

Main Topics

- *PRI blocks investigation of Juan Camilo Mouriño*
- *Leadership of energy reform initiative in doubt*
- *Economic stimulus package announced*
- *Calderón takes rotating presidency of Rio Group; 5 Mexicans among those killed or wounded in attack on FARC camp*

The PRD and its allies moved to create a congressional commission to investigate their allegations against Secretary of Government **Juan Camilo Mouriño** for conflicts of interest while serving in the last government. PAN Senate leader Santiago Creel and party president Germán Martínez came to Mouriño’s defense, with Creel saying that an attack on the Government Secretary was “cunning blow” that struck all PANistas. The PRI congressional leadership initially backed the PRD’s call for an investigative commission, but reversed course after meeting with Mouriño. Manlio Fabio Beltrones, PRI Senate leader, explained that “commissions of this type are an inefficient vehicle to resolve these kinds of allegations.” (Reforma 3/7-9)

Mouriño defended himself in a TV interview. He acknowledged his signature on the 2003 contracts between Pemex and a family firm while arguing that “being the legal representative [of a company] is not a crime.” The PRD promised to disclose more ‘illegal’ contracts. *Reporte Indigo* provided details about several Mouriño associates who got government jobs that could enable them to provide benefits to the family’s energy businesses, while *Milenio* disclosed highway construction contracts received by Mouriño family companies this year. (Televisa 3/6, Reforma 3/7, Report Indigo 3/7, Milenio 3/5)

Commentators foresaw damage to the **energy reform** initiative. Jorge Zepeda Patterson wrote that Mouriño “will certainly be able to survive this scandal, but his capacity to be an arbiter among the country’s political forces and to be useful to the President have been seriously damaged.... Manlio Fabio Beltrones and Emilio Gamboa, leaders of the PRI delegations in the congress, protected Calderón’s dauphin The result is that Mouriño becomes a hostage to the PRI.” Ricardo Alemán said, “It is now clear that Juan Camilo Mouriño is out of the energy reform. The hand on the steering wheel now belongs to the Secretary of Energy, Georgina Kessel.” (Universal 3/6, 3/9)

Key Dates

- **03/16/08:** PRD elects party president
- **03/18/08:** Anniversary of nationalization of oil
- **07/06/08:** Nayarit state elections
- **09/28/08:** Coahuila state elections
- **10/05/08:** Guerrero state elections

President Calderón announced an **economic stimulus package** equivalent to 0.6% of GDP to counter the effects of a U.S. recession. The 10-measure package to promote investment and job creation includes Ps. 27 billion in temporary tax reductions, electricity rate reductions, and higher government spending; and Ps. 33 billion in increased credit and financial guarantees through the development banks. “The package will help mainly due to the reductions in electricity tariffs,” noted Claudio X. González, President of Kimberly Clark Mexico. “These are important steps, although not the total solution,” said Miguel Marón, President of Canacintra, the industrial chamber. (www.shcp.gob.mx, Universal 3/4, Reforma 3/4)

President Calderón assumed the rotating presidency of the **Rio Group** of Latin American countries at their summit in Santo Domingo, after the dramatic reconciliation of President Uribe of Colombia with his Ecuadorian and Venezuelan counterparts. At least four Mexicans were among those killed in Colombia’s attack on the FARC camp, and another was seriously wounded. The presence of the Mexicans—who were sympathizers on a tour, not guerrillas—brought to light the long-standing presence of the FARC in Mexico City and their support networks at the National University (UNAM) and other schools. (Universal 3/9)

Opinion Polls

A *Reforma* survey (3/5) showed that the popularity of Mexico City mayor Marcelo Ebrard has sagged from year-end levels, with only a 50% approval rating, while his disapproval rate has reached 37%. Jobs and public safety, with just 30-31% approval, got the lowest marks, while water supply and informal street vendors showed the biggest negative shifts.

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Marcelo Ebrard is doing his job as head of government [in Mexico City]?

