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Senate Approves Five New Electoral Court Judges

by LADB Staff

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After a contentious debate, the Senate reached a consensus and ratified five new members of the electoral tribunal (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federacion, TEPJF). They will join Alejandro Luna Ramos, the only holdover from the previous group of TEPJF judges. The selection of the new TEPJF magistrates would normally go unnoticed, but the issue took on greater importance given the controversy over the July 2 presidential election.

Center-left candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of the Coalicion por el Bien de Todos, who lost the election by fewer than 250,000 votes, criticized the TEPJF for its decision not to order a recount (see SourceMex, 2006-08-09, 2006-08-30, and 2006-09-06).

In criticizing the TEPJF, Lopez Obrador said the electoral court was one of several "corrupt" institutions at the service of the government in power. Lopez Obrador has formed a parallel government and named a cabinet, which will pressure the legislature to consider his priorities.

The five new electoral judges and Luna Ramos will serve 10-year terms. The Mexican high court (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nacion, SCJN) selected the nominees from an original list of 160 names. That list was eventually whittled down to 32 names and later to five finalists.

The new TEPJF justices are Constancio Carrasco Daza, Flavio Galvan Rivera, Manuel Gonzalez Oropeza, Salvador Nava Gomar, and Maria del Carmen Alanis Figueroa. Carrasco Daza and Galvan Rivera previously served in judicial capacities, while Gonzalez Oropeza and Nava Gomar are academics, and Alanis Figueroa once held a high-level position in the federal electoral institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE). Galvan Rivera was chosen to lead the TEPJF, taking the role of Leonel Castillo, who presided over the previous electoral court.

Selection generates some controversy

The selection of the new justices was not without controversy. Members of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) pushed for the elimination of Luna Ramos from consideration. Luna was appointed in 2005 to complete the term of the late Jose Luis de la Peza. Sen. Ricardo Monreal, deputy floor leader of the PRD in the Senate, questioned whether Luna Ramos should be part of the new TEPJF because of his vote to ratify the victory of Felipe Calderon of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN). "There is no guarantee that [Luna] could be impartial, said Monreal. "He voted to ratify the electoral fraud of July 2."

The PRD questioned whether the SCJN should have included Luna on the list, given that he is the brother of SCJN Justice Margarita Luna Ramos. The party also questioned the nomination of Alanis Figueroa, who acknowledged a friendship with former federal Deputy Margarita Zavala, the wife of President-elect Calderon. In the end, the PRD was unable to derail the nominations of Luna

Ramos and Alanis Figueroa, who had strong support from the PAN, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), and the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM).

Rather than cast a negative vote, the PRD delegation in the Senate decided to let the process move forward, supporting all nominees sent by the SCJN. The Frente Amplio Progresista (FAP), formed by the PRD and coalition partners the Partido del Trabajo (PT) and the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD), was also facing pressure from Lopez Obrador to boycott the ratification of the new TEPJF members.

The FAP decided, however, to participate in the vote. "Lopez Obrador suffered another setback when the FAP ignored his request not to support the election of the new TEPJF members," said Manuel Velazquez, a columnist for the Mexico City business newspaper El Economista.

Lopez Obrador names "cabinet" for parallel government

As part of Lopez Obrador's move to reject the current political structure in Mexico, which he claims contributed to the "electoral fraud" on July 2, the center-left candidate has created a parallel government (see SourceMex, 2006-09-20).

Lopez Obrador has plans to launch his new government on Nov. 20, the anniversary of the start of the Mexican Revolution to overthrow dictator Porfirio Diaz on the early 1900s. In preparation for the inauguration, the former candidate announced his new cabinet, mostly made up of close collaborators during his presidential campaign or former members of his cabinet during his tenure as mayor of Mexico City.

The list of 12 cabinet members, six of whom are women, includes such prominent names as Bertha Lujan, who led the Red Mexicana Frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC), a grassroots organization that opposed Mexico's participation in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Former Mexico City police chief Bernardo Batiz, economist Mario Alberto Di Costanzo; ex-federal deputy Laura Itzel Castillo, and former Mexico City environment secretary Claudia Schienbaum also joined Lopez Obrador's cabinet.

Sources close to Lopez Obrador told the Mexico City daily newspaper El Universal that several academics, politicians, business owners, and civic leaders who collaborated with the candidate during the presidential campaign turned down a request to be part of the cabinet. In many cases, these individuals had been elected to Congress, accepted a post in the new Mexico City administration, or opted out because they would receive no salary, said the sources.

Among those who turned down Lopez Obrador's request was economist Rogelio Ramirez de la O, who served as Lopez Obrador's economic advisor during the presidential campaign. Ramirez de la O, who was in line to become finance secretary had Lopez Obrador won the election, has endorsed Calderon's decision to name Agustin Carstens to head the president-elect's economic-policy team (see SourceMex, 2006-10-25).

Lopez Obrador has not offered any details on how his government would function, including where officials would be headquartered or exactly what role his cabinet ministers would play.

He promised, however, that his collaborators would have important jobs. "This is not a symbolic government, in name only, or as many think, a shadow cabinet," Lopez Obrador said at an announcement ceremony. "Quite the contrary, it will be an active government with demands, proposals."

While the role of the new cabinet will be limited, sources said Lopez Obrador would work closely with the FAP in Congress to promote his legislative priorities, such as blocking privatization of the energy sector and promoting increased spending on social programs. (Sources: Agencia de noticias Proceso, 10/02/06, 10/18/06, 10/31/06; Notimex, 11/02/06, 11/03/06; Associated Press, 11/03/06; El Economista, 09/25/06, 10/03/06, 10/24/06, 10/26/06, 10/27/06, 10/31/06, 11/01-03/06, 11/06/06; El Financiero, 10/24/06, 11/01/06, 11/03/06, 11/06/06; La Jornada, 09/22/06, 10/04/06, 10/26/06, 10/31/06, 11/01/06, 11/02/06, 11/06/06, 11/07/06; Excelsior, 09/22/06, 10/23/06, 10/24/06, 10/26/06, 10/31/06, 11/01-03/06, 11/06/06, 11/07/06; El Universal, 10/23/06, 10/26/06, 10/27/06, 11/01/06, 11/02/06, 11/06/06, 11/07/06; Milenio Diario, 10/26/06, 10/31/06, 11/02/06, 11/03/06, 11/06/06, 11/07/06; The Herald-Mexico City, 11/02/06, 11/06/06, 11/07/06)

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