



Center for Strategic and International Studies ■ Washington, D.C.

On January 23, 2007, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Thomas A. Shannon Jr., spoke at CSIS on the opportunities and challenges facing the region. He emphasized the importance of regional unity in the transnational security agenda, market-driven and government facilitated economic integration, and international migration. He also highlighted the need for democratic governments to address persistent issues of poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Secretary Shannon called for 2007 to be a year of engagement between the United States and countries of the Western Hemisphere. He stressed deepening commercial ties, finding points of convergence with the newly elected leaders in Latin America, and contributing resources, financial assistance and political support to the issues identified by the governments of the region. He concluded by expressing the need to end political divisiveness and to articulate policy in terms of development and economic well-being for all citizens.

During the Q&A session, Secretary Shannon responded to questions on bilateral energy policy with Brazil, President Calderon's early crack down on drug cartels, Venezuela's plans for telecommunication nationalization, debt restructuring in Ecuador, and regional financial integration in Central America, among others. He spoke positively about the potential of new bilateral energy policy with Brazil that would provide financial mechanisms to protect countries vulnerable to petroleum price spikes without gutting social agendas and to encourage research and development in alternative fuels, such as ethanol and bio-diesels. He was encouraged by President Calderón's early commitment to extraditing drug cartel kingpins, a sign of continued commitment to former President Fox's legacy of bilateral cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico. He also confirmed that President Chávez had indicated a desire to improve relations with the United States.