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Grupo de Amistad: House to launch Argentina Caucus

The U.S. House of Representatives is launching an Argentina Caucus to deepen the U.S. relationship with Argentina. The Argentina Project – part of the Latin American Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars – will host the formal launch on January 9, where U.S. and Argentine lawmakers will celebrate the milestone.

The caucus arrives at a [complicated moment](#). The Trump administration has spoken glowingly about Argentine President Mauricio Macri, whom President Trump welcomed to the White House in April. In August, Vice President Pence traveled to Buenos Aires and gushed over the historic reform process underway. “I’m here today to reaffirm the enduring bond between the United States and Argentina. And I’m here to commend you, President Macri, for your bold reform agenda – an agenda that’s transforming Argentina’s economy at home and restoring its reputation around the world,” Mr. Pence said at the Argentine presidential residence in Olivos. “Argentina, in many ways, is an inspiration across this hemisphere and across the wider world. And I’m here to tell you, on behalf of President Trump, the United States is with you.”

But at the same time, Argentina has been a punching bag for the U.S. Department of Commerce, where Mr. Trump’s “America First” agenda is arguably most coherent, and packs the biggest punch. In Mr. Trump’s first year in office, Commerce has twice targeted Argentine biodiesel exports for sky-high tariffs, and it is poised to prohibit Argentine aluminum exports to the U.S. market.

In this context, the U.S. Congress has been urging the White House to support Mr. Macri, a pro-market moderate whose predecessors distanced Argentina from the United States in favor of cozy ties to China, Iran, Russia and Venezuela. In April, the House passed a resolution reaffirming the United States-Argentina partnership and calling upon the U.S. Department of State to “increase cooperation with the Government of Argentina on areas of bilateral, regional and global concern.”

Now, U.S. lawmakers plan to play a more direct role in advancing bilateral cooperation. The Argentina Caucus will be led by two influential congressmen, Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), the chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, and Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), the ranking member (in other words, the most senior Democrat) on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Other members of the caucus will include Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.), Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.), Rep. Albio Sires (D-N.J.), Rep. Steve Womack (R-Ark.) and Rep. Carlos Curbelo (R-Fla.). Additional congressmen are expected to join. In their invitation to colleagues, the caucus chairmen called the United States and

Argentina “natural partners,” and urged the United States to “work collaboratively with the Argentine government to capitalize on current opportunities and to address the challenges ahead.”

The list of Congressional Member Organizations for the 115th Congress fills up 97 pages, and also includes a Brazil caucus. Still, the establishment of the Argentina Caucus is significant, particularly if lawmakers and their staffers pursue an ambitious agenda. Potential areas for cooperation include promoting democracy in the region, and joint efforts to combat transnational crime and drug trafficking. The caucus is designed as a platform to convene policymakers; hold briefings and meetings; educate lawmakers and staffers about developments in Argentina; and develop policy ideas to strengthen bilateral ties.

Argentine lawmakers appear eager to participate. The Argentine Senate and Lower House maintained United States “friendship groups” even during grim periods in the diplomatic relationship. For the caucus launch next month, several friendship group members are expected to travel to Washington (despite the summer holiday season and Mr. Macri's busy legislative agenda) including Deputy Cornelia Schmidt-Liermann, the chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Deputy Silvia Lospennato.

Happy New Year: From the Argentina Project

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