

**Ken Salazar, Ambassador to Mexico**

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The Biden administration has now named former US Senator Ken Salazar from Colorado to be its Ambassador to Mexico. Having worked with Ken in the administration of Colorado Governor Roy Romer, I can attest to his knowledge, integrity and commitment. He served as Attorney General for Colorado (1999-2005), US Senator from 2005 to 2009 and Secretary of the Interior from 2009 to 2013 and there is no better choice for this position that offers major challenges but also great potential for improving mutual US-Mexico issues.

The first challenge would be gaining the trust and respect of Mexico's President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (better known as AMLO). Despite Trump's unending insulting of Mexico and Mexicans, AMLO became a Trump supporter and has been cool to Joe Biden. He remains extremely popular in Mexico and with the Congress in the control of his party, Morena, very powerful. However, his cavalier attitude towards the pandemic has resulted in many unnecessary deaths and he is only now beginning a vaccination program. The murder rate is staggering. There have been 604 murders in Juárez (pop. 1.5 million) in just the first five months of 2021. That compares to 447 in all of 2020 in the much larger New York City. Despite his alleged commitment to the poor, I have seen absolutely no evidence of social programs in my many visits to the Juárez area. And unlike the US, there has been no stimulus program for the millions who were put out of work by the pandemic.

Can a new US Ambassador build a relationship with him that would help resolve some of these issues?

Other issues involve the new United States Mexico Canada Agreement which replaced NAFTA and was enacted on July 1, 2020. Can a new Ambassador help with its implementation? Mexico is by far the largest export market for border states like New Mexico and Texas and this accounts for thousands of jobs.

When NAFTA was passed in 1994, there was a commitment to a bi-country border cleanup program which was never fulfilled. This is still a huge need and could be a boon to US environmental companies.

The US House of Representatives has passed legislation introduced by former New Mexico Congresswoman Xochitl Torres Small calling for improved technology at ports of entry which is where 90% of illegal drugs enter the US. Could a new Ambassador help form a partnership with Mexico whereby Mexico could also use this technology to slow the flow of guns into Mexico?

Could Mexico and the US initiate a border-based COVID program that could be quickly implemented for the many workers who have to cross the border every day. Could this be expanded to help with the many other health issues that plague border cities like Juárez?

US officials arrested General Salvador Cienfuegos in Los Angeles last October 15 without notifying Mexican officials, causing a diplomatic uproar and ending with a dismissal of his drug-related charges. Although this occurred during the Trump presidency, there remains a lack of trust. Can't a new and better law enforcement-related working relationship now be formed between Biden and AMLO with the new Ambassador pushing it along behind the scenes? Salazar's experience as Attorney General for Colorado will be invaluable here.

Given conditions of violence, corruption, crop destruction due to climate change, on-going poverty and devastating hurricanes, we can expect continuing flight from Central American countries like Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Can Mexico partner with the US in an effort to assist those countries and can Salazar be part of that process?

Immigration is obviously the most highly publicized issue. An Ambassador with Salazar's stature can help humanize this issue and remind policy makers in Washington that there is more than just politics involved. For example, in the last few weeks, I've visited four shelters in Juárez and nearby Palomas, Mexico and am astonished at how long many of these families have been waiting for asylum hearings.

The challenges are enormous but so are the opportunities. Thanks to the Biden administration for moving quickly and naming this very special public servant, Ken Salazar as their choice.

Morgan Smith has been documenting conditions in the Juárez area for the last decade as well as assisting a number of humanitarian organizations there. He can be reached at [Morgan-smith@comcast.net](mailto:Morgan-smith@comcast.net).