President Vicente Fox Makes Minor Changes to Cabinet, Staff

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
President Vicente Fox Makes Minor Changes to Cabinet, Staff

by LADB Staff
Category/Department: Mexico
Published: 2003-08-06

After the July 6 election, President Vicente Fox replaced some members of his staff, but the changes fell far short of the comprehensive shake-up demanded by legislators from the president's Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and the two opposition parties. The only Cabinet-level change came at the Secretaria de Turismo (SECTUR), and this occurred only because Secretary Leticia Navarro Ochoa resigned for personal reasons.

Fox appointed Rodolfo Elizondo, who had been the presidential spokesperson, to take Navarro's post at SECTUR. Elizondo was replaced by Alfonso Durazo, who would not only become the president's spokesperson but would also implement an overhaul of the president's social communications department. Durazo, who was the president's personal secretary before taking the new post, will add media relations to his duties.

Fox's commissioner for US-Mexico border affairs Ernesto Ruffo Appel also tendered his resignation in late July, effective in September. But Ruffo raised the possibility that he may not be replaced, with his functions related to trade and immigration assumed by an independent council. The lack of major changes were a surprise because the president had been under pressure from all sides to overhaul his Cabinet.

Some analysts said a Cabinet shake-up would have been a good opportunity for Fox to show his willingness to work with the opposition Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) following the PAN's disappointing performance in the elections (see SourceMex, 2003-07-09). The president admitted as much in statements to reporters shortly after the election. "It is very probable that we will have to make some changes in the Cabinet," Fox said.

PRD officials said the opposition parties were not necessarily expecting any Cabinet changes prior to the election, but a shake-up was expected shortly after July 6. "We do not understand why the president would not make adjustments after the elections were over," said PRD secretary-general Carlos Navarrete.

Tourism secretary only Cabinet official to leave post

The president was under pressure to replace a handful of Cabinet members whose performance had been questioned for one reason or another by the PAN, PRI, and the PRD. Among the ministers whose jobs were thought to be in jeopardy were Finance Secretary Francisco Gil Diaz, Environment Secretary Victor Lichtinger, Health Secretary Julio Frenk Mora, Communications and Transportation Secretary Pedro Cerisola, Agriculture Secretary Javier Usabiaga, Labor Secretary Carlos Abascal Carranza, and Education Secretary Reyes Tamez Guerra.
Still, when the changes were announced in late July, Tourism Secretary Navarro was the only Cabinet official to leave a post. The president defended his decision to stay the course. "I have no reason to remove any minister, because our goals are being met," Fox said in a radio interview. Fox's stance prompted criticisms from all parties. "The president needed to make immediate and more comprehensive Cabinet changes," said Carlos Macias, spokesperson for the PRI executive committee (comite ejecutivo nacional, CEN).

Still, Macias described the appointment of Elizondo and Durazo as positive steps. The lack of change angered members of Fox's center-right party, who had called on Fox to purge all Cabinet members who had been affiliated with the PRI, especially Gil Diaz. "It is a worrisome signal that the president is not rectifying his course after the election," said PAN Sen. Javier Corral, who also questioned the president's appointment of a staunch PRI loyalist like Durazo to take over the president's social communications functions.

Environment secretary retains post despite rumored departure

One Cabinet change that had most been expected was in the Secretaria del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT). Secretary Lichtinger was rumored to have offered to step down in February, but Fox did not accept the resignation. The secretary had received mixed reviews in recent months, with critics like Alfonso Cipres Villarreal of the Movimiento Ecologista Mexicano (MEM) blaming Lichtinger in part for the Fox administration's lack of progress in implementing comprehensive programs to protect the country's ecosystems.

Still, Cipres said Lichtinger was not entirely to blame, but rather the inefficient bureaucratic structure of SEMARNAT. Cipres called for SEMARNAT to be eliminated and replaced with an independent agency similar to US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Some environmental organizations like Greenpeace Mexico came to the defense of Lichtinger, who previously served as director of the North American Free Trade Agreement's Montreal-based Commission on Environmental Cooperation (CEC).

Greenpeace Mexico's interim president Alejandro Calvillo said the removal of Lichtinger would benefit the Secretaria de Economia (SE) and the Secretaria de Agriculture, Ganaderia, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentacion (SAGARPA). "The SE wants to water down government restrictions on emissions and transportation of toxic wastes, and SAGARPA is interested in promoting genetically modified foods," said Calvillo.

New tourism secretary urged to support casinos

Elizondo's appointment was well received by the Confederacion de Camaras de Comercio, Servicio y Turismo (CONCANACO-SERVYTUR) and the Asociacion Mexicana de Hoteles y Moteles (AMHM). "Taking into account [Elizondo's] former experience as chair of the tourism committee (Comision de Turismo) in the Chamber of Deputies, this is a positive development," said AMHM president Miguel Torruco Marques. "He is very well aware of the needs of our sector."

Elizondo will oversee the proposals to push through a new federal tourism law (Ley Federal del Turismo), which will seek to increase Mexico's appeal as a domestic and international tourism destination. In addition, CONCANACO-SERVYTUR has joined the Camara Nacional de la Industria
de Restaurantes y Alimentos Condimentados (CANIRAC) and the Consejo Nacional Empresarial Turistico (CNET) in urging Elizondo to make a strong push to legalize Las Vegas-style casinos in Mexico.

Outgoing secretary Navarro supported the concept of casinos, but backed off when it was apparent that Congress was not ready to support this type of gambling operation (see SourceMex, 2002-04-17 and 2002-12-11). "With Elizondo, we have two great assets," said CONCANACO-SERVYTUR president Raul Alejandro Padilla Orozco. "He has legislative experience, and he also has the ear of President Fox." There is some concern, however, that Elizondo may not be in his post long enough to see the changes sought by business groups. Elizondo is rumored to be interested in representing the PAN in the Durango gubernatorial election in 2004. (Sources: The Washington Post, 07/18/03; The San Diego Union-Tribune, 07/23/03; Cronica de Hoy, 07/11/03, 07/17/03, 07/18/03, 07/21/03, 07/28/03, 07/29/03; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 07/28/03, 07/29/03; El Sol de Mexico, 07/16/03, 07/29/03, 07/30/03; The Dallas Morning News, 07/30/03; Milenio Diario, 07/14/03, 07/17/03, 07/29/03, 07/30/03, 07/31/03; Reforma, 07/15/03, 07/31/03; Notimex, 07/15/03, 07/29/03, 07/31/03; La Jornada, 07/15/03, 07/16/03, 07/18/03, 07/28-31/03; Unomasuno, 07/30/03, 08/01/03; El Universal, 07/15/30, 07/24/03, 07/29/03, 08/04/03; El Financiero, 07/11/03, 07/28-30/03, 08/04/03, 08/05/03)

-- End --