

**Opening Statement
Chairman Dan Burton
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Committee on International Relations**

**Oversight Hearing
*“Immigration: Responding to a Regional Crisis”***

Today we will tackle perhaps one of the most difficult issues facing our hemisphere today...Immigration. From the beginning of its “New World” roots until this very day, the United States has served and continues to serve as a dream destination for countless millions. As a nation of immigrants, our culture, dreams, economic prosperity and our many other strengths come from the people who have landed on our shores throughout the centuries, whether by choice, necessity or coercion.

Today, the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere will examine immigration from a different perspective than what we have seen to date. We do not intend to discuss building walls or deploying troops. Instead, we intend today to engage our neighbors in the hemisphere in an effort to better understand the immigration problem and hopefully convince our neighbors that they too have a dog in this fight.

On February 16, 2006, the Mexican Congress unanimously adopted a resolution entitled “Mexico and the Migration Phenomenon.” This historic resolution represented the first public acknowledgement by the Mexican Congress that they too are responsible for curbing illegal immigration into the United States. Within the February 16th resolution is the commitment of the Mexican Congress to improve border security on their side and to ensure that everyone who leaves the country does so through legal channels. It also commits the Mexican government to secure its southern border, where migrants from South and Central America are crossing into Mexico on their way here. These principles and the other accompanying recommendations represent a sharp departure from past practices in Mexico. We commend the Mexican Congress for this new approach. We must now build on this commitment with the new government in Mexico as well as to engage the governments in all of Latin America.

In my experience, I have found that the majority of work-seeking illegal immigrants come from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, and other nations throughout Latin America. They are looking for better-paying jobs than those available in their home countries. If these economies were in better shape, and the local population was able to find jobs with more competitive wages, they wouldn’t want to leave, and the number of illegal immigrants looking to come here would shrink dramatically.

We can help these countries stimulate their economies through free- and fair-trade agreements, and we already are off to a great start. Congress passed the Central American Free Trade Agreement in 2005, integrating the economies of the five Central American nations as well as the Dominican Republic with our own and greatly expanding their access to foreign

direct investment. And we have pending agreements with Colombia and Peru, which should be taken up this Congress as well.

As chairman of the House International Relations Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, I have seen the progress being made by many of our friends in Latin America. In many countries, jobs are being created and economies are being strengthened. But such progress is not enough. We should work with the leaders of these countries, many of whom I have come to know well and admire, to build on the economic strength that comes from these agreements and redouble our efforts to close the development gap. I have every hope and expectation that they will.

Today, we will hear from witnesses for the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security, which are responsible for current U.S. Immigration policy and enforcement. These agencies will implement the final immigration bill that will come out of Congress very soon. I look forward to hearing their testimony and to asking them questions. Thank You.