

Status of U.S.-Latin American relations to be examined at May 16-18 conference at UCSD

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In the aftermath of Proposition 187, NAFTA, and increased drug trafficking at the U.S.-Mexican border, what is the current status of U.S.-Latin American relations? How these and other controversial policy issues have impacted and helped to shape the U.S.-Latin American relationship will be the subject of a conference May 16-18 sponsored by the Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies (CILAS) at the University of California, San Diego.

The three-day conference, *The United States and Latin America: Reassessing the Relationship* represents the first time independent analysts from leading universities and Latin American advocacy groups will sit down with public policy makers for a free-wheeling discussion of relations in the post-Cold War era," says conference organizer Peter H. Smith, CILAS director. Smith, a renowned authority on U.S.-Latin American relations, is the author of the new book *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S. -Latin American Relations*, published this year by Oxford University Press. In a pre-conference interview, United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America director Isaac Cohen pointed up the timeliness of the conference in light of the current election-year debate on U.S. trade. "Of concern to all of us is the emergence of a potentially dangerous bipartisan populist, protectionist trend to silence interest in free trade," said Cohen. "It's astounding that as we approach the last presidential campaign before the millennium, we are seeing a resurgence of a mercantilist viewpoint popular in the Middle Ages. By advocating the repeal of NAFTA and trade reciprocity in favor of a trade export surplus, proponents of a closed U.S. economy can, if they prevail, precipitate a major disaster for the entire world economy."

Kicking off Friday afternoon's panel on Prospects for Free Trade, Cohen will argue that in the two years since its inception, NAFTA has achieved impressive success. The relationship established between NAFTA partners has propped up Mexico's economy, enabling it to survive its latest financial crisis without resorting to a trade embargo. It also has bolstered the efforts of Mexico's struggling trade unions to enforce their right to assemble and organize, and has fostered international compliance with environmental legislation to save endangered species such as the water birds of Leon's Silver Lake reservoir.

During the conference, panelists will examine public policy toward the Americas on a country-by-country basis with focused sessions on Cuba, Mexico, and Brazil. Major policy issues to be explored and debated during the conference include the current status of free trade as a result of NAFTA and the 1994 Miami Summit, and the effectiveness of the Clinton administration's policies on immigration and drug trafficking.

On Saturday, U.S. Attorney Alan D. Bersin of San Diego, who maintains the U.S. is actually winning the drug trafficking war, will face Peter Lupsha, professor of political science at the University of Mexico. Lupsha will take the position that "despite flagrant abuses, the U.S. has 'certified' Mexico as a cooperative drug enforcement partner primarily as a way to justify free trade policy, thus facilitating repayment of U.S. loans."

The conference will conclude with a review of U.S.-Brazil relations by Thomas E. Skidmore, Cescedes professor of History at Brown University. Calling Latin America "the forgotten region," he will argue that "the economic development of Latin American countries like Brazil, Chile and Argentina, which are poised for

development, is being bypassed in favor of investing in Pacific Rim countries. In the long run, is it wise to allow Latin America's recent economic stagnation to divert us from investing in the recovery of a region with which we have such close historical, political and cultural ties?"

The conference, free and open to the public, will begin at 4 p.m., May 16. For more information about the conference agenda or to arrange conference interviews, please contact Steve Weingarten, (619) 534-7635.

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