

Mexico's top diplomat for North America: 'Texas is the NAFTA state'

By [Sean Collins Walsh](#) - American-Statesman Staff



Posted: 4:56 p.m. Thursday, March 09, 2017

Mexico's top diplomat for North American affairs said Thursday in Austin that he hopes Texas politicians will take a leading role in highlighting the benefits of the U.S.-Mexico trade relationship as President Donald Trump prepares to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"Texas is the NAFTA state by definition," Carlos Sada Solana, the Mexican foreign affairs undersecretary for North America, told the American-Statesman. "When



negotiations start ... we want to start with a position that is happening in reality, not with any misinformation.”

On the campaign trail, Trump called NAFTA “the worst trade deal in history” and vowed to pull out or renegotiate terms to make them more favorable to U.S. workers.

While many economists agree with Trump’s assessment that NAFTA led to a loss in U.S. manufacturing jobs, especially in the Rust Belt, there is a [wide consensus that Texas has benefited](#) from the 25-year-old pact, which eliminated tariffs among the U.S., Mexico and Canada.

In 2015, \$381 billion worth of trade between the U.S. and Mexico passed through Texas, accounting for 65 percent of total trade between the two countries, according to the Census Bureau. About 4.9 million American jobs depend on trade with Mexico, including 382,000 in Texas, according to the Wilson Center, a Washington, D.C., think tank chartered by Congress that studies global affairs.

Sada Solana, an engineer from Oaxaca, is a longtime diplomat, having previously served as Mexico’s consul general in San Antonio, Los Angeles, Chicago and Toronto. He’s in Austin to visit the [Casa Mexico](#) at South by Southwest, which is organized by the Mexican Consulate in Austin and aims to showcase the country’s technology sector and entrepreneurship.

While in Austin, Sada Solana said he also has met with Texas House Speaker Joe Straus, R-San Antonio, and other state lawmakers. Gov. Greg Abbott, he said, might visit Mexico soon.

Straus on Thursday echoed Sada Solana’s sentiments about the cross-border relationship.

“Our trading relationship with Mexico has created considerable economic opportunity in Texas, and our work together on issues like counterterrorism has made our state safer,” Straus said in a statement. “It would be a mistake to weaken cooperation between our two countries.”

As Trump made policy goals dealing with Mexico — including amending NAFTA, curbing illegal immigration and building a border wall — central to his campaign and

administration, Mexico's Foreign Affairs Secretariat, the equivalent of the U.S. State Department, has taken a more outspoken approach to its northern neighbor.

Sada Solana's appointment as ambassador to the U.S. in April was interpreted as a sign of that new strategy. (He was replaced in that role in January by Gerónimo Gutiérrez Fernández.)

On Thursday, Sada Solana reiterated Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto's previous statements about Trump's plan to build a wall along the length of the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border and have Mexico pay for it: "We do not like the wall, no matter what."

"It is a hostile approach against a country that is not only a friend and neighbor but is a strategic partner ... but we understand that it is a decision of the autonomous government of the United States and we cannot do anything about it," he said. "Regarding who's paying for the wall, we are not paying for the wall. That's a fact."