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STATEMENT BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS¹

THANK YOU, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sires, members of the committee, it is a privilege to join you today. I appreciate the invitation. I have had the pleasure of working with many of you in the past and I look forward to getting to know the concerns and perspectives of the new members of the committee. I am grateful for this subcommittee's abiding support for the Administration's efforts. I would like to focus my remarks on the opportunities we see in the Western Hemisphere.

In pursuit of our national interests abroad, foreign policy is as much about seizing opportunities as it is about countering threats. We are fortunate in the Western Hemisphere to have far more opportunities than threats. Opportunities to achieve energy self-sufficiency and to address climate change. To improve education. To increase trade and create jobs. To consolidate the democratic gains of the last 30 years. We are working hard to take advantage of these opportunities.

U.S. relations with our hemispheric neighbors are on a positive trajectory. We have fulfilled President Obama's commitment at the 2009 Summit of the Americas by pursuing flexible, balanced partnerships. We focus on four areas: promoting inclusive economic growth; increasing citizen security; promoting clean energy; and strengthening democracy.

In the past 15 years, 56 million households in the region joined the middle class. Over 40 percent of U.S. exports go to the Western Hemisphere, more than to any other region. During the past three years, U.S. exports to the Americas increased by more than \$250 billion, to nearly \$700 billion in 2011. U.S.-Mexico bilateral trade alone supports nearly six million U.S. jobs. We are working to increase those numbers through trade promotion agreements with Colombia and Panama. Last summer, Canada and Mexico joined Chile and Peru in the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, which we hope to conclude expeditiously.

These developments and trends all translate into more jobs, better and cheaper goods and services, and rising prosperity on Main Streets across the United States. That is good news.

1. Roberta S. Jacobson, Assistant Secretary of State, Statement Before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (Feb. 28, 2013), *transcript available at* <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/rm/2013/205468.htm>.

Admittedly, not all of the news is good. In some countries, policy reforms are needed to accelerate economic expansion, regional integration, and greater opportunity for prosperity to be more widely shared. Many countries and people in the region remain under pressure from criminal gangs and violence. In response, we expanded and linked our four citizen security programs: the Merida Initiative, the Central American Regional Security Initiative, the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, and the Colombia Strategic Development Initiative. Through a whole-of-government approach we are focusing on institution and capacity building while encouraging economic development for those most at-risk.

U.S. assistance has helped bring a dramatically improved security situation in Colombia, where the Santos administration is engaged in well-designed discussions on peace with the FARC that could result in the end of the longest running insurgency in the region and the FARC giving up drug trafficking. In Mexico, our partnership with President Peña Nieto's administration is off to a strong start with both sides committed to addressing crime and violence through durable, long-term cooperation on institution building and social development. We are partnering with Colombia, Mexico, and others to help Central America address its security challenges.

I am focused on the challenges and opportunities of three key issues: energy, education, and the defense of human rights and democracy.

The Western Hemisphere is increasingly a global supplier of energy. Companies and entrepreneurs who never focused on the region are waking up to its enormous potential.

At the 2012 Summit of the Americas, the United States and Colombia launched Connecting the Americas 2022, a hemispheric initiative to provide universal access to affordable electricity within a decade. This complements President Obama's Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA), in which we and 33 partners promote efficiency, encourage renewable energy, reduce the carbon footprint of heavy oils, and put Latin American cities on a more sustainable path. ECPA promotes adaptation and mitigation to climate change, in particular in the Andean Amazon and the Caribbean, where we are working to reduce net deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions without inhibiting economic growth and development.

Education underpins our other goals in the Americas. We can expand the momentous economic gains of the past decade only if we improve education. That's why President Obama launched "100,000 Strong in the Americas," to increase educational exchanges between the United States and Latin America and the Caribbean to 100,000 in each direction each year.

To meet that goal, we must double the current flow of students at a time when our own budget constrains us, so we are partnering with academic organizations and the private sector.

Our push on education complements our interest in promoting greater social inclusion. Expanding educational opportunity is crucial to ensuring all citizens share in the region's recent prosperity.

Our commitment to true partnership and shared responsibility calls for an honest re-examination of areas where this hemisphere once led, but now falters.

In some countries, populist leaders who are impatient with or even disrespectful of democracy's processes are closing down or subjugating independent media, and seeking to control courts and legislatures. We understand the aversion to unwarranted interventionism. That said, this hemisphere has been a global leader in setting standards of what democracy looks like. The leaders of many of today's democracies in the Americas were fighting for these rights in their own countries not so long ago.

Attacks on freedom of expression require a principled response. We are working through the Organization of American States and its Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression to protect these rights. We will continue to speak out to defend strong, independent institutions of democracy, including by using the March 22 OAS special General Assembly on the hemispheric human rights system to voice strong support for the continued independence of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

In sum, our policy of partnership and shared responsibility has produced real progress. Though positive stories rarely make the news, they abound in the Americas, where inclusive economic growth is transforming the region and several of our partners are emerging as players on the global stage. There is of course still more to do to foster the peaceful, prosperous and democratic hemisphere we all want to see.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman. I look forward to working with you and other members of this committee to advance U.S. interests in the hemisphere.

Articles

