

Mexican President-Elect Picks Hard-Line Interior Minister

The Washington Post
November 29, 2006

MEXICO CITY, Nov. 28 -- Mexican President-elect Felipe Calderon named a hard-line conservative as interior minister Tuesday, and lawmakers slapped and pushed one another in a deepening political crisis three days before Calderon takes power.

Francisco Ramirez Acuña was chosen to spearhead the new government's handling of unrest, with [Mexico](#) reeling from leftist street protests over Calderon's election, violence in the popular tourist city of Oaxaca and a spate of bombings in the capital.

Ramirez Acuña, a close ally of the president-elect from the right wing of the ruling National Action Party, also will play a key role in trying to win support in Congress for tax, energy and labor reforms.

Calderon faces open hostility from left-wing parties who claim he stole the July 2 presidential election and have vowed to prevent him from being sworn in on Friday.

In the lower house of Congress, rival deputies shoved and slapped each other and traded insults. They then chanted abuses in a standoff that lasted more than an hour after leftist deputies tried to seize control of the main podium.

Although Calderon has promised to work with opposition parties to ease months of tension, his appointment of Ramirez Acuña drew immediate fire.

"He's a fascist. We are going to see more repression," said Gerardo Fernandez, spokesman for the leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party.

Ramirez Acuña, 54, was governor of the western state of Jalisco, where he was often criticized for being too eager to use state police to crack down on protesters.

Calderon said Ramirez Acuña has shown he is open to dialogue but also has "an irrevocable responsibility to uphold the law."

The new interior minister is expected to take a hard line in Oaxaca. Six months of protests against the state's governor have left the picturesque state capital in chaos. About 15 people have been killed, most of them shot by what protesters say are off-duty policemen.

Ramirez Acuña struck a conciliatory tone Tuesday. He said he would seek to open talks with all political parties and tried to play down concerns he would be a hard-liner.

"Not a heavy hand, but a firm hand to reach agreements," he said in a radio interview.