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Baja California Appoints Interim Governor; PRI Holds Two State Primaries

by LADB Staff

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In early October, the Baja California legislature unanimously approved the appointment of Alejandro Gonzalez Alcocer as the state's interim governor. Also, in recent weeks, the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) held primaries in four states to select gubernatorial candidates. Gonzalez, who until recently served as the state president of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), will serve out the remainder of the term of Hector Teran Teran. Teran died of heart failure in the state capital of Mexicali.

Teran was elected in August 1995 to serve a six-year term concluding in 2001, succeeding fellow PAN governor Ernesto Ruffo Appel (see SourceMex, 08/09/95). In 1991, he was the first member of the PAN elected to the Mexican Senate, breaking the complete dominance of the PRI in the upper chamber. Gonzalez was a compromise candidate approved by the PRI, the PAN, and the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD).

The PRI, which holds 11 of the 25 seats in the Baja California state legislature, had originally pushed for one of its members to be appointed interim governor, while the PAN had proposed Sen. Ricardo Garcia Cervantes or Mexicali Mayor Eugenio Elorduy Walter. Despite overwhelming support from PAN state legislators, other members of the party criticized Gonzalez's appointment. Rodolfo Valdez Gutierrez, who was the government secretary in the Teran administration, resigned after he accused party president Felipe Calderon Hinojosa and Mexicali Mayor Elorduy of "manipulating" the process. Valdez had supported PAN federal Deputy Fortunato Alvarez Enriquez for the post.

Primaries in two states expose divisions within PRI

Some divisions were also evident in the PRI after the party decided to promote a more democratic selection of gubernatorial candidates in Quintana Roo, Guerrero, Baja California Sur, and Hidalgo states in mid-September. Disputes within the PRI were particularly apparent in Quintana Roo and Guerrero states, where candidates hand-picked by the incumbent governors lost the primary to other PRI members.

In Guerrero, former Acapulco mayor Rene Juarez Cisneros narrowly defeated Manuel Anorve, a close ally of Gov. Angel Aguirre Rivera. Juarez is expected to face stiff competition from the PRD in the February elections. The PRD candidates include Sen. Felix Salgado Macedonio and former Atoyac mayor Maria de la Luz Nunez Ramos. According to the weekly news magazine Proceso, the contest between Anorve and Juarez represented a power struggle between followers of Aguirre and supporters of former governor Ruben Figueroa Alcocer. Several days before the election, Juarez and five other candidates wrote PRI national president Mariano Palacios Alcocer asking the party's executive committee to prevent Aguirre from manipulating the results of the election.

While Aguirre decided not to challenge the PRI executive committee, Gov. Mario Villanueva Madrid of Quintana Roo remains embroiled with the party leadership regarding its support of an open process in the recent primary. In the election, former army officer Joaquin Ernesto Hendricks Diaz won the nomination over Villanueva's hand-picked candidate Addy Joaquin Coldwell. Hendricks is the favorite to win the Quintana Roo gubernatorial race in February. Following the defeat of his candidate, Villanueva announced he was breaking with the PRI executive committee.

Villanueva asked for the resignation of PRI president Palacios Alcocer and secretary general Carlos Rojas. "Rojas has financed groups that oppose the PRI, and he is trying to create opposition in outlying states," Villanueva told the Associated Press. (Sources: Notimex, 10/05/98, 10/06/98; El Diario de Yucatan, 10/06/98, 10/07/98; El Universal, 10/05- 08/98; Novedades, 09/22/98, 10/08/98; Associated Press, 10/07/98, 10/08/98; La Jornada, 09/22/98, 10/05/98, 10/08/98, 10/09/98; The News, Excelsior, 10/06/98, 10/08/98, 10/09/98; Proceso, 08/16/98, 10/11/98; San Antonio Express-News, 10/11/98; El Financiero International, 10/12/98)

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