

Not all Venezuelans with Chávez

Delegation sheds light on politics during visit to Springs

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Many Venezuelans oppose their president's denunciations of the U.S. government, political leaders from the South American country said during a Wednesday visit to Colorado Springs.

The leaders agreed on that much, even while they held different views on Venezuela's political turmoil.

Colorado Springs is the last stop for the seven-person delegation from Venezuela. The group also visited Washington, D.C., and Mississippi. It includes representatives from four political parties, including Dayaneth Scorza, a member of the party of President Hugo Chávez.

Scorza said Chávez "exceeded himself" by referring to Bush as "the devil" during a speech to the United Nations General Assembly last year. Still, she said, relations between the countries would improve if a different U.S. president were in office.

"The government of Venezuela has nothing against the power of the United States, per se," she said through a Spanish interpreter.

Scorza is a staff member of the Venezuelan National Assembly and is active with the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela.

Other visitors pointed out practices they've seen here and want their country to adopt. Delsa Solorzano, a member of the opposition Un Nuevo Tiempo party, said she was surprised by television news coverage of vigorous debates between political parties here.

"It reminded me what it is to have freedom of expression, which is the way it has to be," she said. "It hasn't been that way in my country for quite awhile."

Chávez has stirred controversy in Venezuela by refusing to renew the broadcasting

license of a television network that aired news coverage critical of his leadership. He accuses the RCTV network of playing a role in an attempt to oust him from power in 2002, according to news reports.

A Washington-based organization called American Council of Young Political Leaders sponsored the visit, a program it runs twice a year with delegations from various countries. Participants are ages 25-40.

The U.S. Department of State helps pay for the program. Another sponsor is the Colorado Springsbased El Pomar Foundation, which gives \$35,000 annually, said Vice President Gary Butterworth.

The visit to Colorado Springs also included a tour of Colorado College and a meeting with Mayor Lionel Rivera.

“The mission is to bring people together despite what is happening government-to-government,” said Quentin Lide, chief operating officer of the young political leaders’ group. “We are exposing young leaders to different viewpoints and regions of the country so that they hopefully will have a better understanding about our political system, but also what the differences are in opinions across the United States.”

ABOUT THE COUNTRY

- The Republic of Venezuela is on the northern coast of South America. It covers an area more than three times the size of Colorado.

- The population is about 26 million people, most of them Spanish-speakers. The capital is Caracas.

- The country achieved independence from Spain on July 5, 1811. The president is Hugo Chávez, first elected in 1999.

- Venezuela is a major trading partner of the United States. About 60 percent of its exports come here, and about 36 percent of its imports are from the United States. The main export is oil.