

Colorado's Commercial Outreach to Latin America

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The passenger output of Denver International Airport (DIA) places it as the major hub in the center of the country. Its passenger traffic makes it one of the top four airports in the United States and helps make the statement that it is great to do business in Colorado.

As with the airport, the state also projects major power in attracting business interests both nationally and internationally. People like Gil Cisneros have seen to it that Colorado is not left behind in reaching for a fair share of international markets. His collaboration to achieve this goes back to the time he led the regional Small Business Administration some decades ago. I first had the opportunity to see him at work during the outstanding forums for which his organizations are known.

My first collaboration with his leadership was on two U.S.-Mexico Chamber of Commerce commercial delegations to Mexico that featured Gov. Owens' efforts to bring Colorado closer to its economic partners abroad. The first centered its work in Mexico City and Guadalajara where Colorado has an International Trade office and the institution I represented had students studying abroad in one of its state universities.

The second U.S-Mexico Chamber trip included Mexico City and Monterrey, Nuevo León in the north that gave us a peek into the high-tech capabilities of the host country. Monterrey Tech, Mexico's MIT located in that city, has been a major center of innovation for the nation and its customers abroad.

As Cisneros' leadership shifted from the U.S.-Mexico Chamber of Commerce to Chamber of the Americas (COTA) the focus also changed from a Mexico perspective and interest to the broader landscape of North and South America. It was a timely change because the 21st century has brought in Asia as a major player in the Americas as China is moving into the space left by the United States' lack of attention to its South American neighbors.

Some of the COTA forums reveal for example, the emerging importance of Brazil among others and its voiced desire to be more than an Atlantic economic power with important European connections. China is calling and Latin America is responding by looking seriously at its Pacific trade.

Many have heard about Panama's expansion of its canal to accommodate the crossing of some of the largest ships that travel between the two oceans. Also, there is a contract between Nicaragua and Chinese interests to build another canal between the Atlantic and Pacific.

As if this was not enough competition, Peru is looking to its deep-water ports to provide leadership for the Asia trade. This requires major improvements in its infrastructure that can be facilitated by American companies and their technology.

This is where Colorado-based Chamber of the Americas is making major contributions as it brings together American corporate services, innovation and technology to help respond to Peru's improvement needs. COTA sponsored commercial delegations have gained the confidence of Peru's economic and political authorities and are at work helping the country move forward.

On November 17, 2013, a COTA delegation made history by going to Cuba to take a look at the country's economic landscape. This represents a unique act by Cisneros and COTA, as history tells us that any move to build relations with the Cuban people remains controversial. But this is the 21st century and there are many changes in store for Latin Americans both here and abroad. A Colorado-based entity is helping to make a difference.