



Trent Zimmerman MP
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Australia and Latin America

Mr Speaker

I am proud to represent in this parliament an electorate that is such a wonderfully diverse multicultural community. North Sydney is home to people from every corner of the world, and they have added to the vibrancy of the North Shore. We are a welcoming community, and I see this best epitomised at the scores of citizenship ceremonies I've attended since my election to parliament.

One of the trends I have observed at those ceremonies and through my other work in the community is the growing number of people with Latin American heritage who have made their home in our area.

While the numbers, relative to people of other backgrounds, are still small, there is discernible growth. In fact, around 2,000 residents in my electorate identify as holding Latin American ancestry, with those with Brazilian, Colombian, Chilean and Peruvian heritage collectively forming the majority of that number.

I know that those from South and Central America and from Mexico will add to the diversity of our area as they bring their own special cultural traditions. Those in my electorate are part of a Latin American community which numbers over 140,000 across Australia.

Latin American migration to Australia has a long history. In fact, the first recorded Latinos arrived in Australia from Chile in 1837.

It is an interesting historical fact that one of them was an exiled Chilean President, Ramon Freire, who was ousted during a military coup. A notable figure in Chilean history, his descendants were to occupy the presidency on two additional occasions, including during the more recent term of Eduardo Frei in the 1990s. Those links, for people escaping political turmoil, extended into more recent times, with former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet having spent six months in Sydney in exile during the Pinochet regime.

I know that what I am seeing in my electorate is a national trend. More Latin Americans are moving to Australia as students, short-term workers or permanent migrants, and this is of benefit to Australia. I hope it reflects a broader development, a deeper engagement with a part of the world which it is fair to say has for too long been neglected by Australian governments.

I passionately believe that the potential of our economic, cultural and political relationship with Latin American countries is considerable. I am pleased that this has been recognised by the Coalition Government, and we have seen great strides made over the last six years to improve our engagement with nations on the other side of the Pacific.

I was reminded of this growth, still incomplete but with such great potential, during a conference held here in the parliament last week by the Australia-Latin America Business Council. The council, under the leadership of its president, Richard Andrews, and CEO, Marcelo Salas, has been a staunch and consistent advocate for stronger ties between our two regions, and I congratulate them on what they are achieving. ALABC turns 30 this year, and during that period it has helped facilitate a growing understanding of the opportunities that lie in Latin America.

I also explored some of the opportunities with South America through my role as convener of the Australia-Argentina Parliamentary Friendship Group in the 45th Parliament—and I want to acknowledge the ambassador, Hugo Gobbi, for his incredible advocacy as well.

The case for our engagement is obvious and growing. The continent's population will reach over 700 million by 2030, meaning it will be home to over eight per cent of the world's population and be its third largest region. Over the same period, its middle class will reach 345 million. While many Latin American nations have experienced both economic and political difficulties—and we particularly despair about the situation currently faced by Venezuelans—the trajectory of economic growth is clear. So too, I hope will there be greater resilience for its democratic institutions.

With a GDP 76 per cent higher than the combined GDP of ASEAN nations, the opportunities are just so great. This has been a focus for the coalition government. We saw it with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which has improved our trading opportunities with Chile, Peru and Mexico. Those opportunities will be further expanded if we can conclude an agreement with the Pacific Alliance, which includes Mexico, Columbia, Chile and Peru.

Soon this parliament will consider our free trade agreement with Peru. This agreement will open up new opportunities in one of the fastest-growing economies in Latin America. I am disappointed that, to date, the opposition has been unwilling to extend its support for the Peru FTA. It would be exceptionally short-sighted for Labor to oppose this agreement.

These agreements are, I hope, just the start. We can broaden the depth of economic relationships. I would hope that an FTA with the Mercosur nations will, one day, be on the agenda. And the expansion of direct air routes, for example, to Mexico and Brazil would add vital aviation capacity.

This is a region that does have so much to offer Australia, and I will continue to advocate for an even greater focus on a part of the world that, once considered economic competitors, can, will and should be our partners.