

# COLOMBIA PROGRAM PROFILE



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## History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with the Colombian parliament in September 2006. The Commission focused its work with the Chamber of Representatives and Senate on strengthening independent research and analysis capabilities, the Chamber's budgetary oversight and drafting capacity, and legislative oversight of the executive branch.

The Commission implemented the partnership by sending two Congressional delegations to Colombia and hosting training seminars for Colombian members of congress and staff. The partnership was formally concluded in June 2010 by mutual agreement at the end of the last Colombian congress's term of office. The Commission continues to maintain a relationship with the Colombian legislature, focusing on issues of bilateral concern.

## Accomplishments

- Assisted staff of the Afro-Colombian caucus in developing tool for evaluating how government programs assist underprivileged groups
- Provided models for developing independent research and budget units.

## Background

In 1991, the Republic of Colombia adopted a new constitution which decentralized the state and reinforced the separation of powers among the government's three independent branches. The Colombian legislature is bicameral; the Chamber of Representatives has 166 members and the Senate 102 members, all of whom serve four-year terms.

## Congressional Delegations

In August 2009, U.S. Representative David Price led a congressional delegation of eight Members of Congress to Colombia to meet with the leadership of the Chamber of Representatives and Senate. The purpose of the visit was to assess the state of the legislative strengthening partnership with the Colombian legislature, three years into Colombia's membership. The Commission mutually agreed with its Colombian interlocutors that the legislative strengthening program would transition into a broader dialogue on bilateral issues in the future. The U.S. delegation concluded the visit with a visit to Cartagena, a center of Colombia's Afro-Colombian population and a focal point of the government's efforts to demobilize and reintegrate paramilitary and guerrilla fighters.

Two years prior, in August 2007, Representative Price led a congressional delegation of seven Members of Congress to Bogota to meet with members of the Colombian legislature to engage in peer-to-peer dialogue focused on the role of political parties in a legislature, fundamental committee operations, and the benefits of an independent budget analysis office in order to conduct legislative oversight of the executive branch. The U.S. congressional delegation also met with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe to

discuss issues of importance to the U.S.-Colombian relationship. Following its program in Bogota, the congressional delegation traveled to Medellin to meet with local officials and discuss their relationship with the federal government.

## **MP Seminars**

In April 2007, the House Democracy Assistance Commission organized a weeklong program for visiting members of the Colombia parliament. The program began with an overview of how the U.S. Congress works, led by the office of the Clerk of the House and the Congressional Research Service. Participants were then divided into three smaller workshops focusing on (1) the role of politics and political parties in the legislature; (2) the importance of an independent legislative research service; and (3) the benefits of independent budget analysis information and oversight of the executive branch.

An additional workshop on the role of committees in the legislative process was led by Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, who shared their experiences with their Colombian counterparts. Following the Washington, D.C. program, the Colombian legislators travelled to the congressional district of Representative Sam Farr in California to discuss constituent relations, public accountability, and community outreach.

## **Staff Seminars**

In October 2012, two staff members from the Colombian Chamber of Representatives participated in a staff institute to strengthen legislative budget analysis. Twenty-three staff from twelve partner countries participated in the program, which included meetings with officials from the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and staff from the House Budget, Appropriations, Agriculture, and Ways and Means Committees. Participants also met with representatives from the Government Accountability Office, the World Bank Institute and the International Budget Partnership.

Staff of the Colombian Parliament participated in a Legislative Staff Institute organized by the Commission in October 2008. The staff institute hosted 25 participants from 11 partnership countries for a 10-day program focused on congressional oversight and budgeting. Participants were given an overview of the budget process in the United States and the structure, organization, and services provided by the Congressional Budget Office. Issues of particular importance were the need for transparency, how to conduct revenue estimation, and how key policy issues such as health, defense, agriculture, infrastructure, and education affect the budgeting process.