

To the Editor

Condoleezza Rice seems to have embodied the old proverb, "If you can't beat them, join them," when she finally decided to back Chilean Jose Miguel Insulza in his bid for OAS General Secretary last week. Post Columnist Jackson Diehl called her last-minute turnaround a "quiet victory" for US diplomacy ["The Rice Touch", May 9], but to believe that one must be inclined to wishful thinking.

Through Latin American eyes, this "victory" looks like a substantial defeat. After backing two other candidates for the position, it became clear that Insulza would win. At the final hour, Rice decided to find a way out of the mess, offering US support in exchange for Insulza's public statement against "elected governments that do not govern democratically." The vague statement reflects how little Rice was able to obtain in the end, and underscores the clumsiness of US policy in the region.

Mr. Diehl interprets the statement as a warning to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, whom the State Department opposes. But in reality, the statement is intentionally vague, more accurately applying to Haiti, whose elected leader was removed in a coup d'etat last year, or Ecuador, whose now-ousted president sacked the country's Supreme Court. Indeed, the statement applies to the leaders of Peru or Colombia as easily as it does to Venezuela.

Mr. Diehl further misunderstands Venezuela by calling President Chavez an "anti-American demagogue" who is "elected-but-authoritarian." Yet the majority of the Venezuelan people believe that Chavez is a democratic President that delivers. For this reason, Venezuelans have supported him in more than nine separate elections.

Sincerely,

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