

Main Topics

- *Federal pension reform approved by the Chamber of Deputies*
- *Confrontation brewing on abortion*
- *Mexico City mayor Marcelo Ebrard begins to make his mark*
- *The President receives death threats*

The federal pension reform law—the **first structural reform in 11 years**—was approved by the Chamber of Deputies by a vote of 313 to 146. The PRI, PAN, PVEM, PANAL and Alternativa voted in favor, with the PRD, PT and Convergencia against. Workers covered by the federal pension agency ISSSTE (almost half of whom are teachers) will transition to a system of individual retirement accounts, which will initially be managed by a new entity, Pensionisste. After three years, account holders may choose to move their accounts to any of the other retirement fund administrators. “The decision taken today, despite adversity and threats, proves that we can actually reach agreements,” said President Calderón.

The law was prepared in the Finance Ministry and enjoyed the active support of Elba Esther Gordillo, head of the National Teachers Union. Congressional debate centered on concerns that she and the union would have too much control over the new pension fund. The supporters of the reform agreed to sponsor an amendment to the general pension law to establish professional criteria for managing all pension funds. PRI Senate leader Manlio Fabio Beltrones said, “we will not allow for the brother, son or cousin in law of an inconvenient person to become the head of the new entity.” Beltrones also said he expected the ISSSTE law to be passed by the Senate this week. (Reforma 3/23, El Universal 3/23)

A PRD and Alternativa initiative in the Mexico City legislative assembly to **decriminalize abortion** during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy has become a national issue. President Calderón called for “caution” and said he hoped “those who have the majority don’t resort to bullying on such a delicate issue.” Government Minister Ramirez Acuna said that the fundamental principles of the PAN were “pro life and against abortion.” Anti-abortion advocates, including the Church, have been waging an intense media campaign against the measure, which is expected to come to a vote by the end of April. A Reforma poll showed that residents of the capital favor decriminalization by a margin of 59% to 36%.

Key Dates

05/20/07: *Yucatan gubernatorial election*

06/2-3/07: *PAN National Assembly*

08/05/07: *Baja California gubernatorial election*

11/11/07: *Michoacan gubernatorial election*

March 2008: *PAN National Committee election*

Mexico City mayor Marcelo Ebrard spoke out in favor of decriminalization at the ceremony marking the anniversary of the birth of Benito Juárez, the day after the Calderón and Ramirez remarks. Ebrard said the bill was part of the PRD’s platform and was supported by a majority of the population. He rejected any attempt “to subordinate the political representation of the city to questions of faith.” (Reforma 3/20, El Norte 3/21)

Ebrard has attracted a great deal of attention, and praise, for **tough actions against organized crime**. Last week, he closed down 200 automobile chop-shops in Iztapalapa and expropriated the land where they operated. Political commentator Ricardo Aleman noted that no state governor has taken such direct action against organized crime, making Ebrard, in fact, Calderón’s best ally in the federal government’s security initiative. (Universal 3/22)

Calderón revealed that he and his family have **received death threats** from organized criminals. Security around the president has been increased, and the news provoked widespread calls of support for the President. Emilio Gamboa, the head of the PRI in the Chamber, called on all parties to “close ranks” with the President. “We are truly in a war.... We cannot call a truce; we have to continue fighting organized crime with all the power of the State.” (Universal 3/23-24)