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THE DIPLOMAT





Ambassador Patrick Duddy looks for common ground with Venezuela's president, Hugo Chávez

By David McKay Wilson '76

Career diplomat Patrick Duddy '72 is decidedly diplomatic when talking about the hot seat he occupies in the U.S. Embassy in Venezuela. The recently confirmed U.S. ambassador arrived in Caracas in late August, charged with finding common ground with a nation headed by President Hugo Chávez, the United States' most vocal critic in Latin America.

Duddy is well aware of the personal clashes between Chávez and President George W. Bush over American policy in the Southern Hemisphere and over Chávez's campaign for 21st-century socialism in his oil-rich nation. Duddy also understands the robust economic relationship between the two countries, fueled, so to speak, by Venezuela's petroleum and natural gas reserves.

"The current administration in Venezuela has argued for a different vision for the hemisphere and has frequently positioned its vision as an alternative to ours," said Duddy, in a telephone interview from Caracas. "That's explicit. So in this context, and acknowledging the tensions and the connections, we are looking for ways that our interests manifestly overlap. I want to find ways to cooperate in the interest of both nations."

For Duddy, a Bangor, Maine, native, the ambassadorship caps a diplomatic career in Latin America and in Washington that he began more than 25 years ago as a Foreign Service officer in the United States Informa-

tion Agency, a then-independent entity that supported U.S. State Department cultural exchange and information programs. The agency was abolished in 1999, when its information and exchange functions were folded into the State Department.

Duddy came of age in the late 1960s, and he was among those who viewed public service as both an attractive career and a calling that was "inherently important for us to do." As he was contemplating how he would serve, it's unlikely he would have dreamed of the scene on the evening of October 29, when he was in Caracas with his wife, Mary, to officially present his diplomatic credentials to President Chávez. First Duddy attended a ceremony at the presidential palace with ambassadors from Italy, Chile, and Vietnam, who also made their official presentations. Duddy had a 40-minute private conversation with Chávez, which press reports noted was the first between the Venezuelan president and a U.S. ambassador since 2002. The meeting five years ago came shortly before a short-lived coup d'état temporarily removed Chávez from power.

The pair discussed narcotics trafficking as well as baseball, one of Chávez's passions. Duddy, who called for improved ties between "our sister nations," pledged cooperation with Venezuela to combat drug trafficking.

Then they traveled to the National Pantheon to lay a wreath at the tomb of Venezu-

elan national hero Simón Bolívar. There, the honor guard played the national anthems of both countries in a solemn ceremony.

This was a new beginning for the United States and Venezuela. Chávez, who has become the developing world's sharpest critic of U.S. imperialism, has made a name for himself bashing Bush—and sharing his nation's oil wealth with the poor. The U.S.-Venezuela relationship bottomed out in September 2006, when Chávez likened President Bush to "the devil" in a speech at the United Nations in which he railed against U.S. imperialism.

Thirteen months later, the October ceremony was an auspicious start to Duddy's term as ambassador, which typically runs for three years. If that is the case, Duddy's term would extend 20 months into the administration of President Bush's successor. Patrice Franko, Colby's Grossman Professor of Economics and an affiliate of the international and Latin American studies programs, said Duddy's diplomacy during Bush's final year in office will set the stage for changes when a new U.S. leader takes office in 2009. "It will be interesting to see what kind of groundwork he can lay for the next administration," Franko said. "The tensions today are clearly personal between Chávez and Bush. I think Patrick is well cut out for the job. He's the consummate career diplomat."

Duddy, an English major, discovered a hankering for foreign affairs at Colby. And after obtaining a master's degree in English at Northeastern, he taught in Germany at the European division of the University of Maryland and at the American College of Switzerland.

His first foreign service posting came in 1983 in the U.S. Embassy in Santiago, Chile, during the rule of President Augusto Pinochet. Duddy spent time in both political and public diplomacy sections, laying the groundwork for the career to come.

Over the next two decades, his assignments took him to U.S. embassies in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Panama, and Bolivia. From 2002 to 2005 he was counsel general at the U.S. consulate in São Paulo, Brazil, a diplomatic mission larger than many U.S. embassies.

Then he was called back to Foggy Bottom in Washington to serve as deputy assistant secretary in the State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs until his appointment by President Bush and confirmation in August by the U.S. Senate.

"That's the brass ring," said Andy Koss '73, counselor for public affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel, who knew Duddy at Colby as a wire-rim glasses-wearing serious student of literature and poetry. "He has risen to the top in a very competitive culture. It shows the level of trust the administration has in Patrick, to be entrusted with heading up such a difficult and challenging embassy."

Duddy replaced William Brownfield, whose three-year term was marked by Chávez's threats to expel him over charges he was meddling in Venezuelan affairs after he expressed concern over the government's plans to nationalize certain private companies.

The stakes are high. The United States is Venezuela's leading trade partner, with the Latin American nation exporting \$36 billion in goods to its northern neighbor in 2006, ac-



ording to a U.S. State Department report. The United States, meanwhile, sells \$9 billion worth of goods to Venezuela, making it the 22nd-largest market for U.S. products. Among the U.S. firms with facilities in Venezuela: Ford, Chrysler, General Motors, and Archer Daniels Midland.

Chávez, whose campaign to improve health and education for the poor has boosted his popularity in Venezuela, has championed economic policies that he maintains will empower the South American economies, including the Caracas-based Bank of the South, a regional lending institution with \$7 billion in capital that was to open in December. It will be a financing option for South American nations that in the past have relied on the World Bank, which is perceived to be controlled by the United States. Chávez's close ties to leaders in Iran and Syria also have rankled U.S. leaders.

Robert Gelbard '64, the former U.S. ambassador to Bolivia and Indonesia, worked with Duddy in the late 1980s and early 1990s when they were both serving in Latin America. Gelbard says Duddy is the right man for the high-profile job—a highly re-

spected diplomat known for his deep knowledge of the region and his calm approach to charged situations.

"Patrick has gravitas," said Gelbard, chairman of Washington Global Partners, an international consulting firm, and a member of Colby's Board of Trustees. "He's taken very seriously by the Venezuelan press, and, given the positions he has had in Washington and Latin America, he is clearly seen as a senior representative of the American government. His arrival has been welcomed."

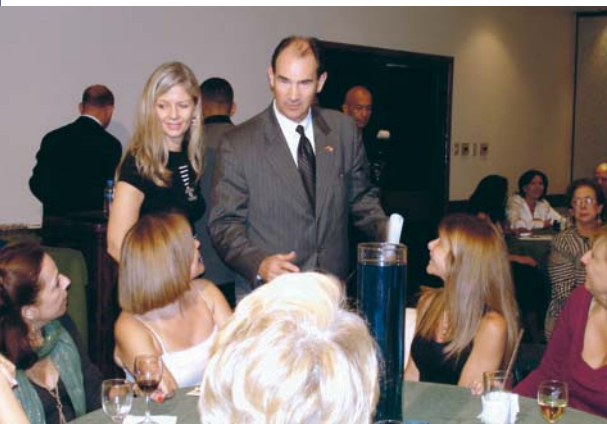
Gelbard has firsthand knowledge of Duddy's ability to resolve international disputes. In 2006 one of Gelbard's corporate clients faced the arbitrary imposition of substantial taxes on its product by a country in Central America. Gelbard went to Duddy, who mobilized his staff and requested that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice speak to that country's president.

"I went to Patrick, and he and his staff were tremendously helpful in developing the circumstances where my client could negotiate an equitable solution to the problem," Gelbard said.

"He has risen to the top in a very competitive culture. It shows the level of trust the administration has in Patrick, to be entrusted with heading up such a difficult and challenging embassy."

Andy Koss '73, counselor for public affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, commenting on Duddy's appointment as ambassador to Venezuela

Left, Patrick Duddy '72, U.S. ambassador to Venezuela, at a baseball clinic for children in Caracas. Sponsored by the Narcotics Affairs Section of the embassy, the clinics encourage youth and teens to resist drug use and feature baseball skills taught by well-known professional baseball players. Below, Ambassador Duddy at a lecture sponsored by the Fulbright Association in Caracas. Duddy opened September's lecture with a few words about remembering the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.



Duddy says his interest in foreign affairs began around the dinner table in Bangor in the 1960s, when his family would discuss international issues. At Colby Duddy gobbled up courses in government and international relations, including several with Professor of Government Guenter Weissberg. While a freshman, Duddy took a Jan Plan set up by Weissberg at the United Nations, where Duddy interviewed Belgian diplomats involved in writing the U.N. Law of the Sea Treaty.

(The treaty was adopted by the United Nations in 1982 but has yet to be ratified by the U.S. Senate. In late October, as Duddy was presenting his credentials to Venezuelan President Chávez, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was debating whether to vote on the treaty the ambassador studied almost four decades earlier.)

“We were freshmen, so going to New York was a bit daunting,” recalled Swift Tarbell '72, who was on the U.N. trip and later, in the 1980s, worked in the Reagan administration on international trade. “The Belgian diplomat working on the issue gave us tomes of material. It was a great introduction to foreign affairs that I’ve never forgotten.”

Over his quarter century in the Foreign Service, Duddy has learned the art of diplomacy on the job. He was public affairs officer in Panama City beginning in 1997, serving as the spokesperson for the U.S. embassy, which comprised 20 different government agencies. He was the international media’s main source of information on the hand-over of the Panama Canal to Panama. In São Paulo, Brazil (the largest city in South

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America and home to the largest U.S. consulate in the Western Hemisphere), as consul general from 2002 to 2005, Duddy worked with thousands of U.S. corporations active in Brazil, either looking to invest in Brazil’s booming industrial region or trading with the country. While serving as deputy assistant secretary at the State Department in Washington from 2005 to 2007, he worked with the U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti, which was helping to restore democracy to one of the region’s poorest nations.

“The peacekeeping mission had soldiers from two or three dozen countries, so it’s a fascinating process how you all work together,” Duddy said. “The work was such a challenge because you have so many different ways of doing things. Then there were language issues, with a Brazilian commander overseeing troops from Argentina and Jordan.”

Serving as ambassador taps Duddy’s skills as an administrator, negotiator, and conversationalist. On a typical day in mid-October, Duddy met with his senior staff to discuss the projects they were involved in. He met with the leader of a major Jewish organization, had a staffer contact the Venezuelan government to check on the protocol for the presentation of his credentials, and worked with his public affairs staff to plan a few media events. He then had informal meetings with Venezuelans outside the office to learn their views and provide his perspective on U.S. policies.

Evening receptions or luncheons are forums at which Duddy, who is fluent in Spanish and Portuguese, can engage in such candid conversations.

“If the U.S. ambassador goes to the office of a minister, that’s a formal exchange, and I’m presumed to be going on behalf of my government, so notes will be taken and memos written,” Duddy said. “Being at a reception permits a different conversation. It’s like background in anticipation of an inter-

view. You not only get to express your view of x, y, or z, but you also get to understand their reality and the dynamic of their political moment.”

In Venezuela, that political moment will test Duddy as he seeks out venues to promote cooperation between the nations. In one initiative, the embassy holds baseball clinics for Venezuelan youths, encouraging them to both play sports and steer clear of narcotics.

“Drug use is something that concerns people throughout the hemisphere, both north and south, and over the years we have learned, much to our sorrow, that it’s not something that can be addressed quickly or unilaterally with any great effect,” he said. “So we are working hard to support an investment in people and the kinds of programs that materially improve the conditions of people’s lives.”

The baseball initiative, which received coverage in the Venezuelan press, was just one effort to make connections with the Venezuelan people as Duddy begins his toughest assignment yet. He does so with optimism, determined to move forward, seeking constructive engagement with Venezuela on a wide range of issues—from oil production in the Orinoco oil fields to instruction in fielding ground balls to the manufacture of auto parts at factories owned by U.S. automakers.

His work so far seems consistent with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s assessment of him as a “fine and inspirational leader” at his swearing-in ceremony in Washington August 9.

“I am just certain we are sending the right man to Venezuela,” Rice said. “So I know, Patrick, that you will reach out to the Venezuelan people. I know that you speak strongly for the values that we hold. I know that you will tell them that they have a friend in America and in Americans.”