide of economic prosperity.

Our economic focus in the hemisphere is committed to an inclusive opportunity agenda, with a special emphasis on youth and innovation. Youth involvement is vital to our entrepreneurship initiatives, through the Small Business Network of the Americas, the Women's Entrepreneurship in the Americas Initiative, the Latin America International Diaspora Engagement Alliance, and *100,000 Strong in the Americas*.

Of course, prosperity cannot exist without security. That is why we continue to invest in security cooperation with Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and Colombia, with a focus on strengthening democratic institutions and rule of law to capitalize on earlier investments in high-tech equipment. Mexico's recent success in capturing some of the most wanted drug kingpins demonstrates that our cooperation is producing tangible results that protect Mexican and U.S. citizens. In Central America we have adapted our strategy to focus equally on governance, prosperity, and security, recognizing the need for a more balanced approach. Our support in Colombia remains critical as this valued partner strives toward a peace accord. A Colombia at peace will be of even greater assistance in helping our neighbors build capacity to confront transnational crime.

A more vigorous and focused energy diplomacy is another core priority. The shift in the world's energy map to the Americas has created huge openings for greater cooperation on energy matters in the Western Hemisphere, including collaborating regionally to promote energy security with responsible environmental stewardship. We are working with our North American partners – at a moment when our own energy production is increasing – to offer an environmentally sound energy lifeline to the Caribbean and Central America, both of whom require assistance in coping with high energy costs. Under the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas and Connecting the Americas 2022, the United States is strengthening

regional energy security through initiatives that will increase energy efficiency, reduce emissions, and combat climate change.

Mr. Chairman, let me close by saying that I am sincerely grateful for the support that the House Committee on Foreign Affairs has provided to our core foreign policy interests in this hemisphere. While we may have occasional differences on policy, I believe that we are fully united in our core strategic interests in seeking to advance democracy, human rights, social development, security, and economic prosperity in the region. Overall, I believe we have established a basis for strong, bipartisan cooperation where it matters most between the State Department and this committee, as well as among this Committee's Members and staff, to the great benefit of our nation.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.