

Overseas Development Council: Policy Advisor to Distant Neighbors

The ODC links policy-makers in the United States and Mexico

The U.S.-Mexico Project of the Overseas Development Council has worked to improve both communications and policy in U.S.-Mexican relations since its founding in 1979. Today, the Project serves as the major forum in Washington for policymakers from the public and private sectors of both countries for off-the-record discussion of critical bilateral issues.

This past June, Cathryn Thorup, U.S.—Mexico Project Director, and ODC Vice President, Richard Feinberg, were asked to testify at the Helms hearings on Mexico. As Mexico-bashing began to dominate the policy discussion in Washington, ODC stepped forth to stress the need for an enlightened, coordinated and farsighted U.S. policy toward Mexico. The dangers of a fragmented policy-making process were highlighted by the Helms hearings. As domestic and foreign policy issues become increasingly interwoven and as the stake increase, more actors—both public and private—demand a say in policy formulation. Certain domestic constituent interests may be well-served, but U. S. long-term interests in Mexico are not. President Reagan's invitation to President de la Madrid to meet with him in Washington was perhaps the clearest indication of the awareness in the aftermath of the hearings of the need to mend our southern fences.

While in Washington, President de la Madrid invited Victor H. Palmieri, Chairman of ODC's Board, John W. Sewell, President of ODC, Cathryn Thorup, Richard Feinberg and Guy F. Erb, Chairman of the U.S. - Mexico Policy Committee, to meet with him, expressing his support for the Council's extensive work on U.S. relations with Mexico.

With the return of Congress this fall, the U.S. - Mexico Project reinitiated the U.S.-Mexico

Congressional Staff Workshop. In September, Stephen Lande of Manchester Associates, an international consulting firm based in Washington, spoke on U.S. Mexican trade relations. He pointed out the critical need for congressional staff members to be aware of the important implications of various legislative initiatives which, through not specifically geared red toward Mexico, could seriously affect the bilateral relationship. His presentation focused on H.R. 4800 —A Bill to Enhance the Competitiveness of America, which could have serious implications for Mexico's attempts to expand and diversify its exports and to liberalize its import regime. (For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Stephen Lande, "U.S. Omnibus Trade Bill—Future Damage to Mexico's Exporters", *Business Mexico*, August 1986).

The next Workshop will examine Mexico's recent debt relief package. Discussion will focus on the debate over whether this new agreement offers a real opportunity for sustained growth and reduced poverty in Mexico, or simply postpones the problem for the next two years, leaving the hard choices to President de la Madrid's successor. Dr. Norman Bailey of Colby, Bailey, Werner & Associates will be the speaker at this program.

As part of the U.S.—Mexico Seminar Series, Mariclaire Acosta, Executive Director of the Mexican Academy for Human Rights, spoke at ODC in late October. Controversy around human rights protection in Mexico has arisen in the United States during past years in response to certain highly publicized cases, but in general it receives insufficient attention despite its potential importance in the context of both Mexican domestic politics and U.S.-Mexican relations.

Tim Bennet of the Office of the U.S. Trade

Representative will be the speaker at the sixth U.S. - Mexico Congressional Staff Workshop in December. He will discuss the protection of intellectual property in Mexico, the impact of current laws on investment and technology transfer, and the pros and cons of newly proposed Mexican legislation. The protection of U.S. Intellectual property through patents, trademarks and copyrights is a concern of the Reagan administration with regard to many trading partners. The debate in Mexico focuses on pharmaceuticals and agricultural chemicals, both of which are currently non-patentable under Mexican law. The stated logic behind this is to allow Mexico to maintain control over inventions related to "priority" industrial sectors, generally considered to be any related to health and welfare. Current Mexican legislation is viewed in the U.S. as a disincentive for foreign investment, thus having a long-term impact on U.S. trade with Mexico.

In February 1987, ODC will publish a volume edited by Cathryn Thrup entitled *The United States and Mexico: Face to Face with New Technology*. The book will examine the impact of new development in technology on trade, investment and labor flows between the United States and Mexico. Ms. Thorup is also conducting research on bureaucratic

structure and bilateral conflict which will culminate in a book entitled *Conflict Management in U.S. - Mexican Relations: The view from Washington*. Another addition to ODC's publications effort was the appearance in the April-June 1986 edition of *Foro Internacional* of "U.S. - Mexican Relations: The Issues Ahead", co-authored by Cathryn Thorup and Guy Erb, making this important analysis of the bilateral relationship much more accessible to the Mexican reader.

Beginning in December 1986, the project will examine domestic interest groups and their impact on the U.S. foreign policy process, focusing specifically on their impact on U.S. legislative initiatives affecting Mexico. Issues relating to Mexico are of concern to many different groups, each with its own agenda, often at odds with each other and with broader U.S. policy aims. This study will identify these groups and examine the mechanisms they use to influence U.S. policy towards Mexico.

ODC's U.S. - Mexico Project examines a broad array of issues affecting the bilateral relationship. If readers have suggestions for particular issues that they feel demand the attentions of a Washington-based policy-oriented audience, please contact us at 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., #501, Washington, D.C., 20036★

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