

Powell reassures Mexico on immigration changes

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The chances that Congress will overhaul immigration rules have increased with the end of the presidential campaign and the improvement of security along the U.S.-Mexican border, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said yesterday.

But he cautioned that approval of the first major immigration changes in 18 years would depend on the new Congress that takes office in January.

"We don't want to overpromise," Powell told a news conference during discussions here on a range of cross-border issues. Joining him for his 20-hour stay in Mexico were five fellow cabinet secretaries.

Powell met with Mexican President Vicente Fox, who has made U.S. immigration changes a priority. Fox says the millions of Mexicans working in the United States should have legal status there so they can live without fear of arrest and deportation.

During his discussions, Powell said he reaffirmed President Bush's "plan to work with our new Congress to develop a temporary-worker program to match willing foreign workers with willing U.S. employers."

Bush and Fox agreed in 2001 to press for immigration changes, but the Sept. 11 attacks soured Congress on the idea. Since then, enhanced border security has been the main U.S. goal in relations with Mexico.

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