

## Arizona's SB 1070 and the Hypocrisy of Mexico's Governors and State Legislators

By George W. Grayson

### Introduction

Mexico's whiny governors and state legislators have turned hypocrisy from an art form into an exact science by lambasting their Arizona counterparts' gambit to curb illegal immigration — a move supported by 70 percent of the Grand Canyon state's citizens. Epithets such as "Hitlerism," "Racism," and "Xenophobia" flood the air around Mexico's statehouses. Talk abounds of "asphyxiating" Arizona with a boycott of its businesses and products. Yet the very same Mexican officials who excoriate Gov. Jan Brewer for signing Senate Bill 1070 recklessly squander public funds that should be used to create jobs at home for their countrymen who have crossed unlawfully into the United States. This *Memorandum* begins with a brief analysis of the changing role of Mexico's governors in recent years before examining the chasm between the rhetoric of these individuals and their acutely irresponsible behavior.

### Mexico's Governors Replace President as Viceroy

When the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governed Mexico from 1929 to 2000, the president was the big enchilada.<sup>1</sup> In addition to constitutional powers that resembled those of a U.S. chief executive, he also boasted meta-constitutional prerogatives. For instance, he had complete access to an unaudited account containing hundreds of millions of dollars that could be spent as he saw fit. Although limited to one six-year term, he played the pivotal role in handpicking his successor; rather than fret about primaries, conventions, or public-opinion polls, he consulted with power-brokers in the country and then employed the "big finger" — the infamous "*dedazo*" — to anoint the next occupant of Los Pinos presidential residence.

In the heyday of PRI ascendancy, Vincent L. Padgett observed that the president was the "*jefe de jefes*" (chief of chiefs), who makes all final decisions. "Each new public work is still his gift to the people, who (especially in rural areas) petition him for the things they need in the same way that the Viceroy was petitioned centuries ago,"<sup>2</sup> the distinguished political scientist wrote.

In the words of prize-winning journalist Alan Riding, "Like the Divine Right of Kings and the infallibility of the Pope [the myth of omnipotence] maintain the mystery of the office. The President is ... the heir to a pre-Hispanic tradition of theocratic authoritarianism that was enormously reinforced by the political centralism and religious dogmatism of the Spanish Colony."<sup>3</sup>

Even though Mexico formally practiced federalism, PRI presidents treated governors like errand boys. They would dispatch them to state houses and, sometimes on a whim, peremptorily sack them. Thomas Marshall, Woodrow Wilson's vice president, once remarked that "being vice president resembles living in a catatonic state. You can see and hear and know what's going on around you, but it's impossible to move or speak." During the PRI's Tammany Hall-style rule, many Mexican governors experienced the same malady. Iconic President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) and Carlos Salinas (1988-94) each removed half of the 31 state executives. Occasionally, the changes preceded promotions; more often, they were punitive.

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Few PRI governors shed tears when standard-bearers of the center-right National Action Party (PAN) captured the presidency, first with Vicente Fox Quesada in 2000, then with Felipe Calderón Hinojosa in 2006. In truth, many state executives believed that they had died and gone to heaven thanks to these opposition victories. The incompetent Fox could not organize a one-car funeral and Calderón, who had 25 years of political experience, has nonetheless proved to be a greenhorn at the poker table. As a result, governors no longer had to worry about arm-twisting from Mexico City.

Now these latter-day viceroys call the shots in their jurisdictions, just as presidents did nationally during the PRI's golden era. Their impunity springs from compliant media (whose owners fear losing state advertising), cozy economic bonds to businessmen (who lust for government contracts), blatant manipulation of state legislatures (whose members often receive extravagant salaries and benefits in return for rubber-stamping executive initiatives), state electoral institutes (whose counselors owe their lucrative posts to the governor), and, in recent years, tacit accords with drug cartels (most of whose capos want to make money, not topple the government).

### Criticism of Senate Bill 1070 and Gubernatorial Behavior

Ulises Ruiz Ortiz epitomizes the “dinosaurs” that roamed Mexico's political Jurassic Park during most of the twentieth century. The venal state executive of hugely impoverished Oaxaca state, Ruiz Ortiz has joined PRI governors of Campeche, Tabasco, and Veracruz in castigating the Arizona legislation. Meanwhile, this wily politician, who has his eyes set on the presidency of his party, bought 164 vehicles for his cronies' enjoyment. He made the purchase with federal funds earmarked for the construction and equipping of a specialized hospital in San Bartolo Coyotepec.<sup>4</sup>

Last year, Ruiz reported spending \$6 million (72 million pesos) to install a new roof on the 11,000-seat Auditorio Guelaguetza, a combination sports arena, theater, and entertainment center located on the Cerro del Fortín hill at the northwest edge of Oaxaca city. The principal event held in the facility, built in 1974, is the annual Guelaguetza dances held on the two Mondays following July 16. In announcing the project, the governor said: “Our actions serve as an example to the country.” Some example! When a reporter from a highly respected Mexico City newspaper made a site visit, he found that the deteriorating auditorium still lacked a

roof, leading him to call the venture a “phantom” public work.<sup>5</sup>

For his part, Veracruz Governor Fidel Herrera Beltrán also condemned what he referred to as Arizona's “anti-immigrant” policy: “This is the moment to launch a major protest through Mexican diplomatic channels to avoid the commission of a new error like the wall and the persecution of those who sustain the United States' development.” An aspirant to succeed Calderón in 2012, Herrera urged Barack Obama to promote a migration accord similar to the one adopted by Mexico and Canada. “We must seek the development of these two economies that are joined geographically,” he stated (presumably referring to Mexico and the United States).

Few believe that Herrera is purer than Caesar's wife. Protected witnesses, who once worked in his regime, insist that the state administration is joined at the hip with Los Zetas, Mexico's most dangerous and brutal drug cartel, which specializes in beheadings, immersing foes in vats of acid, and beating rivals to death with two-by-fours. A veteran journalist who covers the crime beat wrote that Veracruz officials “have permitted Los Zetas to control practically all activities related to organized crime, from the sale of drugs to robbing gasoline from Pemex [the nation's oil monopoly], including kidnapping, extortion, and traffic in illegal immigrants.”<sup>6</sup>

Even more self-righteous is the PAN state executive of Guanajuato, Juan Manuel Oliva Ramírez, another presidential wannabe who presides over the Migration Affairs Committee of the National Conference of Governors. He admonished the Foreign Affairs Ministry to take a muscular stance and an energetic position against the Arizona law: “We have said that migrants of various nationalities in the United States deserve recognition and, above all, that promises are carried out to reform immigration laws.” This statement reflects the findings of a Zogby Poll; specifically, that 58 percent of Mexicans believed “the territory of the United States' Southwest rightfully belongs to Mexico.” Only 28 percent disagreed, and 14 percent were unsure.<sup>7</sup>

Guanajuato is a major “sender” of illegal immigrants to “El Norte” — in large measure because its elites live like princes, pay little in taxes, and ignore the plight of the downtrodden in their midst. Despite dysfunctional, union-colonized public schools and a grossly inadequate health care system, Oliva Ramírez proposes to dole out \$3.25 million for a statue to celebrate the bicentennial of Mexico's independence.

Oliva Ramírez might have adopted the slogan “Run for Governor and See the World.” During the 17

months after assuming office on September 26, 2006, he made 16 trips abroad, averaging a week apiece and including four continents. Instead of dipping into the public till, the peripatetic state executive might have cashed in his frequent flyers miles to pay for these journeys. State legislators have twice asked for details of the costs incurred during the junkets, but have yet to receive a response. “[Oliva Ramírez] seems to be wasting money; he never informs us of the results of his trips, never discloses an agenda of the places visited; and, even worse, he speaks of attracting investments that ... do not materialize,” harrumphed PRI legislator Bárbara Botello Santibáñez.<sup>8</sup>

It’s no surprise that Guanajuato’s “flying governor” joined Zeferino Torreblanca, state executive of dirt-poor Guerrero and another shrill advocate of “defending our countrymen against aggressive legislation,” and 35 other officials at the International Tourism Fair. The Mexican visitors did not bed down in Comfort Inns, but spent taxpayer funds at the plush Madrid MEVictoria and Palace hotels. The least expensive room in the former — where Leonardo DiCaprio, George Clooney, and Cindy Crawford were also guests — was \$316.83 (with breakfast); the latter charged \$349 (without even chocolate con churros). A Guanajuato state bureaucrat, who slept in a cheaper MEVictoria accommodation, ran up a bill of approximately \$2,382 during the seven days that the delegation luxuriated in the Spanish capital.<sup>9</sup>

Ismael Hernández Deras, governor of drug-suffused Durango, has also blistered the Arizona initiative. Yet, he authorized his finance secretary to shell out nearly \$6,000 (70,000 pesos) per month for a mansion in the posh Lomas de Guadiana section of Durango city, the state capital. The 5,000-square-meter home is equipped with a swimming pool, Jacuzzi, bar, and massage parlor.<sup>10</sup> He claimed that the building would be converted into a cultural center. Meanwhile, it served as an R&R spot for Hernández and his chums.

Not to be outdone, the Guadalajara-based Jalisco legislature gave its 500 staff members a 75.5 percent pay increase (\$595,750) during the first quarter of 2010. Two years ago, the state’s ultra-conservative governor, Emilio González Márquez, ignited a firestorm of protests when he scooped \$750,000 out of the state treasury to help the Roman Catholic Church construct a sanctuary to the martyrs of the Cristero Rebellion, a

war that pitted Catholic zealots against a repressive lay government in the late 1920s.<sup>11</sup>

Mexico State’s governor and 2012 presidential front-runner, Enrique Peña Nieto, has flouted a legal ban on out-of-campaign-season TV appearances by spending tens of millions of dollars — \$6,444,807 during the first six months of 2009 alone.<sup>12</sup> Reportedly, his expenditures with the Televisa media conglomerate give rise to appearances on news, sports, women’s, children’s, and cooking shows, as well coverage in supermarket tabloids owned by the omnipresent network. When Pope Benedict XVI received the movie-star handsome Peña Nieto and his actress-fiancée Angélica Rivera in mid-December 2009, the scandal sheets treated the audience as if it were the second coming of Christ.

Meanwhile, Francisco Garrido Patrón, who recently completed his term in the Querétaro Governor’s Palace, lavished \$75,000 on each of his eleven outgoing cabinet secretaries. He also spent nearly \$13 million of federal monies on the unauthorized acquisition of 240 acres of land. This transaction sparked a rebuke from the Superior Auditor of the Federation, who charged that state public servants had diverted national funds to “a goal other than which they were intended.”<sup>13</sup> Under Garrido Patrón, the state legislature appropriated \$833,333 to construction firms for projects that were never undertaken. His successor alleged that during his six-year term Garrido Patrón acquired six personal properties whose value was greater than his salary for his period in office.<sup>14</sup>

The Nuevo León state legislature has demanded that Gov. Rodrigo Medina de la Cruz deplore the pending Arizona law. “We hope that the state of Arizona will rescind the statute, but we cannot permit ... the enactment of this type of discriminatory legislation,” warned Deputy Héctor Gutiérrez de la Garza. No doubt the so-called “golden boy” state leader will adopt the legislature’s advice when he gets a chance. For the moment, he is on a spending spree — with \$15 million showered on the media during his first six month as governor. These disbursements, designed to burnish the image of the handsome 37-year-old politician, come at a time that the crime-convulsed state has had to go into debt to pay bureaucrats their salaries and benefits.<sup>15</sup>

Gubernatorial salaries in Mexico averaged \$141,042 in 2007, according to official websites, many of which resemble the logo-phonetic script of the Mayans in their difficulty to interpret. This figure is \$16,643 more than the average for their U.S. counterparts (\$124,398); Gov. Brewer makes just \$95,000.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

These outlays by state officials pale in comparison with the princely expenditures that Mexico's federal deputies and senators make on themselves and their sidekicks. Moreover, they represent only the tip of the iceberg, inasmuch as governors and state legislators enjoy multiple special stipends, sweetheart deals with the

private sector, and lucrative arrangements with union leaders and other special interests. State officials below the Rio Grande should devote more time to deploying resources to improve the lives of their poor and less time spouting demagogic rhetoric about the Arizona situation that resulted, in part, from their callous, self-serving behavior.

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> In fact, a decline in presidential power was obvious after the December 1994 economic crisis that Salinas bequeathed to President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), who pulled the country out of the deep recession, but possessed neither the inclination nor the adept political team to govern in an authoritarian manner like most of his predecessors.

<sup>2</sup> L. Vincent Padgett, *The Mexican Political System* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 187.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Riding, *Distant Neighbor: A Portrait of the Mexicans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 66.

<sup>4</sup> Abel Barajas, "Gastan en autos fondo de salud de Oaxaca," *Reforma*, March 4, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Virgilio Sánchez, "Presume Ulises obra 'Fantasma,'" *Reforma*, December 6, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Jorge Carrasco Araizaga, "El cártel 'La Compañía' somete a Veracruz," *Proceso*, February 6, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> AIC/Zogby Mexican Opinion Poll: Report, "Mexicans Say Southwest U.S. Belongs to Them; Shouldn't Need Permission to Enter U.S.," Americans for Immigration Control, Inc., June 11, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Jorge Escalante, "Quiere el PRD auditora Oliva por escultura," *Reforma*, April 7, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> "Viajan gobernadores como reyes a feria de turismo de España," *Noticaribe*, January 23, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> María Elena Sánchez, "'Abarata' Gobernador renta de residencia," *Reforma*, September 21, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Ulises Zamarroni and Andrea Merlos, "Cardenal avala limosna de gobernador de Jalisco," *El Universal*, April 26, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Miguel Uriate, "En publicidad, Peña Nieto prefiere a Televisa," *El Semanario*, September 15, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Fernando Paniagua, "Hallan en Querétaro desvío de \$155 mdp," *Reforma*, March 6, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Mirna Ramos and José García, "Gasta Medina \$1 millón al día," *Reforma*, April 28, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Kapp, "Govs' Salaries Range from \$1 to \$206,500," *Stateline.org*, May 15, 2007.