

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

TRUMP, PEÑA NIETO DISCUSS MEXICAN GUEST-WORKER PROPOSAL

Leaders also address Nafta renegotiation in one-on-one meeting at G-20 summit; 'we've made very good progress'

By Robbie Whelan
July 7, 2017

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and U.S. President Donald Trump, at their first one-on-one meeting since Mr. Trump took office, agreed Friday to explore new ways of allowing Mexican workers to temporarily enter the U.S. to help the agriculture industry.

The proposal came at the end of a half-hour meeting between the two heads of state at [the G-20 summit](#) in Hamburg, Germany, where both sides also discussed the coming renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which Mexico's government said it hoped to finish by the end of this year.

"We're negotiating Nafta and some other things with Mexico and we'll see how it all turns out, but I think that we've made very good progress," Mr. Trump said after the meeting, according to Reuters.

Despite the upbeat message, the meeting could have gotten off on the wrong foot when a reporter asked Mr. Trump if he still wanted Mexico to pay for the proposed border wall. Mr. Trump answered, "Absolutely," according to a video posted online by ABC News.

Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray, who was seated next to Mr. Peña Nieto during the exchange, said he didn't hear what Mr. Trump said, but added that the subject of the wall wasn't brought up during the meeting. Mexican officials have insisted they would walk out of any meeting between both sides if the U.S. team brought up Mexico paying for the wall.

In Mexico, Messrs. Peña Nieto and Videgaray were both criticized on social media for not canceling the meeting after Mr. Trump's comment.

The idea for a guest-worker program comes as the Trump administration is deporting growing numbers of illegal immigrants in the U.S. It would reprise the so-called Bracero Program from 1942 to 1964 that saw hundreds of thousands of Mexican farmworkers come to the U.S. legally to help pick crops and return to Mexico.

Mr. Videgaray said the plan to study a possible guest-worker program, an idea floated amid labor shortages in parts of the U.S. economy like agriculture and construction, was a sign relations were improving between both sides amid strains over a host of issues, including the proposed wall.

"The fact that the presidents agreed to explore new mechanisms for agricultural workers shows that the relationship is entering in a more constructive phase," he said in an interview with Mexico's Radio Fórmula.

The Trump administration's tougher immigration policies and crackdown on unauthorized migrants have been cause for concern in Mexico, where U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security John F. Kelly was winding up three days of meetings Friday.

Mr. Kelly stressed that the approach of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, is to target migrants who are in the U.S. illegally who have also committed crimes, including those accused or convicted of minor infractions such as drunken driving.

He also said ICE wouldn't deport "Dreamers," or young people living in the U.S. under the 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program, despite recent news reports of some Dreamers having been detained and deported.

"We have not, not, not gone after anyone who has DACA status," Mr. Kelly told The Wall Street Journal in an interview. "Barring any policy change or law, we are working at the other end of the spectrum: illegal aliens who have committed crimes."

But if ICE agents encounter undocumented immigrants in the course of their duties, they have been instructed to take them into custody for possible deportation, he said.

Mr. Kelly met Friday with Mexico's Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong following meetings with Mexican officials focused on bilateral relations, economic partnerships and combating transnational criminal organizations.

A surge in drug-related violence has led to a sharp increase in murders in Mexico, which totaled 11,155 in the first five months of this year, an increase of 31 percent from the year-earlier period.

Mr. Kelly acknowledged that killings have risen sharply, but said he isn't worried about violence spilling over the border into the U.S. since drug cartels "are very careful about violence in the United States because of the reaction they feel the U.S. might take."

"That violence has a lot to do of course with drug trafficking and production, which has as its root cause U.S. drug demand," Mr. Kelly said. "We Americans have got to do something about drug demand in our country."

Mr. Kelly said that in recent weeks, he has met with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price to discuss a "comprehensive drug-reduction campaign" focused on educating young people about the consequences of illegal drug consumption.

"The average college kid that does a little blow on the weekend, a little cocaine on the weekend, doesn't understand that from the point at which that coca is grown in Colombia, turned into cocaine, trafficked up through Central America and Mexico into the U.S., doesn't realize that a number of people have been murdered," Mr. Kelly said. "There's no such thing as a violence-less drug deal ... We have to make people understand that so they don't start using drugs."