
INTERVIEW

Governor Clements talks to EIR about past and future relations with Mexico

The following interview with the Governor of Texas, William Clements, a Republican, was conducted by EIR's Harley Schlanger on Oct. 29 in Houston.

Schlanger: A lot of credit has come your way for the role that you have played in helping to shape relations with Mexico. What has been the important accomplishments so far in improving U.S.-Mexican relations?

Gov. Clements: Well, I think that undoubtedly the single most important factor has been to be able to open up the line of communications. It doesn't do any good to have a telephone if the line is dead. In my endeavors, we are now enjoying an open line, where at least we're talking to each other and discussing mutual problems. That sounds like a simple thing to accomplish, and you wonder why it was not heretofore existing, but it didn't. People talked, but nobody listened. Too often, there was a one-way conversation; too often the United States was talking down to Mexico, instead of talking to Mexico as a partner and as a neighbor, as a sovereign state.

Because of the Mexican culture and the type of people that they are and their traditions, they want to be treated with respect. Part of that respect has to do with the recognition that they are indeed a sovereign state, that they are our neighbor, and that they want to be treated in a neighborly fashion. On that fundamental premise I have been able to open up the line of communication.

Schlanger: Now the lines are open, what do you see as the immediate priorities?

Gov. Clements: I have said on many occasions that the most sensitive area in our relationship has to do with the undocumented worker. Some people refer to it as the illegal alien; the Mexicans prefer to call it the undocumented worker, and I appreciate the nuance. I think it has been difficult in the past for the U.S. to recognize that this is in fact the most sensitive area we have between us. I will say to you that until we solve this problem, or until we properly address this problem, we are not going to solve the others. This one strikes right at the heart of the relationship.

Schlanger: Some of the press have made a great fuss about whether you switched your position [on the Reagan immigration program]. . . .

Gov. Clements: That's nonsense.

Schlanger: What do you think at this point of the Reagan policy, and where do we go from here?

Gov. Clements: I agree with my Mexican governor associates who met with us in El Paso recently that President Reagan's program as articulated by Attorney General Smith, who headed up the cabinet task force, is a great first step forward, with emphasis on "first step" and on "forward." They don't consider it a step backward—it's a beginning; I don't think it's much more than a beginning.

I think that everybody has to realize that not only will Texas continue the in-depth studies that we've had under way, we are going to further define those studies, and we will present our position before both the House subcommittee and the Senate subcommittees. There will be some differences in our approach to the problem than the administration's. But I can assure you that it's all in the spirit of constructive criticism or constructive suggestions. We will not be the only ones putting forward different ideas. So I come back to what our Mexican friends and governor associates said, that this is a good first step forward; there are some differences, but that's to be expected.

Schlanger: You mentioned different approaches. One of those which has had lots of play in the press and has been thoroughly rejected by the Mexican government is the approach of the Hesburgh Commission, and the bill presented by Sen. Walter Huddleston, which says that the first problem is closing the border and the second problem is getting Mexico to reduce its population. This was the proposal which had come forward from the Carter administration around the program of Global 2000. What are your comments on that?

Gov. Clements: Well, not only is closing the border absurd, in my judgment it's impossible. All of us in



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government have a starting point which has to do with the real world, and the real world tells me that we cannot close the borders.

In Texas, we have over a thousand miles of border along the Rio Grande River, and some of it is very wild wilderness area. There is no way in this world that we can physically close this border. I don't know of any good neighbors that have, so to speak, a Berlin Wall. I am absolutely opposed to that sort of thing. Any solution that we come up with has to address the mutuality of our problem and have the concurrence and agreement of Mexico. If Mexico is not in agreement with it, it's not going to work, I don't care what the plan is.

The so-called "Hesburgh plan" or the "Jimmy Carter plan" that not only includes the closed border but also a blanket amnesty, that's no plan. And Mexico doesn't want that; they don't want to lose their citizens, and we don't want that. We in Texas would go right up the wall on some kind of general amnesty for all these undocumented workers. That is not the right approach to the problem.

Now the other issue, that has to do with decreased population, hits a very sensitive nerve in Mexico. I think President López Portillo and all of the governors with whom I've discussed this issue agree that their rate of population growth must be slowed and they're working at it . . . and I might add that they are making progress in this regard.

Schlanger: I think it's fairly clear that their approach, which I think is a correct approach, is that it's not a population problem, it's a problem of having the resources, the industry, and the technology to be able to provide for the population. Ambassador Gavin has taken steps to address this in his statement in Mexico City. He said that there would be no more "obstructionism" in the

United States toward Mexican development. In particular he put forth the idea of oil for technology, and included in that was the idea of nuclear technology for oil.

Gov. Clements: I agree fundamentally that the proper approach, the long-term approach, for Mexico is to build their industrial base, and by building their industrial base, they create jobs, they help their economy and they increase their gross national product. They do all those things, but I want to emphasize that that is long-term—not short-term. For the kind of industrialization that will have the impact that people like to talk about, beyond the year 2000, we are talking about enormous amounts of capital. We're talking about a gain in technology, in personal skills—career skills for the Mexican people, none of which can be accomplished overnight. So we have, first of all, a short-term set of problems that we must address. Then we have long-term goals that must be addressed and *implemented* over time. But let's not confuse short-term and long-term.

You know, it's well and good for various individuals to talk in glowing terms about "increased investment," "planned development," "industrial base," "literally hundreds of thousands of new jobs," and "raising the standard of living and making work in Mexico more attractive," and so forth—that's fine. You know I could talk about motherhood in those same glowing terms, but you are talking about a cycle that will probably cover two to three generations. We have a set of problems that it is in our mutual interests that we identify, and try to find solutions to them *in the short term*.

Schlanger: What kind of progress do you see being made in the short term?

Gov. Clements: Well, I think good progress is being made, talking about commerce, in the usual sense—we are not only exporting from the United States, but we are importing from Mexico. In other words, again, a communication between the two states, where it flows both ways. We're talking about tourism—both ways. We're talking about cultural exchange—both ways; we are talking about educational opportunities—both ways; and I can go on and on. Environmental problems along the border—there's no use waiting long-term for these problems, we can address them right now. The energy problem, I agree, is a short-term problem. If we need the energy, and they have the energy, there's no reason why we can't work this to our mutual benefit on a fair market price.

There's another set of problems that are long term; they require a different approach, and they have to be carefully considered—long-term as to the implications within Mexico, where they are fundamentally related to a long-term Mexican plan that employs the resources of the United States, whether it's in straight-out, simple

capital terms, or whether it's in partnership, business-venture terms, or whether it's in the exchange of technology.

But these are things that are sovereign decisions within Mexico. And they will have long-term implications within Mexico, and *they* are the ones who have got to make that decision.

Schlanger: Do you see the economic plan of the López Portillo administration as a step in the right direction then?

Gov. Clements: Yes, I do. I don't guess that I'm entitled to an opinion as a Texan and a U.S. citizen, but I much admire President López Portillo. I have high respect for his judgment and his vision, if you will, of what Mexico's all about; where it's been in the past, where it is now, and where it's going in the future, and I think he's made an excellent President for Mexico.

Schlanger: Do you see the probability for continuity with Miguel de la Madrid?

Gov. Clements: I don't think there is any question about it. I have discussed this with some of my friends in Mexico at considerable length. I'm satisfied that there will be continuity and, if anything, that De la Madrid is a logical next step forward in this overall planning for Mexico. I think he is the right kind of choice. He has a well-known and recognized background, in economics and financial matters, in budgetary matters, and he will be, in my judgment, a good person to carry forward these plans and this vision that President López Portillo has enunciated so well.

Schlanger: In the past, the United States has, particularly under the Carter administration, been very unreliable as a partner. The Reagan administration has made steps to improve that. . . .

Gov. Clements: I just want to make the point that one President's term of four years is a very short time in history and that I don't at all think that Mexico looks upon the United States as unreliable. I don't think they ever did think that. I think that they thought we could have chosen a better President than Mr. Carter, but, nevertheless, they realized again that that is short-term, and this relationship—this goes on forever. In history four years is nothing. And Mexico, I think, has a great respect for the United States. All we have to do is to do our part as a good neighbor, as a partner with Mexico, and I am convinced that they will do their part.

Schlanger: Was there progress made at Cancún?

Gov. Clements: Always from meetings of this kind, progress is made. I think those meetings are good. The most is accomplished on what you would term "non-substantive issues." The fact that they do get together, the fact

that they do talk about mutual problems, the fact that these lines of communications do open up—I think that's the important thing.

Schlanger: What do you see as the economic outlook for Texas up ahead?

Gov. Clements: Excellent.

Schlanger: What can Texas say to the rest of the country?

Gov. Clements: Well, I don't think the rest of the country represents the kind of business environment that Texas does. We don't have a corporate income tax in Texas, we don't have a personal income tax in Texas. We have one of the very lowest tax rates in the United States. We have a very strong right-to-work law in Texas where the unions cannot be and are not dominant. These are the things that I think make a state have a strong economy or not. The free-enterprise system flourishes in Texas—Texas exemplifies the spirit of the entrepreneur. And you can take that as a beginning and say, "Well, is that true in New York?" Or "Is that true in Michigan, or Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or Massachusetts," and under those circumstances you might come up with the answer, "Well, no that really isn't true." They do have excess taxation, they do have a domineering factor in their unions. Free enterprise does not flourish, the spirit of the entrepreneur is dead. I could just go on and on.

I am not preaching gospel or trying to stimulate more people to come to Texas—we have more people coming to Texas than we can say grace over. We've got them coming from both directions.

Schlanger: Do you foresee an increase in trade in Texas with Mexico through the ports and island trading areas?

Gov. Clements: I think it will continue. I know of no one in a senior position in the Mexican government that doesn't agree with me that this will continue. And one of the reasons is—they're for it and I'm for it. It's no accident that when we meet in El Paso that all those items were on the agenda; in the interim period between meetings, we had subcommittees meeting on it.

Schlanger: As someone who has had some experience with defense policy in the past I'd like your comments on the AWACS victory yesterday.

Gov. Clements: Well, I strongly supported the President in his program with the AWACS and, as a matter of fact, I predicted a victory for the AWACS a month ago. This is not a new position. I felt that the President would win. I thought that others were not only on the wrong side of the issue—they were on the wrong side for the wrong reasons! They really hadn't thought it through, and they really didn't know what they were talking about. And it was only right and logical that the President would prevail on that issue.