



**Florida Department of State  
Katherine Harris  
Secretary of State**

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris  
to the Gulf of Mexico States Accord (GoMSA) Annual Conference

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Simultaneous Interpretation (English/Spanish)

- Thank you, Governor Alemán, for that gracious introduction. And I would like to thank all Veracruzanos for your warm hospitality these past few days as the Annual Conference has been underway.
- It is truly an honor to represent Florida as our state assumes the Presidency of the Gulf of Mexico States Accord for the year 2002. We believe that -- working together and building on the advances

made under the previous Presidencies of Tabasco and Veracruz -- the next twelve months will see the most productive period in the Accord's history.

- As you know, the Governors of the Accord's eleven member states gathered in Campeche on May 13, 1995 to sign the organization's charter. They pledged to promote cooperation in a variety of areas of importance to the Gulf region and to work toward the "implementation of the articles of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)."
- At the time, few foresaw what a tremendous success the NAFTA would become. In recent years, Mexico annually has attracted over \$10 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Even more impressive, from 1993 to 2000 Mexico's exports catapulted from \$52 billion to \$166 billion – and now represent over one-half of all exports from Latin America and the Caribbean. Mexico has

taken its place as the world's eighth largest exporter overall.

- Moreover, Mexico -- bolstered by the framework of the NAFTA -- now constitutes the United States' second largest trading partner. Indeed, many experts feel certain that by the end of this decade Mexico and the United States will have cemented such an extensive bilateral commercial relationship that each will be the other's most important trading partner.
- Our eleven Gulf states lie at the center of this ever-more prosperous NAFTA zone and have a special and particular role to play in the upsurge in NAFTA trade.
- If our states were a single nation, our 62 million citizens would constitute the world's nineteenth largest country.

- Our collective “GDP” of over \$1.5 trillion would rank among the world’s largest five economies.
- At the same time that the Gulf of Mexico unites us with its beautiful waters, it also provides us with a unique piece of infrastructure: it is truly a “Border without Bridges” and a “Trade Superhighway.”
- Our member states hold enormous collective political power at the federal level in both Mexico and the United States.
- As for Florida itself, our economic record in recent years has also been impressive – we are the fourth most populous state in the Union and boast a gross state product that surpasses \$460 billion. Indeed, if Florida were an independent state it would boast the world’s sixteenth largest economy.

- During the last decade Florida's 2-way trade more than doubled growing from \$31B to nearly \$74B.
- In 1998, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Florida totaled \$34B, sustaining over 260,000 jobs.
- In 2000, more than 1,100 foreign-affiliated companies in Florida employed more than 71,000 workers.
- In addition to our participation in the Gulf of Mexico States Accord, another especially remarkable Florida international initiative – of great actual and potential interest to our Gulf States – has been the creation in our legal system of a true civil-law type of notary. Florida was the first state in the US to create such a bridge between the common law traditions of the US and the civil law systems of so many of our neighbors, including Mexico. Alabama has now joined us in this initiative, and Louisiana, of

course, has long maintained its own notarial tradition from its French roots. It is remarkable, and no coincidence, that all three US civil-law notarial jurisdictions are members of the Gulf States Accord. This groundbreaking adaptation of our legal system is a concrete measure of the importance we place on Gulf-wide and hemispheric integration.

- It is important to emphasize that among US states, Florida is the number one trading partner of every nation in Latin America and the Caribbean – except for Mexico. Thus, enormous untapped opportunities exist for increased commercial ties – and Florida will pursue them vigorously.
- During his visit to Florida last September, President Vicente Fox advocated the creation of a “strategic alliance” between Mexico and Florida. This laudable position has been very gratifying to Floridians and obviously has ignited our optimism

and enthusiasm as we pursue initiatives in common with Mexico. Fortunately, the Gulf of Mexico States Accord already provides the basic architecture for completing this much closer bilateral relationship. We especially look forward to supporting the development of President Fox's Plan Puebla-Panamá, which will spread greater prosperity throughout southeastern Mexico and Central America.

- As early as 1993 the Maritime Administration of the United States Department of Transportation documented the cost advantage of shipping many types of traded goods across the Gulf of Mexico instead of overland. If anything, advances in nautical technology and increased traffic congestion at the land border have made the Gulf an even more attractive alternative for routing goods within the NAFTA.

- In this regard, we expect that new passenger and cargo ferry service between Tampa and the Yucatán Peninsula will be inaugurated during the peak tourist season at the end of this year.
- An already realized logistical success story is the initiation of the shipment of Daimler-Chrysler vehicles manufactured in Mexico from Tampico to Tampa for distribution in the southeastern United States. As a result, transit times have been cut from forty to ten days and the vehicles suffer virtually no damage *en route*.
- We hope that this sort of shipping success will be replicated a thousand times over as we more fully take advantage of the Gulf of Mexico's natural infrastructure.
- The message we must send loud and clear to the NAFTA entrepreneurs is that the Gulf

of Mexico “trade superhighway” provides a better, safer, cleaner and cheaper method of moving goods.

- Moving now to a somber but sadly necessary subject, in the wake of September 11 security has of course leapt to the top of the international agenda. Impetus in Canada, the United States and Mexico to build a “North American security zone” has strengthened and presents a long-term project that merits the full support of the Accord.
- Gulf-wide cooperation in this area will help ensure that trade flows; tourists; and food supplies remain reliable and secure. Mexico’s “Closer Than Ever” publicity campaign points out the advantages in this new era of turning to those friends who are nearby.
- As I have stated before, it is during this time of global uncertainty and instability that our example of regional cooperation can serve as a model for

our two nations and the rest of the world. Our creative use of the common connection we share through the Gulf of Mexico to increase trade, develop cultural exchanges and expand educational opportunities provides a vital beacon of hope to other regions beset by war, strife and poverty.

- During the course of Florida's Presidency of the Accord, we can look forward to:

1. Significant advances in the protection of the Gulf of Mexico's ecology and in the implementation of improved nautical technology. The University of South Florida's College of Marine Science, partnering with other relevant institutions from throughout the Gulf, will play a key role in these activities.

2. Conclusive discussions with the North American Development Bank concerning innovative ways to access its multi-billion dollar capital fund for

projects along NAFTA's "new" border region -- the Gulf of Mexico.

3. Florida's hosting this spring of the first comprehensive strategic planning summit since the signing of the Accord. These intensive talks will involve all eleven Accord members in addition to high-level officials from the appropriate agencies of each federal government and the private sector. The summit will set the Accord on a clearly charted path in the areas of culture; education; the environment; trade; tourism; and finance over the next one-, five- and ten-year periods.
4. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Regatta and Fiesta del Sol al Sol, will occur again this year at the end of April in St. Petersburg. This event features numerous cultural, educational and economic development activities such as a Latin film festival; art and folk art exhibits; joint projects by Mexican and Floridian primary school students; a trade show;

and of course the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Regatta del Sol al Sol sailing between St. Petersburg and Isla Mujeres.

- Thousands participated in last year's Regatta and Fiesta del Sol al Sol, and we expect even greater turnout this year as the festival becomes an established and prominent part of the yearly cycle of community events in the Tampa area and the Gulf region as a whole.
5. A transportation conference led by the US Maritime Administration specifically for Gulf of Mexico region entrepreneurs interested in improving their knowledge of and access to cutting-edge shipping logistics.
  6. A concerted effort – begun here this week -- to establish new air service connecting major cities throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

- In this vein, I would like to thank the St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport for participating in this week's Annual Conference, as well as the airline companies that have joined us.

7. Inauguration of the Gulf of Mexico States Institute, a policy and research think tank that will attract foundation and educational grant monies and provide the Accord with a strong intellectual compass. Planning in this area has already been well advanced by discussions between the Universidad Veracruzana and the University of South Florida.

- Indeed, these two institutions have already created a functioning student and professor exchange program.
- And, just as today's Conference proceedings are being broadcast over the Internet, we hope to link all the Gulf's universities in cyberspace.

8. Solidification of the Gulf of Mexico Partnership, the bi-national private sector initiative established last year in support of the Accord's commercial objectives.

- Under the Co-Chairmanship of Richard Ludwig, president of Tampa's TECO Power Services, the Partnership will move forward in building an effective network of business interests throughout the Gulf states and increasing regional business activity.
- As government officials we can and we do make our best effort in laying the foundations for increased business opportunity, but in the end it is the private sector that represents the driving force of progress and higher living standards.
- So I look forward to working with all of you in the coming year and beyond as we develop our common border – the Gulf of Mexico. We are

indeed blessed to have this beautiful body of water as our common connection. Taking advantage of the Gulf's enormous potential for increased trade and tourism, stronger educational and cultural bonds, and strengthening regional cooperation will ensure that each of our states is a better place in which to live and work. Our shared goal is to promote a healthy and vibrant Gulf region for the benefit of all our collective 62 million citizens.

- The Florida Department of State firmly supports the Gulf of Mexico States Accord. With the indispensable coordination of the Secretariat in Tampa – under the direction of Secretary General Gary L. Springer -- I am certain the Accord will continue to make excellent progress of which we can all be proud. The magnificent cultures that have flourished through time in the Gulf of Mexico region ought to serve as inspiration for us as together we build an ever-brighter regional future.
- Thank you, and God bless!