

# The U.S.–Mexico Futures Forum 2011



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The border between Tijuana and San Diego. (Photo by Nathan Gibbs.)

## U.S.–MEXICO FUTURES FORUM

# Global Crisis, Bilateral Response

by Brian Palmer-Rubin

Crisis has become a familiar theme in United States–Mexico relations today. Whether the epicenter of the crisis is north of the border (the ongoing economic calamity), south of the border (Mexico’s drug war), or beyond (global warming), unfolding events have reinforced the shared fates of these two countries. If the participants at the U.S.–Mexico Futures Forum on April 15 and 16 — now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year — were not convinced of the urgency of these issues before coming to the event, they certainly faced a sobering series of discussions. Three topics were addressed in-depth: renewable energy and climate change; Mexico’s security crisis; and North America’s response to the emergence of China as a global economic power. Participants also took part in a discussion about Mexico’s justice system, prompted by the arresting documentary “Presumed Guilty,” and exchanged views with such luminaries as Darrell Steinberg, President pro Tem of the California State Senate; Robert Reich, UC Berkeley Professor of Public Policy and former U.S. Secretary of Labor; Kamala Harris, California Attorney General; and State Controller John Chiang.

The forum occurred at a propitious time to reflect on — and perhaps advance — binational strategies to deal with pressing social, political and economic issues. Both countries will hold presidential elections in 2012 that will serve as referenda on the current national



Human Rights Trilogy, by Rufino Tamayo. The original symbol of the Forum, now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year. (Images courtesy of the Olga & Rufino Tamayo Foundation.)

administrations, which have had to navigate turbulent times over the past few years.

Forum participants from the United States were highly qualified to offer insight during this crucial juncture. Public policy experts, political leaders, entrepreneurs, labor union leaders and scholars provided a wide spectrum of opinions based on their interpretations of the American political climate and its conduciveness to innovative responses to pressing bilateral challenges.

On the Mexican side, the July 2012 elections are expected to lead to the ouster of the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN), the center-right party that has held power since 2000. Mexican news is dominated by ghastly reports of drug-related murders, which the Trans-Border Institute tabulated as exceeding 34,000 in the period beginning in 2006, when President Calderón initiated a military campaign against drug cartels, and ending in 2010. The popular perception that Calderón is

losing the drug war and the inability of the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution, PRD) to rally around a single candidate have cleared the path for the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) — the party that dominated Mexican politics throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century — to retake the presidency.

Given this tense political climate, the diversity of Mexican politicians in attendance at the Forum was notable. All three of Mexico’s major political parties were represented, with participants including Beatriz Paredes Rangel, congresswoman and outgoing president of the PRI; Adriana González Carrillo, Senator for the PAN; and Amalia García Medina, outgoing governor of Zacatecas and former president of the PRD.

Participants engaged in frank discussion and expressed a shared appreciation for the need for action by policymakers in both countries. The tone of the event was best reflected by Harley Shaiken’s opening remarks,

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summarizing the objective of the Forum: “We’ve never sought consensus, but we have sought understanding and, hopefully, new policy approaches.”

## Renewable Energy and Climate Change

A full day of discussions was kicked off by a panel on an issue that affects not only the United States and Mexico but the entire planet: the global environmental crisis. The panelists that spurred the discussion included Luis Alfonso de Alba, Mexico’s Special Representative for Climate Change to the United Nations; Robert Collier, consultant for the ClimateWorks Foundation and a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley’s Center for Environmental Public Policy; and Steve Weissman, Director of the Energy and Cleantech Program at Berkeley Law.

The consensus among the presenters was that climate change is an urgent threat to global well being and that innovative new framings of the issue are required to generate the political initiative and public support necessary to pass emissions regulation, make the required investments in clean technology and commit to multilateral environmental agreements. Collier promoted a framing of reforms as addressing three symbiotic challenges: climate change, public health and energy security. Christopher Edley, Dean of Berkeley Law, advocated that policymakers

should respond to the public’s “green fatigue” by framing renewable energy technology as “a Sputnik moment.” Edley reasoned that investments in green technology might be more popular with the American public if framed as a strategically crucial economic competition with China.

## Security

Perhaps the most far-reaching ideas at the Forum were proposed in response to Mexico’s security crisis. This issue is fundamentally binational, both in terms of the drug market — Mexico’s drug cartels exist to feed U.S. demand for illicit drugs — and in terms of inter-cartel violence, which threatens to spill over into U.S. border cities and is exacerbated by the free flow of firearms from U.S. vendors across the border. The panelists, who offered nuanced appraisals and suggestions, were Shannon O’Neil, Douglas Dillon Fellow for Latin American Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, and Sergio Fajardo Valderrama, former mayor of Medellín, Colombia, and a consultant to Mexico on the drug war.

The panel was particularly insightful thanks to the diverse experiences of the participants in dealing with drug-related policy in the United States, Mexico and Colombia, the site of the last major crisis of drug violence in the Western Hemisphere. Both O’Neil and Fajardo urged

[Gov. Jerry Brown signs the California Dream Act on the back of its author, Assemblyman Gil Cedillo, July 2011.](#)



Photo by Damian Dovarganes/Associated Press.

U.S. policymakers to take lessons from the Colombian experience. O’Neil suggested that a successful element of U.S. involvement in Colombia’s drug war was to help professionalize the military to prevent soldiers from defecting to the cartels. Fajardo explained that his mayoral administration’s success in alleviating drug violence in Medellín was achieved by transforming urban spaces and providing sources of employment for youth to decrease the attractiveness of entering drug gangs.

### North America, China and the Global Economy

No discussion of U.S.–Mexico relations would be complete without an analysis of the economic predicament that affects both countries. The ongoing economic crisis — and North America’s poor prospects for a swift recovery — constitutes a limiting factor for addressing the other crises that confront these two countries. The final panel of the forum focused on strategies for emerging from the recession and for adjusting to the rapid rise of China as a global economic force. The presenters were Enrique Dussel Peters, Professor of Economics and Director of the China–Mexico Studies Center at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, and Clyde Prestowitz, President of the Economic Strategy Institute.

Panelists and participants agreed that both the United States and Mexico should respond to the Chinese threat by investing in bilateral trade deals to confront the competition posed by China to U.S. and Mexican producers. Dussel Peters explained that Nafta’s emphasis on promoting U.S. textile exports and automobile manufacturing in Mexico is obsolete, since China has already overtaken the former and is poised to overtake

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Photo by Jim Block.

Steve Weissman and Amalia García Medina.

Pete Gallego.



Photo by Megan Kang.



Photo by Megan Kang.

Rafael Fernández de Castro, co-convenor of the Forum.



Photo by Jim Block.

Art Pulaski.

## Global Crisis, Bilateral Response

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the latter industry in the next two decades. The panelists agreed that the United States and Mexico should focus efforts on retaining high-tech sectors that generate stable, high-quality employment. According to Prestowitz, the U.S. has moved too slowly in countering China's strategy of offering inducements such as subsidies and tax breaks to encourage high-tech firms like Intel to move their plants to China.

Robert Reich's lunchtime remarks placed the global economic situation in the context of historical economic shifts in the United States and the resulting structural imbalances. According to Reich, the current political emphasis on fiscal balance is misplaced and has undermined prospects for both the United States and Mexico to recover from "the Great Recession." Instead, Reich maintained, the Obama administration should focus its energies on short-term expansionary policy to increase demand and long-term redistributive policy to increase the purchasing power of the American middle class. This would, in turn, increase demand for Mexican exports to the United States. Middle-class Americans'

wages have languished during the past 30 years, while the GDP has doubled, mostly to the benefit of the richest one percent.

Reich was pessimistic about the likelihood that the Obama administration would switch to a more expansionary policy, however. Republicans' success in steering the political discourse and convincing Americans that the deficit is a bigger problem than job growth has limited Democrats' options, he maintained. Democrats are under pressure to show that they are striving to "get the fiscal house in order" to buttress their electoral prospects in 2012. Reich also expressed doubts about the Obama administration's most concrete proposal to generate employment, calling the cleantech sector "80 percent hype." Reich characterized cleantech as a boutique industry that will likely generate jobs for highly educated workers, the group least afflicted by the current employment predicament.

### "Presumed Guilty"

Forum participants also watched clips of "Presumed Guilty," an award-winning film that documents the path

of Toño Zúñiga, a man accused of murder, as he navigates Mexico's perverse criminal justice system. The film was produced by Roberto Hernández and Layda Negrete, doctoral candidates in UC Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy, and has received international acclaim, becoming the most watched documentary in Mexican history. Hernández introduced the film and joined in an emotionally charged discussion with forum participants about the failings of criminal justice in both countries and the urgent need for reform.

In one particularly striking sequence, Zúñiga — acting as his own defense attorney, which is routine in Mexican criminal court — questions the chief detective overseeing his case. When Zúñiga confronts the man about the complete lack of evidence to justify his arrest, the officer replies: “If you were arrested by my agents and you're behind bars, it's because you're guilty.” According to Hernández, this attitude is symptomatic of a systemic bias in Mexico's criminal justice system. Judges are not present at most hearings, and most guilty convictions are handed down on the basis of no evidence. As a result, due process is routinely violated, and many innocent defendants are found guilty. The statistics speak volumes: the national conviction rate is 80 percent; in Mexico City it is 95 percent.

While “Presumed Guilty” focuses on the shocking flaws in Mexico's criminal justice system, at the Forum it spearheaded a discussion that also delved into the failures of the U.S. justice system to respect the rights of the accused. Texas State Representative Pete Gallego recounted his own personal transformation from a tough-on-

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Photo by Jim Block.

María Echaveste.

Adriana González Carrillo.



Photo by Jim Block.

crime district attorney and author of Texas' death penalty law to an advocate for death-row inmates. Gallego explained that after meeting with the families of executed prisoners who were later found to be innocent, he has come to believe that strict safeguards against wrongful convictions are a necessary component of a well-functioning justice system.

The debate sparked by "Presumed Guilty" has pressured policymakers to increase such safeguards in Mexico's justice system. In the past few years, Mexico City and several states have adopted reforms that institute police lineups, require experts to oversee witness testimony and facilitate the presentation of physical evidence. In the words of Amalia García, governor of the state of Zacatecas, "the reforms are expensive, but it is much more expensive not to have reforms."

### **Bold Ideas, Trying Times**

This year's U.S.–Mexico Futures Forum was characterized by sobering accounts of crises, innovative ideas for responding to them and pessimism about the conduciveness of the current political and economic climate to enacting paradigm-shifting policies. Concluding remarks offered by Rafael Fernández de Castro, Chair of the International Studies Department at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México and former adviser to the Mexican president on International Affairs,

summarized the current state of affairs: at a moment when drug violence, economic stagnation and climate change threaten fundamental damage to the United States and Mexico, both countries are ill-prepared to respond.

The economic crisis, coupled with the pressure exerted by deficit hawks to shrink the budget, has drastically limited the resources that the U.S. government can spend to aid Mexico in the drug war, generate job growth or promote green energy technology. The political conditions in both countries are also cause for concern. As Reich explained, the upcoming presidential election and the threat posed by radical right-wing movements in the United States have induced the Obama administration to follow a risk-averse policy path for the coming year. In Mexico, according to Fernández de Castro, party leaders are also consumed by the 2012 electoral campaign and are thus loath to embrace bold ideas for responding to the security crisis and other challenges.

As demonstrated by the two days of Forum discussions, the promotion of cross-border dialogue and solution-seeking is a necessary response to today's challenges.

[Brian Palmer-Rubin is a Ph.D. candidate in the Charles & Louise Travers Department of Political Science, UC Berkeley.](#)

[From left: Shannon O'Neil, Christopher Edley and David Bonior.](#)



Photo by Megan Kang.



Photo by Jim Block.

## Participants at the 2011 U.S.–Mexico Futures Forum

### Front row, from left:

**Luis Alfonso de Alba**  
Mexico's U.N. Special Representative for Climate Change

**Juan Ernesto Pardini**  
Director of Analysis of Public Finances,  
Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad

**Shannon O'Neil**  
Douglas Dillon Fellow For Latin American Studies,  
Council on Foreign Relations

**Maria Echaveste**  
Berkeley Law School;  
White House Deputy Chief of Staff (1998-2001)

**Rafael Fernández de Castro**  
Mexican Presidential Advisor, International Affairs (2008-11);  
Professor, International Studies Department, ITAM

**Harley Shaiken**  
Class of 1930 Professor of Letters and Science;  
Chair, Center for Latin American Studies, UC Berkeley

**Amalia García Medina**  
Governor of Zacatecas (2004-10)

**David Bonior**  
Chair, American Rights at Work;  
Democratic Whip, U.S. Congress, 1991-2002

**Sergio Fajardo Valderrama**  
Mayor of Medellín, Colombia (2004-07)

### Second row, from left:

**Pete Gallego**  
State Representative, Texas

**Art Pulaski**  
Chief Officer, California Labor Federation

**Clyde Prestowitz**  
President, Economic Strategy Institute

**Claudia Corichi García**  
Plurinomial Senator, Mexico

**Adriana González Carrillo**  
Federal Senator, State of Mexico

**Steve Silberstein**  
Co-founder and first President, Innovative Interfaces Inc.

**Enrique Dussel Peters**  
Professor of Economics, Director, China–Mexico Studies, UNAM

**Beatriz Paredes Rangel**  
Deputy, National Assembly;  
President of the PRI (2007-11)

**Alex Saragoza**  
Professor of Ethnic Studies, UC Berkeley

**Beatriz Manz**  
Professor of Geography and Ethnic Studies, UC Berkeley

**Gil Cedillo**  
State Assemblyman, California

**Robert Collier**  
Visiting scholar, Center for Environmental Public Policy, UC Berkeley

**Steve Weissman**  
Director, Energy and Cleantech Program, Berkeley Law School

**Christopher Edley**  
Dean, Berkeley Law School

**Dionicia Ramos**  
Vice Chair, Center for Latin American Studies, UC Berkeley

## Special Guests



**John Chiang**  
California State Controller  
(Photo by Roger Bayne.)



**Kamala Harris**  
Attorney General of California  
(Photo by Steve Rhodes.)



**Robert Reich**  
Professor of Public Policy, UC Berkeley  
(Photo by Matty Nematollahi.)



**Darrell Steinberg**  
President Pro Tem of the California State Senate  
(Photo courtesy of the Office of the President Pro Tem.)