

9-5-2007

President Calderon's First State Address Surrounded by Controversy

LADB Staff

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

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "President Calderon's First State Address Surrounded by Controversy." (2007). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/5141>

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 Calderon's First State Address Surrounded by Controversy

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2007-09-05

As expected, the first State of the Union address in President Felipe Calderon's six-year term was surrounded by controversy, not so much in its content as in the format of the speech. For many years, the tradition was for the president to deliver his speech, known as the *informe*, both orally and in written form to a joint session of Congress at the start of the legislative session. This year, Calderon delivered only a written copy to Congress at the San Lazaro legislative palace on Sept. 1 and retired after speaking for about 90 seconds as part of a negotiated settlement with opposition parties. The president was still able to deliver his speech orally from the National Palace to an invited audience and to the Mexican public on Sept. 2 via a televised transmission.

PRD, PAN negotiate format

The awkward format was the result of a negotiation between legislators from Calderon's conservative Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD). The third major party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), was left out of negotiations but went along with the agreement in the interest of bringing a peaceful resolution to the dispute between the two other parties.

The PRD was seeking to use the State of the Union address to question the legitimacy of Calderon's presidency, which it claims was obtained through a fraudulent vote in July 2006 (see SourceMex, 2006-07-12 and 2006-09-06). The PAN was trying to avoid a repeat of last year, when the PRD and its allies succeeded in keeping President Vicente Fox from delivering his address directly to the Congress (see SourceMex, 2006-09-06).

The PRD-PAN clash also extended to Calderon's swearing-in ceremony on Dec. 1, 2006, when the president-elect was forced to sneak in through a back door for a brief inauguration (see SourceMex, 2006-12-06). This year, after several days of public posturing and behind-the-scenes negotiations, leaders of the PAN and PRD agreed to the format on Aug. 31, a day before the scheduled address. "In the end, we were able to show the ability to dialogue," said PAN Sen. Santiago Creel Miranda, who will serve as leader of the Senate in the upcoming legislative session.

The negotiated format also gave the PRD the opportunity to symbolically reject the legitimacy of Calderon's presidency by walking out of the legislative hall as soon as the president arrived. "We won't accept an illegitimate president," said PRD president Leonel Cota Montano, explaining why his entire delegation had left the chamber. "We won't tolerate one minute of Calderon's presence."

PRD Deputy Ruth Zavaleta, who will serve as leader of the Chamber of Deputies during the next legislative session, arranged for PAN Deputy Cristian Castano to receive Calderon's written address. Except for Calderon's 90-second address, the various parties represented in Congress had agreed

not to present any speeches from the podium at San Lazaro. One party broke with this agreement, the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD), when Sen. Dante Delgado took the podium for about five minutes. Delgado said he did not agree with any "pacts of silence."

The PAN and PRD were unable to avoid controversy completely. A transmission in which Zavaleta was explaining her party's decision to walk out on Calderon was suddenly cut short. Her address was shown on the congressional channel, but the feed was cut from the transmission by the two major commercial networks, Televisa and TV Azteca. "I inform you that I am stepping away from this podium," Zavaleta had said in her comments. "I cannot receive a document that is the result of an electoral process that, while declared legal, is also questioned by millions of Mexicans."

Interior Secretary Francisco Ramirez Acuna initially blamed the problem on "technical difficulties," but later explained that the overzealous director of the presidential media center (Centro de Produccion de Programas Informativos y Especiales de la Presidencia, CEPROPIE) made an error in judgment by cutting off the transmission. Rene Antonio Palavicini, the CEPROPIE director, resigned shortly after the incident. PRD leaders countered that Palavicini was being made a scapegoat and demanded that Ramirez Acuna leave his post. "The real question is who ordered that the transmission feed be cut off," said Deputy Javier Gonzalez Garza, who heads the PRD delegation in the lower house. "I think that the Interior Secretariat was involved in this matter."

The lower house, including the PAN delegation, presented a formal protest to the Calderon administration about the incident. "The Chamber of Deputies, in a unanimous declaration, wants to inform the federal executive that it rejects the interruption of the signal on national television," the legislators' statement said.

Annual address declines in importance

Observers said the awkward format of Calderon's annual speech this year reflected a decline in the importance of the address during the past two decades. "In the wake of Carlos Salinas de Gortari's 1988 presidential election victory still widely viewed as fraudulent opposition lawmakers took to heckling the sitting president in every speech before Congress," said The Houston Chronicle.

Salinas' successor Ernesto Zedillo endured strong criticisms from the PAN and PRD (see SourceMex, 1998-09-09). Fox also faced heavy criticism from the PRI and the PRD (see SourceMex, 2005-09-07). "This was a lackluster event, far from the glamour that once was its trademark," the Mexico City daily newspaper Milenio Diario said of this year's speech. "This was a stark contrast to the informes of the past, where legislators sought opportunities to appear in photographs with the president

-- End --