

TRIP REPORT: PERU & COLOMBIA NOVEMBER 2011



A delegation from the House Democracy Partnership (HDP) traveled to South and Central America from November 5-12, 2011, to renew the commission's partnership with the Congress of Peru, meet with counterparts in HDP partner Colombia, and conduct bilateral visits to Panama, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The delegation was led by HDP Chairman David Dreier (R-CA) and included HDP members Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), Sam Farr (D-CA), and Susan Davis (D-CA), along with Reps. Dennis Cardoza (D-CA) and Gregory Meeks (D-NY). This was HDP's fifth outbound legislative strengthening mission of the 112th Congress and 26th overall since 2005.

The delegation began its mission with a brief stop in Panama (November 5) for a dinner with President Ricardo Martinelli, senior cabinet officials, and members of the Panamanian Congress. The dinner gave Members an opportunity to discuss the implementation of the recently enacted U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement and other issues of mutual interest, including the consolidation of Panama's democratic institutions since its military dictatorship was overthrown in 1989.

The central focus of the delegation's mission was its program in Peru (November 6-8), which has been one of the commission's most active partners since the HDP program began in 2009. National elections in July 2011 led to high turnover in the Peruvian Congress, and the current visit allowed HDP members to reintroduce the program to their Peruvian counterparts and renew discussions about the key challenges they face. In a meeting with Speaker Daniel Abugattas and members of his leadership



HDP Chairman David Dreier (R-CA) reaffirms a memorandum of understanding with Peruvian Speaker Daniel Abugattas in Lima.



HDP Member Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) discusses constituent outreach with Peruvian MPs.

team, the delegation emphasized the importance of making the legislature more accessible and accountable to the public and discussed ways in which the U.S. and Peruvian legislatures could work together to address this and other challenges.

The delegation then held seminars on three key areas of legislative strengthening with Peruvian MPs: one on ethics with the Ethics Committee, one on oversight and committee operations with committee chairs, and one on constituent relations and media outreach with members of various political parties. The delegation also attended a lunch hosted by Speaker Abugattas and the Women's Peruvian Parliamentary Caucus, where Chairman Dreier signed a new Memorandum of Agreement reaffirming HDP's partnership with Peru, and a reception for Peruvian MPs and civil society leaders hosted by the U.S. Ambassador. Concurrently, HDP staff met with senior staff from the Peruvian Congress to discuss common challenges faced at the staff level and areas of future cooperation.

The delegation's next stop was Colombia (November 8-10), where the HDP relationship with the Congress dates to 2006. Since the election of President Juan Manuel Santos in 2010, the Colombian Congress has enacted several major laws to address entrenched challenges facing the country, including a major law to compensate the victims of Colombia's internal conflict. The current visit allowed HDP members to take stock of these and other developments and discuss various issues of bilateral concern, including the recently enacted U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement.



The delegation is recognized for support of the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement.

During a breakfast meeting with President Juan Manuel Santos and senior cabinet officials, members discussed the need for Colombia to effectively implement both the free trade agreement and labor action plan to ensure the gains of trade are broadly shared and emphasized the continued importance of the U.S.-Colombian relationship. The delegation's program in the Colombian Congress included visits with the leadership of the House and Senate, a working lunch with members of the Afro-Colombian and Women's caucuses, and a ceremony in plenary session honoring the delegation for its support of the free trade agreement. As in Peru, HDP staff also conducted peer-to-peer meetings with their counterparts in the Colombian Congress.

Following Colombia, the delegation visited El Salvador (November 10-11), which recently marked a milestone in its democratic development with the peaceful transfer of power to the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), which waged a guerilla insurgency against the Salvadoran government during the 1980s. In addition to meetings with President Mauricio Funes and senior cabinet officials, the delegation conducted a working lunch with the leadership of the Salvadoran legislature and attended a reception for Salvadoran civil society leaders hosted by U.S. Ambassador Mari Carmen Aponte.

The delegation concluded its mission in Guatemala (November 11-12), which has an excellent record of free and fair elections since the end of its civil war in 1996. The country's most recent election was held just a week before the delegation's visit, and HDP members met with both outgoing President Álvaro Colom and incoming President Otto Pérez Molina to discuss closer U.S.-Guatemalan cooperation to expand trade, combat drug trafficking and crime, and strengthen democratic institutions. The delegation also met with the leadership of the Guatemalan Congress and conducted a working lunch with representatives of various political factions, while HDP staff also met with their Guatemalan counterparts.



The delegation meets with the leadership of the Guatemalan Congress in Guatemala City.

Overall, the delegation successfully advanced HDP's mission of strengthening democratic institutions abroad and fostering closer ties between the U.S. Congress and key partners. HDP members also met with U.S. Peace Corps volunteers in four of the five countries visited during the trip, to highlight the important work of the Peace Corps in Latin America.

For more information about HDP programs, please visit <http://democracy.house.gov>.