

The “facts on the ground,” therefore, will continue to drive U.S. and Mexican leaders to exchange perspectives and explore the possibilities for a renewed bilateral relationship. These stakeholders recognize that the U.S. and Mexico are increasingly interdependent: the two countries share a 2,000-mile-long physical border across which people, goods and ideas flow constantly. It is thus inevitable that the U.S. and Mexico will interact over common issues; the questions are how and on what terms. In this context, the Futures Forum continues to provide an important vehicle for the open exchange of diverse points of view, contributing to a

redefinition of U.S.–Mexico relations around our shared interests and interdependence.

Catha Worthman is an attorney with Lewis, Feinberg, Lee, Renaker and Jackson, PC, an employment rights law firm, and a graduate of both UC Berkeley’s Latin American Studies program and the School of Law.

Priorities for the Next President

by Christopher Edley Jr.

Leadership is not just about making a calculation of how to adopt the best possible policy within the envelope of the politics of the moment. Leadership is also about trying to influence the way the public understands and empathizes, so that you can change that political envelope and make different solutions possible.

Now the “to-do list,” the inbox awaiting the next president of the United States, is unbelievably scary. It is unlike what we faced when Clinton took over in 1993 and unlike what Carter faced when he took over in 1977. I was involved in both of those transitions, and this is just scary. And it seems to me that if the next president is to address our current problems and repair the damage of the last few years it will require an ability to change the politics of those problems.

However, having worked in the White House under two presidents and having worked on a number of presidential campaigns, I’m painfully aware of how limited a period of time the next president will have to actually prosecute an agenda and how little time there is for the president to focus on key priorities. So I made a list. My top five priorities for the next president are: 1) the economy and the budget; 2) Iran, Afghanistan and security generally; 3) terrorism and homeland security; 4) climate change, energy and the environment; and 5) health care.

That’s a lot to try to get done before congressional midterm elections start to consume all of the available oxygen in Washington. But look what I’ve left off the list: immigration, global development, infrastructure investments, labor and workers’ rights, veterans issues, trade and trade-related matters, education and more. And all of this must happen against the backdrop of a broken Washington, where partisanship is crippling and policy must be communicated through the flawed transmission mechanism that is the media, in which even the best of leaders has difficulty communicating with the public. I think that the next president is going to face mountainous expectations that will be very tough to meet.

Christopher Edley Jr. is Dean and Orrick Professor at the UC Berkeley School of Law. This article was adapted from Dean Edley’s comments at the 2008 U.S.–Mexico Futures Forum.



Photo by Antonio del Valle.

Christopher Edley Jr.