

Fox on immigration: 'Fences' won't solve issue

Mexican President Vicente Fox, who kicked off a four-day, three-state tour in Utah, said a proposed wall to keep undocumented immigrants in Mexico `won't resolve this problem.'

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WEST VALLEY, Utah -- Mexican President Vicente Fox kicked off a four-day U.S. visit by decrying Congressional proposals to build a wall to keep undocumented immigrants in Mexico, saying ``we won't resolve this problem with fences, but hand in hand, working together."

Fox told a cheering crowd of 1,000 Mexicans and Mexican Americans -- some of whom had come from as far as Montana to hear him -- that they helped keep the U.S. economy running and displayed the hard work and honesty that made their native country proud.

"Even though you are far from Mexico, you are an integral part of Mexico," Fox said. ``We will never forget you. We love you."

Fox's visit, which takes him to Washington state today and to meetings with California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in Sacramento and Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa in Los Angeles later in the week, comes on the heels of President Bush's proposal to station 6,000 National Guard troops at the border and amid growing frustration over illegal immigration.

The Senate is expected to vote Thursday on immigration legislation that may allow many of the 12 million illegal immigrants now in the country to remain, a proposal that conservatives in the House have vowed to block.

Analysts say the current environment makes Fox's trip a risky undertaking.

"He's shooting himself in the foot -- with a machine gun," said George Grayson, a Mexico expert at the College of William & Mary in Virginia. ``The last thing senators

and representatives in Washington want is someone from abroad telling them how to legislate."

Fox, who completes his six-year term in December and by law is barred from seeking reelection, had hoped to negotiate an immigration reform package during his presidency, a goal sidetracked by the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and the war in Iraq.

His political heir, Felipe Calderón, has a narrow lead in polls to become Mexico's next president in the July election. Grayson said Fox's visit also risked stealing the spotlight from Calderón during this critical time in Mexico.

The visit has already stirred some resentment in Utah. Representatives from the Utah Minuteman Project, a group that opposes illegal immigration, protested outside a state dinner at the Governor's mansion Tuesday night.