

Mexican President Delivers Text but No Address

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MEXICO CITY, Sept. 1 -- For weeks, one question dominated political talk in [Mexico](#): Would he or wouldn't he?

The nation's most powerful lawmakers and its most influential commentators exchanged predictions about whether Felipe Calderon, president of Mexico for nine months, would deliver his state-of-the-union address inside the ornate chamber of Mexico's Congress. In a matter of a few minutes Saturday night, Calderon ended the speculation and simultaneously set off a debate about whether Mexico should end the tradition of its presidents delivering state-of-the-union addresses to Congress.

Shortly after 7:30 p.m., with a national television audience watching, Calderon walked firmly into the legislative chamber and handed over the text of his speech in a bright red box, but did not utter one word of it. Wearing the bright green, red and white presidential sash, Calderon took a microphone in hand, asked the vice president of Mexico's lower house of Congress to pass the speech along to lawmakers and left.

The president of Mexico's lower house, Ruth Zavaleta, wasn't there to receive the handoff. Before Calderon could reach the stage, she and dozens of other lawmakers -- all members of the Democratic Revolutionary Party, or PRD, who allege Calderon's election was fraudulent -- rose and streamed to the exits.

The scene, for all its strangeness, paled in comparison to last year, when Calderon's predecessor, [Vicente Fox](#), was blocked from entering the chamber by PRD lawmakers who punched and kicked rivals to seize control of the room. Fox was the first president in Mexican history not to deliver the address before Congress. Calderon, who this month vowed to give his speech despite threats that the event would be disrupted, became the second. Both men are members of the conservative National Action Party.

"We've got a circus," [Mexico City](#)-based political analyst Federico Est?vez said in an interview. "The members of Congress just can't contain themselves."

Calderon is scheduled to address the nation Sunday morning from Mexico's National Palace, where the sublime murals by Diego Rivera tell a story of conquest and conflict that dates to the Aztecs. It was unclear whether Calderon would deliver his state-of-the-union address at the invitation-only event or give another speech.

Calderon's decision not to insist on delivering the speech seemed designed to avoid a spectacle similar to Fox's embarrassment the year before. Calderon is a former legislator known for his skills in the art of compromise, and he is said to have directed intricate

negotiations about the handoff, even defining whether he would enter the chamber to deliver the text or step no further than the hallway. The negotiations made for screaming headlines in the capital's newspapers and flashing bulletins on Internet sites that tracked the declarations of lawmakers who fought a bruising backstage battle over the evening's particulars.

Mexico's Congress building, known as San Lazaro, was ringed by heavily armed riot police. During the hours before the speech, several prominent political figures tried to break through, only to be rebuffed because they were not legislators. Calderon, in keeping with his desire not to provoke a confrontation, opted not to make the traditional stop at the National Palace to personally collect his presidential sash because protesters had massed outside.

Mexico's state-of-the-union speeches have been in decline for two decades. They were once showy affairs that lasted for three hours or more. But in 1988, after widespread allegations that the Institutional Revolutionary Party stole the presidential election, the speech was interrupted by a lawmaker who stormed down the aisle and began accosting President [Miguel de la Madrid](#). Since then, the speeches have been much shorter.

Now many here are calling for the speeches to stop. "In the end, it is sort of a silly arrangement, and it won't last," Estevez said of Calderon's compromise. "Why not send it by PDF next time?"

The hubbub over this year's speech seems to have had no effect on the popularity of Calderon, who has consistently received high approval ratings since starting a military assault against drug cartels suspected in 3,000 killings in the past year. On the morning of the speech, the newspaper Reforma published a poll that showed Calderon's approval rating soaring to 65 percent from a previous high of 58 percent.

The same newspaper, though, declared an end to the tradition of state-of-the-union speeches before Congress. Its headline: "They bury the ritual."