

Main Topics

- *President Calderón visits U.S.*
- *President Calderón launches infrastructure fund*
- *Deputies elect IFE's replacements*
- *Peasant organizations bring demands to Congress*

President Calderón is conducting a **five day tour of the United States** that is taking him to New York, Boston, Chicago, Sacramento, and Los Angeles. His visit aims at promoting investment in Mexico, and reaching out to large Mexican expatriate communities at a time when immigration continues to be a high profile political issue in the U.S. presidential campaign. Notably, Calderón has yet to visit Washington, DC since his inauguration.

President Calderón announced the creation, by decree, of a **National Infrastructure Fund** of approximately \$4 billion, part of a \$25 billion investment in infrastructure over the next 5 years. "History proves that investments in infrastructure are crucial for the development of nations...infrastructure can be Mexico's passport to the future," he said in a speech delivered at Los Pinos. The resources will be used to construct and maintain highways, drainage systems, water treatment plants, airports and ports. According to Treasury Secretary Agustín Carstens these resources, together with those already allocated in the budget could generate more than 100,000 jobs in 2008. Carstens said the increased spending is intended to counteract the global slowdown. "The fund is a timely response...Precisely because we do not underestimate the world wide economic tendencies, we are not crossing our arms...we want to react.," he said. (Proceso, 2/6)

More than one month after a self imposed deadline, deputies from the PRI, PAN and the PRD selected Leonardo Valdés Zurita, to be the **new President of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE)** for a six year period. Mr. Valdés, proposed by the PRD, received 398 votes of 431 cast by the legislators. He headed the Mexico City Electoral Institute (IEDF) from 1998 to 2004. The deputies also selected Marco Antonio Baños, a long time IFE executive who was backed by the PRI, and Benito Nacif, a political analyst and academic from the CIDE who was backed by the PAN to the IFE board. President Calderón highlighted these selections as proof that "Mexicans can agree on the things that most interest the country." However, according to Salvador García Soto, a columnist from El Universal, these appointments have little to do with the qualifications of the new IFE members: "In the agreement reached to name the new IFE board members, they [the deputies] placed less value on the capacities of the candidates and selected those who did not cause strong resistance from the other political forces." (Universal, 2/7)

Anti-NAFTA peasant groups and others who paralyzed Mexico City last week threatened to abandon negotiations with the government if the "TV spots promoting the benefits of NAFTA are not removed from the air." They have also demanded that the Ministers of Agriculture, Economy, and Labor be excluded from the negotiations. At the same time, leaders of various peasant groups were received by the coordinators of the parties in the Chamber of Deputies who agreed to start a "formal dialogue" around the protestors' demands which include the renegotiation of NAFTA's agricultural chapter. Ruth Zavaleta, President of the Chamber, expressed her willingness to try to work with the protestors. (Reforma, 2/8)

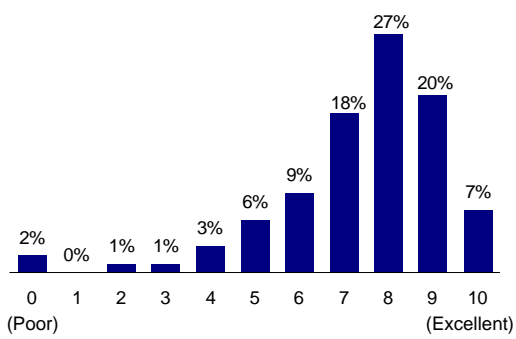
Key Dates

- 02/17/08:** Hidalgo state elections
- 03/16/08:** PRD elects party president
- 07/06/08:** Nayarit state elections

Opinion Polls

A new Ipsos-Bimsa/Universal poll shows President Calderón's approval rating up 9 points to 66% in January 2008 from 57% in November 2007, when his government announced an increase in gasoline prices. The same poll shows an increase in Calderón's personal favorability rating, which rose to 7.4 in February 2008, as compared to 7.1 in November 2007.

How would you rate President Calderón as a person on a scale of 0 to 10?



Personal favorability rating by party affiliation:

	Apr-07	Aug-07	Nov-07	Feb-08
PAN	8.4	8.2	8.4	8.3
PRI	7.3	6.6	6.9	7.4
PRD	6.0	5.4	6.1	6.4
Independents	7.0	6.8	6.5	6.8
Total	7.4	7.0	7.1	7.4