

3/1/2007 - Congressman Sires Opening Statement Foreign Affairs Subcommittee On Western Hemisphere

For Immediate Release

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(Washington, D.C.) - Today, Congressman Sires attended the first hearing for the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere concerning United States policy toward Latin America. Congressman Sires expressed his concerns to Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon about the lack of attention to and the reduction of funding for Latin America:

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

"Assistant Secretary Shannon, in reviewing the budget for the Western Hemisphere, I have noticed the cuts in assistance that we are providing this region.

"I am very concerned about this since at the same time we have seen the election of Presidents in Latin America that are not supportive of the United States and our democratic goals. For example, there is Evo Morales in Bolivia who has decriminalized coca cultivation and increased ties to Cuba and Venezuela. In Nicaragua, there is Daniel Ortega who we are unsure of what his position is because he continues his anti-U.S. rhetoric.

"And now to make matters worse, we have seen the President of Iran touring Latin America and building relationships with Latin American countries.

"The Administration's request for 2008 reduces funding for Child Survival and Health Programs by over \$35 million. In addition, the President's budget proposes cutting over \$5 million in assistance to Bolivia. By decreasing our involvement in this area, the U.S. is creating a void that is allowing other countries that are anti the United States, like Iran, to step in and fill. I see these cuts as highly problematic and I look forward to discussing the Administration's rationale for these reductions later during this hearing."

As a member of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Congressman Sires will continue to ask tough questions to this Administration about their Latin American policy.