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Election News: PRI Leadership, Presidential Candidates, Mexico City Mayor

by LADB Staff

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Several political events in November could have repercussions for the presidential and local elections in 2000. The governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) selected a new leadership team to coordinate electoral efforts. Prominent former PRI member Manuel Camacho Solis joined the growing list of presidential candidates, while the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) elected former party president Manuel Lopez Obrador to represent the party in the Mexico City mayoral race in 2000. Also, the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) was awarded the Pachuca mayoral seat after an Hidalgo state electoral tribunal overturned a narrow PRI victory.

PRI announces new leadership team

On Nov. 29, Dulce Maria Sauri Riancho became the second woman appointed president of the governing party. Sauri Riancho, who had been serving as party secretary-general, replaced Jose Antonio Gonzalez Fernandez. Gonzalez Fernandez stepped down as party president after serving for seven months. He now replaces outgoing health secretary Juan Ramon de la Fuente, who was selected as chancellor of the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM). De la Fuente replaced Francisco Barnes de Castro, who resigned under pressure because of his inability to end a prolonged student strike at UNAM (see SourceMex, 1999-11-17).

Gonzalez Fernandez is widely credited with managing the PRI's first-ever primary election in early November, which was won by former interior secretary Francisco Labastida (see SourceMex, 1999-11-10). Sauri Riancho, who briefly served as interim governor of Yucatan state, is the seventh person to lead the party since President Ernesto Zedillo assumed office in December 1994. Sen. Maria de los Angeles Moreno held the post briefly early in Zedillo's term. In the past five years, the PRI has also been led by Mariano Palacios Alcocer, Juan Millan, Santiago Onate Laborde, Humberto Roque Villanueva, and Gonzalez Fernandez. Roque Villanueva was one of three candidates defeated by Labastida in the Nov. 7 primary.

Political analysts said the most important change in party leadership was the appointment of former social development and interior secretary Esteban Moctezuma Barragan as secretary-general. Moctezuma coordinated Labastida's campaign during the PRI primary and is expected to continue in that capacity while also serving as a party officer through the general election, scheduled for July 2, 2000. Moctezuma, Zedillo's first interior secretary, has held eight different posts in the administration and the PRI during the past five years.

Former PRI member Camacho launches presidential candidacy

In late November, former Mexico City mayor and finance secretary Manuel Camacho Solis became the latest politician to formally announce his candidacy for the Mexican presidential election in 2000. Camacho will represent the Partido del Centro Democratico (PCD), which he formed in February

1998 (see SourceMex, 1998-02-25). Camacho said he decided to enter the race after an effort to form a broad coalition of opposition parties collapsed in late September. The coalition failed because of disagreements between the PRD and PAN on the method to select a common candidate (see SourceMex, 1999-09-29). The PCD participated in subsequent talks with the remaining parties on forming a center-left coalition. But Camacho said he was dissatisfied with this effort and decided to launch his own candidacy. "As long as we are not capable of finding a way to truly distinguish ourselves from the PRI...we will not be able to grow and to present society with a real alternative," Camacho said in an interview with the weekly news magazine *Proceso*.

In his announcement speech, Camacho said his candidacy will present true contrasts to the positions offered by PRI candidate Francisco Labastida. Camacho declined to offer specifics during the speech, although he criticized the policies of the Secretaria de Gobernacion (SEGOB) under the leadership of Labastida. "I have profound differences with the policies he implemented in Chiapas," said Camacho, who helped negotiate the San Andres accords with the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN). Zedillo and Labastida refused to recognize the accords, which ultimately led to the collapse of negotiations with the EZLN.

Camacho's candidacy is expected to hurt the PAN and the PRD, which concerned the presidential candidates for the two parties. PRD candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas said Camacho was mistaken in his assessment of the coalition-building efforts. "[Camacho] believes that the centerpiece of a campaign is a candidate and not broader political compromises," said Cardenas, who is also the candidate for the Partido del Trabajo (PT), Convergencia Democratica (CD), and Partido Alianza Social (PAS).

In addition to Labastida and Cardenas, Camacho will be competing against Vicente Fox of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional, Gilberto Rincon Gallardo of the Partido Democracia Social (PDS), and Porfirio Munoz Ledo of the Nueva Republica, formerly the Partido Autentico de la Revolucion Mexicana (PARM). Munoz Ledo has been a member of both the PRI and the PRD. Jorge Gonzalez Torres of the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) had said he intended to run, but the party decided to form a coalition with the PAN.

PRD elects mayoral candidate for Mexico City

Lopez Obrador won a landslide victory in the PRD's mayoral primary in Mexico City in mid-November. PRD electoral officers said Lopez Obrador obtained slightly more than 76% of the vote, compared with only 8% each for federal legislators Demetrio Sodi de la Tijera and Pablo Gomez. Federal Deputy Ifigenia Martinez and mayoral aide Marco Rascon each received about 4% of the vote. Lopez Obrador, who had not intended to seek the post, had to be coaxed to run in the Mexico City primary by some PRD national leaders.

The former party president has wide name recognition, and is considered the strongest candidate to keep the Mexico City mayoral post in the hands of the PRD. But the move by party leaders to impose Lopez Obrador's candidacy was sharply criticized by Gomez and Sodi de la Tijera. Both legislators said Lopez Obrador failed to meet the requirement that all candidates reside in Mexico City for five consecutive years (see SourceMex, 1999-10-06).

Addressing these concerns, party president Amalia Garcia said electoral authorities had checked into Lopez Obrador's residency status and determined that he was eligible to run in the mayoral race.

Lopez Obrador is expected to face tough competition in the mayoral election. The PRI will be represented by former finance secretary Jesus Silva Herzog, while the likely candidate for the PAN is Deputy Santiago Creel Miranda. Other minor candidates, such as Deputy Marcelo Ebrard of the PCD, are not expected to be factors in the election, scheduled on the same day as the presidential race.

State electoral tribunal overturns PRI victory in Pachuca

In mid-November, a state electoral tribunal overturned the PRI mayoral victory in Pachuca, Hidalgo state, and declared the PAN candidate the winner of the race. Hidalgo's electoral tribunal (Tribunal Estatal Electoral, TEE) ruled that PAN candidate Jose Antonio Telleria won a very narrow victory over his PRI rival Alberto Jonguitud Falcon.

A recount of the ballots showed that Telleria obtained 28,221 votes, compared with 28,205 for Jonguitud Falcon. The PAN had asked for the recount, citing irregularities in the Nov. 7 election that gave Jonguitud Falcon the victory by 22 votes. After a review of the ballots, the TEE found sufficient irregularities to throw out the results of three precincts. The final count favored Telleria. But the TEE's ready willingness to reverse the election results raised some suspicions. Some critics charged that the reversal may have resulted from a deal between the PAN and the PRI.

Deals between the center-right opposition party and the government were said to be common, especially during the administration of former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Following the results of the Nov. 7 election, PAN legislators had threatened to stall deliberations on the 2000 budget unless their concerns regarding the Pachuca vote were resolved satisfactorily. But legislators for both parties denied any deal involving the Pachuca election. "The PAN raised the suspicions by conditioning its actions on the budget to the Pachuca election," said Deputy Arturo Nunez, leader of the PRI delegation in the Chamber of Deputies. PRD officials had no comment on the matter, other than to say the government took the proper legal action in reversing the Pachuca results. (Sources: Associated Press, 11/15/99, 11/22/99; San Antonio Express-News, 11/23/99; Proceso, 11/28/99; Spanish news service EFE, 11/29/99; La Jornada, 11/17/99, 11/22/99, 11/24/99, 11/30/99; El Universal, 11/19/99, 11/30/99; The News, 11/13/99, 12/01/99; Novedades, 11/19/99, 11/22/99, 11/30/99, 12/01/99; Excelsior, 11/18/99, 11/22/99, 11/23/99, 11/30/99, 12/01/99, 12/02/99; Proceso, Notimex, 12/05/99; El Economista, 11/12/99, 12/06/99; Reforma, 11/11/99, 11/22/99, 11/23/99, 11/30/99, 12/06/99)

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