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# Disruption & Transformation in the Americas

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Leaders including Vice President Mike Pence sent a powerful message in defense of Latin American democracy during the 49th Washington Conference on the Americas.

The 49th annual conference, titled “Disruption and Transformation in the Americas,” gathered top officials from across the Americas and private-sector leaders to discuss the region’s economic and political outlook.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence energized the audience during his keynote address, highlighting the disruptions and transformations taking place in the Americas. “It’s unquestionable that over the last two years, there has been profound transformation in Latin America... Since my first visit to Latin America two years ago, the people of the Western Hemisphere have voted in election after election for prosperity, security, and transparency from their governments—and the United States has stood with them every step of the way,” said Pence.

Pence referred to Nicolás Maduro’s regime as “the single greatest disruption to peace and prosperity in the Western Hemisphere.” He also stated that the United States reaffirms its “commitment to the Venezuelan people—and to our partners in the region—to support the transformation that is now taking place.”



“This partnership between the State Department and the Council of the Americas—the premier business association in the hemisphere—is a strong reminder of the positive relations that need to be continually forged between the public and private sectors to advance business in the hemisphere,” said COA President and CEO Susan Segal, who opened the conference along with COA Vice President Eric Farnsworth.

Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, Kimberly Breier, highlighted the importance of the inter-American relationship: “We believe that the Americas has an incredible opportunity—the chance to cement a future of democracy and prosperity for this hemisphere through deeper U.S. engagement, greater business investment, and stronger people-to-people ties, and we are committed to working to achieve results in these areas.”



Breier was followed by a keynote interview between CNBC contributor Michelle Caruso-Cabrera and Nayib Bukele, the president-elect of El Salvador. Bukele outlined his priority to attract investment after taking office on June 1, which he saw as the best way to stem emigration flows. He estimated that every one job created in the country would prevent five people from emigrating. He also said the outgoing administration's decision to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China was not a done deal. "I'll be frank. We're not going to do what's in the U.S.' best interest or China's. We're going to do what's best for El Salvador," he said. "That might be going back to Taiwan, it might be staying with China. It's an ongoing discussion."



Following the interview, COA Chairman Andrés Gluski honored U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, with the Chairman's Award for Leadership, noting his leadership on Capitol Hill promoting U.S. policy toward Latin America. Following the award, Rubio gave remarks on the importance of democratic order in the region: "We have a chance for the Western Hemisphere to be, truly, the first free hemisphere in all of human history. We have two or three places left to go. But just imagine, that as a legacy of our time in public policy. To be able to say that we were able to be a part of having the first truly free hemisphere in the history of all of mankind."



Jan Van Acker, president of Latin America and Emerging Markets for Merck, introduced the panel "Prospects for Investment, Innovation and Inclusive Growth in the Americas." Moderated by Shery Ahn from Bloomberg, the panel included U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Axel van Trotsenburg, the World Bank's Vice President for Latin America, and President Joaquim Levy of Brazil's development Bank, BNDES.

"The needs of this region are between \$150 billion and \$250 billion," said van Trotsenburg. Senator Cassidy, noting that Louisiana is the largest recipient of foreign direct investment per capita, said that Washington ought to pay more attention to its neighbors. "Any relationship needs to be tended to," he said. "And the U.S. needs to tend to its relationship with our fellow Americans in the hemisphere." Joaquim Levy talked about efforts to go digital in order to scale public services for a rapidly growing retirement population, and also deepening partnerships with countries in Asia where the development bank sees wealth generation and new demand markets.





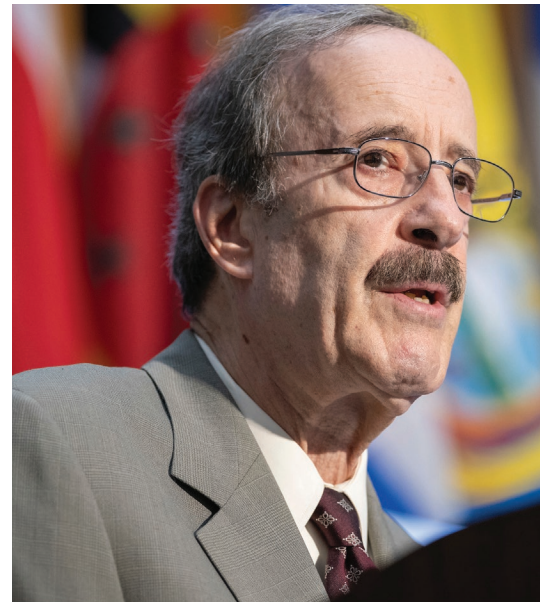
Additional speakers at the conference included U.S. Representative Eliot Engel, Colombian Vice President Marta Lucía Ramírez, Canadian International Trade Diversification Minister James Carr, Mexican Foreign Affairs Minister Marcelo Ebrard, and U.S. Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan.

“A policy that cuts off aid, that turns our back on anti-corruption efforts, that keeps out migrants and refugees, and that stokes trade wars doesn’t help United States citizens or anyone else. It leaves America standing alone,” said Congressman Eliot Engel (D-NY), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. “I’m concerned with U.S. policy toward Latin America, starting with a wall on our southern border...I would never slam the door on immigrants who come here now because I wouldn’t have wanted the door slammed on my grandparents.”

Colombian Vice President Marta Lucía Ramírez said she feels the mantle of responsibility as the first female Vice President of her country for women in Colombia and throughout the hemisphere. She also talked about ways the Duque administration is working to strengthen the rule of law, gender equality, entrepreneurship, and economic development.

Canada’s Trade Minister James Carr spoke about Ottawa’s global trade agenda and leadership in advancing meaningful and pragmatic improvements to the World Trade Organization in a conversation with Financial Times Reporter James Politi. “Canada’s relationship with the Americas is an enduring one because of the deep ties between our people and the growing trade ties that contribute to our mutual success,” he said. “It is important that together we support efforts to modernize the World Trade Organization so it reflects the realities of a trading system of the twenty-first century.”

Marcelo Ebrard, Foreign Affairs Minister for Mexico, discussed the country’s foreign policy agenda and the relations between Mexico City and Washington. He shared that the current Mexican government is working to achieve four main goals: tackle corruption, combat poverty and inequality, promote the growth of the country as a whole, and make the society safer. “We are shifting the focus of policymaking toward the benefit of society as a whole,” he said. On the bilateral relationship with Washington, he emphasized that it’s based on mutual respect, cooperation for development, and negotiated solutions to common problems.







To close the conference, Acting U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan spoke about regional security and prosperity. He said that 63 percent Central Americans cite lack of food as a primary reason for migration. “This crisis is about children, their safety, and the future of our region,” said McAleenan. “The status quo should not be acceptable for anyone who cares about the region and its people...The loss of energy and youth from whole areas of Central America could be devastating for its future.”

The 49th Washington Conference was a complete success. Looking toward 2020, our 50th annual conference is not to be missed. After a half century of convening U.S. and Latin American leaders in Washington, DC, our 50th annual conference will be an opportunity to celebrate the continued engagement between governments and the private sector to address critical issues affecting the Western Hemisphere and to reflect on how the promotion of democracy, rule of law, and free markets has transformed the Americas. Make plans now to join us!



**The Council of the Americas thanks the sponsors of our 49th annual Washington Conference on the Americas for their tangible and meaningful support. We look forward to seeing everyone in 2020 at the 50th annual Washington Conference on the Americas!**

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