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PRI Candidate Ernesto Zedillo Launches Presidential Campaign

by Carlos Navarro

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In late March, the new presidential candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Ernesto Zedillo, launched his presidential campaign. Zedillo, who counts on less-than-unanimous support from members of the ruling party, has faced criticisms about the manner in which he was chosen to replace slain PRI candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio ([SourceMex, March 30, 1994](#)).

Critics concur that Zedillo has strong economic credentials, but continue to question his commitment and ability to address the tough challenges of political and social reform. "Zedillo hasn't shown himself as being too strong in politics, and the main challenge of the next administration is political reform and attending to basic social necessities," said analyst Jonathan Heath of Mexico City-based consulting firm Macro Asesoría Económica.

"In those areas, Zedillo still has to prove himself." Political analyst Luis Garrido even asserted that, "Many party members have affirmed that the new PRI candidate cannot win the election without resorting to electoral fraud of massive proportions." During his political career, Zedillo has never run for elected office.

For his part, author and political commentator Octavio Paz said "the authoritarian decision taken by the PRI deprives Mexico of its democratic richness and throws an ominous cloud over the electoral process and the Aug. 21, elections."

Still, the PRI leadership has attempted to focus attention on Zedillo's strengths as a candidate. For example, spokespersons for President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration have countered the criticisms regarding Zedillo's lack of political experience by pointing out that he displayed effective political skills in his dealings with legislators while he served as Minister of Public Education, and when he headed the now-defunct budget and planning ministry.

For his part, Zedillo has attempted to project a campaign image of continuity with the ideas which had been espoused by Colosio. Prior to the assassination, Zedillo served as Colosio's campaign manager. "The main problems facing Mexico are the deep injustice and insecurity, worsening unemployment, low wages, and the huge inequality in our country," Zedillo said in an early April television interview. He reiterated these themes in a subsequent radio interview, characterizing the four fundamental problems facing Mexico as injustice, unemployment, low wages, and poverty.

In addition to the public campaign activities, the PRI has been working intensively behind the scenes to bolster Zedillo's candidacy and to assure the highest degree possible of party unity going into the August elections. For example, in a surprise move, on March 30 Salinas removed his controversial chief of staff Jose Cordoba Montoya. Cordoba, described by many analysts as the

"power behind the throne" in the Salinas administration, was also reportedly a close associate of Zedillo. Cordoba was named as Mexico's envoy to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in Washington.

According to political analysts in Mexico City, the action was designed to give Zedillo a "more independent" image, and to help dispel the notion that the Salinas administration is intent upon manipulating the upcoming elections. "That was a head that had to roll...to indicate that Zedillo is going to represent a wider constituency," said analyst Rogelio Ramirez. "He has to distance himself from the small group of people around Salinas who now control everything."

There was also widespread speculation that some sectors of the party leadership agreed to accept Zedillo's nomination only in exchange for a commitment by Salinas to remove Cordoba from his position. Cordoba was replaced as chief of staff by the PRI's secretary for international affairs Santiago Onate Laborde, who was a close associate of Colosio. Onate previously headed the Environmental Attorney General's Office (Procuraduria Federal del Medio Ambiente, PFMA) and also served as Mexico's representative to the Organization of American States (OAS).

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