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THURSDAY & FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2-3, 2008

THE 12TH ANNUAL MIAMI HERALD  
AMERICAS CONFERENCE

BILTMORE HOTEL | CORAL GABLES | FLORIDA, U.S.A.

NEW LEADERSHIP — NEW FOCUS: GOOD GOVERNANCE  
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE HEMISPHERE

FEATURED SPEAKERS:



LEONEL FERNANDEZ  
President, Dominican Republic



RENÉ PRÉVAL  
President, Haiti



EFRAÍN RÍOS MONTT  
President, Guatemala



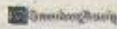
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ADEMS02

Wed Oct 1, 2008

# U.S. crisis brings out isolationist feelings

Just when the United States desperately needs to open new export markets to address what may become the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, a new poll indicates that Americans are turning increasingly isolationist.



ANDRES OPPENHEIMER  
IN MY OPINION  
@oppenheimer  
MiamiHerald.com

Whether it's free trade or immigration, Americans said in the Zogby International/Inter-American Dialogue poll that they have little trust in the rest of the world.

The survey of 4,700 people will be released during the 12th annual Miami Herald Americas Conference, which begins Thursday at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables.

Asked what should be done with the 1994 free trade agreement among the United States, **\*TURN TO OPPENHEIMER, 12A**

**MiamiHerald.com**  
See complete Zogby poll results on Latin American issues and get live coverage from the Americas Conference

Thursday Oct 2, 2008

# Isolation not answer for U.S.; more integration is

• OPPENHEIMER, FROM 1A

Mexico and Canada, 42 percent of Americans said it should be revised, 17 percent said the United States should withdraw from it and 21 percent said it should not be changed.

On whether Congress should ratify the pending free trade deal with Colombia, 18 percent of Americans said it should be ratified, 14 percent said it should be defeated. But 30 percent said it should be ratified with additional human rights conditions, which would in effect force a new negotiation of the agreement.

Fifty-eight percent of Americans said they support expanding the fence along the Mexican border and 34 percent said they oppose the expansion, the poll said. "Anytime in America that you see any kind of economic stress like the one we are seeing right now, you see this sort of reaction: a reaction against outsiders, against outside economies, against outside peoples," said John Zogby, who conducted the poll.

"But it may also reflect a rejection of policies coming out of Washington. There is a serious crisis of confidence in our government institutions," Zogby added.

He noted that this and other polls shows that, overall, Americans still support free trade and a humane treatment of undocumented immigrants, especially of children who were brought to the United States by their parents.

When I read the results of this poll to Marcelo Giugale, head of the World Bank's economic policies for Latin America, his reaction was, "These figures are scary."

"These figures are scary." "This shows a huge communications problem," Giugale said. "The benefits to the country of greater integration to the rest of the world, especially at a time like this, have not been explained well enough to the American people."

My opinion: I agree. There are several reasons why the United States needs greater integration with Latin America and the rest of the world. Economically, even if a new financial rescue deal is hammered out in Congress in the next days, the current U.S. credit crunch will significantly slow U.S. and world economic growth, which will mean fewer U.S. exports and fewer jobs for Americans.

Exports have been one of the few bright spots of the U.S. economy in recent months, if not the only one. And don't be fooled by CNN's Lou Dobbs and other reckless populists who tell you every day that America is losing good jobs to Mexico. The top U.S. exports to the world are high-end goods such as nuclear reactors, and the top U.S. exports to Mexico are electrical machinery and other relatively expensive products.

According to U.S. Commerce Department figures, U.S. export-related jobs pay about 15 percent more than the average U.S. job. We need more free trade deals — not fewer — as well as to expand the ones we have so that U.S. manufacturers, farmers and service providers can export more goods to 95 percent of the world's consumers who live abroad.

Financially, the United States relies heavily on other countries' purchases of U.S. Treasury Bonds and other debt instruments, which have allowed the Bush administration to spend much more than the country could afford over the past few years. If the irresponsibility of the 133 Republican and 95 Democratic members of the House who voted against the rescue package leads to a major U.S. recession and countries stop trusting the U.S. financial system, Americans will have even less money available to conduct

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**IMPACT ON U.S. IMAGE**  
Politically, barring an immediate passage of a new rescue plan, financial chaos on Wall Street will have an effect on America's image as a country that works. The next U.S. president will have a harder time preaching democracy and fundamental economic and political freedoms abroad if his country is perceived to be collapsing.

The world will be a worse place than it is today. And for Latin America, all of this will be bad news. A slowing world economy will push down commodity prices that have fueled economic growth in South America, and a depressed U.S. economy will mean a major drop in exports and tourism in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

It's easy to be a populist and blame others in times like these. But it is also utterly reckless. What we need are leaders who can stand up to populism and make the case that only through greater economic integration will this country be able to sell high-end products to the rest of the world, and avoid the loss of millions of American jobs that are being increasingly threatened by the country's isolationist mood.

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AMERICAS CONFERENCE

# Market crisis 'threatening democracy'

■ On the first day of The Miami Herald's Americas Conference, Latin American leaders warned that the U.S. economic meltdown could disillusion the region's fledgling democracies.

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES AND JANE BUSSEY  
jbussey@MiamiHerald.com

The crisis gripping U.S. financial markets not only menaces economic stability in much of Latin America and the Caribbean but also threatens fragile democracies, leaders from the region said Thursday.

On the same day the \$700 billion financial industry bailout bill was inching its way through Congress, regional political leaders, elected officials and analysts pointed to the consequences a Wall Street meltdown could have on countries in the region.

"It's really threatening democracy, what is taking place," Dominican President Leonel Fernández said in his keynote address to The Miami Herald's

\*TURN TO LATIN AMERICA, 12A



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Watch videos and view  
photos of the conference

NATION, 4A

## SEARCHERS LOCATE FOSSETT'S PLANE

HUMAN REMAINS AT SIERRA  
NEVADA CRASH SITE YIELD  
ENOUGH MATERIAL FOR  
DNA TESTING

Friday Oct 3, 2008

• AMERICAS CONFERENCE

### Latin Americans call market crisis a threat

At The Miami Herald's Americas Conference, Latin American leaders warned that the U.S. economic meltdown could disillusion the region's fledgling democracies. (1A)

Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>

LATIN AMERICA, FROM 1A

2th annual Americas Conference in Coral Gables.

High expectations over the prospects of democracy in the region have given way to disillusion as democracy failed to boost economic prosperity and social advancement, Fernández warned. He noted that the Caribbean was not only buffeted by the financial and economic crises and rising food and energy prices, but also slammed by intense tropical storms and hurricanes this season.

"Because of the financial crisis there is uncertainty, and of course this provokes anxiety and anguish in all of our countries," Fernández said. He added, though, that he remained optimistic the region would overcome its problems.

The two-day conference, which ends Friday, tackles issues ranging from the fate of the middle class in Latin America and the role of political parties, to how the U.S. presidential elections will determine future U.S. policy for the region.

World market events have captured the attention of representatives of countries that until recently were confident they would avoid the financial mayhem that has changed the face of Wall Street and hit pocketbooks on Main Street.

"The whole world is worried about what could happen here," said Marisol Argueta de Barillas, El Salvador's foreign minister.

**VULNERABLE**

Argueta de Barillas said her country was vulnerable because more than half of Salvadoran exports are destined for the United States; the banking system could suffer from diminished loans; and the flow of remittances — equal to almost 20 percent of the gross domestic product — is already slowing.

Speakers insisted the crisis underscored the deep divide in the region over a U.S.-backed economic model that prescribes deregulation, privatization and trade liberalization.

"This is not only a U.S. crisis," said María Fernanda Espinosa, Ecuador's ambassador to the United Nations.



NISSA BENJAMIN/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

*'Because of the financial crisis there is uncertainty, and of course this provokes anxiety and anguish in all of our countries.'*

- LEONEL FERNANDEZ,  
Dominican president

"This is a systemic crisis. It is a crisis of the economic model."

Earlier, World Bank economist Samuel Freije-Rodríguez outlined the persistent problem of inequality, which has failed to budge significantly despite economic growth. Race, gender and family income still determined which children would have access to an education and therefore opportunities for a better life, Freije-Rodríguez said.

"In Latin America, there are huge inequalities, not only among adults but also among children," he said, adding that with the exception of Uruguay, income inequality was worse in Latin America than in sub-Saharan Africa, a much poorer region

of the world. Latin America is considered a region of middle-income nations.

Former Costa Rican presidential candidate Ottón Solís said the financial turmoil and the bailout underscored the diminished faith even the United States held in free markets solving all problems.

Solís echoed Fernández in concerns that democracy was under stress from the stark disparities in the region and threats from the right and the left. "Inequality is a source of instability. In some corners there is democracy fatigue. Democracy has not delivered."

"Latin America is stuck between two insanities — free trade agreements and the insanity of petro-populism." He was referring to the

strict U.S.-imposed rules of free trade agreements and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez's lavish use of oil proceeds to build support.

While representatives from many countries insisted many nations were better prepared to withstand the market turbulence spreading from the U.S. subprime crisis, even the most optimistic conceded no one can predict how long it will last or how deep it will go.

"Chile has been doing well," said Carlos Appelgren, director of North America, Central America and the Caribbean in the Chilean Foreign Ministry. "We believe we are prepared to face this crisis whose dimensions we still don't know, either in the United States or in Chile."

**MORE OPTIMISTIC**

Christopher Sabatini, senior director of policy at the Council of the Americas, a business advocacy group based in Washington, took a more optimistic view of how the region will fare through the crisis.

"The central banks in Latin America are much stronger and [more] independent than they have ever been," Sabatini told an afternoon panel on Latin America's middle class. "A crisis like this could not have hit at a better time."

Sabatini also dismissed the fear that the crisis would benefit populism.

"There will be a fair amount of chest-thumping, gloating," he said. "The issue is not going to strengthen populism. The wheels have already fallen off that wagon."

Disappointment with the fruits of democracy also discourage the region's youth from participating in politics.

"Politics is dirty and boring" — that's what we keep hearing from students," said Sebastián Acha, a member of Paraguay's National Congress and a professor at the University of Asunción. "I tell them, that's why we have to get involved in politics, because it's dirty. If it were clean, there would be no reason to jump in."

Miami Herald staff writers Trenton Daniel and Frances Robles contributed to this report.

'The whole world is worried'

AMERICAS CONFERENCE

## AROUND THE CONFERENCE

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES

jcharles@miamiherald.com

When some people think of the most dangerous places in Latin America, Colombia and Mexico usually come to mind. But Wednesday's Foreign Policy Magazine ranked Caracas, Venezuela, as the "Murder Capital of the World."

The news was delivered by Leopoldo López Mendoza, the mayor of Chacao, an upscale municipality in Caracas. Just last month, López made international headlines when Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez barred him from running for mayor of greater Caracas. López delivered the news about Caracas as a panelist at the Americas Conference on Political Parties and Elections in Latin America. The city has 130 homicides per 100,000 residents in comparison to the once bloody city of Medellín, Colombia, which now has just 30 murders per 100,000.

AMERICAS CONFERENCE

### NO TV CABLE

Some speakers ask for projection screens – others ask for technology to stream their words live from the Biltmore Hotel.

A day before the conference, one dedicated worker got to know the hotel inside and out as she ran around scouting out the loading docks, parking lot, golf course – and even the kitchen.

Not even the mojitos and hors d'oeuvres were enough to deter her mission: finding the right place for a 24-foot truck to park and still get its 754-foot cable inside the ballroom where Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernández was to give his luncheon address.

Too bad the plan was aborted at the last minute. Maybe it was the fear of having all of those attendees trip over the cable as they rushed in to hear Fernández give his address.

Speaking of Fernández, during a serious address about how the Caribbean is being hit by five simultaneous crises – among them consecutive storms and rising food and fuel prices – Fernández couldn't help but issue an observation on the U.S. presidential elections.

"I am not supposed to take sides," he told the group with a sly smile, but in the Dominican Republic many say Barack Obama looks like he's half Dominican and many say he comes from my neighborhood.

### NO MCCAIN, NO SACA

In another incident related to the U.S. presidential elections:



SACA

El Salvador President Tony Saca was a confirmed speaker to this year's Americas Conference. But on

Tuesday night, a Salvadoran embassy official in Washington and another source close to Saca called conference organizers asking frantically whether John McCain was coming. Both were told that due to the financial crisis, McCain would be represented by his Latin American advisory team leader.

Hours later, the U.S. Secret Service told conference organizers that Saca had canceled his visit to Miami.

### PINOCHET NOSTALGIA

Chile's late Gen. Augusto Pinochet is considered one of the most blatant symbols of human rights abuse and corruption in Latin America – or so we thought. But in a lobby corner, nostalgic chatter prompted one attendee to blurt this out: "Pinochet was a good president."

Some still credit Pinochet with setting up an economic system that is the basis for Chile's financial success.

### A NEW LANGUAGE

The attendees at the Americas Conference usually speak English, Spanish or Economics. Now we can add "red and blue" to that, thanks to a World Bank study examining inequalities in Latin America.

In trying to get the audience to better understand the inequality gap, speaker Samuel Freije-Rodriguez offered up this example: "There are two countries: 50 percent speak red; 50 percent speak blue."

*Miami Herald staff writers Jane Bussey, Trenton Daniel, Frances Robles and Latin America columnist Andres Oppenheimer contributed to this report.*

Friday Oct 3 2008

AMERICAS CONFERENCE

# Mayor's credo: Fight the power

Despite three assassination attempts and a government ban on seeking reelection, the mayor of a Caracas municipality said he remains devoted to bringing change to Venezuela.

BY FRANCISCO MARADIAGA AND FRANCES ROBLES  
frobles@miamiherald.com

"All the rights for all the people" is a phrase Leopoldo López is willing to die for.

It is also a concept some people are willing to kill him for.

There have been three assassination attempts on the 37-year-old mayor of Chacao, an upscale Caracas municipality. Eleven bullets took the life of his close friend and bodyguard.

López longs to change his country for the better, but he will have to do it from the outside the ballot box: Last month, the mayor was banned by the government from seeking office after his term expires. The move kept López from running for mayor of Greater Caracas, a seat he said he was poised to win.

"We had 65 percent support; there was no doubt we were going to win," López said Thursday at the 12th annual Americas Conference at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables. "We were going to break the myth in place for

the past 10 years that only those in power have the heart of the people."

Despite being knocked off the ballot, briefly kidnapped once and almost killed three times, López said elections are the only path for Venezuela's opposition, and for other Latin Americans growing weary of their leaders.

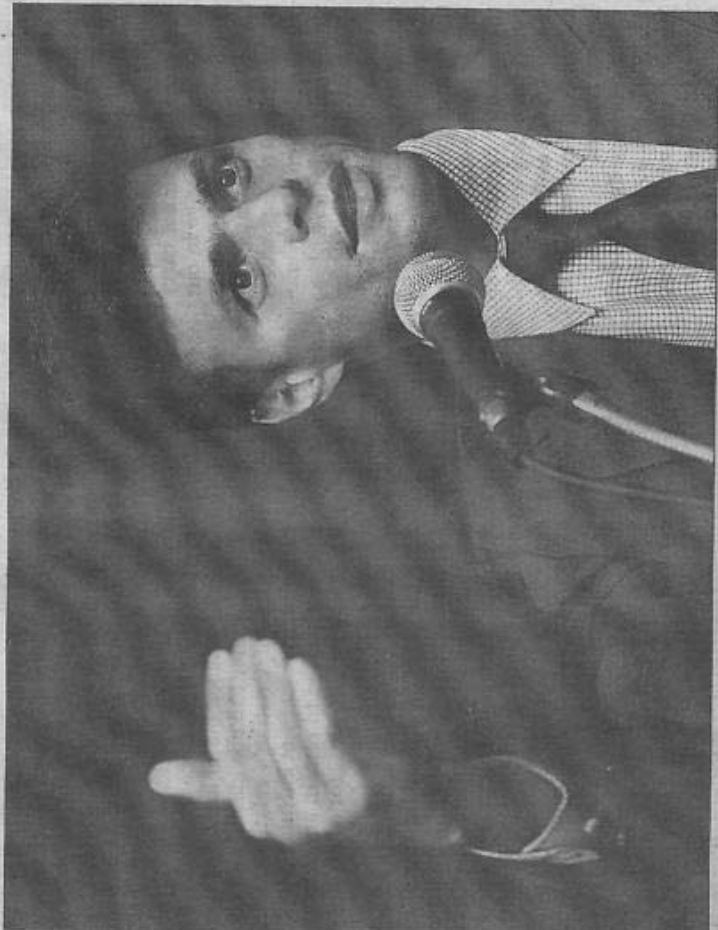
López has come to symbolize what critics of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez say is the government's effort to use its institutional powers to hold onto control. The young, newly married Harvard-educated López became a vocal crusader and white knight in the cause to oust Chávez.

Mayor of his town for eight years, he will have to step down when his term is up in 2009. His friend's killers have never been caught.

Last month, the Venezuelan Supreme Court upheld the government decision to keep López and more than 250 other candidates from running for office because of criminal charges against them. In López's case, the charges dated as far back as 1998.

Critics say the measure was an orchestrated move to keep Chávez's opponents at bay. Human Rights Watch complained, and López filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

López was accused of mis-



**BANNED:** Chacao Mayor Leopoldo López, who will have to step down when his term is up in 2009, speaks Thursday at the Americas Conference in Coral Gables.

NISSA BENJAMIN/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

*'Our message is not one of desperation. It's a message of struggle for a better future for Venezuela.'*

-LEOPOLDO LOPEZ,  
Mayor of Chacao

ering taking part in the electoral process, and that's good," he said. "They are playing the democratic game. They are no longer staging coups — or at least not as many of them are trying to stage coups."

López agreed.

He said opposition activists abstained from several elections in Venezuela, and were unhappy with the outcome. But last year voters defeated a constitutional referendum that would have locked in Chávez's power — a sign that the opposition must stick to elections and democracy, he said. Even if they got knocked off the ballot.

The referendum loss was Chávez's first in a decade.

"Our message is not one of desperation. It's a message of struggle for a better future for Venezuela," López said. "I

wanted to be the mayor of the city of Caracas, and the powerful and those that manage the power put a stop to it. But they cannot put a stop to dreams."

appropriation of funds, vast majority of the candidates affected by the government's move were Chávez supporters. The sheet also said López had ample opportunity to present exculpatory evidence.

"It was quite legal and based on a law that was revised in 2001 which his political party backed," said


Alex Main, an international relations advisor for the Venezuelan government. "It did not just affect the opposition."

Main said the opposition activists long abstained from participating in elections — and then turned around and complained about the results. "Clearly they are reconsid-

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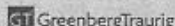
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# Préval: Haiti needs help, not deportees

■ Four tropical storms this summer have left Haiti unable to accept U.S. deportees, President René Préval says.

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES  
AND TRENTON DANIEL  
jcharles@miamiherald.com

Haitian President René Préval said Friday that his storm-ravaged country will no longer be able to accept U.S. deportees and, for the first time, publicly called on the Bush administration to let



PREVAL

undocu-  
mented Hai-  
tians stay in  
the United  
States until  
their home-  
land recovers.

"Haiti will  
no longer be  
able to

receive the deported individ-  
uals that the United States  
sends us on a regular basis,"  
Préval said in his closing  
address at the Americas Con-  
ference in Coral Gables.

"This is the occasion for  
the United States administra-  
tion to put in place for Hai-  
tians the benefit of TPS, the  
Temporary Protected Status,  
that has already been granted  
to other countries in the  
region, such as El Salvador,  
Honduras and Nicaragua," he

\*TURN TO HAITI, 12A



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IMMIGRATION

# Haiti needs help, Préval says

\*HAITI, FROM 1A

said.

After Hurricane Mitch in 1998, Washington granted the Central American countries TPS and it was recently renewed.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement last month temporarily halted deportations to Haiti but said it would review its decision on a daily basis. The relief is not TPS, a designation approved by Congress in 1990 for foreign nationals fleeing civil war and natural disasters.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security declined to comment late Friday on Préval's request.

In an attempt to slow deportations, Haitian government officials in the United States have said they stopped issuing travel documents to deportees after last month's Hurricane Ike.

After refusing for two years to ask for TPS for Haitians, Préval sent Bush a two-page letter on Feb. 7 requesting a deportation reprieve. Préval said he plans to make another formal written request in the coming days and had made a personal request to President Bush. But Friday's public plea was a first for Préval, who has been criticized for not speaking out to seek help for Haiti.

"Without losing his pride, he needs to reach out and ask for help. He needs to have a plan," Miami Haitian activist Marleine Bastien said. "The conditions the Haitian people are living in right now demand it.

"He needs to be more visible on the international scene. He's the commander in chief. He has the responsibility to bring the pains and suffering of this people for-



JOHN VANBEEKUM/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**SEEKING AID:** President René Préval says Haiti needs financial assistance to recover from storm damage.

ward," she said.

Préval's TPS plea came during a rare appearance in South Florida. The day before, he visited Haiti's northwest port city of Gonaives, which remains encased in mud weeks after Tropical Storm Hanna submerged it.

He repeated his call at a meeting Friday night with more than 50 Haitian community activists. He shared firsthand knowledge of the food shortage and other humanitarian issues facing Haiti because of the natural disasters.

"Now we are in an emergency," he told the audience.

Haitian community activists are planning a vigil for TPS on Saturday evening at Notre Dame d'Haiti Catholic Church in Little Haiti.

At the Americas Conference, Préval said that while he had seen TV images and read the reports on the storm damage, nothing prepared him for the sight and smell of the devastation. On Friday, Haitian authorities increased the official toll to 793 dead and 310 missing.

Préval called on Haitians

and friends of Haiti to assist the country in its reconstruction, saying the four back-to-back storms in three weeks had set the country back several years and "compromised our chance for development."

Haiti, he said, doesn't need just financial aid but investments of capital, expertise and desire to help the country. The two hurricanes and two tropical storms collapsed major roads and bridges, destroyed more than \$180 million in crops and left hundreds of thousands homeless.

"Haitians are hardworking and they need to be in conditions where they can produce. We need help to create those conditions so that we can return to real production," he said. "We need investments to rebuild our infrastructure through international assistance but also by mobilizing support in Haiti and abroad."

The United Nations, which issued a \$108 million urgent appeal on behalf of Haiti shortly after the hurricanes, has had a hard time attracting support. So far,

*Because of devastation from recent storms, Haiti's president says his country won't be able to accept people deported by the United States.*

only 17 percent has been collected, prompting Préval to say that he was worried that "we will find ourselves alone or almost alone in the face of action."

"We need to organize assistance, and I also ask that you take measures ... to appeal for the TPS and do what you can to push for this flash appeal by the United Nations. ... Also do what you can to help rebuild Haiti. I know that the Haitian Diaspora can mobilize itself," he said.

Préval encouraged Haitians living abroad to come back and contribute. "We are waiting for you," he said.

In the wake of the U.S. financial crisis, the presidential elections and Hurricane Ike hitting Galveston, Texas, Haiti has struggled to remain in focus.

Stressing the need for TPS, Préval said the plea was important for Haiti — not just for Haitian families living in the United States who send more than \$1.6 billion annually to relatives on the island — an important part of the country's gross domestic product.

"These people come [home] and do not find work," Préval said of deported Haitians. "They would represent too heavy of a burden on the Haitian budget."

Sept. Oct 4, 2008

## AMERICAS CONFERENCE

Sat. Oct 4, 2008

## U.S. INFLUENCE

# Candidates' aides debate role in region

■ Advisors to John McCain and Barack Obama argued over trade, Cuba, immigration and other topics at the Americas Conference.

BY FRANCES ROBLES  
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Latin America advisors to presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama clashed on everything from trade and Cuba to immigration Friday, exchanging ideas and insults in a debate on the next president's role in the region.

McCain advisors Adolfo Franco and Richard Fontaine — two of the four panelists at the Americas Conference session in Coral Gables — portrayed McCain as a man of experience whose familiarity with the region dates back to his birth in Panama. And a girlfriend way back when in Brazil, Fontaine noted.

Obama policy advisors Dan Restrepo and Francisco Sanchez pounced on their rivals, painting their candidate as the only response to years of neglect by Republicans and saying McCain was a flip-flopper who displayed "followership" and never shored up support for his own immigration projects.

## 'GLASS HOUSES'

"People in seven glass houses should not throw stones," Restrepo said, mocking McCain's vast real estate holdings.

On immigration, Franco shot back: "Barack Obama has been on the sidelines silent — then and now."

He said Restrepo offered a stricter Cuba policy stance than his own candidate and suggested a different candidate for the Democratic party:



PHOTOS BY AL DIAZ/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**SPEAKING FOR THEIR CANDIDATES:** Adolfo Franco, above right, and foreign policy advisor Richard Fontaine represented John McCain. Below, Francisco Sanchez, left, and Dan Restrepo spoke on behalf of Barack Obama.



"I would be more comfortable having Dan [Restrepo] as president of the United States for Latin America," Franco said. "His position is closer to John McCain's than Barack Obama's. We don't know where this guy stands on

Cuba."

The advisors said both candidates support comprehensive immigration reform. Only McCain advocates free trade, while Obama would be open to engage in dialogue with Cuba.



"Barack Obama does not want to leave any tool off the table," Sanchez said, responding to criticism that the candidate suggested he would meet with Raúl Castro without any preconditions.

"This idea that he is going to sit down and have tea and crumpets, as John McCain has suggested in the past, is ludicrous."

## INTEREST IN ELECTION

As Latin America continues its shift to the left, several nations plunge into storm-related crisis and high food prices have create even more havoc in the region, aspirations are high in the hemisphere for the upcoming U.S. election. Years of perceived abandonment by the Bush administration, which was focused on wars in the Middle East, created a vacuum experts say desperately needs to be filled.

"The new occupier of the White House will face a Latin America and Caribbean community that is disenchanted," Haitian President René Préval said at the conference.

"The crises facing the world today are not just of the moment. They are here to stay . . . As a consequence, all of these crises must be faced with a spirit of solidarity and regional responsibility in the spirit of a true alliance for progress."

## McCain ONCE HAD BRAZILIAN GIRLFRIEND

BY FRANCES ROBLES

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Sen. John McCain has had a decades-long history of involvement in Latin America - including a romance 50 years ago with a Brazilian girlfriend, the presidential candidate's foreign policy advisor said Friday.

Speaking at an Americas Conference panel



TEIXEIRA

discussion on the next U.S. president's Latin American policy, McCain advisor Richard Fontaine mentioned that the Arizona senator was born in Panama, traveled the region for years and had a Brazilian flame who recently emerged in the press. Proof, he said, that McCain's interest in the hemisphere runs long and deep.

"In fact, I saw, I guess it was last week, that his old girlfriend in Brazil has been found from his early days when he was in the Navy and was interviewed," Fontaine said at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables. "She's a somewhat older woman now than she was then, but it sort of speaks to the long experience he has had in the region - in the most positive terms."

But that's not all, Fontaine said.

"In a more official capacity, I mean certainly in Central America in the 1980s he was one of the few senators that traveled down to Central America quite frequently to deal with the issues that faced America at the time," he said. "He dealt with the environmental act, having traveled the Amazon rain forest in Brazil and the Galapagos."

The romance Fontaine referred to was with former model Maria Graçinda Teixeira de Jesus, who recently gave an interview to Brazil's O

Globo saying the former Navy pilot was quite the kisser. According to McCain's memoirs, *Faith of My Fathers*, they met in 1957, when his ship, the USS Hunt, docked in Brazil.

"I called him John but also my darling and my sweet coconut," she said. "He was a great kisser, I liked it so much that I bought a book to learn how to kiss."

Asked afterward about whether he was suggesting that McCain's fling with the Brazilian counted as Latin America foreign policy experience, Fontaine said: "The only thing I was trying to convey was that his experience goes back a long way."

"He was born in Panama, which illustrates a lifetime spent in Latin America. He has known a lot of people. The thing about the Brazilian girlfriend was in his first memoir and it stuck in my brain. Look at the two candidates and contrast his extensive experience. That's the only point I was trying to make."

After the conference was over and the story had swept through cyberspace, Fontaine called to clarify that his remarks were "a bad attempt at humor."

Teixeira said McCain "was not only a good kisser; he was good at everything. He was a great love of mine. But he left and it ended. Otherwise, I would be up there with him . . . I was a model and he was a military man who traveled a lot. I'll never forget him, and I would never have imagined that he would write a book and talk about me."

If he wins the White House race, she says she will send a telegram congratulating him. She'll sign it, "your great Brazilian love."

Special correspondents Alejandra Labanca and Francisco Maradiega contributed to this report.

## THE AMERICAS

## THE OPPENHEIMER REPORT

# Hard economic times may just be starting

**D**on't be fooled by the universal sigh of relief that was heard Friday when the U.S. Congress approved a \$700 billion package to rescue the U.S. banking system.

The measure will help avoid an economic collapse, but the U.S. economy will remain in the doldrums, and Latin America will be hit harder than many suspect.

Granted, the Wall Street crisis that rocked world markets in recent weeks will not mean "the debacle of capitalism," as Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez triumphantly proclaimed, nor will it cause the First World to "plunge like a bubble," to use Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's mixed metaphor.

That's not going to happen. More likely, it will mean a shift of the pendulum from the Bush administration's excessively deregulated free market economy to a more regulated one, as has happened so many times after cycles of U.S. overspending and undertaxing.

But judging from what I heard from Latin American presidents, economy ministers and leading economists at The Herald's Americas Conference hours after the House passed the bailout, the U.S. credit crunch will hit us all for the remainder of this year and in 2009, if not longer.



IN MY OPINION

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That will mean a slowdown in U.S. economic growth, the engine of the world economy, and the main source of trade, tourism and investment for most Latin American countries. The U.S. economy, which was projected to grow at 3 percent a year for the rest of the decade before this crisis, is now projected to grow by 1 percent next year, or not to grow at all.

As a result, Latin American countries will see a drop in their exports to the world's biggest market, fewer U.S. tourists, and less family remittances from their migrants living in the United States. This will especially hurt Mexico and Central America, whose economies are closely tied to the U.S. market.

But South America will also be hit hard by a drop in

result in less demand for oil, soybeans and other raw materials that have fueled the growth of Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and other countries in the region.

"The commodity bubble, while not bursting, is clearly deflating," Mohatarem said. Financially, Latin America as a whole will have greater difficulties to access foreign loans to pay for infrastructure projects or meet their foreign debt payments. In addition, the financial crisis comes at a time when many countries already are facing higher oil and food import bills.

"We have four crises that are affecting our countries simultaneously," Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernández said. "The finan-

cial crisis, the energy crisis, the food crises and the global warming crisis. There is no question that this will have an immediate, direct impact on us."

While international financial institutions have not yet officially downgraded their economic projections for Latin American economies in 2009, they probably will do so soon.

Augusto de la Torre, the head of Latin American department of the World Bank, told me in a television interview that Latin America's economy may grow by 2.5 percent to 3.5 percent in 2009. Previous World Bank projections, and those of most international financial institutions, were forecasting a Latin

American growth rate of at least 4.5 percent for next year.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

**My opinion:** The U.S. bailout is good news, but won't be enough. It will not spur economic growth unless

Washington starts reducing its \$11.3 trillion debt, and people renew their confidence in the economy. The next U.S. president should impose an austerity package — much like those prescribed to Latin American countries whose financial crises rocked world markets in the 1980s and 1990s.

As for who will get hurt the most in Latin America, the list will include the very countries that have been celebrating the U.S. financial crisis as the alleged "collapse of capitalism."

The decline in commodity prices will hurt the export income and may increase political tensions in Venezuela, Argentina, Ecuador and other raw material-exporting countries that have been spending above their means. Their populist policies were based on sky-high commodity prices — and that's an era that may have come to an end.



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**What's your opinion? Post on Andres Oppenheimer's blog. Don't miss his live chat at 1 p.m. every Thursday.**

## THE CARIBBEAN

# Region facing tough fight against drugs

BY TRENTON DANIEL  
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Trapped between the powerful narcotics cartels and drug-consuming nations, the Caribbean and Central American countries that serve as transit routes are outgunned and underfunded in their efforts to fight the drug scourge and rising violence, regional leaders said Friday.

"Violent crimes, from kidnappings to executions, have become front-page news . . . in the region," Panamanian Vice President Samuel Lewis Navarro told participants on the closing day of the 12th Annual Americas Conference, which examined the state of democracy and challenges in the region.

"In Panama, every poll shows that security is among the first causes of concern of the population," Lewis Navarro said.

Representatives from Belize, Panama and Mexico described the bleak circumstances governments face by trying to tackle organized crime, violent gangs and drug cartels.

Many countries have rewritten their criminal laws and are trying to boost the effectiveness of their police forces.

But drug gangs have managed to extend their tentacles into all levels of government and law enforcement by buying protection and driving fear into all levels of society with torture, executions and displays of brutality.

"With that very kind of atmosphere it is difficult to deal with criminals," said Wilfred Elrington, foreign minister of Belize.

"The people who are really involved in drug trafficking are never arrested," Elrington

said, noting these include "people in the government, people who are in the boardrooms and in banks who facilitate the trafficking."

Elrington said that countries like Belize, which produce no illegal drugs, have scant resources to battle the traffickers and are saddled with debts, higher prices for energy and the rising numbers of citizens being expelled from Europe and the United States.

Many of the poor see little chance of advancement except through dealing with narcotics.

"The security of the First World is very dependent on people from the Third World," he said.

Panama's Lewis Navarro also pointed to the need to offer the poor jobs as alternatives to crime.

"Security and development are two sides of the same coin," Navarro said.

Mexico's executive secretary of the National Public Security System, Monte Alejandro Rubido Garcia, blamed the rising violence in Mexico on the reaction of drug traffickers to the government's military offensive against organized crime cartels.

"No country is immune" to the global problems of the trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans, said Rubido Garcia.

He added that the Mexican government was attempting to reorganize its dispersed security forces, citing difficulties in coordinating the efforts of 1,600 different police forces in the country. But Rubido Garcia warned of the hypothetical scenario for "a post-modern war," if religious, political or other fanatics ever joined forces with the violent drug gangs.

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