

## The President's News Conference With President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa in Merida

March 14, 2007

*President Calderon.* Good morning, Mr. President, dear friends from the media. I thank you for being here in this press conference. I would like to thank very sincerely President George Bush for visiting our country and for dedicating almost 3 days to his visit in Mexico.

I am very pleased to inform you that President George Bush and myself, we're fully satisfied for how fruitful this meeting has been for both countries. As leaders of sovereign nations, we have talked in a respectful environment and a cordial environment about very diverse and complex issues of our bilateral agenda. We coincided in sharing our core responsibility, which now, more than ever, happened to be a shared responsibility. We reiterate our commitment with democracy, with the defense and respect of human rights, the promotion of free trade, with the rule of law, security, sustainable development and, in particular, our fight against poverty.

From this platform of understanding, we have covered in detail each of the issues of our bilateral agenda. I would like to express my gratitude to President Bush that we have talked so openly, with the sincerity and respect of both countries that are not only neighbors, but they are pursuing to do what true friends should do.

We have talked, for example, about the strengthening of a task force that will be directed to the transition of full trade of sensitive products such as corn and beans. We talked about the need to cover the phenomenon of migration as a factor of prosperity for both nations, orderly migration process. And we acknowledged the effort that President Bush and his administration is doing in order to promote within the Congress a comprehensive migratory reform that will acknowledge the rights of the migrants and workers, that would allow

orderly and legal programs for temporary jobs, and would allow the reunification of family ties.

We have expressed our concern for protecting and guaranteeing human rights of those who cross the border and, above all, about the enormous relevance of generating in Mexico opportunities that the citizens need for their development.

We shared the need of having a safe border that will close the gates to drugs, arms, and terrorism and that will open its doors to trade, prosperity and trade. Our border should be a tightening and closing point; the border should bring us together and not separate us. For this, we are considering the possibility of establishing new cross points and border bridges that will speed up the transit of goods and people. Both Presidents have agreed to coordinate in a better way our actions in order to confront organized crime in both sides of the border.

Mexico and the United States are nations that are joined together in the pursuit for better levels of well-being for its people. We do have the means, and, in this meeting, we have seen the political will in order to reach shared goals. I'm fully convinced, then, from this visit on, we will be able to start a new stage of the relationships that take place between Mexico and the United States.

*President Bush.* *Senor Presidente, gracias. Buenos dias.* Laura and I have had a fascinating trip, and our final stop was a really good one, Mr. President. Glad to be back in Mexico. This is an especially beautiful part of your wonderful country. The hospitality was very generous, and the meals were quite good. [Laughter] *Estoy lleno.* [Laughter]

Over the past 2 days, the President and I have had a very—a series of friendly and

very productive meetings. That's what the people of our respective countries expect. They expect people to work out differences in a constructive way. They expect leaders to seize opportunities for the benefit of our respective peoples. And the spirit is very strong to work together.

I appreciate so very much the fact that during our meetings, we reaffirmed the values of democracy and transparency and rule of law that guide both our countries. We discussed ways to make our Nation safer, both nations safer and both nations prosperous.

President Calderon is taking a tough stand against organized crime and drugs, and I appreciate that. I made it very clear to the President that I recognize the United States has a responsibility in the fight against drugs. And one major responsibility is to encourage people to use less drugs. When there is demand, there is supply. And to the extent, Mr. President, that we can continue to make progress to reduce drugs, it will take pressure off of Mexico. So we have a responsibility.

Mexico has a responsibility as well, and the President is working hard on that responsibility. And we agreed to work together. Mexico is obviously a sovereign nation, and the President, if he so chooses, like he has, will lay out an agenda where the United States can be a constructive partner.

And the other place where we can work together is in the region. And so the President, who is a very strong leader in Central America, for example, will work with the United States and the Central American countries to develop a regional plan, because it could be successful in Mexico, and yet the problem could be transferred to the south, in which case we wouldn't have the security we would want. So, Mr. President, thank you for your leadership on this issue. I'm looking forward to working with you on it.

We talked about the economy. My view is, is that when Mexico grows, the United

States benefits. And obviously, to the extent, Mr. President, you're able to put forth your innovative policies, we applaud your efforts. I appreciate so very much some of the innovative ideas that you're putting forward. As I said last night in the dinner, I appreciate very much the fact that you're focusing development in the south of your country.

Obviously, there was a lot of discussion about trade. People in my country are concerned about trade; people in Mexico are concerned about trade. There are strong protectionist sentiments in the United States. And I will work, Mr. President, to reject those protectionist sentiments, because I believe trade is one of the best avenues to help common prosperity. And anytime we have trade relations, there will be complications. And I pledged to the President that we would work together to ensure a smooth transition to full trade in dealing with sensitive issues such as corn and beans.

Education is an important issue that is—for our two countries. And I appreciate your commitment to strong education. The United States can help. I'm a big believer in student exchanges between our two nations, on both sides of the border. And one reason I am, is because I think it's important, sometimes, for people to gain an accurate perception of my country by coming to my country. I love for the fact that students travel back and forth.

Mr. President, this morning I met with some students that are funded through USAID programs, who have come to the United States to take different courses in different subjects, and then have come back to Mexico to lend the expertise that they have gained to improve the communities in which they live. This is a vital program that the United States must continue, in my judgment, in order to help people realize the great benefits of education.

We spent a lot of time on the important and sensitive issue of migration. I say "sensitive" because obviously this is an issue

that people can use to inflame passions. I say “important” because a good migration law will help both economies and will help the security of both countries. And the reason I say that is that if people can come into our country, for example, on a temporary basis to work, doing jobs Americans aren’t doing, they won’t have to sneak across the border.

And by the way, a system that encourages people to sneak across the border is a system that leads to human rights abuses. It’s a system that promotes *coyotes* and document forgers. It’s a system that allows for the exploitation of citizens who are trying to earn a living for their families.

And so, Mr. President, as we discussed, I will work with Congress, with members of both political parties, to pass immigration law that will enable us to respect the rule of law and, at the same time, respect humanity in a way that upholds the values of the United States of America.

I appreciate your hospitality. It’s been a very warm greeting, Mr. President. I thank you and your good wife for being so kind to Laura and me. I look forward to future conversations. *Muchas gracias.*

*President Calderon. Gracias, el Presidente.* We will have a Q&A session now, starting with the Mexican press.

#### *Mexico-U.S. Relations/Mexico’s Foreign Policy*

Q. Good morning, President of the United States of America, President of the United Mexico States.

*President Bush. Perdoname.*

Q. Good morning. Your visit is coming to an end now—this is a question for President George Bush: At the end of your visit, sir, have you found allies in order to place a counterweight to the initiatives of Hugo Chavez? What commitments did Felipe Calderon take on in order to be a counterweight to these initiatives of Hugo Chavez, on the one hand?

And on the other hand, President Felipe Calderon, Foreign Minister Patricia has

said that you are working in order to strengthen the relationship with Venezuela. How is this compatible with the commitments that you’re taking on with President Bush in order to give thrust to this counterweight in Latin America concerning Hugo Chavez?

*President Bush.* Thank you for the question. We spent a lot of time talking about Mexico’s role in the world. Mexico is a respected nation; President Calderon is a respected leader. But our conversations focused on democracy and rule of law and prosperity and how to improve the lives of our fellow citizens. We spent time talking about social justice and concern for the poor.

One of the reasons I’ve come down here again is to remind people in this important part of the world that the United States cares deeply about the human condition; that we spent 1.6 billion of bilateral aid last year, most of the money going to social justice programs. And that doesn’t include programs like the one I saw in the highlands of Guatemala, where our military was providing basic health care for citizens.

So, Mr. President and I spent time talking about how to advance a hopeful agenda, one that will lift the spirits of people. And I respect the role Mexico plays. I mean, Mexico will lead diplomatic efforts for the common security and common prosperity, and that’s an important role.

*President Calderon.* The commitment and purpose of my Government is to have constructive, positive, and sound relations with all countries of the world and, of course, with the countries of Latin America, without exception. And certainly the more—the most important relationship with Mexico abroad is the one that we have with the United States, due to the migration that exists, the flows through the borders, and all else that you are well aware of.

However, Mexico is respectful of the opinions of other leaders. We are respectful of the heads of states of other countries,

such as Venezuela and certainly the United States. We are a government that has principles and values, values such as democracy, freedom, liberty, and legality and certainly security and safety.

On the other hand, not as a strategy—this was not something that we focused on as a strategy in our talks, but as a conviction of our government. Mexico has to play a role which is balanced, weighed, and it has to be a leader in Latin America, in agreement with its culture, its history, its economy, its people.

We are deeply Latin American, and we, too, want justice, development, democracy for all of Latin America. That is where we are engaged, and we are committed. We certainly do agree and coincide with other countries, many countries, of course, who coincide and agree with those principles.

#### *Department of Justice*

Q. Mr. President, thank you. The Attorney General acknowledged yesterday that in a statement made by—

*President Bush.* Hold on, Roger [Roger Runnigen, Bloomberg News]. The world wants to hear your voice.

Q. Thank you. The Attorney General acknowledged yesterday that there were mistakes in the firing of prosecutors. What is his future in your cabinet? Do you have confidence in him? And more importantly—or just as important—how effective can he be in Congress going forward when he's lost a lot of confidence among Democrats and doesn't have any defenders among Republicans?

*President Bush.* I do have confidence in Attorney General Al Gonzales. I talked to him this morning, and we talked about his need to go up to Capitol Hill and make it very clear to members in both political parties why the Justice Department made the decisions it made, making very clear about the facts. And he's right: Mistakes were made. And I'm frankly not happy about them, because there is a lot of confu-

sion over what really has been a customary practice by the Presidents: U.S. attorneys and others serve at the pleasure of the President. Past administrations have removed U.S. attorneys; it's their right to do so.

The Justice Department recommended a list of U.S. attorneys. I believe the reasons why were entirely appropriate. And yet this issue was mishandled to the point now where you're asking me questions about it in Mexico, which is fine. I mean, if I were you, I'd ask the same question. This is an issue that—and so Al—let me just say, Al was right; mistakes were made; and he's going to go up to Capitol Hill to correct them.

I appreciate the fact that he's taken some action, because anytime anybody goes up to Capitol Hill, they've got to make sure they fully understand the facts and how they characterize the issue to Members of Congress. And the fact that both Republicans and Democrats feel like that there was not straightforward communication troubles me, and it troubles the Attorney General, so he took action. And he needs to continue to take action.

#### *Immigration Reform/President Calderon's Meeting With Former President Vicente Fox of Mexico*

Q. Good morning to both Presidents. President Bush, I ask you, why do Mexicans want to—why would you think that Mexicans could believe in a reform in migration when for so many years, this was not a possibility nor reality? And what are your chances of coming through with this bill in Congress? And President Calderon, you had lunch with President Fox. Can you tell us what you talked about?

*President Bush.* They talked about *carne*. [Laughter] Excuse me. I wasn't there. [Laughter]

No, that's a legitimate question, and the question is, why now? Why do I think something positive can happen? Well, first of all, the legislative process takes awhile

in the United States. I don't know about Mexico, Mr. President, but sometimes legislators, you know, debate issues for awhile before a solution can be achieved.

And we had a very—by the way, we haven't had a serious debate on migration until recently. A law was passed in 1986, and then there really wasn't a serious debate until pretty much starting after the year 2000, if my memory serves me well. I've always known this is an important issue because I happened to have been the Governor of Texas. And so I'm very comfortable about discussing the issue and have elevated the issue over the past years. And Members of Congress have taken the issue very seriously, but it's hard to get legislation out of the Congress on a very complex issue.

A lot of Americans were deeply concerned that the United States was not enforcing our laws. They felt like there wasn't a commitment to the rule of law. Over the past year, I believe we have shown the American people that there is a strong commitment to the rule of law. And I think Members of Congress are now feeling more comfortable that the country is committed to rule of law, which then makes some more openminded to my argument, which is that if we can have migration reform, it will make it less likely somebody will feel like they have to sneak across our border, and, therefore, take pressure off the border. In other words, security for the country, border security, will be enhanced by a good migration law, and then it will make it easier for us to focus our assets on drugs, terrorists, criminals, and guns moving both ways.

I believe—I feel pretty good about it. I don't want to predict legislative successes. But I can tell you my mood, and my mood is optimistic because the mood in the Congress seems like it has changed from skepticism last year to knowledge that getting a comprehensive bill will be in the Nation's interests.

Secondly, I'm optimistic because Republicans in the Senate are working with Democrats in the Senate. We're facilitating that work. The administration is very much involved with helping the Senators find common ground, to the point where we can move a bill as quickly as possible out of the Senate so it gets to the House of Representatives.

I'm not a betting man. I don't like to bet, because when I do, I usually lose. But I'm an optimistic man, in this case, about getting comprehensive reform, and a bill is in the interests of both countries.

*President Calderon.* I met with former President Vicente Fox, whom I like, and we have a good friendship. We belong to the same party. I invited him to lunch; we talked for quite a while, talked about matters in a very constructive fashion. And he congratulated us for the work that we've done during these first 100 days. He also said that he had the will to collaborate and cooperate in a respectful fashion with the government for the benefit of Mexicans.

I have also met with other former Presidents, and I'm sure that I will continue to meet with President Fox in the future throughout my administration.

*President Bush.* Here it comes.

#### *Department of Justice*

*Q.* Thank you, Mr. President, President Calderon. On the dismissal of U.S. attorneys: There have been allegations that political motivations were involved. Is political loyalty to your administration an appropriate factor? And when you talked to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales last year, what did you say? And what did you direct him to do?

*President Bush.* Thanks, Kelly [Kelly O'Donnell, NBC News]. I've heard those allegations about political decisionmaking; it's just not true. Secondly, just so you know, I get asked—I mean, I get complaints all the time from Members of Congress on a variety of subjects—this Senator, this Congressperson so-and-so—and there's

occasionally frustration with the executive branch. And they will pull me aside and say, "Are you aware of this? Are you aware of that?" And I did receive complaints about U.S. attorneys.

I specifically remember one time I went up to the Senate, and Senators were talking about the U.S. attorneys. I don't remember specific names being mentioned, but I did say to Al last year—you're right, last fall, I said, "Have you heard complaints about AGs? I have"—I mean, U.S. attorneys, excuse me—and he said, "I have." But I never brought up a specific case nor gave him specific instructions.

Q. Sir, might he have inferred that you discussed it with him—was a need for him to take action?

*President Bush.* You're going to have to ask Al that question, but as I say, I discuss with my Cabinet officials complaints I hear. I mean, when Members of the Senate come up and say to me, "I've got a complaint," I think it's entirely appropriate and necessary for me to pass those complaints on. Now, I don't every single time, but people view their moment with the President, sometimes, as an opportunity to unload their frustrations about how things may be working in their State—or Congresspersons, how things may be working in their district. And whether it be the Attorney General or the Secretary of State or other members of my Cabinet, I pass those complaints on at times.

What Al did was, and what the Justice Department did was appropriate—U.S. attorneys serve at the pleasure of the President. In other words, they're appointed by the President; they can be removed by the President. What was mishandled was the explanation of the cases to the Congress. And Al has got work to do up there. And the thing I appreciate about the Attorney General was, he said publicly that he could have handled it better—mistakes were made—and took action. And obviously, more action needs to be taken. That's what I discussed with him on the phone today.

### *Energy/Trade*

Q. Good morning. President Calderon, concerning energy matters, 3 days before the celebration of the anniversary of the expropriation of oil in our country, could you tell us what the position of the Senators of opposition have stated about these matters of oil? We know that the reserves and, of course this oil abundance, perhaps, is coming to its end. Was this issue on oil discussed here?

And, President Bush, 2008 will welcome the opening up of livestock and agriculture matters. Sir, is there a possibility of renegotiating or, perhaps, leave it for a later date this negotiation of this part of the trade agreement because of the complaints of Mexican producers?

*President Calderon.* The truth of the matter is that we did not discuss this issue of oil, because this is something that has to do specifically with Mexicans. This is a Mexican issue. We will not privatize a company that belongs to Mexicans, such as of the case of Pemex. We will have to see this later on, in terms of sovereignty, and speak about the initiatives, of course, and to see what our Congress states. We do have problems with the decline of, especially, Cantarell, which has been very important in the production of oil throughout the years, but which is declining in amounts. But we will have to be very clear on the fact that we will be sharing responsibility between Congress and the President.

Concerning agriculture and livestock, I do share the sensitivity of our working group and President Bush. We have set up a working group to deal with the matters of corn and bean, precisely to make more agile this transition, which is established at the end of the free trade agreement, NAFTA.

We do have different problems now today, different from what it was 1 year ago, when we see that the prices of corn are going down. We are having very high costs in our production. This has left our

producers out of competition. And now we are seeing what consumption is all about with these very high prices, in the case of corn.

However, due to the circumstance we have had in this meeting, we strengthened and we will be strengthening even more a group, a working group, which will address these issues, which are very sensitive for Mexican producers.

*President Bush.* No, no. Excuse me, Tony. One reason I didn't bring up energy is because energy is—it belongs to sovereign Mexico. And I'm confident that the President will make the best interests for the people of Mexico, working with the Congress.

In terms of opening up NAFTA, renegotiating NAFTA is a mistake, in my judgment. NAFTA has worked. And there is a mechanism in place, that the President just described, about how to resolve sensitive issues. There will be sensitive issues on a frequent basis when it comes to trade. And the best way to resolve those is through negotiations and discussions, recognizing the sensitivities on both sides of the border. But trying to renegotiate a treaty that has been incredibly important for both sides of the border, in my judgment, would be a mistake. You don't want to weaken NAFTA; you want to make sure it stays strong in order that prosperity continues to expand and people benefit on both sides of the border.

*Immigration Reform/Immigrant Life in the United States*

*Q.* Thank you. President Bush, you said the other day that you want to first—on immigration, want to first find a coherent Republican position in the Senate. Most Senate Republicans voted against last year's bill in the Senate. What changes are you willing to make? And would you be willing to forgo a path to citizenship as part of that bill? And, President Calderon, it's been reported you have relatives working in the United States. What have you learned from

their experiences? Do you know, do they want to become citizens? And do you know, are they there legally? [*Laughter*]

*President Bush.* What was your question again? No. [*Laughter*] Michael Chertoff and Carlos Gutierrez are negotiating with Republicans, helping Republicans find common ground, Steve [Stephen Dinan, Washington Times], and this isn't the appropriate place to be conducting negotiations.

It is the appropriate place to talk about the spirit of moving the bill forward. And obviously, we would like to be able to convince no-voters that it makes sense to be for a comprehensive immigration policy. I feel strongly that it's in our interests, national interests, to get a bill done. That's why, after all, I took—I gave the address to the United States from the Oval Office on this very subject.

And you asked about amnesty—look, amnesty is not going to fly. There is not going to be automatic citizenship; it just won't work. People in the United States don't support that, and neither do I; nor will kicking people out of the United States work. It's not practical. It is not a realistic solution. Some may articulate that, but it's empty talk. And so therefore, there's got to be a middle ground, a reasonable way to deal with the 12 million or so people that have been in our country for a period of time. And that's where a lot of the discussions are taking place, Steve. And I think we can find a rational way forward, somewhere in between automatic citizenship and kicking people out of the country. It's in our interests we do so. I mean, we are a nation of law, and therefore, if we can change the law for the better, we ought to do so.

And so, Mr. President, back to the man's question over there, I'm optimistic. And—but he helped—his question was somewhat insightful—well, very insightful—because what he pointed out was the legislative challenges that we face. He also made it clear in his question that the administration is very much involved with working with

Republican Senators to help find common ground between Republican Senators and Senator Kennedy, who is emerging as the lead Senator on the Democrat side.

I will tell you, if we can find that common ground, we have a very good chance of getting the bill out of the Senate, because Senator Kennedy is one of the best legislative Senators there is. He can get the job done. I know firsthand, because we reformed our education system, Mr. President, with his help in 2001. Not to slip in another issue, but we do need to get No Child Left Behind reauthorized, and I'm looking forward to working with Senator Kennedy on the reauthorization.

*President Calderon.* Yes, I do have family in the United States, and what I can tell you is that these are people who work and respect that country. They pay their taxes to the government. These are people who work in the field; they work with—in the fields with vegetables. They probably handle that which you eat—the lettuce, et cetera. These are people who respect the United States. These are people who have children, who want these children to be educated with respect for the land where they live and with respect for Mexico.

I am from Michoacan, and in Michoacan, we have 4 million people—2 million of these Michoacanos are in the States. We want them to come back; we want them to find jobs here in Mexico. We miss them. These are our best people. These are bold people—they're young, they're strong, they're talented, they have overcome tre-

mendous adversity—who are working so that they can come back to their country someday.

And I'm saying this for all Mexicans, not only those Mexicans that I am related to by blood, by land, soil, air. And I want to say that I am fighting so that instead of having our people cross the border to find work, we want investments to cross the border and come over here.

The U.S. economy is capital intensive. We are labor intensive. We can give democracy to our people if we find sound basis so that we could also find those factors which can give jobs to our people. I have said this, and I will continue to say this: I hope—and I've hoped—that someday, everybody will believe as I do. I believe in work. I believe that I will see all of these people coming back, and embrace them knowing that, well, that we live in countries that defend liberty and freedom.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:04 a.m. at the Fiesta Americana Merida. In his remarks, he referred to Margarita Esther Zavala Gomez del Campo, wife of President Calderon. A reporter referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela; and Secretary of Foreign Relations Patricia Espinosa Cantellano of Mexico. President Calderon and some reporters spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## Joint Statement by the United States of America and Mexico *March 14, 2007*

Mexico and the United States, as proud and sovereign countries, today reiterate their conviction that the shared values of democracy, transparency, rule of law, and respect for human rights are the solid founda-

tion on which the increasingly rich and complex networks that link their economies and societies are based.

Presidents Felipe Calderon and George Bush resolved during their first official