

Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas

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It is critical that Florida and the United States provide bipartisan support for the 12 Western Hemisphere countries that have formed the alliance called “Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas.” These 12 countries that previously have negotiated trade agreements are: Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru and the United States.

The presidents of the member countries of Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas met in New York on September 24, 2008, and issued a communiqué announcing that their countries are committed to the following goals: (1) increasing international trade in the Americas that is broadly shared for the benefit of all citizens; (2) promoting regional trade whereby countries in the Americas can better compete with Asia and other regions of the world; (3) expanding regional economic development and job creation; (4) enhancing labor and environmental standards; and (5) engaging the private sector and civil society to advance these objectives through public/private partnerships.

The concept that these select countries in the Americas might form an alliance was first proposed by Robert Zoellick, the president of the World Bank. Mr. Zoellick emphasized that for this alliance to succeed in its goals it must be supported in the United States in a bipartisan fashion. He also suggested that the alliance be headquartered in Miami, to take advantage of its many benefits, such as a diverse workforce with significant cultural and bilingual skills and an impressive infrastructure that includes air transportation services, seaports, financial services and international academic institutions.

Some will criticize Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas since they believe it is too modest in its objectives because it might be abandoning the broader version of a 34 country Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). In our judgment Western Hemisphere integration must start somewhere, and this is a good start. Remember, the European Union also started small. We hope that Brazil, Uruguay, the Caribbean countries and other countries in the Americas will soon join Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas.

With the 34 democratically elected heads of state meeting at the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago in April 2009 (just six months away), it is critical that the leaders of our hemisphere develop a bipartisan consensus strategy on how our region will compete more effectively with the rest of the world. In our judgment, the Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas could be just the vehicle to create such a consensus.