

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Chairman Richard Lugar Opening Statement**

**U.S. & MEXICO: IMMIGRATION POLICY & THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP
March 23, 2004**

Today the Senate Foreign Relations Committee meets to examine the U.S.-Mexico bilateral relationship with a special focus on the role of immigration. The relationship between Mexico and the United States is complex and wide-ranging. Every day, the bilateral agenda deals with trade, management of our common border, water distribution, energy cooperation, transportation, communications, tourism, the environment, human rights, and the struggle against drugs and organized crime.

Americans and Mexicans must understand that the fate of our two nations is inextricably intertwined. Mexico is the second largest trading partner of the United States. An economic downturn in either economy will affect the health of the other. Moreover, Mexico's importance to U.S. national security has been underrated – particularly during this era of global terrorism. Americans will not be as prosperous or as secure as we can be without sustained economic growth and political stability in Mexico, and a U.S.-Mexican relationship that transcends momentary disagreements in pursuit of our shared objectives.

The most obvious economic and security concerns related to Mexico stem from Mexican migration across the U.S. border. When Presidents Fox and Bush met in January 2001, they recognized that migration is “one of the major ties that bind our societies.” Mexicans represent 30 percent of the total immigrant population of the United States. Mexico's share of our total unauthorized immigrant population increased from 58 percent in 1990 to 69 percent in 2000.

Too often the debate on how to respond to illegal immigration from Mexico ignores the larger context of our relationship with Mexico or the role that Mexico must play in helping us get a grip on this question. I believe that we need to broaden the context of the debate, so that we see immigration as not just an economic or law enforcement issue, but also as a foreign policy issue. We must engage in diplomacy aimed at making the Mexican government a closer ally in preventing and responding to illegal immigration.

I would offer five common objectives that Mexico and the United States should pursue as we are developing and debating immigration policy.

First, the United States and Mexico both have a strong interest in improving the management of our common border. Both nations must cooperate in preventing illegal immigration, as well as in preventing tragedies in which Mexican citizens attempting to enter the United States lose their lives while concealed or transported in dangerous circumstances. Our border cooperation also must include strengthened efforts to stop terrorist infiltration via land, sea, or air.

Second, both the U.S. and the Mexican governments should try to facilitate greater transparency among the undocumented Mexican population in the United States. It serves the interests of neither nation to keep illegal immigrants in the shadows. Through matricula cards or other methods, we must have greater ability to identify Mexican nationals in this country. Without identification, little interaction with American society is possible. This increases the chances that immigrants will be the victims of crime or exploitation, reduces the value of remittances to Mexico, and complicates the jobs of U.S. emergency and social service personnel.

Third, in conjunction with improved border management and immigration transparency, the United States should develop realistic mechanisms through which illegal immigrants can regularize their status through positive behavior.

Fourth, cross border labor must be put in the context of our broader trade relationship. It is legitimate to develop means to match willing Mexican workers with willing American employers in sectors where no Americans can be found to fill a job. We should strive to achieve this through regularized means that accentuate the benefits to both the American and the Mexican economies. President Bush's temporary worker proposal and other similar proposals developed in Congress deserve close examination by this body.

Fifth, the United States and Mexico should expand cooperation aimed at domestic development in Mexico, particularly in the country's poorest regions. The two-year-old Mexico-United States Partnership for Prosperity is a good start toward this objective, but more needs to be done. The Mexican government must undertake this effort as a special responsibility that goes hand in hand with American willingness to develop means to regularize the status of illegal immigrants.

This morning we are joined by three impressive panels to discuss these objectives and other aspects of our relationship with Mexico.

On the first panel, we will hear from our colleagues, Senators Hagel, McCain, Craig, Durbin, and Cornyn. Each of these Senators has grappled with the immigration question, and each has sponsored relevant legislation. We are pleased by the strong interest of our colleagues in this hearing and look forward to learning about how their bills would contribute to the improvement of U.S.-Mexican relations and American immigration policy.

On our second panel, we will hear from representatives of the Administration. We welcome Roger Noriega, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs; Eduardo Aguirre, Director of the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services at the Department of Homeland Security; and Stewart Verdery, Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning at the Department of Homeland Security.

On our final panel, we will hear from Dr. Stephen E. Flynn, the Jeane Kirkpatrick Senior Fellow for National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations; Dr. Demetrios Papadimitriou, President of the Migration Policy Institute; and Dr. Arturo Valenzuela, Director of the Center for Latin American Studies at Georgetown University.

We thank all of our witnesses and look forward to their insights.

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