

Mexican Senator Offers 'A Vision of the Future'

Political leaders in the north of Mexico are demonstrating the courage to change their axioms. Under the headline, "Yes to a Vision of the Future," the Sonoran daily El Imparcial on Nov. 11 published the closing speech given by Sonoran Federal Senator Alfonso Elías Serrano, from the PRI party, to the Regional Forum "Let's Build the Bridge to the Future: The 21st Century PLHINO." The Senator called for a turn away from the errors of NAFTA, back to the commitment to build great projects which "normal people" had, four decades ago. His remarks have been translated from Spanish.

A few weeks ago, I heard one of the members of the Pro-PLHINO Committee of the 21st Century say that 40 years ago, people held a larger vision of the future . . . that then, there were more normal people. And this made me ask myself, at just what moment did we cease to be normal people; at what moment did we stop thinking about the future, and concentrate on resolving day-to-day problems?

But it's not a question of regretting or seeking someone to blame for what could have been, but was not. Rather, it is a question of recovering, as a nation, the vision of the future that we had in the days when great infrastructure projects were proposed in Mexico; in the days when advances were made in space exploration internationally; in the days when our universities carried out ambitious research toward eradicating diseases and epidemics in the world.

And this is where the North West Water Plan (PLHINO) comes in, because it proposes to bring water from [the state of] Nayarit to Sinaloa and Sonora, through the construction of great engineering works, transporting surplus water from one basin to the other, by means of 16 consecutive rivers that stretch from Santiago in Nayarit, to the Yaqui in Cajame, by means of which 16 billion cubic meters of water that currently pour into the sea in that area, could be exploited. With this, we would be in a position to confront the great challenges of food, water, and energy that we will need in the future, and to resolve in part the problem of immigration.

With the launching of the Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] in 1994, and under the notion that it was more feasible to import food than to produce it, we stopped farming in the countryside at the rate that we had been, and we became dependent on the United States for food. Now, we realize that conditions in the world have changed regarding food supply and demand.

Already in the past few months, we have had a taste of what is coming if we don't find alternatives for meeting Mexican's demand for grain, to keep tortilla and other basic prod-

uct prices accessible.

At the same time, we have emerging countries like China and India which, in recent years, have been growing at historic rates, and their people, now with greater buying power, are demanding more and better products from the countryside.

This foretells a series of challenges that are to come in the area of food, water, and energy.

That is why we must put everything we have into pushing for the PLHINO, because it would guarantee Mexico's food sovereignty, with nearly 400,000 new hectares for agriculture in the three states which would benefit... It would create thousands of jobs in construction, tourism, industry, and the countryside, including more than 5 million agricultural jobs; it would generate the capacity to produce more than 1,000 megawatts of clean and cheaper energy, and it would provide Sonora with more than 1 billion cubic meters of water.

The PLHINO must be seen as both a matter of state and of national security, and any analysis of it must focus on the benefits that it would generate for the quality of life of the citizenry. Of course, the PLHINO requires an important investment of resources, but this is not a short-term project, but rather one that will come to fruition step by step over the coming years, which will also allow the use of novel financing options.

In sum, one must remember that Rome was not built in a day and that, as the popular refrain goes, if these things were easy, everyone would do them....