

Alan Stoga, President**Daniel Wilson, Managing Director and Editor****President proposes comprehensive political reform**

On the last day of the fall Congressional session, President **Felipe Calderón** submitted a nine-point* constitutional political reform proposal. The initiative will be taken up when Congress reconvenes in February. The President [said](#) that the objective of the reforms was “to bring political institutions much closer to the citizens and their will and their decisions ... and to move from ‘effective suffrage’ to ‘effective democracy.’” He said the reforms were intended “to produce governments that are more effective, more accountable, and that facilitate the construction of agreements for fundamental reforms.”

PRI Senate leader **Manlio Fabio Beltrones**, who proposed his own set of political reforms in June, “welcomed” the initiative, while [calling](#) the proposals “incomplete.” He said that the moves would strengthen the Executive (a view shared by most observers) and needed to be balanced with other measures to maintain checks and balances. Beltrones supports re-election, reducing the size of Congress, and popular referendums for constitutional issues. He also advocates Senate ratification of cabinet officers, recall elections for elected officials, and greater accountability through a strengthened government audit agency.

Mexico state Governor **Enrique Peña Nieto**, the front runner for the 2012 PRI nomination, [attacked](#) re-election: “The history of our country has left clear lessons that whenever anyone tried to impose [re-election], the only thing that resulted was social upheaval.”

Andrés Manuel López Obrador [dismissed](#) the proposals as “pure deception” intended to divert attention from the economic crisis and to sustain the oppression of the people by the “mafia of power, politics and money.”

PRD Senate leader **Carlos Navarrete** said it was “positive” for the Calderón to “dismantle the old regime,” but warned against any move toward a two party system.

PAN Senator **Santiago Creel** [backed](#) the reforms fully, echoing the President’s line that they would “bring the citizens closer to politics.”

Commentary by political policy analysts and commentators was overwhelmingly positive, with some caveats.

Jesús Silva-Herzog Márquez [called](#) it “the most profound initiative for institutional reconstruction in contemporary Mexico.” He said the ‘most delicate’ proposal was the one for a presidential runoff and its alignment with the congressional elections, which he predicted would lead toward a two-party system, with disastrous consequences for the representation of third parties and democratic stability.

Former Foreign Minister **Jorge Castañeda**, who took the government to the Inter-American Human Rights Court over the issue of independent candidacies, called it “the most transcendental proposal since Salinas [called for] the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993.” “Without reforming the essential institutions of the old authoritarian *priista* regime, Mexico is paralyzed. The Mexican political system, ever since the PRI lost its majority in the Chamber in 1997, hasn’t functioned. It doesn’t allow decisions to be taken, to innovate, nor confront the country’s challenges,” he wrote.

* The legislative package has 9 points; the President’s speech divided re-election in two, giving a Decalogue.

1. Re-election of legislators and municipal officials

Permit re-election for up to 12 consecutive years of federal senators, deputies, state congressmen, and mayors – everyone except the President and state governors. States could impose additional limitations. Currently, immediate re-election is prohibited for all elected offices.

2. Reduce size of Congress

Reduce the Senate to 96 (from 128), with three senators per state. Any party (or independent candidate) with at least 25% of the vote would be assured a seat; additional seats would be allocated on the remainder method. Currently the party with the highest vote in each state gets 2 seats, and the ‘first minority’ party gets one. The 32 proportional representation seats would be eliminated.

In the Chamber, there would be 240 direct election seats (now 300) and 160 proportional election seats (now 200). No change in the method for allocating seats, other than redrawing districts.

3. Second round presidential election

If no candidate won an absolute majority in the first presidential voting round, the top two contenders would have a runoff. The first round would take place on the 1st Sunday in July, and the runoff on the 2nd Sunday in August, at the same time as Congressional elections.

4. Increase minimum vote needed to retain party registration

Increase the threshold to 4% of the national vote from the current 2% for a party to retain its registration and right to public funding. (Based on the July 2009 elections, the PT, Convergencia, and Panal parties would not have made the 4% threshold.)

5. Allow independent candidates

Eliminate the requirement (codified in 2007) that all candidates be put forward by a political party.

6. Citizen initiatives

Allow citizens or civic groups to propose legislation directly to Congress.

7. Supreme Court legislative initiatives

Empower the Supreme Court to propose legislation to Congress in its ‘sphere of competence.’ This power currently exists in 29 of Mexico’s states.

8. Preferential presidential initiative

Allow the President to declare two legislative initiatives ‘preferential’ each Congressional session. If Congress did not vote on an initiative before session end, it would automatically become law. If an initiative included constitutional changes and Congress did not vote, the matter would go to the people as a referendum. Congress would be free to amend the proposals.

9. Line item veto

Give the President the power to veto parts of legislation and the Expenditure Law half of the budget, in addition to the current full veto.