

OUR VOICE

“We are finished with this for the time being,” said Senator Harry Reid, Democrat from Nevada and majority leader, as he turned the Senate to work on energy legislation. That was his reaction to the Senate vote (50-45), which was insufficient to end the debate on the immigration reform and put it to the vote. Those in favor of ending the debate and voting on the bill needed 60 votes. In other words, the reform will not be approved in the short term.

Thus, temporarily at least, the Senate and its leader concluded a debate that has been harsh and ferocious from the beginning. The latest summary of the proposed reform, in its last stages backed by the White House, had a rocky beginning and was clearly promoted at a bad time, when the U.S. political class considers this a *toxic* issue, which, as such, cannot be dealt with as freely as they would like. Even so, though it seems very contradictory, presidential pressure led the issue into a tense congressional debate that resulted in the polemical senatorial vote. In the same sense, we have commented here and elsewhere, the political moment in the United States does not admit *anomalous* issues in the political debate. Much less when the overwhelming weight of the enormous foreign policy failure of the war against terror and particularly the tragic adventure in Iraq are added to the priorities of the presidential primaries, all of which has a huge impact on the debate about this and other sensitive issues in Washington and throughout the country.

Although U.S. immigration legislation urgently needs reforming, neither the government nor society were duly prepared to deal with them fully. This can be explained on two levels: first, U.S. society is divided about its present and its future. This polarity existed even before 9/11, but was deepened by the terrorist attacks. In addition to its loss of innocence, it was subjected to unprecedented pressure about its response to the world and its enemies. Even if only partially, U.S. society has been forced to support a foreign policy in Iraq that from its very beginnings could be seen as weak and false. Knowing how weak its society is in times of crisis, the White House promoted nationalist euphoria that initially received a favorable response, to the point that it got President George W. Bush reelected (even if an important number of voters did do an about-face). Thus, government blackmail was very effective. In the second place, the Bush administration, like no other in modern U.S. history, is facing a credibility and popularity crisis both domestically and internationally. The reason has already been explained: the U.S. administration went to the extreme in its antiterrorist obsession; but it is perhaps the outrageous exercise of *hard power* that has relieved Washington of the moral power that it once had among its European, Latin American and other allies around the globe. Anti-Americanism has grown as never before throughout the world and, alongside that, Washington’s moral authority has decreased as it has been unable to make its exercise of power credible. To this extent the U.S. state suffers internally the consequences of this growing deterioration. Because it has not understood the limits of its power, the establishment has been incapable of making some fundamental aspects of its sustainability visible (with the regret and self-imposed silence of a good number of political and social actors, those who have usually belonged to the rational center). This crisis, which transcends the Iraq policy, as can be seen daily in the scandals the Bush administration has been implicated in, has played out most contradictorily on the domestic stage. Today, it was immigration reform that suffered the blow; tomorrow, that enormous wear and tear on the U.S. political establishment will cause other reverses. It will perhaps be then —and it is devoutly to be wished— that Americans will stop a moment and have to think again about Santayana’s magnificent maxim: “Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.”

* * *

Of course, immigration reform affects Mexico directly. This is why Mexico’s new administration’s actions to push for the most favorable possible decision in the United States are very important. It may need to reformulate the country’s international alliances and its foreign policy strategies. In our “International Affairs” section, we include an article by analyst Leonardo Curzio who goes into great detail about what are emerging as the main outlines of President Felipe Calderón’s foreign policy, among which the author recognizes a more pragmatic vision and the explicit intention of deepening relations with Latin America. Recently, most Latin American nations have undertaken different attempts at integration and democratic

consolidation. Nevertheless, significant conflicts subsist both among and within these countries. Very often these conflicts are violent and have prevented the consolidation of peace in the hemisphere, as Luis Díaz Müller shows in his contribution to our “Politics” section. This issue of *Voices of Mexico* also includes researcher Ariadna Estévez’s reflection about the link between undocumented migration and human rights.

Domestically, we can say that one of the main political themes of the new administration’s first six months is political actors’ new willingness to finally bring about the much-needed reform of the state. In his article, political analyst Pedro Salazar establishes some of the orientations that will necessarily have to be taken into account in that reform, among them, the urgently needed debate about the relevance today of the presidentialist system. Two other topics that have been in the public eye are transparency and accountability on the one hand, and the respect for human rights, on the other. We dedicate our “Society” section to these issues, starting with an article by Alonso Gómez-Robledo V., a member of the council of the Institute for Access to Public Information, who examines transparency in Mexican institutions of higher education. The second contribution to this section is from academic Rubén García Clarck, who looks at the recent performance of the National Human Rights Commission, centering on the analysis of its recommendations and their scant impact on the behavior of public institutions under investigation.

Undoubtedly in the first half of 2007, the reform of Mexico’s social security system for public employees (through the so-called ISSSTE Law) has become one of the issues that has most polarized society. Specialist Gustavo Leal describes from a critical, comparative perspective what he considers to be this law’s unfortunate consequences for state employees, comparing them to the reforms other countries have implemented in their social security systems. We have also included in our “Economy” section two contributions about the very sensitive issue of declining oil production in Mexico. David Shields, a well-known energy consultant, offers us a general panorama of the crisis of Pemex’s oil and gas production, and Víctor Rodríguez looks at what seem to be very rich oil fields discovered along the border with the United States and in the Gulf of Mexico, that make an agreement about the exploitation of the shared deposits urgent.

* * *

This issue’s “Art and Culture” section is dedicated to the magnum exhibition “Revelations. The Arts in Latin America, 1492-1820”, which brought together a huge number of works that are part of the opulent legacy of the Spanish viceroalties and Portuguese-dominated Brazil. This text is followed by an article about the artistic career of América Gabrielle, who in addition to being a sculptress and painter, is an untiring art promoter. Next comes an article about the La Quebrada cliff divers, whose stunning feats are part of the golden age of Acapulco. Lastly, we touch on film and three Mexican directors whose work has brought them international renown; in this issue, we present an article about the first of them, Alfonso Cuarón.

Our “The Splendor of Mexico” section is dedicated to a region of Michoacán where tradition and craft-making are more alive than ever. One article deals with efforts to promote respect and preserve traditional wear in indigenous communities in the Uruapan region; another touches on the abundant, versatile folk crafts made in more than 200 communities. The section finishes with an article about the Paricutín volcano, born suddenly in the mid-1940s, a part of local history. In “Museums” we look at Uruapan’s La Huatapera, a place that pays homage to Michoacán’s four indigenous peoples.

We dedicate our “Literature” and “In Memoriam” sections to one of Mexico’s most renowned writers of twentieth-century Mexican *costumbrista* literature, depicting local customs and manners. Recently deceased Rafael Ramírez Heredia undoubtedly deserves this small homage, for his legacy as a novelist and short-story writer, but also because of his indefatigable work as the teacher of many generations of Mexican writers in his famous literary workshops. Precisely one of his most outstanding disciples, Gilda Salinas, writes about his work and career.

* * *

I will end by informing our readers that because of increasing printing and editing costs, we are obliged to reduce the number of issues we produce a year: starting with this issue, we will be publishing every four months. *Voices of Mexico* is a very important project for disseminating Mexican culture among English-speaking peoples and nations. For that reason, we will continue our best efforts in its preparation. For the time being, we have preferred to reduce the number of issues, but maintain and improve the magazine’s quality by focusing on new and more original sections and material.

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde