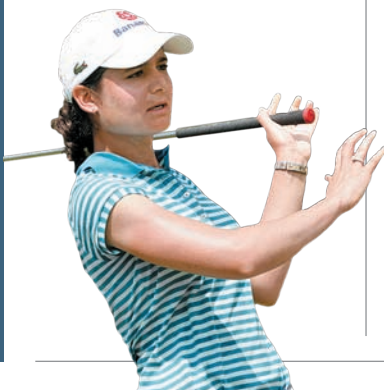


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# Obama visit seen as 'good sign for Mexico'

Los Pinos says trip shows high priority placed on relationship

BY JONATHAN CLARK  
The News

U.S. President Barack Obama said Wednesday that he will visit Mexico next month, sparking optimism here that the trip could herald a "change in posture" toward the United States' southern neighbor.

According to a White House statement, Obama plans to meet with President Felipe Calderón to discuss issues including "how the United States and Mexico can work together to support Mexico's fight against drug-related violence and work toward effective, comprehensive immigration reform."

The announcement comes at a time of increasing bilateral tension over spiraling drug violence in Mexico and a U.S. decision to ban Mexican trucks from its interior.

Even so, official reaction in Mexico to Obama's visit was largely optimistic.

Los Pinos spokesman Maximiliano Cortázar told a press conference that the April 16-17 visit "underscores the high priority that both [Obama and Calderón] place on the strengthening of the bilateral relationship," while Silvano Aureoles Conejo, a Senate caucus leader for the opposition Democratic Revolution Party, called the visit a "good sign for Mexico" that



WHITE HOUSE COURTESY PHOTO/PETE SOUZA

Obama meets with the U.S. Congressional Hispanic Caucus on Wednesday. He announced his Mexico trip at the meeting.

suggests a "change in posture" from the White House.

However, analysts warned against reading too much into the trip.

"More than a change of position, this is just a natural step for a new administration," said Ana María Salazar, a Mexico City-based political commentator and former senior policy adviser in the Clinton Administration.

"It makes a lot of sense for the new president of the United States, having already traveled to Canada, to then come to Mexico, since Mexico is a very important country to the United States from many perspectives."

The Obama-Calderón talks will focus on topics such as economic development, environmental issues and further cooperation on security, Cortázar said. Echoing the White House comments, he also added immigration as a key talking point.

Local migrant rights activists said they were heartened by Obama's visit and plans to discuss immigration, but expressed concern that the issue would be just one part of talks likely to be dominated by security concerns.

*Talks are expected to focus on security, trade, the environment and immigration.*

"We would like to see immigration discussed as a distinct issue," said Paulo Martínez, spokesman for the Mexico City-based migrant rights group Sin Fronteras.

"Otherwise, migrants will end up being criminalized and stigmatized with the label 'illegal' rather than being treated as contributors to economic development."

Obama will stop in Mexico on his way to the Summit of the Americas being held April 17-19 in Trinidad and Tobago. It will be his second meeting of the year with Calderón; the two leaders met in Washington about a week before Obama's inauguration in January.

Obama's visit to Mexico will follow the visit of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who will be in Mexico City and Monterrey March 25-26.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced Wednesday he, also, will visit Mexico in early April to discuss drug violence.

Mexican officials long complained of neglect during the administration of former U.S. President George W. Bush, whose foreign policy focused on the Middle East and the war on terror.

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