

## Harry Reid's Junket

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**Free Trade:** It's tempting to snicker about Sen. Harry Reid's trip to Latin America as just another congressional junket. But this could be pretty important if Reid comes around on free trade. Let's see if he's serious.

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With few words, the Senate majority leader announced his intent to improve U.S. ties with Latin America by leading a delegation of six other senators, Democrats and Republicans alike, to Paraguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico over Thanksgiving break. At first glance, Reid seemed to justify the trip with an old-fashioned dose of Bush-bashing.

"Senator Reid believes that U.S.-Latin American relations have been neglected by this Administration," "His first and now second trips as Leader have been to the region, a symbolic show of respect and goodwill."

It's a stretch to think that Bush has neglected the region when it's Democrats like Reid who've done their utmost to keep Latin American nations from getting permanent free-trade treaties.

Is it Bush's fault 46 million Colombians, led by a pro-free-trade president with a 78% approval rating, still have no free trade deal?

Wednesday in Bogota, Reid's group visited union officials, a prosecutor and President Alvaro Uribe, all pivotal players on free trade.

A day earlier, Reid said he didn't anticipate approving the Colombia pact unless he could verify changes that reduced the murders of union officials, El Universal reported.

That raises questions about Reid's sincerity, because Colombia has reduced union deaths sharply since Uribe came to power.

Ten years ago some 300 unionists were killed in a year by thugs. This year it's about 25, proportionately lower than the population as a whole. Ironically, the last murdered Colombian unionist died because he advocated free trade.

How Reid can go to Colombia, see the growing prosperity, the public safety, the kids now unafraid to go to school, the nightly celebrations of a peace they had never known before, and then insist on shutting all 46 million out — especially after touring lousier places with no free trade, like Paraguay — is impossible to understand.

What is known is that Reid has an appalling record on free trade. He's voted against free trade for Singapore, Chile, Oman and Central America, even trying to undermine Costa Rica's popularly approved trade pact last September. The free-market Cato Institute gives Reid just a 17% favorable rating on free trade. Coming to Latin America and telling the locals they aren't good enough for free trade is the wrong way to "improve" Latin American relations.

If Reid really wants to do one better than Bush, he should seize the day on free trade and scold Bush for not getting it done sooner.

Maybe then this wouldn't be a junket, but an accomplishment.



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