

Bush chided for not focusing on Mexico; Calderon polite but firm about immigration, barriers

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Body

MERIDA, **Mexico** — Mexican President Felipe **Calderon** **chided** President **Bush** on Tuesday for trying to build a wall between their two countries and lamented that the American leader never made **Mexico** the priority he once promised it would become during his presidency.

As he welcomed **Bush** for their first meeting since taking office in December, **Calderon** set a **polite** but **firm** tone, raising some of the toughest issues in U.S.-Mexican relations. The comments, at a ceremony for **Bush**'s arrival, underscored the difficulties that may lie ahead in two days of talks between the leaders.

Among the top issues was U.S. legislation, signed by **Bush** last year, authorizing 700 miles of fencing and other **barriers** along the U.S.-Mexican border. **Calderon** acknowledged that a better way to halt illegal **immigration** would be for his government to improve social and economic conditions in **Mexico** so that his people do not feel driven to head north to support their families.

Mexicans respect Americans' right to decide how to handle their security, **Calderon** said. "But at the same time, we do consider in a respectful way that we may truly stop the migration by building a kilometer of highway in Michoacan or Zacatecas than 10 kilometers of walls in the border."

In another pointed remark, **Calderon** recalled that **Bush** had promised as a candidate in 2000 to put **Mexico** at the top of his foreign policy agenda. "Unfortunately, the terrible happenings against the United States people made that — in a very understandable way, the priorities changed," he said, referring to Sept. 11, 2001. "Nevertheless, I believe that it is now time to retake the spirit of those words and to direct our relationship toward a path of mutual prosperity."

While vowing to fight drug running in his country, **Calderon** also pointed out the U.S. responsibility for stopping the demand. "To be successful in our struggle," he said, "we need the collaboration and the active participation of our neighbor, knowing that if we do not reduce the demand for drugs in a certain area, it will be very difficult to reduce the supply in ours."

Bush did not directly rebut **Calderon** but promised to push for **immigration** legislation at home that would address their mutual problems.

"I respect your views on migration," **Bush** said. "Because we're working together, I believe we will make good progress on this important issue."

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