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U.S. & Mexican Border State Governors Hold Annual Conference In Monterrey

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Aguilar and Monica Savage * Upon conclusion of the Eleventh Border Governors' Conference held on April 22-23 in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon the ten governors from the US and Mexican border states signed the "Monterrey Declaration". The conference was hosted by Nuevo Leon Gov. Socrates Rizzo Garcia. The Declaration contains four points: 1. Support for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as negotiated and signed by the heads of state in the US, Canada, and Mexico. The governors' support is based on three beliefs: A) that the trade accord will enhance the ability of the three countries to compete more effectively in the global economy; B) that it will lead to creation of new employment opportunities in all three countries; and C) that it will result in a cleaner environment. 2. An appeal to the executive branches from each of the three countries to conclude negotiations on the parallel agreements on labor standards and the environment, and an appeal to the three legislatures to approve the agreement so that NAFTA can be implemented as scheduled on Jan. 1, 1994. 3. An agreement that the governors will mobilize economic, social, and political forces to support the agreement and to push for its final approval. 4. A commitment by the US border governors to send a letter expressing their support for NAFTA to US President Bill Clinton and to the US National Governors Conference. The following governors signed the declaration: Socrates Rizzo Garcia (Nuevo Leon); Ernesto Ruffo Appel (Baja California); Eliseo Mendoza Berruet (Coahuila); Francisco Barrio Terrazas (Chihuahua); Manlio Fabio Beltrones Rivera (Sonora); Manuel Cavazos Lerma (Tamaulipas); Fife Symington (Arizona); Pete Wilson (California); Bruce King (New Mexico), and Ann Richards (Texas). Ms. Richards did not attend the annual meeting, but she nonetheless signed the document outside of the conference. Conference themes The main themes of the conference, addressed in round table discussions and working sessions, included investment, tourism, education, the environment, communications, and the impact of the free trade agreement on the border economy. State and national officials from both countries participating in the conference never strayed from their staunch support of NAFTA, although on several occasions officials did address opposition criticism of the agreement, such as labor and environmental concerns. For example, Mexican Trade Secretary Jaime Serra Puche- - who addressed a session of the conference labelled opposition to NAFTA in all three countries "protectionist." He cautioned against allowing such criticisms to result in protectionist barriers that could interfere with the free flow of merchandise and services. Serra also stressed that the parallel accords on labor and the environment, currently under negotiation, must respect the sovereignty of the three countries. Moreover, officials argued that environmental preservation and economic expansion are not incompatible. "Time and again the Mexican government has stated its commitment to sustainable development," said Mexico's Interior Secretary Patrocinio Gonzalez Garrido, who attended the conference. "Mexico will not open its doors to those who come to contaminate our natural resources, or who ignore our advanced labor laws." Various strategies to encourage investment in the border economy were also mentioned, such as the creation of a high technology network, plus cooperation among the state, the private sector, and academic institutions to devise new investment strategies and projects. Legislation dealing with endangered species and
biodiversity were singled out as topics for possible comparative studies among the border states. Border's unique nature stressed Jorge Montano, Mexico's ambassador to Washington, and John Negroponte, US ambassador to Mexico City, both stressed the need for US and Mexican states to highlight the unique nature of the border region. "The border has for some been the point of separation of our countries and a symbol of our differences," said Montano. "For others, the border has been a region with its own personality, far from the centers of power in both countries. Today it is necessary to see the line which most separates us as the place where we are brought together. It is the meeting point of our two countries...and the place where the constructive potential and creativity brought on by the contact between our two countries is most apparent." For his part, Negroponte noted that a total of 275 million border crossings were registered during 1992. "The border is a zone of great progress," he said, pointing out the considerable US investment in the maquiladora sector. "There is a chemistry between our national territories, and new opportunities perhaps best symbolized by the negotiation of NAFTA." Despite the wide range of topics covered, however, conference discussions did not deal with some of the key border issues such as the drug trade, human rights, or immigration. According to Arizona Gov. Fife Symington, drug trafficking was left off the agenda because it was considered a federal rather than a state issue. [The co-authors attended the eleventh annual conference of Mexican and US border governors in Monterrey on April 22-23 on behalf of the Latin America Data Base.]

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