

Ambassador Jeffrey Davidow

**An important decade of progress in Latin America, but much remains to be done
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Latin American expert Ambassador Jeffrey Davidow, in both his Global Business luncheon talk and his Global Issues evening presentation at UNF underscored Latin America's success in advancing democratic governance (only Cuba remains outside the fold though some democracies are clearly far more democratic than others). It has also successfully transitioned from outworn and failing statist economies to a free market system. Economic growth in the hemisphere's economies remains positive -4% - 6%, but the region is falling behind in the rapid advance of globalization (China, India) and is now less important than it once was. Latin America has a wealth of natural resources to boost growth, but to keep pace and move forward it needs to address critical problem areas. Davidow mentioned endemic poverty, corruption/cynicism, "creeping dictatorships" (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua), crime, narcotics, violence. But of all these he underscored poverty (40% below the poverty line—15 - 20% abject poverty) and the need for education as the most critical areas. The U.S. can help and we should he said.

The U.S.-Latin America relationship is consistently troubled by feelings that we ignore the Hemisphere (or conversely become too involved). In point of fact it is Latin America's stability that permitted the shift in U.S. attention and resources to areas like Iraq, Afghanistan and away from the neighborhood.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is aggressively using his billions in oil revenues to promote like-minded authoritarian, radical populist governments elsewhere, as in **Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Honduras**. The message and promises are very attractive to the large numbers of Latin America's poor and uneducated.

Chile is the model LatAm country in Davidow's judgment. **Brazil** may finally be getting it together to realize its long touted potential. It has taken a lead role in trade negotiations and there are new oil discoveries. **Colombia** has done a heroic job in its struggle to defeat guerrilla groups and drug cartels. **Peru** has done the same. **Mexico's** recent surge in violence on the border is a good sign and the result of a long-needed, determined effort by the Mexican government to defeat the power of the drug cartels. We are supporting Mexico's efforts, as we did those in Colombia and Peru, but we also must address our own large part of this problem as drug consumers.

Cuba under the Castro brothers remains a criminal Stalinist state. While its totally failed economy might make a trade opening with the U.S. attractive to them, it will not be allowed to go far and never at the expense of tight political control. Fidel strongly condemned the Gorbachev liberalization and saw it as "cracks in the wall"--ultimately responsible for the breakdown of the Soviet state. Blaming the U.S. economic sanctions for its economic disaster is also convenient. It is unlikely, said Davidow that any significant concessions in the area of human rights and democratic governance will be made by the current Cuban gerontocracy, though with the current mood in the U.S. little would probably be needed. Younger Cuban "apparatchniks" below the top remain a big unknown. Legal impediments to normalizing relations between the U.S. and Cuba were long ago passed by the U.S. Congress and major change in the relationship requires Congressional action. In any discussions with the Cubans, Davidow said, everything should be on the table—immigration, energy, drug trafficking—and human rights, not just economic sanctions.

-Ambassador Marilyn McAfee