

## **COTA North America in the Spotlight**

*by David Conde, November 19, 2014*

Governor John Hickenlooper led a Colorado Biennial of the Americas Summit business delegation to Mexico in July of this year. Gil Cisneros, CEO of the Chamber of the Americas (COTA), was a part of the delegation and took the opportunity to execute a planned opening of a COTA office in Mexico City.

Since then 11 corporations have become chartered members of the Chamber and the list is growing. COTA also has offices in Guadalajara, Monterrey and Veracruz, but it is the Mexico City office that is rapidly becoming a platform for a variety of commercial, trade and educational activities that show great promise.

In addition to the Mexico visit, and the important subsequent COTA developments in the country, the Chamber has held communications, discussions and forums to cement its work in Mexico as well as with its North American partners Canada and the United States. Among the forums was one featuring John Burstein, Cofounder and Principal of Mexico Retail Properties (and infrastructure investment throughout the country that featured the building of 65 shopping centers, toll roads, hospitals, schools, prisons, airports, water treatment plants and energy initiatives).

Among the projects were a significant number of Walmart store buildings that dot Mexico's landscape. The lessons learned in doing business in Mexico include understanding the legal parameters in the country, developing and employing personal relationships in doing business, educating and encouraging a sense of ownership on the part of the workforce, keeping the economic endeavor narrow in scope, and being patient with the cultural rhythm as it applies to business.

The trade challenges the United States faces with respect to North, Central and South America were well described by Eric Farnsworth, the Vice President of the Council of the Americas and Americas Society, in COTA's September 10<sup>th</sup> Forum. He expressed the need to bring more commercial cohesiveness to the Western Hemisphere, especially between the United States and Latin America. The development and implementation of more free trade agreements across North and South America is of paramount importance to future economic relations, especially given the gradual current tendency of Latin America to find closer market alliances with Europe and Asia.

Latin America is not the only one drifting away from U.S. global understandings. as Canada has major complaints about American trade relations treatment. Norman S. Leach, Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Canada, pointed out in an October 18<sup>th</sup> Forum that the Keystone Pipeline issue is only the most obvious of a list of trade dysfunctions that need to be fixed.

All of COTA's speakers about trade in the Western Hemisphere portray a sense of optimism reflected in the significant economic recovery in the world and the increasing globalization of

markets. A note of caution is evident, however, when talking about the United States being distracted by world events from major economic issues with its neighbors.

The latest event planned for COTA is a reception for the formal announcement by United Airlines, a Chamber sponsor, of the inauguration of a nonstop Denver-Panama flight schedule. The announcement will be held at the Palm Restaurant on Friday, November 21<sup>st</sup>.

Panama and its trade infrastructure have also been featured in COTA discussions. The latest expansion of the Panama Canal has put the country at the center of world trade, especially the Asian initiatives.

The Chamber's partnership with United Airlines on this event demonstrates again its focus efforts to promote business in the Americas. Under Gil Cisneros' leadership the organization will be doing much more of that.