

# **Mexican boycott spurs outcry; U.S. FIRMS SAY THEY'RE ALLIES OF WORKERS**

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## **Body**

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U.S. lobbyists lashed out Wednesday at the Mexican boycott-American campaign timed for May 1 to coincide with the ``Day Without Immigrants" protest in the United States.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico said organizers are risking a backlash and foolishly targeting some of their best allies, since U.S. corporations have actively lobbied the U.S. Congress for immigration reform, including legalization for many of the estimated 11 million undocumented migrants.

Mexicans' refusal to ``buy American" on May 1 could further polarize the debate and make reform supporters seem anti-American at the very moment that lobbyists are trying to persuade lawmakers in Washington to pass a bill that would benefit migrants, said Larry Rubin, the chamber's s president.

``This is like shooting oneself in the foot," Rubin said. ``U.S. companies have been the first to lobby, launching a huge lobbying effort for immigration reform. . . . Why hurt something that is helping you?"

Migrants and their supporters in the United States are being encouraged to skip work and school and not spend money for one day to demonstrate the migrants' importance to the U.S. economy.

South of the border, Mexicans are targeting American stores and chain restaurants -- ``That means no Dunkin' Donuts, no McDonald's, Burger King, Starbucks, Sears, Krispy Kreme or Wal-Mart," reads one e-mail making the rounds.

But even activists are confused about which companies are U.S.-owned. Sears is cited by boycott organizers, despite the fact that Sears' Mexico stores were bought by Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim in 1997. And few organizers mention Vips -- the chain of ubiquitous Mexican diners -- even though they are owned by Wal-Mart.

A quarter of Mexico's formal private-sector jobs with regular pay are provided by U.S. firms, according to the chamber, including Walmex, the Mexican Wal-Mart subsidiary that is the nation's biggest private employer with 140,000 workers. Delphi Corp., the U.S. auto-parts maker, is second with 70,000 workers.

``Certainly, companies could be hurt," Rubin said at a news conference Wednesday.

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The chamber represents more than 2,000 American and other foreign companies doing business in Mexico, and **says** its members are responsible for \$100 billion of investment in the country.

The companies **say they're** helping Mexico by providing jobs, but activists counter they pay so little that Mexicans have little choice but to head north.

Backers of the **Mexican boycott** insisted Wednesday that the protest could send a message that American companies should offer better pay and benefits to their **Mexican workers**.

Unskilled **workers** at **U.S.** companies usually start with Mexico's minimum wage of \$4.35 a day. A cashier at Subway (or "sandwich artist," as the company refers to them) earns about \$189 a month in Mexico City. In Colorado, Subway cashiers make four times that -- \$824.

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