

## Mexican President Criticizes 'Absurd' U.S. Border Policies

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MEXICO CITY, March 16 -- Mexican President Felipe Calderón said Friday that U.S. border policies are marred by many "absurd" paradoxes that hurt the Mexican economy and force more Mexicans to migrate illegally to the United States.

In an interview en route from Mexicali, [Mexico](#), to Mexico City on his presidential jet, Calderón criticized construction of more border fencing and accused U.S. border agents of slowing the flow of commerce between the countries by sometimes failing to staff enough crossing booths.

He also argued against plans to line with concrete the massive All-American Canal, which connects the Colorado River to farms in California. Calderón said the project would cut off groundwater that flows into Mexico and possibly hurt the businesses of Mexican farmers enough that they would need to migrate illegally to make a living.

The border debate has become increasingly personal for Calderón, after recent revelations that some of his relatives have migrated. During President Bush's visit to Mexico this week, Calderón said he has relatives "working in vegetable fields" and restaurants in the United States. "They probably handle what you eat," he said at a news conference.

In the interview Friday, Calderón said that between "five and 20" of his relatives have migrated and that he does not know their current immigration statuses or whether they entered legally. The relatives include "cousins, uncles and in-laws," he said.

"I'd rather not say who they are," Calderón said.

Top aides to Calderón have said that he would like to shift immigration away from the center of U.S.-Mexico relations, but on a visit Friday to the border cities of Tijuana and Mexicali, he returned to the theme repeatedly. At the inauguration of a wastewater treatment plant outside Mexicali, Calderón commented on the "absurd paradox that in their determination to have less migration, at the same time [the United States] is cutting off more job opportunities for Mexicans." The audience members -- some of whom held handkerchiefs to their noses to block the odor coming from the treatment plant -- applauded loudly.

Aboard his plane, Calderón said U.S. border policies seem to run counter to U.S. intentions for "friendly relations" with Mexico. He described the relationship between the two countries as "complex and difficult."

He seemed particularly irked by bottlenecks at border checkpoints -- some Mexicans sleep in their cars to get a spot in line. Calderón singled out the crossing at San Ysidro, Calif., one of the busiest in the world, as a trouble spot that is hurting commerce between the nations.

"There are times when, out of 24 booths, 17 are not open," he said.

Calderón is pushing for a comprehensive revamping of the U.S. immigration system and said he believes there is a better chance of achieving that goal now that Democrats have control of Congress. But he noted that progress on immigration could take place only if "Democrats told the truth and did not trick" voters with promises during last fall's election campaigns.

Calderón has argued that improving Mexico's economy will stem the flow of illegal migrants across the U.S. border. He cited the example of Spain, a country that once had mass economic migrations but has improved its economy so much that it now is a destination for migrants. Hoping to replicate such successes, Calderón boasted that Mexico created 116,000 jobs in February.

"I don't know how many were created in the United States, but I think it could not be many more," he said.

Calderón has been in office since December, after running a campaign focused on job stimulation and free trade. He said if he fails, the next Mexican president would surely be "a populist demagogue" who would hurt Mexico's economy and make today's immigration problem seem "like child's play."

Calderón criticized U.S. drug policy, saying the United States is not doing enough to lower consumption and to help combat the narco-traffickers who have terrorized Mexico in recent years. He called U.S. aid to Mexico to combat drugs "a symbolic gesture" and accused U.S. officials of failing to do enough to stop the flow of drugs across the border.

During his first 100 days in office, Calderón has sent federal police and military troops to areas plagued by drug violence, including Tijuana, Acapulco and Monterrey. He said that this year, he will continue using the military and federal police to launch major operations against Mexican drug cartels, which have grown in size, strength and barbarity to rival the Colombian cartels of the 1980s. But Calderón said he would also like to focus attention on police reforms as a way of combating drug gangs.

Calderón's trip to the border took him far from the scene of a historic event in Mexico City, where same-sex couples lined up for the first time in the city's history to register for civil unions and the first civil union ceremony took place Friday.

"I completely respect a person's sexual preferences," Calderón said. "However, I believe in the family, that the family is an institution headed by the principle of heterosexuality."