



**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) Strategic Planning Meeting

Orlando, Florida, July 2002

- Thank you, Gary (Springer) for that gracious introduction. I would like to warmly welcome each of you to the first Gulf of Mexico States Accord Strategic Planning Meeting.
- The tremendous participation that we witness here attests to the Accord's growing vigor and increasing relevance to the sixty-two million members of the Gulf of Mexico community.

- The variety of organizations represented among us is truly amazing:
 - Two (2) national governments; seven (7) state governments; one (1) county government; and three (3) municipal governments;
 - Six (6) state, regional and local economic development agencies;
 - Six (6) international financial institutions;
 - Five (5) universities and one (1) think tank;
 - A hemisphere-wide multilateral institution and a regional humanitarian agency;
 - A port; an airport; a cruise line; an energy producer; a national legal organization; a sponge

company; a consulting firm; and a builder of watercraft. All of these firms currently are members of the private sector Gulf of Mexico Partnership, or constitute potential members.

- I would especially like to recognize this meeting's sponsors: TECO Power Services, Florida Intergovernmental Relations Foundation (FIRF) and the St. Petersburg/Clearwater International Airport. Your support is crucial to fulfilling the GoMSA's objectives;
- In addition, I would like to thank Mario Rodríguez Montero -- Director General for International Affairs with Mexico's Energy Secretariat -- for accepting our invitation to speak at tonight's official dinner. Licenciado Rodríguez has enjoyed a distinguished career in the service of his country, and his remarks this evening should enlighten us on the critical and

salient role played by energy production and transport within the Gulf of Mexico region.

- In January, upon accepting the Accord Presidency at the Annual Conference – so graciously and successfully hosted by Governor Alemán of Veracruz – I highlighted the GoMSA's growing momentum and some of its prospective projects. I am happy to report that since then advances have been made on several fronts:
 - The most obvious example is the holding of this very Strategic Planning Meeting, the first ever in the Accord's history;
 - Other examples include:
 - The celebration of the 2nd Annual Regatta and Fiesta del Sol al Sol this past April in St. Petersburg. The event featured 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 34th Annual Regatta del Sol al Sol sailing between St. Petersburg and Isla Mujeres.

- A conference hosted by the Tampa Port Authority to foment Florida/Mexico economic relations;
- Advances in the effort to establish new air service connecting major cities throughout the Gulf of Mexico.
- Growing membership in the Gulf of Mexico Partnership, the bi-national private sector initiative established last year in support of the Accord's commercial objectives.
- The opening of a State of Tabasco Trade Office in Miami;

- The organization of a trade mission from Veracruz to the Tampa Bay area coming up this August 21 - 23;
- Ongoing development of the Gulf of Mexico's natural sponge industry, now reviving in some states and still nascent in others. The Florida Association of Volunteer Agencies for Caribbean Action – FAVA/CA – will be spearheading the human capital dimension of this initiative;
- The institutional strengthening of the Accord's Tampa-based Secretariat, so capably led by Secretary General Gary L. Springer;
- The organization of a tour of works by spectacular surrealist Mexican painter Enrique Chavarria;
- And great progress toward the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Accord and the Puebla Panamá Plan.

- I would like to pause here to emphasize how committed Florida is to helping achieve the objectives of the Puebla Panamá Plan, and how much the objectives of the Accord and the Plan coincide and reinforce each other:
 - Fully five of the six Mexican member states of the Accord also play a central role in the Puebla Panamá initiative. As for the Plan's seven member-nations in Central America, these together form Florida's most important trading bloc. So you can see that Florida wholeheartedly shares Mexico's interest in furthering peace and prosperity in this region.
 - Indeed, Florida was one of the few – if not the only – US states to send an official delegation to the Puebla Panamá Plan Summit held in Mérida last month. The tremendous cohesion and momentum generated by the Summit will serve the Accord in two major ways: as a direct and

indirect spur to many of our own initiatives, and as a superb example of regional cooperation for economic development. The seven heads of state and one vice president who drove the Summit's success sent an explicit message to the rest of the world that the region has energized itself for growth.

- In Florida, we take such messages seriously. We took it to heart last September when Mexican President Vicente Fox in Miami 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.

- Although the Accord has achieved much over the past months, it is now poised to do even more. I would like to exhort all of you – so clearly dedicated to the Accord’s mission and success – to envision the best Gulf of Mexico community possible and then strive to make it a reality.
- Here in Orlando we have the unprecedented opportunity to set the Accord on a clearly charted path toward the future in the areas of culture; education; the environment; finance; trade; and tourism. Over the next one-, five- and ten-year periods, we all hope to see advances in these areas so great that they inspire admiration throughout the nations of NAFTA, the framework under which the Accord operates.
- The basic outlines of the exciting work before us were laid down at the Annual Conference in Veracruz and are included in your conference packets.

- Our major tasks include:
- 1. Pressing forward with the Border States Initiative. The eleven members of GoMSA indeed make up the NAFTA's "new border." Through focused and energetic action at the federal level in both Mexico and the United States, we can attract the resources necessary to fortify the Gulf's economy.
 - Building new projects with the international financial and trade development consortium represented here today, and whose members have been welcomed as formal participants in all Accord activities.
 - Continued discussions with the North American Development Bank on accessing its multi-billion dollar resources are critical in this endeavor.

- 2. Continued construction of the “NAFTA Superhighway.” 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.
- An already realized logistical success story in this regard is the shipment of Daimler-Chrysler vehicles manufactured in Mexico from Tampico to Tampa and Pensacola 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.
- To make the attractiveness of the Gulf as the basis of intra-NAFTA transport more tangible, the

Annual Conference in December will include the Accord's first "Transportation Summit", organized with the help of the United States' Department of Transportation and Mexico's Secretariat for Communications and Transportation.

- 3. Bolstering the Accord's Secretariat. Since its establishment in Tampa in 1999, the Secretariat has been able to count on the Florida Department of State as a steadfast source of funding. Now that the Secretariat has resoundingly proved its effectiveness as the fulcrum of the Accord, it is time for all member states to demonstrate their commitment to supporting it. I will be sending a letter to each state governor within the Accord on this subject in the near future.
- 4. Expanding the private sector Gulf of Mexico States Partnership. 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. Thus, the Partnership has become key to the overall success of the Accord.

- 5. Further development of the Gulf of Mexico States Institute. The Institute will function as a policy and research think tank that will attract foundation and educational grant monies and provide the Accord with a strong intellectual compass. Organization in this area has already been well advanced through the joint efforts of the Universidad Veracruzana, the University of South Florida and the Accord Secretariat.
- In conclusion, please let me reiterate the importance of our work here in Orlando. The Accord is in position to lead the Gulf of Mexico community to a much brighter future. Let the magnificent cultures that have flourished through time in the Gulf of Mexico region serve as

inspiration for us as together we build an ever-better regional future. By dreaming great dreams, we can achieve great results.

- I look forward to seeing you all again at the Annual Conference this December in St. Petersburg.
- Thank you, and God bless!