

News from the Kennedy School

Office of Communications and Public Affairs

Mexican President Calderon Highlights Mexican Reforms, Calls for Greater Cooperation

by Robert O'Neill, Kennedy School Publications

February 12, 2008 – Mexican President Felipe Calderon MPA 2000 called the Mexican and U.S. economies complimentary and pushed for a new perspective on the issue of immigration during his address at the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum on Tuesday evening.

Calderon's visit, his first to the United States since his controversial and contested election victory in December 2006, decried what he described as "this anti-Mexican or anti-immigrant spirit" in the United States.



Mexican President **Felipe Calderon** speaking in the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum, February 11, 2008

"I need to change in Mexico the perception that the Americans are the enemy, and it is important to change the perception that the Mexicans are the enemy," he said. "We are neighbors, we are friends and we must be allies."

Calderon underscored his respect for the sensitivity of the immigration issue, which came to a head with the defeat last year of legislation that would have eased illegal immigrants' path to citizenship, and which has been a hot-button issue in the presidential primaries.

But, while saying he was saddened by seeing so many citizens leave Mexico for a life in the United States, he said that Mexico's labor-intensive economy was an obvious match for the United States' capital-intensive economy.

"We are two complementary economies, and that phenomenon is impossible to stop," he said.

Calderon outlined reforms his government has undertaken to make the country more prosperous, including changes to the country's criminal justice system and its tax and pension regimes, and highlighted a proposed \$50 billion investment in the country's infrastructure, part of a plan to make Mexico more attractive to international investors.

Calderon also discussed a signature issue: the battle against criminal gangs that run the lucrative drug trade. He said that 22,000 arrests have been made, over one billion "doses" have been seized, and more than 100 drug lords have been extradited to the United States.

"If you see dust in the air, don't worry, because we are cleaning the house right now," he said in reference to what he said would be a "long and costly war."

But he also called on the United States to share responsibility in fighting the drug trade.

"Drugs are not only (Mexico's) problem," he said. "Our problem is we are the neighbor of the largest consumer in the world, and we are paying the cost for this," he said.

Calderon was a Mason Fellow and his visit coincided with the Program's 50th anniversary this year.

