

Mexico's Calderon Heartened By Outcome of U.S. Elections

The Washington Post
November 9, 2006

Mexican President-elect Felipe Calderón said yesterday that Democratic gains in Congress could lead to "room for improvement" in U.S.-Mexican relations, a suggestion that headway may be made on immigration and other bilateral issues.

At a White House meeting with President Bush today, Calderón, who takes office on Dec. 1, is expected to express [Mexico's](#) disappointment with the decision by the outgoing Republican-controlled House and Senate to approve a 700-mile fence along the Mexican-American border, an effort to stem the flow of millions of migrant workers.

During a meeting yesterday with Washington Post reporters and editors, Calderón said the outcome of Tuesday's midterm elections allowed for "some room for improvement in terms of bilateral relations."

"I know President Bush is facing a difficult moment," he said. "But I think there is an opportunity. After the elections, I hope Americans and Congress will have a chance for rational debate."

Calderón, a Harvard-educated economist and a member of the conservative National Action Party, made job creation a central platform of his campaign. He returned to that theme yesterday, saying that new jobs and foreign investment in Mexico would be more effective than a fence as a tool against migration.

His predecessor, current President Vicente Fox, made the same arguments against the fence, to no avail.

"Now maybe you have people crossing the border looking for capital," Calderón said. "We need capital crossing the border looking for people."

Calderón also said that the North American Free Trade Agreement had been a boon for Mexico but that more needed to be done to make the economy more competitive. He said that only by reducing tariffs, eliminating other regulations and enforcing the rule of law could Mexico be seen as a destination for foreign investment.

Mexico also has recently been suffering from increased violence. Calderón acknowledged the months-long protests that have shut down the city of Oaxaca and expressed hopes that order would be restored. His home state of Michoacan, as well as the neighboring state of Guerrero, have seen a wave of violence, including decapitations, shootings and bombings. Much of that violence has appeared to be drug-related.

Yesterday, the president-elect acknowledged that there had been "a deterioration in the environment in Mexico."

"Probably, the main challenge I will have to face is how to strengthen institutions and the rule of law and to stop the loss of respect in authority."

Calderón, 44, waged an intense campaign against Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the populist former mayor of Mexico City. The results of the July 2 vote were contested, leading to weeks of appeals to electoral courts and protests in the capital's streets by López Obrador supporters. Calderón was declared president-elect Sept. 5.

Yesterday, Calderón suggested that divisions created by the controversy were fading. He also expressed hope that, as a former member of the National Congress, he would be well-positioned to reach out to the opposition.