

Opening Statement of the Honorable Matt Salmon (R-AZ)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Hearing on “Overview of US Interests in the Western Hemisphere: Opportunities and Challenges”

February 28, 2013

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Good morning, and welcome to our first hearing of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, where we will be exploring the opportunities and challenges the U.S. faces in the region. When I returned to Congress this year, I was privileged to rejoin the Foreign Affairs Committee and honored to have been given the gavel of the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere. As a native Arizonan, I know what many of my colleagues have yet to realize, our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere are critical to U.S. security, energy independence and economic prosperity. I believe that our strong cultural, trade and investment relationships and demographic ties with Canada and the Americas connect the region and open the way to constructive dialogue on how to make our hemisphere safer and more prosperous.

First of all, let me welcome the Subcommittee’s distinguished new Ranking Member, Congressman Albio Sires who represents the 8th Congressional District of New Jersey. I look forward to working with you on a bipartisan basis to help foster positive results for U.S. foreign policy in the region.

In addition, to our returning Senior Members of the Committee, it is my pleasure to give a warm welcome to our Freshman Majority Members, Ron DeSantis and Trey Radel, both of whom hail from the great State of Florida. And although not new to Congress I would like to welcome two new additions to the Subcommittee on the Minority side of the aisle, Theodore Deutch and Alan Grayson, also both from the great State of Florida.

It is my firm belief that we have an opportunity to positively engage our friends and neighbors in the hemisphere not only on security issues as we work together to combat transnational criminal and terrorist organizations, but in strengthening bilateral and multilateral relationships that promote democratic values and free market principles.

I am looking forward to the opportunity to take a closer look at progress being made under the Merida Initiative to determine if there are ways to make the program more effective. Insecurity in Mexico and throughout Central America continues to threaten our own security, and I believe it is in the U.S. national interest to promote a safer and more secure region.

I also plan to make sure that this Subcommittee does everything in our power to foster and build upon our strong relationship with Canada, with whom we already maintain the world’s

largest bilateral trading relationship. Our Subcommittee will also focus attention on the incredible opportunity we have to achieve energy security and economic growth in North America by encouraging the Administration to give its final approval to the vital Keystone XL Pipeline. In addition, I will seek to promote energy independence and economic growth by seeking to strengthen U.S. trade relations with Mexico, and by supporting the U.S. - Mexico Transboundary Agreement that was signed in February of last year.

I hope to see the United States reassert its role in promoting hemispheric free trade policies, strengthening trade and investment relations in Brazil and throughout the entire region.

Lastly, we must not forget the key economic role of travel and tourism in the region, especially in the Caribbean, and the importance that limiting the negative effects that transnational crime can have on regional economies.

We do face challenges. This Subcommittee will continue to press for sound U.S. policy on Cuba – one that is committed to a real and meaningful democratic transition on an island that has been plagued by a repressive government at odds with regionally held values of economic and individual liberties.

In Venezuela, we will continue to monitor Venezuelan ties with Iran and Hezbollah, and will encourage the Obama administration to continue focusing the intelligence community's efforts on monitoring the threat of Iranian influence in our region. Mindful of a post-Chavez transition, the United States should be engaged in strengthening democratic institutions in Venezuela and in supporting free and fair elections.

I want to thank our witnesses for agreeing to appear before our Subcommittee today, the Honorable Roberta Jacobson, Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, and the Honorable Mark Feierstein, Assistant Administrator for the bureau of Latin America and the Caribbean for the US Agency for International Development. We look forward to hearing your testimony and insights on the region.

###