

# WebMemo



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## The United States and Mexico: Helping One Another, Helping Ourselves

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The United States and Mexico share almost 2,000 miles of border and many of the same problems, including immigration challenges, inadequate border security, and drug smuggling. The two nations do not adequately collaborate to address these issues, despite common goals: defeating the drug cartels, bringing economic development to Mexico, and finding sensible and compassionate solutions to America's immigration crisis and broken border. The U.S. administration can help Mexico help us—and itself—by implementing a complement of economic, security, and investments measures.

**Separating Facts from Fiction.** Contrary to the assumptions of some, Mexico supports American efforts to secure the border and create sensible and legal avenues for immigration. Better border security will help quell the plague of lawlessness that threatens both countries. Illegal immigration hurts Mexico by trapping many of their most productive citizens on the U.S. side of the border—rather than returning to invest and prosper in their own country. Legal, market-based avenues for immigration would create disincentives for illegal immigrants. This would be a vast improvement over the status quo—for both countries.

**Help Wanted.** Congress and the Administration must work together to accomplish the following:

- **Ensure** the Department of Homeland Security finishes the job of gaining operational control of the U.S.–Mexican border sooner rather than later.

- **Enforce** current immigration laws.
- **Establish** realistic quotas and responsible visa worker programs that address market needs, security imperatives, and public health concerns. This can be accomplished through reforming and expanding current visa programs, or by creating new pilot programs.
- **Encourage** adequate, public–private investment in border infrastructure. The United States has underinvested in the most important components of the system, such as infrastructure (e.g., adequate bridges and roads) at the points of entry. More investment in road networks that connect to rail terminals, seaports, and airports is essential to providing the capacity, redundancy, and flexibility required for the free flow of trade and travel. This is particularly vital at the small number of transit nodes that handle most of the cross-border traffic.
- **Work** with federal and state law enforcement agencies to coordinate efforts to stop the illicit sale and shipments of weapons and bulk cash that fuel Mexico's cartel-driven drug violence.

**Time to Act.** Mexico benefits when America acts. By securing the border, both countries can

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/Immigration/wm1901.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Immigration/wm1901.cfm)

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focus on the serious problem of drug trafficking and its deepening cycle of violence and criminality. Border agents require infrastructure at the border to successfully carry out that mission—and the less time they spend looking for illegal immigrants, the more time they can fight violent crime.

**What Mexico Can Do.** Economic reform is key to resolving the immigration issue. By creating new, private-sector jobs in Mexico, the “supply push” that drives illegal immigration to the United States

can be reduced. Mexican President Felipe Calderon must make the Mexican economy more competitive by challenging its private sector monopolies and duopolies.

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