

Bill Richardson for President

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A New Partnership With Latin America

10/24/2007

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Thank you for being with me. Thank you to NDN for hosting us here.

Before I talk about Latin America, I want to take a few moments to talk about what is going on here in this state.

These are tough times for Californians. They are tough times for all Americans. The fires that have ravaged this state ... have ravaged the national consciousness.

Brave men and women are working day and night to end the devastation. Fire fighters continue to risk their own lives ... to protect the lives of their fellow Americans.

In this sea of destruction, we can see reflected the courageous will that defines our nation.

We must each step up and do what we can.

Yesterday, my campaign donated ten thousand dollars to the Red Cross to assist relief efforts. I encourage all of you to give as much as possible, as soon as possible.

I also ordered two strike teams of New Mexico fire fighters to assist in protecting against the fires here. I know that these fine New Mexicans will reflect the very best of our state's fire fighting tradition. Please take good care of them.

In addition, it is clear that we need more air resources, so that we can be better positioned to handle these fires and better prepared to handle any other crises.

I recall, in another disaster, when I led an effort in New Mexico to help out victims of hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. I remember going out to meet the first plane of refugees and you can feel so helpless in the presence of people that have lost everything.

We did what a state can do.

New Mexico has experienced the devastation and tragedy of huge wildfires and we know well the toll it takes on families and communities.

On a national level, I believe that we need to reform our military to ensure that our National Guard system is never stretched to the breaking point again.

At the same time that I was ordering New Mexico fire fighters to California, the President deployed three hundred of my state's National Guardsmen to Iraq.

This is not what the National Guard was designed for. The war is leaving our homeland vulnerable to natural disasters. We have to end the war and get all our troops out as soon as possible.

As President, I will get all the troops out within a year after I take office. And I'm going to add fifty thousand troops to the active-duty Army and Marine Corps, so that the Guard can protect Americans right here at home.

Finally, we must honor the first responders who are fighting the fires right now. We must make sure that they have the best equipment, the best health care, and the best benefits for their families. **They deserve nothing less.**

I deeply believe that the coming days will prove that even the greatest natural destruction ... is no match for the hopeful will of the American people. We will put the pieces back together. We will rebuild people's homes. Together,

we will do it.

Today, I want to talk with you about our foreign policy in our own hemisphere.

It is painfully clear that George Bush's disastrous invasion of Iraq has wrecked our international credibility. It has damaged our alliances, emboldened our enemies, depleted our treasury, exhausted our armed forces and fueled global anger against us.

The war continues to divert us from the real war against the terrorists who attacked us on 9-11. And it has undermined our ability to lead the world on pressing issues such as nuclear proliferation and global warming.

Less discussed, but just as important is that the great damage caused by Iraq has extended even to our own backyard, in Latin America. George Bush's cowboy diplomacy has not just led us to ignore urgent challenges in our own region, but has alienated our friends in this hemisphere.

As was so evident when Mr. Bush toured Latin America last March, anti-Americanism is growing at an alarming rate across the region. Through neglect we have turned many of our natural allies into fair-weather friends and outright enemies.

The President once vowed to treat Latin America "not as an afterthought, but as a fundamental commitment." But, despite Latin America's economic and national-security importance to the United States, he has neglected to engage the region.

This policy of negligence is dangerous, and it cannot continue. We need bold action to repair the damage. The next President must have a clear plan for engagement, and the experience to implement it.

As President, I will focus on seven strategies to rebuild our relationship with the rest of our hemisphere. At all times, we must preserve our faith in American values and renew our courage to connect with other nations.

First, diplomacy! We must engage all Latin American countries diplomatically -- including troublesome regimes like Venezuela. This does not mean making concessions. It means honest talk and tough negotiation. It means trying to find common ground where we can and strengthening our interests where we can't.

Second, we need a realistic approach towards Cuba. Currently our policy with regard to Cuba has been static and reactive. What we need is a vibrant and pro-active policy that deals sensibly with economic and personal issues like trade and family visitation..

President Bush has been imposing severe restrictions on family visits and remittances to Cuba. I strongly oppose these cruel and counterproductive rules.

Cuban-Americans should be allowed to visit their families, and they should be able to help them out financially. The Bush administration even denied US Army Sergeant Carlos Lazo, who had won the Bronze Star in Iraq, permission to visit his two sons living in Cuba. **That is appalling.**

Family values must mean actually valuing families.

Furthermore, these restrictions bolster Castro's ability to portray himself as standing up to the big bully in Washington. Put simply, these rules have been good for Castro and bad for Americans **and** Cubans.

As President, I will allow unimpeded family visits and remittances by Cuban-Americans to their relatives in Cuba. I will work with the Cuban-American community to heal the bitter divide that inevitably cuts through this issue. Together, we can create a policy that is good for all Americans.

And I am ready to reassess the trade embargo ... in exchange for Cuba releasing all political prisoners and making positive moves towards democratic freedoms.

Third, we should push for a Latin American country to have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile are obvious potential choices.

Fourth, human rights. We need to replace inflammatory rhetoric about "regime change" with real promotion of human and democratic freedoms. Latinos admire American democratic values, but they know hypocrisy and they've seen it. Guantanamo. Abu Ghraib. Secret prisons. Torture.

Let me be clear:

I will be a President who follows the Constitution.

And I will not only talk about human rights, I will be guided by a strong faith in the universal value of human dignity.

Fifth, fair trade. We must promote trade agreements that include strong and enforceable labor, environmental, and human rights standards. Free and fair trade can benefit both Latin American and US workers. It will benefit consumers throughout the region. And it will bind closer the nations of the entire hemisphere.

Sixth, development. We must lead the hemisphere in promoting economic development and reducing poverty. In an interdependent world, extreme poverty in one nation is the concern of all nations. Strong and equitable economic growth in Latin America is in the US national interest. It must be a priority. Those who think we can keep poor immigrants out with walls ... do not understand the desperate will of starving men and women.

Therefore, seventh, we need comprehensive immigration reform that is realistic and humane. We need to aggressively police the border and punish employers who hire undocumented workers. But we must also recognize that we simply can't deport the twelve million who are already here. We need a tough, fair path to legalization.

Our loftiest ideals are not inconsistent with our most realistic policy objectives. And after so many years of a foreign policy that has ignored both principles and pragmatism, we need a new kind of realism.

This **New Realism** will go beyond the old, balance-of-power politics of the Cold War. We need to understand that what goes on in other countries affects us profoundly, and that skillful American diplomatic leadership is needed to meet the challenges of an age of interdependence. An age of global warming. Of global terrorism. Of global pandemics.

We need to lead with skill and moral credibility.

Across a wide range of economic, cultural and political issues, our future prosperity and security is tightly interwoven with that of all the peoples of the Americas.

Venezuela is our fourth largest oil supplier, providing 15 percent of our annual oil consumption. Mexico is the third largest market for US-grown wheat, corn, cotton and soybeans. Small Central American countries such as Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras are major suppliers of the fresh fruit Americans eat, and Argentina, Ecuador, and Peru are top ten vegetable suppliers.

The President just doesn't get it.

He seems to think that Latin goodwill towards the United States is something we can take for granted. He seems to think that the fact of our geography guarantees the fitness of our relationship. And he continues to believe that region will somehow follow a nation that refuses to lead.

They will not.

In the absence of principled leadership from us, they will turn elsewhere ... anywhere ... to whoever steps up.

Hugo Chávez of Venezuela has had serious success nourishing anti-US anger throughout the hemisphere. Chávez enhances his own power by using our country as his whipping boy. Like his friend, President Ahmadinejad of Iran, he thrives on conflict and incendiary rhetoric. Make no mistake: his gains are secured at our expense.

We need a President who understands international politics and knows how to respond effectively to lies and provocations. When I am President, I will stand up for this country not by returning insults, but by exposing distortions.

We need to take leaders like Chavez seriously, not because they are truthful -- they are not. We need to take them seriously because they are tapping into real resentment against us, and then amplifying it for their own purposes. Across the world, the Bush foreign policy has intensified anti-Americanism and played into the hands of our worst enemies.

The Bush administration's short-sighted, clumsy diplomacy has helped leaders like Chávez and Castro create an axis of anti-American nationalism across the region. With the benefit of Venezuela's oil wealth, Chávez has forged ties with leaders such as Evo Morales in Bolivia and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua. These four countries -- Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, and Nicaragua -- have formed a trade agreement that seeks to exclude and undermine US influence in Latin America. Chávez is reaching out to long-standing US partners such as Argentina. His trade and economic development proposals are filling the void left by our bankrupt leadership in the region. In recent years, Venezuela has purchased more than \$5 billion worth of Argentine government bonds and other debt relief instruments. A few months ago, Argentina's President Nestor Kirchner met with Chávez and Evo Morales in Bolivia, where progress was made on a deal to ship more than \$15 billion worth of Bolivian natural gas to Argentina.

The Chávez method of "checkbook diplomacy" extends to the aid he provided to Peru following that country's catastrophic earthquake in August. Hundreds of people were killed ... thousands more displaced. The nation looked

to the US for help. And yet, it was Venezuela that responded with more aid than the Bush administration.

We handed Chávez yet another public relations coup in the region.

I focus on Hugo Chávez not because he is the disease in Latin America, but because he is yet another symptom. The disease is arrogance.

The next President must take a far more realistic look at what is needed to restore US standing in our own hemisphere. We need a President who understands the region and can talk directly to all the players. And I can speak in Spanish when needed. Yo hablo el idioma de la diplomacia.

I know such direct engagement can work. I've sat down with Fidel Castro and negotiated the release of Cuban political prisoners. The Organization of American States has asked me to serve as special envoy for hemispheric affairs -- to help renew relations with our friends and restart talks with our foes. Only serious dialogue on issues such as immigration and trade can lead to serious solutions and a serious relationship with Latin America.

We must remember that preserving your popularity is no recipe for inspiring a nation, let alone a region or a world.

I owe my success in bringing people together and solving problems to taking risks. Sometimes you have to lay things on the line to get results.

I recall when one of my constituents was taken hostage in Sudan. He was an American journalist from my own state and he was captured with two aides from the African nation of Chad. They were imprisoned on phony charges of espionage -- I had no reason to be optimistic about their release. But the journalist's wife asked me to go and try to get him out. So I went.

The dictator of that country -- al-Bashir -- he said: "You can have the American, but the other two from Chad -- they stay."

At this point I could have left with the American, but I said "No. I am bringing them all out."

It was not the easy choice but it was the right choice.

We went back into the negotiation and I left with all three men.

There was no time then for polls or consultants.

Nor is this a time for political calculation.

We cannot afford leadership that has not been tested. My colleagues in this race have my respect, but it is a simple fact that the next international deal negotiated by any one of them will be their first.

We also cannot afford another President who doesn't understand that stubbornness is not strength. Consultation with friends, coordination with allies -- and negotiation with enemies -- is not weakness. It is what you need to do to get things done. It is the basis for restoring America's international leadership.

The Bush administration has missed too many opportunities to strengthen US engagement. Over and over, the President has failed to address urgent issues -- especially, trade, development and immigration. This "iron triangle" of concerns is tightly welded, and we need a comprehensive vision to tackle them.

At its root, illegal immigration is an economic problem, driven by the lack of decent jobs for people in their home countries. So long as other economies fail to produce jobs, people will continue to come here. As long as we have a monopoly on hope, we will be a magnet for the hopeful. If we want to stop illegal immigration, we need to promote equitable development in Latin America. There is no way around it. We need trade agreements that create good jobs in all countries, including our own, while promoting human and worker's rights.

We need a comprehensive immigration solution in this country -- one that includes a path to legalization. Part of that is increased border enforcement with smarter technology and more guards. It works.

But you know what won't work? This wall. I think that Senators Clinton, Obama, and Biden were wrong to vote to build a wall between the United States and its neighbors.

They talk about change. But they voted for the most blatant example of old-style Washington solutions-- expensive, dumb, and entirely the product of political calculation.

They only funded half the wall. Anyone outside the beltway could tell you how well half a wall works. What's next? Funding for half of a dam? Half an airplane? Half a withdrawal from Iraq?

Apparently the people in Washington who want to build a 12 foot wall have never heard of 13 foot ladders. We

need new thinking in the White House, the kind that would never allow such a symbol along our border. If your Latin America policy starts with a wall between cultures ... it will quickly collapse into rubble.

We need new thinking in the White House on immigration and trade.

Unfortunately, the indifference of the Bush administration has enabled Chavez and others to convince many Latinos that expanded trade with the US is bad for Latin America.

The good news is that there are real opportunities to build mutually-beneficial trade and development partnerships with Latin American countries. We can have trade agreements that are good for workers, companies, and nations. Agreements that create jobs, fight poverty, and reduce the incentives for people to emigrate illegally to the United States.

Other countries are already taking advantage of our missed opportunities. China's trade with Latin America has doubled in just the past six years. The US needs to get off the sidelines and back into the game. It means jobs -- here in the U.S. and in Latin America.

We also need to recognize that for many years to come the US economy will continue to attract Latino workers. While our laws say they cannot come here, our economy says they should. We need to be realistic. . Our economy demands these workers, and it makes no sense to have them here illegally rather than legally. As we crack down on **illegal** immigration, we need to allow more **legal** immigration. We need a reasonable guest-worker program, and an earned path to legalization for those already here. And we need to work with the Mexican government to get them to stop encouraging illegal immigration ... and instead to start creating more jobs in Mexico.

We also need a more effective approach to the problem of illegal drugs. Recent action in Congress would reduce the emphasis on military intervention, and would increase US support for rural development, judicial reform, and law enforcement assistance programs. This is a needed step in the right direction. Our military cannot solve every problem by itself.

As with illegal immigration, we need to recognize that drugs are a development and economic incentive issue. Law enforcement is essential, but it is not enough. To fight drug trafficking, we need to arrest and punish dealers, but we also need to fight the profitability of the trade itself. We need to do more to reduce demand at home

I learned this in New Mexico. As we shut down over 400 meth labs, reducing supply ... we also undermined demand by providing quality drug treatment to break the addiction cycle.

And we must remember that a farmer who can make a living doing something legal, is far less likely to choose drugs production. A worker with a good job is less likely to fall into the clutches of drug smugglers. Stronger Latin American economies will be less vulnerable to drug lords.

Finally, we cannot truly engage Latin America if we do not include the the 28 million indigenous peoples who live there. Too many indigenous peoples live in deep poverty. Too many lack access to the essential services that others in their own countries take for granted. Too many are ignored by their own governments.

It is essential that our policies respect indigenous traditions and promote the rights of indigenous peoples.

After years of neglect and missed opportunities, the President's trip last March to Latin America was too little, too late. The next administration must do better. We will need a renewed commitment to Latin America based upon engagement, dialogue, and cooperation. We need equitable trade agreements, and comprehensive immigration reform.

Having spent part of my childhood in Mexico, and having traveled widely in the region, I understand the complicated dynamics of inter-American relations. My Mexican mother taught me to value and respect Latino culture, just as my American father made me so proud to be a citizen of the United States. My autobiography was titled "Between Worlds," not because we are worlds apart, but rather because we are so close -- and because it is so important that we work together toward common goals. Woody Allen once said that eighty percent of success is showing up. These recent years, we have not shown up in Latin America. Instead, we've **been** shown up by lesser leaders. That must change. If we do not attempt to succeed in the region, then surely we will fail.

Moving forward, we must preserve the shared faith of the people of this hemisphere ... in the principles of human dignity and democratic freedoms.

We must have the simple courage to be strong.

We must step up and lead.

Muchas gracias -thank you very much.

