

FOX WELCOMES HOME MIGRANTS MEXICAN LEADER WANTS CLOSER TIES WITH EXPATRIATES

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Body

President Vicente **Fox** said Sunday that he will go to the northern border to welcome Mexicans working in the United States who traditionally stream back home for the Christmas holidays.

"I'm going to be on the highways, to receive each and all of the migrants of our country with open arms," **Fox** told a gathering of more than 200 Mexican-Americans and other U.S. visitors at Los Pinos, Mexico's White House, on the third day after his inauguration.

Fox's symbolic embrace was a sign of how vital he believes Mexicans in the United States and Mexican-Americans are to the economic development of Mexico.

Through the dollars they send to family members back home, the expatriate community is already an important source of money.

Fox wants even closer ties and more business investment.

His gesture represents a dramatic break with an unhappy tradition. Returning Mexicans are frequently greeted at the border, not by a welcoming president, but with shakedowns by customs and immigration officials and police. About 1 million Mexican workers immigrate to the United States each year, legally and illegally. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there are nearly 21 million U.S. residents of Mexican origin.

Fox, who took office Friday, said it was "no accident" that his first official guests at Los Pinos were the Mexican-Americans with whom he met Sunday.

It was a diverse group that included actor and activist Edward James Olmos, who said **Fox** ranks for him with George Washington and South American liberator Simon Bolivar.

Fox spoke admiringly of the "determination, courage, valor, passion and love" of Mexico's migrants over the years.

"We want to follow your example," without having to leave the country, he said.

The aim, he said, is to make it so "that every little boy and girl can stay with his family, here in Mexico, and can find their way up in his own country."

Juan Hernandez, chief of a new presidential office for assistance to Mexicans abroad, introduced **Fox**.

Hernandez, 45, has dual U.S. and Mexican citizenship; his parents live in Fort Worth.

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He said that the new administration would be working to aid and win the support of Mexicans "regardless of their citizenship."

Other officials, including Foreign Secretary Jorge Castaneda, repeated the theme, promising, for example, to improve service to Mexicans at border crossings.

Fox, Mexico's first president not from the Institutional Revolutionary Party since 1928, is promising new respect for and relationships with Mexico's sons and daughters abroad and peasants and Indians at **home**.

His outreach to the mostly Maya Indian Zapatista rebels in the southern state of Chiapas is already bearing some fruit. In **Fox**'s first official act, just after midnight on his inauguration day, he ordered a partial withdrawal of federal troops from Chiapas. The chief of the Zapatista Army, Subcommander Marcos, responded late Saturday with a conditional offer to resume negotiations with the government.

Fox welcomed the offer Sunday.

And **Fox** later Sunday attended an inauguration celebration in the state of Mexico, outside Mexico City, that was intended to honor peasants. About 40 percent of **Mexican** workers are dependent on agriculture.

But it is Mexicans abroad whose importance to the nation's economy is rising. They send their families upward of \$6 billion a year in a country where about 40 percent of the population of 100 million lives in households with incomes of less than \$200 a month.

Fox and Hernandez repeated promises to make it cheaper and easier for Mexicans abroad to send money **home**.

Graphic

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PHOTO: VICTOR CAIVANO -- ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mexican President Vicente **Fox**, right, shakes hands with a man in Metepec during a meeting of farmworkers Sunday -- his third day in office. **Fox** said he **wanted** to **welcome** returning Mexicans "with open arms."

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