

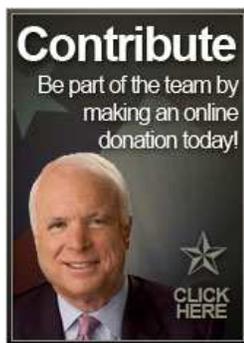


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Senator John McCain Address On Latin America To The Florida Association Of Broadcasters

June 20, 2007

"It is pretty difficult for a politician to resist an invitation to speak before a room full of broadcasters - especially during an election campaign. But I am not here to talk about politics but about our neighbors which have been too neglected for too long. We are all of the New World, united by a common history and a common quest for justice and freedom that began with our struggle for independence.

"Four and a half decades ago, John Kennedy described the people of Latin America as our 'firm and ancient friends, united by history and experience and by our determination to advance the values of American civilization.' Never was this truer than today. With globalization, our hemisphere has grown closer, more integrated, and more interdependent. Latin America today is increasingly vital to the fortunes of the United States. Americans north and south share a common geography and a common destiny. I would like to share with you today my vision about where our hemisphere is headed, and how, as President, I would lead our region.

"The countries of Latin America are the natural partners of the United States, and yet it hardly feels that way today. Anti-Americanism is on the rise in much of the region. The attention of U.S. leaders and the media have shifted toward Iraq, Afghanistan, the broader Middle East and the war on terror. As we have devoted attention and energies to other regions, other, dangerous forces have moved into the breach. Hugo Chavez has used the cloak of electoral legitimacy to establish a one party dictatorship in Venezuela, breathed new oxygen into the decaying Castro regime in Cuba, allied with Iran and other American enemies, and supported populist, anti-American forces throughout the hemisphere. While the United States has been pre-occupied elsewhere, China has launched a diplomatic and economic offensive in the region, with uncertain intentions and outcomes. And there is a growing rejection among some Latin Americans of the free-market democracy that has been so painfully achieved. "We can and we must do better. I have seen the difficult journey this region has made since the 1970s and 80s, a time of war and dictatorship, of hyperinflation and economic stagnation. The Latin America I know is a hopeful place, which prizes its hard won freedom, seizes new economic opportunities and remains a firm partner of the United States. If I am elected president, the United States will forge a new policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean Basin founded on peace and security, shared prosperity, democracy and freedom, and mutual respect.

"There are several areas of concern. The undergoverned tri-border region of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay is a haven for smugglers and radical groups. Iran has launched terrorist attacks in Argentina. Hamas, Hezbollah and similar groups are active in the region. Several states in the Caribbean and elsewhere are small, weak, and vulnerable to narcotics trafficking, money laundering, and even terrorist activity. Trinidad is home to a radical Islamic group that has been implicated in the recent plot to attack New York's JFK Airport, and several individuals involved in that plot are from Guyana.

"Our security priority in this hemisphere is to ensure that terrorists, their enablers and their business partners, including narcotraffickers, have nowhere to hide. One element of this effort requires a new approach to the region's ungoverned areas. We must help governments establish sovereignty over the land, sea, and air, through broader partnerships with willing countries. This means defense assistance, but also measures designed to accelerate broad economic growth, build the rule of law, and extend the scope of government authority to lawless areas.

"Another element of this approach must include bolstering the new democracies of the hemisphere. Polls increasingly show that populations are losing faith with democracy, and blame it for failing to provide security from crime and corruption or a way out of poverty. We should help consolidate democratic gains by helping Latin American countries build the capacity of the state, train political parties, bolster the electoral process, and press for more transparency and accountability.

"There is also great potential for a closer partnership with many Latin American countries at a regional and even a global level. Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and others represent truly international partners of the United States, countries committed to values we hold dear, including an embrace of human rights, the expansion of freedom, economic development, and an orderly and rules-based international engagement. "There has been much talk of a leftward tilt in Latin America, but there are two 'lefts' - there are those center-left governments with whom we can work closely and cooperatively, and there are the few populist, statist governments who oppose much of what the United States and its democratic partners stand for. We should be careful not to overreact to the former, and we must ensure that the latter are marginalized.

"Hugo Chavez is driving Venezuela toward disaster and trying to take others along with him. Since his election, he has overseen the dismantling of Venezuelan democracy. After undermining the parliament and the independence of the courts, he is now targeting the media, free labor unions, and private enterprise. Chavez closed Radio Caracas Television after some 53 years on the air, and is even going after small cable networks. He is calling for the creation of a common defense pact between Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia, to oppose the United States. In his spare moments, he has found the time to meet with the Holocaust-denying President of Iran.

"We have seen this story before. Hugo Chavez, like Fidel Castro before him, embraces authoritarianism and aggression and statist economic policies - a time-worn recipe for disaster. Only today's high oil prices keep him from swiftly joining previously discredited leftist dictators on the ash heap of history. Too many dictatorships are enriched by our reliance on foreign oil. That is why it is a matter of U.S. national security to reduce our reliance on imported oil. "Nor can we forget the people of Cuba. It is in the United States' national interest that the Cuban people live in freedom. A hostile state, a sponsor of terror, a regime that harbors fugitives from U.S. justice and shoots down unarmed American civilian aircraft is a national security threat. As President, I will not passively await the long-overdue demise of the Castro dictatorship. My administration will press the Cuban regime to release all political prisoners unconditionally, to legalize all political parties, labor unions and free media and to schedule internationally monitored elections. And, the embargo will stay in place until those terms are met. I would provide more material assistance and moral

support to the courageous human rights activists who bravely defy the regime every day, and increase Radio and TV Marti and other means to communicate directly with the Cuban people. My Justice Department would vigorously prosecute Cuban officials implicated in the murder of Americans, drug trafficking and other crimes.

"Cuba's transition to democracy is inevitable, and we need to begin planning now for that day. While our Cuba policy does not always accord with that of our hemispheric and European partners, we should begin an active dialogue with them to develop a plan for post-Castro Cuba, a plan that will spark rapid change and a new awakening in that country. The Cuban people have waited long enough.

"We can do this by standing not just against the negative designs of despots, but for a positive vision, for a better future of promise and prosperity and equality that is not American alone, but that constitutes a future shared by all of the hemispheric partners.

"We trade as much with Latin America and the Caribbean as we do with the European Union, and yet there is enormous untapped potential. Brazil and Mexico are together as populous as the United States, while Brazil alone is comparable in geographic size. Many governments in the region have abandoned the excessive spending and statist economic controls that fueled economic crises for decades. Inflation is down, growth is up, and the hemisphere has been free of an emerging market financial crisis for the past five years.

"We need to build on the passage of the Central America Free Trade Agreement by expanding U.S. trade with the region. Let's start by ratifying the trade agreements with Panama, Peru, and Colombia that are already completed, and pushing forward the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Too many Democrats have embraced economic isolationism, paying off special interests by opposing trade agreements with our democratic neighbors. They could not be more wrong. My administration would reduce barriers to trade and press for renewed Trade Promotion Authority.

"Opening new and integrated world markets does not automatically translate into a higher quality life for everyone. Latin America's income inequality poses a threat to stability and free market democracy. As we pursue liberalized trade, we must work with Latin American governments to open up real opportunities for the millions of citizens in this hemisphere trapped in the underground informal economy, without access to credit, with no titles to their property, and no ability to harness their energies and work ethic in an entrepreneurial economy. The power of global capital markets dwarfs the importance of foreign assistance in financing economic expansion. Capital markets do not, however, automatically seek out those who have been left behind - and my administration would work to ensure that those marginalized have an opportunity for a better life.

"Trade offers opportunity; aid can help ensure that those opportunities are available to all. The United States should launch a major program designed not to increase handouts but rather to build capacity, improve education, cut red tape, and reduce the corruption that is the foremost impediment to economic growth. We should target assistance and micro-lending to the economically isolated and often indigenous populations among our free trade partners. We need to help governments do these things not only because extreme inequality threatens the future of market democracy, but also because helping Latin America expand growth and opportunity at home is an important element in curbing illegal immigration and expanding American markets.

"Mexico must be a vital partner in stopping illegal immigration. President Calderon has shown strong leadership in confronting drug crime throughout his country. By extraditing drug kingpins to the United States, deploying Mexican troops to enforce order in cartel-dominated areas, and by taking on the narcotics trade so directly, he has embarked on a courageous and vital course. The Mexican government must win this war. Should the gangs and cartels prove victorious, our security will be weakened and more drugs will flow into the United States. Mexico needs more help from the United States in this effort, and in a McCain Administration, that help will come.

"We need a strong ally and partner in Mexico, and forging this relationship would be a top priority in my administration. I would hope to return U.S.-Mexico relations to the bright days at the beginning of the Bush administration, when the relationship between our President and President Fox held untold promise.

"There is great potential for progress in relations with other key countries as well. The U.S. recently agreed to work with Brazil in an effort to expand sugar production toward ethanol use. This is a good start, but we can go much further toward establishing close ties with South America's biggest economy, a country that is a leader in the region and beyond. Brazil's leadership in the U.N. peacekeeping force in the troubled nation of Haiti is a model of how to foster regional security and cooperation.

"Colombia continues to face enormous challenges, and we have seen some real successes in fighting narco-terror and establishing its authority. Unfortunately, these successes are endangered by Democrats who oppose providing military aid to a democracy under siege and want to turn their back on the free trade agreement negotiated with our strongest ally in Latin America. I intend to fight for Plan Colombia and for a free trade pact with Colombia. You don't build strong alliances by turning your back on friends. Colombia is a country too big and too important to fail, and we need to ensure success.

"In Chile and Peru, the potential to expand ties offers much hope as well. And we should encourage Argentina to choose a course of cooperation based on mutual respect. In Central America, what was once a war-torn region is now a vibrant, democratic success story. Who could have imagined in the 1980s that one day El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras would send military forces to serve with Americans in Iraq?

"For decades, in Republican and Democratic administrations alike, the United States has treated Latin America as a junior partner rather than as a neighbor, like a little brother rather than as an equal. Latin America is not our backyard; Central and South America are not 'beneath' the United States. As a resident of a state that borders Mexico, I am acutely aware of the extraordinary contributions that our neighbors make to the United States - from trade to culture to a commitment to democracy and human rights. We share with our Latin American neighbors a deep regard for faith, family, and hard work. We share a civilization and a hemisphere. And we should work - together - to create in the Americas a new model of relations between the developed and the developing world.

"If elected I will work to create a new global League of Democracies that would give Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Peru and other great nations in the region a voice in confronting common problems based a shared values - a voice that they are denied in the United Nations Security Council.

"I will also revitalize our public diplomacy in Latin America - and the world. In 1998, the Clinton Administration and Congress agreed to abolish the United State Information Agency and place its public diplomacy functions into the Department of State. This was a mistake. Dismantling an agency dedicated to promoting America and the American message amounted to unilateral disarmament in the struggle of ideas. Communicating our government's views on day to day issues is what the State Department does. But communicating the idea of America, our purpose, our past and our future is a different task. We need to re-create an independent agency with the sole purpose of getting America's message to the world. This would aid our efforts in the global struggle against Islamic extremism. It would aid our efforts to communicate accurately with the people of Latin America when some try to propagandize them. Our values of liberty, equality and opportunity are universal. We know our country has been the greatest force for good the world has ever known. Our story is a story of hope, optimism, freedom and compassion. It is a story that must be told effectively and professionally - something this audience knows very well.

"Let me speak from the heart: To the people of Cuba, who have been robbed of their freedom and their dreams: My administration will support the future, freely elected government of YOUR choice. Commissars and jailers will not dictate your future.

"To the people of Venezuela: We will always respect your democratic choices - but we stand against those who seek to corrupt and hijack your democracy.

"To the people of our southern neighbor, Mexico: Our differences are real, but small compared to our common bonds and mutual interests. We will support your president's campaign to advance the rule of law - and the dreams of freedom, opportunity and justice for which your ancestors have struggled for five hundred years.

"To all of the people and governments of our shared hemisphere: No portion of this earth is more important to the United States. My administration will work relentlessly to build a future with liberty and justice for ALL.

"To the druglords and demagogues: You will lose.

"Relations with our southern neighbors must be governed by mutual respect, not dominated by an imperial impulse, nor by anti-American demagoguery on the other. The promise of North, Central, and South American life is too great for that. I believe the Americas can and must be the model for a new 21st century relationship between North and South. Ours can be the first completely democratic hemisphere, where trade is free across all borders, where security and opportunity are defended and advanced for all, where the rule of law and the magic of the marketplace allow all peoples, north and south, to reach their God-given potential. That will be my vision as your President. Together, we can realize it. Thank you."

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