

Change sought for Mexico

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By David Hendricks

The flight of Mexico's upper class from the organized crime and drug cartel battles that plague their nation has created a community that should be willing to help change the conditions that led to their homeland's threatening atmosphere.

Other nations with population- or culture-based immigration and global dispersion have mechanisms that aim contributions and programs toward solving problems at home. Israel is an example.

On May 16 and 17, an important event in Washington, D.C., one with deep San Antonio roots, will launch such a mechanism for Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals living in the United States. The program, the Mexican American Leadership Initiative, will allow them to pool contributions and to boost programs to change Mexico at a grass-roots level.

The big draw of the event will be Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who will appear at a reception May 16 held by the U.S.-Mexico Foundation at the State Department building.

On May 17, former San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros will speak on the "The Challenge of Shared Responsibility" during the first conference of the foundation's Mexican American Leadership Initiative. Appearing with Cisneros at the Woodrow Wilson Center will be Arturo Valenzuela, assistant U.S. secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs.

The New York-based U.S.-Mexico Foundation grew from a nonprofit organization initiated by the San Antonio-based North American Development Bank, which finances utility, street and energy projects along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Other San Antonians involved in the foundation are Raúl Rodríguez, a faculty member of the University of the Incarnate Word and a former NADBank managing director, and José Villarreal, a senior adviser at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld who last year was ambassador general commissioner for the U.S. Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo.

The U.S.-Mexico Foundation already operates three programs within Mexico. One is a training program for public-school teachers and administrators. Another assists small-business producers with their marketing and commercialization efforts. The third seeks to strengthen Mexican laws protecting the rights of children.

More needs to be done to turn Mexican youths away from entering the world of gangs and crime.

“Mexican Americans are in a unique position to encourage engagement between Mexico and the United States,” foundation President and CEO James Polsfut said. “Other diaspora communities have engaged with their countries of origin, but that has not been the case with Mexican Americans,” Polsfut said.

Mexico's security situation is a reason Mexican Americans should become involved in the leadership initiative. “They are watching events in Mexico unfold and wanting (the foundation) to do all we can to be helpful,” Polsfut said.

When invitations for the May 16-17 event went out last week, about 100 were accepted within two days, half of the 200-person capacity. “The fact that Hillary Clinton wanted to participate underscores her belief” in the leadership initiative, Polsfut said. “She believes strongly that diaspora communities can serve as a bridge.”

The Washington event is not invitation-only. “We welcome anyone who wants to take part,” Polsfut said.

Mexican Americans and Mexicans living in San Antonio would make the city look good if they were among the leaders of this effort.

Government programs alone cannot do the job. Mexicans not living in Mexico must show they care.

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