

Chile-California: A Partnership for the Twenty-First Century

By Taylor Boas

“California and Chile are linked by a deep bond and a sense of community, and for that reason, I have looked forward to coming here to share the good news of Chile’s success.” With this tribute to both a long history and a promising future of cooperation and academic exchange between her country and the state of California, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet began a speech before a standing room-only audience in the Chevron Auditorium at U.C. Berkeley’s International House, sponsored by the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS).

In a full day of activities in the Golden State, Bachelet addressed the California Chamber of Commerce in Sacramento, held a joint press conference with Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in Davis, and was awarded the Berkeley Medal—the University’s highest honor—by Chancellor Robert Birgeneau. During her visit, the president discussed the need for multilateral approaches to the challenges of globalization, examined alternative energy solutions to Chile’s growing energy crisis, and formalized several research and education partnerships between Chilean and California universities.

Part of the reasons for Bachelet’s visit was to renew a long tradition of cooperation between Chile and the state of California, in which Berkeley and other California public universities have played an important role. In 1963, California Governor Pat Brown launched the Chile-California Program, which sought to promote technical cooperation between Chile and California in areas such as agriculture, education, water resource management, and highway transportation. As a part of this program, Chilean agronomists who studied at U.C. Davis in the 1960s returned to their country and became leaders in the development of its export agriculture industry. In subsequent years, many Chilean graduate students and academics have spent time at California universities to obtain master’s and doctoral degrees, collaborate on research, and take advantage of the state’s excellence in higher education. At least two of the cabinet members who accompanied Bachelet on her visit have Berkeley ties. Energy Minister Victor Tokman earned his Ph.D. in the Berkeley economics department in 1999, and Foreign Minister Alejandro Foxley served as a visiting lecturer of economics and a visiting scholar at CLAS in 1981.

Part of the effort to expand the longstanding Chile-California relationship consists of a program of scholarships for lower-income Chilean students to pursue graduate studies in the United States, particularly California. During a visit to Washington in April 2007, Foxley and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice laid the groundwork for this Equal Opportunities program, which is jointly administered by the U.S. Fulbright Commission and Chile’s National Commission for Research in Science and Technology (CONICYT). In her recent State of the Union speech, Bachelet announced \$6 billion in funding for this initiative, which hopes to train more than 30,000 graduate students over the next decade. During his discussions with Rice in 2007 and 2008, Foxley also suggested a new program of educational and economic cooperation specifically between Chile and California, due to their similarities in terms of geography, natural resources, climate, and agriculture, as well as California’s excellence in technology and innovation.

The centerpiece of Bachelet's visit to California was a meeting with Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and the signing of a joint declaration entitled Chile-California: A Partnership for the Twenty-First Century. This document expresses both parties' commitment to develop academic and business partnerships in the coming years. The first such partnerships were formally launched during a joint appearance by Bachelet and Schwarzenegger at U.C. Davis, just before her visit to Berkeley. Two of these agreements establish cooperation with U.C. Davis in winemaking and crop genetics; a third proposes that the California State University system provide advice on curriculum development to the Technological University of Chile. Other partnerships that might be unveiled in the future include a program in which education PhDs from California universities would help train Chilean public school teachers, as well as potential Chilean collaboration with Berkeley's Energy Research Institute on alternative and renewable power sources.

Energy was a major focus of Bachelet's visit to California and was the subject of a briefing at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) immediately prior to her public talk at CLAS. Historically, Chile has relied upon hydroelectricity as its main energy source. In 1996, to meet growing demand, it also began to generate electricity from imported Argentine natural gas. Over the past several years, Chile has been faced with severe shortages in both of these energy sources, with a drought reducing hydroelectric generation capacity, and Argentina restricting gas exports in order to maintain sufficient domestic supply. These shortages show no signs of easing in the near future. Nor will it be easy to limit Chile's demand for energy, which has grown at the same rate as its rapidly expanding economy over the past thirty years. These factors, combined with rising global energy prices and the political sensitivity of new hydroelectric projects, have created strong incentives for Chile to explore alternative and renewable sources of energy.

During Bachelet's visit to LBNL, five energy specialists briefed the president and members of her cabinet on California's recent energy initiatives and the potential to implement similar projects in Chile. Several of the presentations focused on harnessing solar energy for electricity generation—something of major interest to the Chilean delegation, which visited the Solar One power plant in Nevada as the last leg of their U.S. tour. Professor Ramesh Ramamoorthy emphasized the vast potential for generating solar power in Chile's Atacama desert. By covering the desert with photovoltaic cells, Chile could theoretically supply not only its own electricity needs but also those of the rest of South America. A presentation by Professor Jay Keasling focused on methods for producing ethanol from switchgrass and other sources of plant cellulose—another technology of interest to Bachelet, who noted that Chile hopes to avoid producing biofuels from corn or other crops that could exacerbate the global food crisis.

In her public talk at U.C. Berkeley's International House, Bachelet focused on the steps that Chile is taking to confront the challenges of globalization, as well as the need for global cooperation to address problems such as rising energy demand and climate change. Bachelet characterized Chile as a development success story—not only because of its rapid economic growth, but also because it has focused on social protection to ensure that its people are secure in the face of globalization. As a result, the percentage of Chileans living in poverty has been reduced from nearly 40% in 1990 to only 13.7% in 2006. Bachelet stressed that her government is prioritizing education to prepare people to compete effectively in the global economy. The Equal Opportunities scholarships for international postgraduate study and the collaborative

research agreements with California universities are an important part of this effort, but so is increased funding for primary schooling, kindergartens, and childcare. In a country where one out of every three families is led by a single mother, assuring the wellbeing of young children gives women the chance to find jobs and escape from poverty.

Other nations besides Chile have also experienced rapid development in recent decades, and increased global prosperity is creating new challenges that call for international cooperation. As Bachelet pointed out, the past thirty years have seen a fourfold increase in the number of people who live in countries with high-growth economies or OECD levels of wealth. Moreover, most of this growth has occurred in the developing world. Prosperity brings numerous benefits, but it also creates new challenges, ranging from climate change to the global food crisis to threats of nuclear proliferation. “For this reason,” argued Bachelet, “the twenty-first century will be increasingly complex, and greater efforts will be demanded of us to ensure that the new international system brings an advance in global governance.”

Along these lines, the president outlined three challenges for the international community. The first task is to recognize that we can solve global problems only through increased international cooperation and collective action. Building upon this recognition, a second step is to construct effective, representative, and transparent institutions that will facilitate such cooperation—“a task in which the United States will bear an unavoidable responsibility.” Bachelet lamented the preference for unilateralism that has been evident in recent years. However, she expressed optimism that multilateral approaches might be strengthened in the future, pointing to the recent United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali as a step in the right direction. Finally, the president identified a third challenge for the international community: ensuring that the process of globalization is an equitable one, and that traditional cultures and those who cannot compete in a new global economy are given adequate protection.

The question-and-answer session following Bachelet’s talk gave her the opportunity to expound upon several of the policy issues that her government has faced, especially with respect to the rights of women. As Chile’s first female president, Bachelet has devoted particular attention to issues of gender equality. Recent laws have strengthened the enforcement of alimony payments and mandated that working women be allowed to breastfeed their infant children. A bill currently pending before the Chilean congress would ensure that men and women with the same jobs receive the same salary. Bachelet acknowledged that domestic violence and the feminization of poverty remain serious problems in Chile, but she also underscored her government’s progress in these areas. Previously, domestic violence that did not result in a death was treated only as a misdemeanor; a new law has increased the severity of this crime. With respect to the number of women in poverty—a significant problem, given the percentage of families headed by single mothers—Bachelet pointed to the benefits of a soon-to-be-enacted pension reform. Starting July 1, 2008, the Chilean government will offer pensions to housewives who work at home without salaries.

Bachelet’s public talk at the International House and briefing at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory constitute an important step in advancing the longstanding partnership not only between Chile and California, but also between Chile and U.C. Berkeley. Building upon recent visits by past President Ricardo Lagos and former United Nations Ambassador Juan Gabriel

Valdés, the ongoing cooperation between Berkeley and Chile offers prospects for novel solutions to some of the most important problems facing Chile, California, and the world.

Michelle Bachelet is President of Chile and a former Minister of Health and Defense. She gave a talk for CLAS on June 12, 2008.

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