

MEXICO TO SEEK AMNESTY FROM U.S. VICENTE FOX PLANS TO DISCUSS WITH BUSH WAYS TO IMPROVE LIVES OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

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Body

President **Vicente Fox** said Saturday he **plans** to press President **Bush** to grant **amnesty** to Mexicans **living** and working illegally in the **United States**, the latest sign of a growing debate on immigration between the two countries.

Bush and **Fox** are scheduled to meet Feb. 16 in **Mexico** during what will be **Bush's** first foreign visit since taking office in January. During his weekly radio address Saturday, **Fox** said he would ask **Bush** to work toward better treatment of Mexican **immigrants** in the **United States**.

If they were granted **amnesty** by the **U.S.** government, Mexicans could receive the education and health benefits they deserve, **Fox** said.

For those who still want to leave **Mexico**, **Fox** said he would talk to **Bush** about finding a "documented **way**, so they can work, return and see their family, then go back again."

Since he took office Dec. 1, ending more than 70 years of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, **Fox** has come up with several proposals to ease the plight of Mexicans fleeing to the **United States**.

U.S. leaders have been lukewarm to his idea of expanding the North American Free Trade Agreement into a common market that would eventually allow the free movement of workers -- an idea that would have to take place after Mexican wages became more competitive, **Fox** has said.

Still, the **Bush** administration and several members of Congress appear willing to take part in a debate on **improving** the **lives** of **illegal** Mexican **immigrants**.

Texas Republican Sen. Phil Gramm, often a foe of legislation designed to ease **U.S.** immigration laws, has said he will push to create a guest worker program for **illegal** laborers from **Mexico**.

And Secretary of State Colin Powell has expressed concern about the large number of undocumented Mexican **immigrants** who die from exposure and other causes while trying to enter the **United States**.

Fox said other topics he wanted to **discuss** with **Bush** include the **U.S.** economic slowdown and the fight against drug smuggling.

Mexico sends more than 80 percent of its exports to the **United States** and has enjoyed several years of economic growth fueled in part by the **U.S.** economy's success.

However, **Fox** has tried to protect his country's economy from being hit hard by **U.S.** economic troubles.

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During his recent trip to Davos, Switzerland, for the World Economic Forum and during meetings in Germany with leaders there, he sought to boost Mexico's newly signed trade agreement with the European Union.

"It would be bad to sit here, crying and lamenting that the U.S. economy isn't going to grow," he said. "That's for them over there. We are going to fight on other fronts."

He also repeated pleas for all Mexicans to help fight organized crime and drug smugglers.

"We are not going to accept it," he said. "Throw them out of our community."

Notes

Visit Web sites for the State Department (www.state.gov: www: regions: wha: index.html and the Mexican president (www.presidencia.gob.mx: ?NLang).

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