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## **Disagreement on Campaign Finance Spending Threatens Electoral Reforms**

*by LADB Staff*

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Negotiations on electoral and political reforms by the four major political parties are in danger of unraveling because of disagreements regarding campaign spending limits in the upcoming congressional elections in 1997. The negotiations are led by Interior Secretary Emilio Chuayffet and the presidents of the four parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies Santiago Onate of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Andres Lopez Obrador of the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), Alberto Anaya of the Labor Party (PT), and Felipe Calderon Hinojosa of the National Action Party (PAN). The negotiators are following up on legislation passed by the Chamber of Deputies and Senate in July and August of this year that commits them to implement political and electoral reforms.

The legislation modifies 18 separate articles in the Mexican Constitution (see SourceMex, 08/07/96). Under the legislation, negotiators were required to reach a consensus by Nov. 6 or have the decisions on campaign reform revert to the Chamber of Deputies. Sources close to the negotiations confirm that the issue of campaign-finance limits has become a major snag in the negotiations. The PRI has proposed that the government allocate 1.8 billion pesos (US\$226 million) to the eligible political parties to use in the mid-term congressional race in August 1997, but the proposal has been soundly rejected by the three opposition parties. "We cannot accept the allocation of such a huge amount of money for elections when the country is still in the midst of an economic crisis," said PAN leader Calderon Hinojosa.

PRD leader Lopez Obrador issued a similar statement. "It is immoral that our country would spend such a sum on politics when we have so much poverty," he said. The PAN is proposing an allocation of 1.2 billion pesos (US\$150 million), while the PRD and the PT are pushing for an amount closer to 1 billion pesos (US\$125 million). Jorge Moreno Collado, a PRI delegate to the federal electoral tribunal (Tribunal Federal Electoral, TFE), defends the PRI funding proposal. "We are not requesting an excessive financing budget, but merely the amount of money that the political parties will require to conduct their electoral activities," he said. In an interview with the daily newspaper Excelsior, PRI president Onate also defended his party's proposal to allocate 1.8 billion pesos (US\$226 million) for the elections, saying this money would preclude parties or candidates having to raise "illegal campaign contributions from drug traffickers or from large companies."

In addition to the question of campaign finance reforms, the PRD has voiced opposition to a proposal by the PRI to postpone a rule granting independence of the newly reformed federal electoral institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE) until 1998. PT leader Anaya said negotiators are far enough apart that the consideration of campaign reforms could revert to the Chamber of Deputies. "There should be a greater effort for the federal electoral code to be approved by consensus," he said. According to Calderon Hinojosa, members of the PAN already plan to vote against the entire package, even if they agree with some of the legislative reforms. For his part, PRD

leader Lopez Obrador raised the possibility that members of his party would support a general plan, but vote against the section dealing with campaign finances. He said some of the agreements reached thus far are proposals advanced by the PRD, but the proposed expenditures remain a concern.

Despite the remaining differences, however, negotiators for the four parties and Chuayffet have already reached agreement on a crucial point required by the electoral-reform legislation approved in August. At a session in late October, the negotiators announced the appointment of Jose Woldenberg as the new director of the IFE. The appointment of Woldenberg and eight other IFE members was reached in late October to comply with a deadline required by the legislation passed by the Chamber of Deputies and Senate in July and August requiring that a New IFE be in place by the beginning of November. The Mexican Congress ratified Woldenberg's appointment in a relatively easy manner, but four PRD legislators expressed their reservations about the new IFE leader by casting a negative vote.

The PRD members questioned the legality of the appointment, since Woldenberg had already served on the IFE one term, and hence may not be eligible to serve in any capacity in the institute. The legislators also questioned whether Woldenberg was the best choice to head the IFE because of his ties to President Ernesto Zedillo's administration. Woldenberg who is adamant about his political independence was once a member of the PRD. On the other hand, he is married to Environment, Natural Resources, and Fisheries Secretary Jolly Carabias. Carabias is one of two independent members on Zedillo's cabinet. Indeed, in his first decision as IFE president, Woldenberg immediately alienated members of the opposition PRD and PAN by nominating Felipe Solis Fierro to oversee the IFE department that has direct jurisdiction over electoral details.

Both the PRD and the PAN, and even some of the newly appointed IFE members, have already criticized Solis for failing to address irregularities during two previous elections under his control. Ironically, the electoral-reform negotiations are taking place amid charges that the PRI is engaged in pre-election irregularities in the local contests in Mexico, Hidalgo and Coahuila states. Calderon has charged the governing PRI with conducting a "dirty campaign" by distributing "untrue and libelous literature" about PAN candidates. For his part, Lopez Obrador warned the government to respect the results of the elections in the three states. "I call on all our members to ensure that fraud does not occur in these elections," he said. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on Nov. 1, reported at 7.95 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources: El Financiero International, 11/04/96; El Economista, 11/05/96; La Jornada, 10/29/96, 10/30/96, 10/31/96, 11/04/96, 11/05/96, 11/06/96; Novedades, 10/31/96; 11/04/96, 11/06/96; The News, 10/31/96, 11/06/96; Excelsior, 11/04/96, 11/06/96; El Universal, 10/31/96, 11/04/96, 11/05/96, 11/06/96)

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