

Trust-building

by *The San Diego Union-Tribune*

Mexican President Felipe Calderon went to Sacramento, Calif., Thursday as part of a four-day swing through New York, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles. The trip was low-key. It didn't include meetings with President Bush, or an address to Congress, or any of the other trappings you would expect when a head of state pays a visit. Instead, Calderon met with Mexican community organizers in New York, delivered a speech at Harvard and met with New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer, Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. Wednesday, Calderon addressed the California Legislature and made the case that Mexicans contribute more to the U.S. economy than they take out. He was scheduled to fly to Los Angeles, to meet with immigrant activists.

The trip was meant to focus attention on the Mexican immigrant community in the United States. Calderon is getting grief at home for not being more outspoken in defense of this community. Mexicans are worried about what they consider an ugly anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican mood in the United States. And they expect the Mexican president to stand up for the expatriates, who last year sent home \$23 billion.

Calderon was slow to get the message, preferring to focus on his war against the drug cartels, his plans for tax reform, public works projects and other initiatives to raise the quality of life for the average Mexican. But guess what? Those average Mexicans have sons and daughters, mothers and fathers in the United States, and they worry about their well-being.

Last week, Calderon played pundit when he told a reporter that in the U.S. presidential race "the most radical and anti-immigrant candidates have been ... put in their place."

We know what you're thinking. Calderon said "anti-immigrant" and there are many Americans who bristle at that sort of language and insist that this debate is only about illegal immigrants.

Yes and no. Much of the debate is about border security and preserving the rule of law. But there is also that X-factor that surfaces whenever we talk about immigration: the fear that immigrants are changing the country, altering the culture and destroying our national identity. And those concerns aren't limited to illegal immigrants. They're tied to immigrants in general, which is why Congress last year wasn't just debating how to stop illegal immigration but also how to limit legal immigration.

That could be what Calderon is talking about. And, if so, he has a point. But so do his critics, who accuse him of meddling in U.S. affairs and having a misplaced concern for Mexican immigrants, who are best served by creating a Mexico that they won't want to leave.

The relationship between the United States and Mexico has never been easy, but it is essential. Divorce isn't an option. These two countries need one another. But Mexicans also need a government that is worthy of the trust they place in it.

Let's hope Felipe Calderon delivers it.

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