

Mexican official strikes cautious tone when discussing Trump's policies

[Local](#)

By [James Barragan](#) - American-Statesman Staff

Posted: 6:42 p.m. Monday, Nov. 14, 2016

Highlights

- Among the bilateral issues at play: NAFTA, border security, immigration.
- In what could be seen as a diplomatic olive branch, Mexican officials wait to engage with Trump on issues.
- “We’re not going to address what was said during the campaign,” says a high-ranking Mexican official.

In what can be seen as the extension of a diplomatic olive branch, the highest-ranking Mexican diplomat in North America said Monday that his government was not going to publicly engage in conversations about a border wall, deportations or any other issues discussed in the U.S. presidential campaign until after President-elect Donald Trump takes office Jan. 20.

“We’re not going to reply; we’re not going to address what was said during the campaign,” Paulo Carreño King, Mexico’s undersecretary to North America, told the American-Statesman on Monday during the first visit by a high-ranking Mexican official to Austin since Trump won the election last week. “What we think is more important is that we push forward an agenda that the two countries have built in the last decades.”

Carreño King said the Mexican government would like to have direct conversations with Trump’s transition team to discuss the relationships between the two countries and what each “wants to and is able to do” to change it.

The comments are a departure from the Mexican government’s previous statements on Trump’s proposed border wall. After an August meeting with then-candidate Trump, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto

[Repito lo que le dije personalmente, Sr. Trump: México jamás pagaría por un muro.](#)

<https://t.co/IJNVe0XepY>

— Enrique Peña Nieto (@EPN) [September 1, 2016](#) " target="_blank">tweeted: “I repeat what I told him personally: Mexico will never pay for a wall.”



Paulo Carreño King, Mexico's undersecretary for North America, speaks at the Headliners Club in downtown Austin on Monday.

James Hollifield, a political science professor at Southern Methodist University, said Carreño King's tone is a return to the delicate diplomacy that is customary outside of the "heated and overcharged" rhetoric of an election campaign.

"These are incredibly delicate issues that will affect the relationships between these two countries and the entire North American community for years to come, so I certainly understand the reluctance of Mexican officials and why they'd want to be careful," Hollifield said. "The main thing is for cooler heads to prevail. That's the approach to this, which is a smart thing to do."

Carreño King also avoided discussing questions about Trump's statement Sunday that he would deport 2 million to 3 million immigrants in the country illegally "immediately," saying the Mexican government would not like to "enter into controversy." He said his government would use the time before Trump takes office to highlight the benefits Mexico and Mexican Americans have contributed to the U.S.

"We trust that the government of President-elect Trump will understand this," Carreño King said, adding that Mexico's consular network stands prepared to defend the rights of its citizens in the U.S. and would offer legal resources if needed.



Mexico's undersecretary for North America, Paulo Carreño King, and Vicki Spriggs, CEO of Texas CASA, talk after signing a memorandum of ... [Read More](#)

Carreño King also sounded an optimistic note on the North American Free Trade Agreement, which took a central role in the presidential election and which Trump says he would like to change. The agreement has contributed to a boost in trade between the two countries, including an estimated \$200 billion between Texas and Mexico every year, and the creation of 6 million U.S. jobs.

"NAFTA has been very successful to create this mega-region to compete in the world with our products, but it was signed 22 years ago," he said.

Carreño King said Mexico would like to see additions to the agreement rather than changes. He said there could be added items about e-commerce, patents and climate change that he believes could be mutually beneficial. [Trump has called climate change a "Chinese hoax."](#)

Carreño King said his government hopes the highly charged rhetoric about a border wall does not affect the relationship between Texas and Mexico, and that he was “reassured” about the strength of that bond in meetings with Texas officials during his visit.

Luisa del Rosal, the executive director of the Texas-Mexico Center at SMU, said all three countries, including Canada, that are part of NAFTA agree that changes can be made and that Mexico is trying to signal to Trump that it wants to continue to be good partners. She said several high-ranking Mexican officials, including the president, the foreign minister and Carreño King, have been tweeting about the unity between Mexico and the U.S.

“I think the Mexican government has made their message very clear: This is the most important relationship to Mexico, and they are interested in continuing its strengths and what the focus will be,” she said. “I really think the Mexican government doesn’t want to be the one to throw the first punch. They want to be a partner and want to give the benefit of the doubt because the relationship is so critical, and they want to show how critical it is by being the friendliest neighbor possible.”

Given Mexico’s conciliatory tone, del Rosal said, the ball is now in Trump’s court.

“Mexico is saying we want to play and we’re waiting for your next move,” Hollifield said, “and that’s the smart move.”