

Letter written to Kevin Lynch following a strategy meeting in Ottawa with a number of officials regarding the desired shift in the orientation of Canadian external interests toward Latin America. This letter argues that a significant aspect of such a re-orientation should be based on immigration policy which is less subject to political and economic winds and can build the foundation for relationships. The letter also argues that Latin America could be an excellent source of immigrants who are easy to integrate.

October 29, 2007

To: Kevin Lynch
Clerk of the Privy Council
Government of Canada

From: Art DeFehr

RE: Comments on Relationships with the Americas

These comments are a follow-up to the dinner in Ottawa this past spring regarding the nature and importance of Canada's relationship to our hemisphere. First, it is clear that the primary relationship for Canada will be the United States followed by both Europe and Asia, for reasons that are valid and unlikely to change. After that there is room for a debate about the relationships with Africa, the Americas and also Australia. The comments that follow suggest how the America's relationship could be structured to be more effective and sustainable.

The America's relationship will be multi-dimensional and include political factors, economic, trade, security and also immigration. Some aspects of the relationship may depend on events, other may be policy-driven and the overall relationship may be affected by personalities in Canada and elsewhere. These comments suggest that there is a fundamental reason why a well-designed and executed relationship built around people with a focus on migration may be sustainable over a range of other circumstances and may in fact provide a stronger foundation for developments in the other sectors of interest.

The underlying assumption is that Canada will continue to have an immigration policy that supports a relatively high level of immigration based on our own economic interests. Mexico and the balance of Latin America should be considered as a uniquely attractive source of immigrants in view of our needs and also the issues that surround immigration.

- Latin America and Mexico in particular are a source of surplus people and will be for at least a decade or more.
- Although this group has a historical attraction to the United States, the current political climate with regard to Hispanic immigration (into the United States) should create conditions where this group will consider the attractiveness of other alternatives. The abusive US immigration policy with respect to this region can be used to the advantage of Canada.
- Latin America has a significant population of people trained to levels where they can compete in our economy. In addition, a number of these countries have education systems influenced by Europe with a stress on technical and trade-related skills that

are often in demand in Canada but our own education system is deficient in these areas.

- Latin American immigrants generally have a set of skills that makes them more adaptable to successful integration in Canada. This includes training, experience in urban living and a structure of society that is not all that different.
- Latin Americans generally have a cultural and religious background that encourages integration into the mainstream. There will be fewer barriers to inter-marriage and other elements of integration.

- Certain immigrant flows tend to be very aggressive when it comes to the use of the family re-unification vehicle to bring a long stream of relatives. In some cases the original person has the right skills but the people who follow may be much less able to integrate. The Latin American population would have two important characteristics with respect to this question. First, the people who follow would be more likely to be similar in terms of skills and adaptability. Second, the interest in bringing parents and grandparents to Canada from places like Mexico would be a much lower priority. If the immigrant has the freedom to travel the relatively short distance home and can support the elder generation with remittances - they are much more likely to prefer to remain where they are. This would reduce some of the critique of the current program where the pressure of family re-unification tends to overwhelm the system.

Immigration flows are a combination of several 'windows' or programs. Although refugees and investors will be somewhat relevant, the bulk of potential immigrants from the south would be economic. The current Canadian immigration system does not have the focus on the Americas or the 'middle skills' that would be important to the success of the recommended emphasis. It could be improved but will on its own have limited impact.

The Provincial Nominee Program could be used more effectively for such an emphasis since certain provinces could choose to focus on this region and develop expertise in certain source countries and with certain Canadian embassies. This could happen with little policy change but some meaningful encouragement and support at the embassy level.

Finally, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) already works with Mexico in particular for agricultural workers. This program should be expanded and extended in any event to become more of a 'front door' to the PNP or the regular immigration program. In order for that to have maximum impact, there should be greater targeting at the TFWP level than at present. Provinces and industries should be encouraged to consider which flows of workers will provide the best outcome in terms of converting TFWP migrants into candidates for permanent residents and citizenship.

Conclusion:

An enhanced focus on migration from the Americas and Mexico in particular would increase the business and political linkages that would assist the desire to develop an overall stronger Americas relationship. Migration could also survive the variations in policy and personality that may affect the other aspects of the relationship. In addition, a successful migration policy from the Americas would be easier to implement and would reduce the associated problems of cultural adaptation and size of demand resulting from family re-unification. The Government of Canada should take a comprehensive look at this question and adjust the migration policies to take greater advantage of our ability to be a preferred destination for people of Hispanic origin.