

BLC Leads Delegation to Mexico City

On March 15-17, 2009, a delegation of members of the Border Legislative Conference (BLC) traveled to Mexico City to conduct meetings with Mexico and U.S. federal officials. The visit was part of the BLC's ongoing efforts to exchange information and strengthen state –federal collaboration on issues of mutual interest, such as border competitiveness, security, and the environment, among others. The delegation was led by Senator Denise Moreno Ducheny of California and Diputado Ramiro Flores Morales of Coahuila, chair and vice chair respectively of the BLC.

Participating border legislators met with the members of Mexico's Senate Committee on Northern Border Affairs; the Office of the Attorney General; Foreign Relations Committee in the Chamber of Deputies; Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; USAID/Mexico; and U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Carlos Pascual.

The meetings were substantive and the members of the BLC had an opportunity to discuss their ongoing legislative agenda and present recommendations on topics that require federal intervention. The topic of security issue was of significant focus in most meetings, particularly due to evolving security situation in Cd. Juarez, Mexico.

Highlights:

- Senator Jaime Rafael Diaz Ochoa, Chair of the Senate Committee on Northern Border Affairs, hosted the members of the BLC to an open dialogue on current border concerns. As the new chair of this Committee, Senator Diaz Ochoa expressed his Committee's commitment to enhance state – federal legislative cooperation to address issues such as economic competitiveness and security. In a press conference conducted after the meeting, the BLC and the Senate Committee Northern Border Affairs expressed their strong interest in the harmonization of laws on issues of mutual interest, and the development of joint strategies on security matters.
- In a working meeting with Jorge Alberto Lara Rivera and Adrian Franco of Mexico's Attorney General's Office, legislators were able to discuss a wide-range of topics related to security as well as judicial reforms being implemented in Mexico. Among the issues expressed by participating legislators were the need to ensure that binational federal strategies, such as the Merida Initiative, incorporate resources and integration of states; the development of joint solutions such as binational drug courts; an enhanced focus and multi-jurisdictional coordination combat money laundering, trafficking of arms, and developing stronger asset forfeiture statutes at the state level;

- Participating border legislators met with several members of the Chamber of Deputies' Foreign Relations Committee. The meeting provided an opportunity for BLC members to brief the committee on recommendations it has identified requiring federal support. During the meeting, the Committee's chair, Dip. Munoz Ledo, informed the BLC delegation of its trip to Washington DC to meet this week with their federal counterparts.
- Undersecretary for North America of Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Julian Ventura, listened and exchanged information with BLC members on a range of border issues, including concerns over wait times, ongoing security worries along the border, greater coordination with other binational mechanisms.
- U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Carlos Pascual informed the delegation of the upcoming visit to Mexico City by President Obama's Senior Security Team. This will include, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and others. Ambassador Pascual informed that the high-level visit will include the announcement of a new U.S. – Mexico security and economic strategy focused on four pillars. These pillars are the following:
 - Disruption and Dismantling of Drug Cartels
 - Institutional Rule of Law
 - Development of 21st Century Borders
 - Focus on Socio-Economic Factors

In addition to the Four Pillars, the Ambassador described the development of a strategy focused on renewable energy. He described recent discussions between California and Baja California officials on energy transmission and alternative sources of energy, including solar and wind.