

OUR VOICE

Last January 15, President Clinton gave his State of the Union Address to the 105th Congress of the United States. On a personal level the context was the absolute worst imaginable, though publicly the situation was quite different. Everyone, those actually present at the speech and those watching it on television, was trying to pinpoint the truth about recent developments: in a look, in the tone of voice or in the president's hesitation over words. The crucial thing was to find out if the president had tried to obstruct justice. If he had, private matters would become public. To everyone's surprise —both his supporters and his opponents— the State of the Union Address was a success, particularly if we take into account that the president of the world's foremost power was giving his annual report at the same time that his integrity was being questioned. Despite that, President Clinton was able to show total control as he read a well-written speech.

Clinton described the United States in the new millennium as a land of opportunity where with hard work people could prosper and where everyone would have a college education. He emphasized the need to renew "the idea of America by widening the circle of opportunity and deepening the meaning of our freedom."

In speaking of his own achievements, he stressed the creation of a "leaner and more flexible government"; the reduction of the federal bureaucracy; the forging of a third way out of the discussion between those for and those against big government: a smaller, but more progressive, government. He underlined the inflation levels attained under his administration, the lowest in the last 30 years.

The projected budget deficit at the beginning of Clinton's administration was U.S.\$357 billion, while in 1998, it dropped to only U.S.\$10 billion. In his address, the president explained that for 1999, it would be zero, making it the first balanced budget in 30 years. Also, for the first time in history, it is a bipartisan budget. Clinton also recognized the need to prepare the American people for meeting the new challenge of the global economy, summing up his position on the matter with the phrase, "Shape it and not shrink from it." Underlying the opportunities in new markets, he mentioned the 240 trade agreements signed to end trade barriers worldwide. In that context, he made his position clear that creating a Fast Track Negotiating Authority was fundamental to speeding up the signing of agreements with Latin America, Africa and Europe.

The president's address also mentioned the significant drop in crime and drug use, stressing the importance of the United States continuing to be a country where talent is rewarded with opportunities and in which its citizens share the same values: family, faith, freedom and responsibility. He also referred to the importance of promoting scientific research for the future, promising government support for it.

Undoubtedly, all the figures supported Clinton in what was the best State of the Union Address of his two administrations, even though the public continued to waiver between believing him or Special Prosecutor Starr. The support Hillary Clinton gave her husband was also a determining factor in the president's image. Those who predicted disaster for the 1998 State of the Union were wrong.

In terms of bilateral relations the U.S. government decision to jointly deal with such thorny

topics as drug trafficking and immigration has had in Clinton one of its main defenders. One example was his recognition of the Mexican government's efforts in the fight against drugs during the U.S. Congress' certification discussions. In any case, it is to Mexico's advantage that the United States have a strong presidency, with an executive who, regardless of founded or unfounded objections to his personal life, has been sensitive toward our nation's problems in his performance in public office.

Clinton's address also dealt with the presidential initiative to create an Area for Free Trade in the Americas (AFTA), which will have an important impact on the future of the hemisphere. We therefore include in our "United States Affairs" section an article by U.S.-Mexico relations specialist María Cristina Rosas, who analyzes the AFTA from the geostrategic point of view, emphasizing the different actors' contrasting conceptions of the proposal. On the one hand, the Mercosur countries, headed by Brazil, have serious doubts about the project's viability. And on the other hand the United States itself is aiming for an agreement that would transcend trade to include environmental questions and the fight against drug trafficking.

The Team Canada visit to Mexico should be put in this very context of economic globalization. NAFTA has made trade relations between Mexico and Canada closer, as shown by specialist Abel Escartín Molina in his article about the visit in our "Canadian Issues" section.

A question which continues to concern Mexican public opinion is the country's so-called political transition. Despite significant changes in favor of a more democratic political system, specialists continue to state that the transition has not concluded. The "Politics" section in this issue is dedicated to this topic.

Sociologist Roberto Gutiérrez looks at the new make-up of Mexico's Congress, which for the first time in history is not dominated by an absolute majority of the party in office, and its possible consequences for the nation's political future. He emphasizes the quest for political consensus among the different caucuses as the only way that the new Congress will be able to contribute effectively to perfecting democracy in Mexico. Next, in "Mexico, the Difficult Transition," political analyst and philosopher Luis Salazar examines in detail the different moments of Mexico's political transition, stressing that it cannot be completed by changing only the electoral system. Lastly, university researcher Leonardo Curzio, in his article "Mexican Chiaroscuro. The 1998 Scenario," offers an overview of possible developments in Mexico in three basic areas: the economy, politics and the justice system and public safety. He stresses the favorable economic achievements of President Zedillo's administration, recognizing, however, the continuing plight of the poor, a problem which, if left unsolved, will undermine full justification of the president's economic model. Politically, while Curzio recognizes the steps forward in democratization, he also points to the conflict in Chiapas as one of the main questions to be solved.

The solution of the conflict in Chiapas is a strategic national priority. Both parties to the negotiation, the government and the EZLN, will have to adopt flexible positions in order to return to the negotiating table. The break-off of talks were partly the result of the different interpretations of the San Andrés Larráinzar Accords. However, the events of December 1997, concretely the massacre of 45 indigenous people by paramilitary forces in the town of Acteal, show that a change in strategy is needed. Acteal aroused indignation among Mexicans. Today, the public is not only waiting for solutions to the conflict in Chiapas, it is demanding them. *Voices of Mexico* thought it necessary to provide its readers with the text of President Zedillo's January 23 speech made in Yucatán, in which he sums up his position about the conflict.

In this issue, the editors decided to dedicate a special space to the city of Zacatecas, a jewel of colonial Mexico that boasts monuments, museums and artistic and historical treasures, and is the cradle of some of the most important painters this country has produced.

We begin with a look at the painting of Zacatecas-born Manuel Felguérez, written by art critics Juan Villoro and Luis Ruis Caso. Felguérez is one of the most widely recognized Mexican painters nationally and internationally. His visual proposal is not only original but also foundational, as writer Juan García Ponce says.

“The Splendor of Mexico” includes a photoreport on the city of Zacatecas, declared by the UNESCO a World Heritage Treasure for its beauty and the conservation of its colonial monuments. But since Zacatecas is also renowned as a center for silversmiths, we have included an article about the city’s Silver Center.

Our “Museums” section is dedicated to Zacatecas’ Francisco Goitia Museum, whose permanent collection includes works by the most prestigious, internationally known, Zacatecan artists, each of whom has a special room in the museum: Francisco Goitia, Julio Ruelas, José Kuri, Rafael and Pedro Coronel and, of course, Manuel Felguérez. In this issue, we also specifically review the museum’s Manuel Felguérez Room.

In the “History” section, we include a piece of this surprising city’s history: the article “The Taking of Zacatecas” explains the incident that redefined the course of the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

In our “Science, Art and Culture” section, we include an interview with well-known Polish-Mexican stage director Ludwik Margules, recognized for the creativity and dramatic impact of his proposals. Among other questions, theater critic María Tarriba asks Margules what the deepest meaning is of stage direction, what his strategies are for effectively communicating with the audience and what the current state of affairs is in Mexican theater.

We also present our readers with an article by Janet Long about a basic part of the Mexican diet: chili peppers. Her original focus explains the properties that make chili peppers hot, the trait that explains why so many people are fanatical chili pepper lovers. Lastly, Néstor García Canclini looks at the globalization of artistic production. He maintains that the priority should be supporting initiatives like the U.S.-Mexico Fund for Culture, that seeks to propitiate mutual understanding between cultures that for geopolitical, historical and economic reasons, must necessarily interact.

In our “Economy” section, the reader will find an article by Professor Jorge Vargas explaining what is involved in determining property rights over the vast oil reserves in the triangle known as the “Western Gap” or the “Doughnut Hole” in the Gulf of Mexico. The rights to these territorial waters are not clear under the existing treaties, resulting in over 20 years of high-level bilateral negotiations.

The situation of women in Mexico is always a timely topic. With the close of the millennium nearing, gender discrimination persists in both people’s attitudes and their actions: the problem is, above all, cultural. Graciela Hierro, in her article in the “Society” section, solidly defends the most advanced and serious feminist positions from a theoretical point of view.

Also in this section, Carlos González contributes an article about the Mexican diaspora in the United States. His approach is novel in that it questions the generally accepted idea that Americans of Mexican descent constitute a solid national group, centered around their forebears’ culture.

One of the most widely known pre-Columbian traditions in Mexico is the ball game. Mexican anthropologist María Teresa Uriarte looks at this tradition and the mythical and religious roots that made it spread throughout the Mesoamerican indigenous cultures, a ritual of honor in which the very lives of the players were at stake.

The “Ecology” section is dedicated to the maguey plant, one of Mexico’s best known and most interesting, not only because it has become a symbol of Mexico in cinema and the visual arts, but also because it is and has been basic to the economy and nutrition of broad sectors of the population since pre-Hispanic times.

Voices of Mexico reaffirms its interest in translating and making available to its English-speaking readers the best pens of Mexican literature. On this occasion, we present a short story by one of our country’s best contemporary poets and short story writers, José Emilio Pacheco.

Lastly, the editors could not close without paying homage to Don Arnaldo Orfila Reynal, an exceptional man in all respects, known in cultural and publishing circles in our country as the “dean of editors in Mexico.” This issue’s “In Memoriam” section is dedicated to him.