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## **Ex-Tlaxcala Gov. Beatriz Paredes Wins Election as PRI President**

*by LADB Staff*

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In late February, the opposition Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) elected ex-Tlaxcala Gov. Beatriz Paredes Rangel as the next party president. Many insiders believe she is the right person to help the PRI regain its identity and heal internal divisions, but she must first repair the party's extremely damaged reputation with the Mexican public. Paredes defeated former Sen. Enrique Jackson Ramirez in a landslide, taking nearly 70% of the vote among the party's national council representatives nationwide. Paredes' victory was not a surprise, as most pre-election polls showed her with a wide lead over Jackson.

Paredes, who represented the PRI in the 2006 Mexico City mayoral election (see SourceMex, 2006-07-12), campaigned as a compromiser who could bring the party together while Jackson cast himself as a candidate who could bring new energy to the party. To make his point, Jackson invited 30-year-old Quintana Roo Deputy Sara Latife Ruiz Chavez to join his slate, running for the post of secretary-general.

Paredes, in contrast, ran on a slate with party veteran Jesus Murillo Karam. The campaign for party leadership was spirited and somewhat divisive and included some name calling by supporters of the two candidates. But, unlike Paredes' previous run for party leadership in 2002, this race was almost benign. In that election, Paredes faced Roberto Madrazo, who consolidated support from the old guard of the PRI. That campaign turned so nasty that many party insiders warned about a major split (see SourceMex, 2002-01-09 and 2002-02-27).

Ironically, many of those considered the old guard rallied behind Paredes this time. She gained the support of most of the party's important players, including a majority of the governors and the party's two top congressional leaders, Sen. Manlio Fabio Beltrones and Deputy Emilio Gamboa Patron. "Paredes, a tireless one-on-one campaigner, out-hustled her opponent in winning friends and influencing people among the 17,252 members of the 31 state political councils plus the more than 300 members of the party's National Political Council," said political analyst George Grayson of the College of William and Mary in Virginia.

Grayson, in a piece written for the Mexico City English-language daily newspaper The Herald, said some key players may have supported Paredes because of her pledge not to use the post as a springboard to seek the party's presidential nomination in 2012. Madrazo made no secret of his intention to use his tenure as party president to seek the PRI nomination in 2006 (see SourceMex, 2003-12-03 and 2005-08-17).

### ***New leader an ally of President Calderon***

President Felipe Calderon and his governing Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) welcomed Paredes' victory, with the president citing his long history of cooperation with the new PRI leader. Calderon

and Paredes worked closely on budget proposals and tax-reform legislation when they both held party leadership positions in the Chamber of Deputies in 2000-2003. Some observers expect Paredes to continue working closely with the Calderon administration, a relationship similar to the one former PRI secretary-general and congressional leader Elba Esther Gordillo had with former President Vicente Fox.

Paredes will have to tread carefully in her work with Calderon, as some PRI members are already expressing concern about her relationship with the president. "Paredes would put our party in the hands of the party in power," said Sen. Mariano Gonzalez Zarur. The PRI ousted Gordillo from her post as floor leader after some legislators accused her of adopting Fox's legislative agenda (see SourceMex, 2003-12-03).

Although there are some parallels between Paredes and Gordillo, the new party president is seen as a uniting force. Gordillo, in contrast, made many enemies within the party with her abrasive personality. Congressional leaders applauded the election of Paredes as party president. Sen. Santiago Creel, who heads the PAN delegation in the upper house, said he was looking forward to a better relationship with the PRI than existed during the years when Madrazo and his successor Mariano Palacios Alcocer led the party. "We were pleased with [Paredes'] acceptance speech, in which she expressed a spirit of openness, dialogue, and understanding," said Creel.

Similar comments came from Sen. Carlos Navarrete, leader of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) in the upper house, who called Paredes' election "a good signal" for the country. "The party at last has...a leader with a capacity for dialogue."

### *Some PRI members propose redefining party as "leftist"*

While Paredes appears to have made many friends among the political establishment, her biggest challenge will be to help the PRI regain the trust of Mexican voters. A public-opinion survey by the polling organization Ipsos-Bimsa and the Mexico City daily newspaper El Universal in January indicated that only 23% of respondents had a favorable opinion of the PRI. Another 36% said they held a negative opinion of the party, while the remainder had no opinion. "[Paredes] will inherit a party undergoing its worst crisis in terms of image and political ranking," said El Universal columnist Juan Buendia.

The PRI did not win a single state in the presidential election in July 2006 and also lost its plurality in Congress (see SourceMex, 2006-07-12). In recent years, the PRI has had difficulty gaining support among the younger generations, who have either gravitated toward the PAN, the PRD, and smaller parties or have abandoned the political process altogether. A major concern for the PRI, said Buendia, is that the party also appears to be losing support among the older generations that had been very loyal to the party. "The PRI has not shown any capacity to cast itself as a viable alternative," said Buendia. He noted that the biggest beneficiary of the PRI's downturn has been the PAN, which has seen a growth in the number of people who openly identify themselves as members of that party.

Some members of the PRI are pushing to redefine the party as leftist and totally disavow the neoliberal policies enacted during the administrations of former Presidents Carlos Salinas de

Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000). A faction of the party has continued to support those policies during the PAN administrations of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderon. "We have to promote the idea of a democratic left, which incorporates all social classes and cultures," said former party leader and ex-legislator Humberto Roque Villanueva and Deputy Beatriz Pagares, the main promoters of the idea.

### *Selection of Yucatan candidate exposes divisions in PRD*

The PRD's capacity to gain from the PRI's misfortunes has been limited by some backlash against the post-election protests that snarled Mexico City. The protests, led by PRD candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, provided an outlet for tens of thousands of supporters to express their frustrations over what they considered a fraudulent election (see SourceMex, 2006-08-09 and 2006-09-20).

At the same time, Lopez Obrador's actions alienated a segment of the citizenry. The Ipsos-Bimsa poll showed that the number of respondents who identify themselves with the PRD is little changed from what it was two years ago. "The Lopez Obrador effect seems to have disappeared, and the PRD is made up of its historic base," said Buendia, referring to the strong support the center-left candidate received in the months leading to the start of the presidential campaign.

At one time, Lopez Obrador led polls by a wide margin (see SourceMex, 2005-11-30). Another problem for the PRD is that its historic divisions have reappeared now that the election is over. Most party factions put aside their differences to rally behind the Lopez Obrador candidacy. "Within the party are sizable 'currents,' some of which disagree with [Senate leader Navarrete's] blanket refusal to deal with Calderon, especially some of the elected members and the half-dozen governors, who must work with federal officials to finance their programs," said Kenneth Emmond, a columnist for the Mexico City English-language newspaper The Herald.

The party's divisions were exposed during a mishandled effort to support PAN defector Ana Rosa Payan to represent the party in upcoming gubernatorial elections in Yucatan on May 20. Despite misgivings from many party members, the national PRD leadership initially announced that it would support Payan as the standard-bearer for a center-left coalition, which would include the Partido del Trabajo (PT) and the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD). A Payan candidacy would have given the center-left parties the best chance to win the gubernatorial race in a state that has traditionally been dominated by the PAN and the PRI (see SourceMex, 2007-02-07).

Just days after announcing its support for Payan, the PRD rescinded that decision because of protests from various factions in the party. Party leader Leonel Cota Montano, a close ally of Lopez Obrador, took the blame for the initial decision to support Payan and the later withdrawal of support. This put Cota Montano at odds with party secretary-general Guadalupe Acosta, who said Lopez Obrador had been the one pulling the strings all along. In the end, the PCD and PT decided to stick with Payan as their candidate, while Hector Herrera Cholo, a popular comedian who has no political experience, will represent the PRD. Herrera got the nomination by default after three viable PRD candidates, including former federal deputy Eric Villanueva, declined to run. (Sources: Agencia de noticias Proceso, 02/07/07, 02/12/07, 02/13/07, 02/18/07; Excelsior, 01/30/07, 02/06/07, 02/12-15/07, 02/19/07; La Cronica de Hoy, 01/09/07, 01/26/09, 01/30/07, 01/31/07, 02/06/07, 02/07/07, 02/12/07, 02/13/07, 02/15/07, 02/20/07; The Herald-Mexico City, 02/19/07, 02/26/07; La

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