

Hyde Backs Federation Of Americas

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Rep. Henry J. Hyde, chairman of the House International Relations Committee, plans to propose today that countries in the Western Hemisphere form a Commonwealth of the Americas with common political, security and economic policies.

In a speech he is scheduled to deliver at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation at Fort Benning, Ga., Hyde (R-Ill.) argues that his initiative could secure recent democratic and economic gains made by the region's countries.

"The first step in that process is to recognize that our fates are joined together. The second is a commitment to act together to make real the opportunity that lies before us: to bring into being the Commonwealth of the Americas," Hyde says in the text, which was provided by his office.

He offers few details about how the commonwealth would be structured or operate. But he says it could craft common efforts to combat drug trafficking and prevent outside countries from intruding in the hemisphere. In the economic realm, he calls for lifting barriers to trade among the region's countries, saying the Free Trade Area of the Americas initiative backed by President Bush could serve as an important element of the commonwealth.

Hyde said forming a commonwealth could provide consistency for the policies of the United States, which he said has long ignored many of its neighbors.