



**MEXICO CITY:** US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is welcome by US ambassador Roberta Jacobson, left, and Mauricio Ibarra, center, director of North American affairs at the Mexican foreign affairs ministry as he arrives at Benito Juarez International Airport in Mexico City.—AP

## US ENVOY TILLERSON IN MEXICO TO SOOTHE TIES

MEXICO DOES NOT BELIEVE IN WALLS BUT IN BRIDGES

**MEXICO CITY:** US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson meets with Mexican leaders yesterday to try to calm a row over President Donald Trump's trade and immigration policies. Trump has outraged Mexico by vowing to build a wall along the border to keep out migrants, whom he branded rapists and criminals during his presidential campaign. His government on Tuesday issued new orders to the authorities to begin arresting and deporting illegal immigrants, many of them Mexicans. Trump has also threatened to put up barriers to Mexican exports, shift jobs from that country back to the United States and even halt remittances by US-based Mexicans back to their families.

Now he has sent Tillerson and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly to Mexico City to smooth over tensions and discuss with Mexican Enrique Pena Nieto how to curb cross-border migration and drug-trafficking. "It's significant that the president is sending the secretaries to Mexico so early in the administration. It's symbolic of the meaningful relationship that our two nations have," White House spokesman Sean Spicer told reporters on Wednesday.

"These are important meetings regarding the president's agenda to improve the quality of lives for both people of Mexico and the United States by combating drug traffickers and finding ways to bolster both our economies through a broader relationship that promotes commerce and legal immigra-

tion." Tillerson and Kelly were scheduled to meet with Pena Nieto at 1900 GMT after talks with Mexico's ministers of foreign affairs, finance and government.

### Respect

Trump's stance on Mexico has driven the countries' relations to their lowest point in years. Pena Nieto canceled a planned meeting with Trump in Washington last month over the US leader's vow to make Mexico pay for the wall. US government officials said Tillerson and Kelly will aim to convince Mexico that it values their bilateral ties. Spicer insisted Mexico and Washington have "a very healthy and robust relationship with the Mexican government."

But Maureen Meyer, an expert at the Washington Office on Latin America, a US human rights advocacy organization, said "relations have been severely strained by the Trump administration's rhetoric and actions." "Secretary Tillerson has an opportunity to set relations on a more sound footing based on mutual respect," she said in a statement.

### Security

The US immigration authorities have arrested hundreds of people across the country as part of Trump's pledge to crack down on illegal immigrants. Kelly on Tuesday issued new orders to step up the detentions. Speaking in Guatemala on Wednesday before traveling to Mexico, Kelly said "my sincere advice to any citizen considering mov-

ing to the United States in crossing our boundaries irregularly-migration-my best advice is to not do it."

Mexico has hinted it could use border cooperation as a bargaining chip. "We have been a great ally to fight problems with migration, narcotics," Mexico's Economy Secretary Ildefonso Guajardo told the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*. "If at some point in time things become so badly managed in the relationship, the incentives for the Mexican people to keep on cooperating in things that are at the heart of (US) national security issues will be diminished."

But Mexico has a lot to lose: it relies on the United States as a trading partner, sending 80 percent of its exports to its northern neighbor. The United States has meanwhile allocated \$2.6 billion worth of aid to Mexico for fighting crime under the 2008 "Merida initiative," US officials say.

### Trade

Vowing to protect US industry, Trump has called for a renegotiation of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement with Mexico and Canada. Pena Nieto has promised to defend Mexico's interests and called for respect from the United States. "Neither confrontation nor submission: the solution is dialogue and negotiation," he said last month. "Mexico does not believe in walls. Our country believes in bridges."—AFP

## CONSERVATIVES LEARN DEALING WITH TRUMP CAN BE COMPLICATED

**WASHINGTON:** For the past eight years, thousands of conservative activists have descended on Washington each spring with dreams of putting a Republican in the White House. This year, they're learning reality can be complicated. With Donald Trump's presidential victory, the future of the conservative movement has become entwined with an unconventional New York businessman better known for his deal-making than any ideological principles. It's an uneasy marriage of political convenience at best.

Some conservatives worry whether they can trust their new president to follow decades of orthodoxy on issues like international affairs, small government, abortion and opposition to expanded legal protections for LGBT Americans - and what it means for their movement if he doesn't. "Donald Trump may have come to the Republican Party in an unconventional and circuitous route, but the fact is that we now need him to succeed lest the larger conservative project fails," said evangelical leader Ralph Reed, who mobilized his organization to campaign for Trump during the campaign.

"Our success is inextricably tied to his success." Trump is to address the Conservative Political Action Conference Friday morning. Vice President Mike Pence is to speak yesterday, as are White House chief of staff Reince Priebus and senior advisers Steve Bannon and Kellyanne Conway. As conservatives filtered into their convention hall Wednesday for their annual gathering, many said they still have nagging doubts about Trump even as they cheer his early actions. Social conservatives were thrilled by a Wednesday night decision to reverse an Obama-era directive that said transgender students should be allowed to use public school bathrooms and locker rooms matching their chosen gender identity.

"He's said that on multiple occasions that he's not a conservative, especially socially," said Zach Weidlich, a junior at the University of South Alabama, "but my mindset was, give him a chance, especially now that he's elected." "He was the better of two evils given the choice," said Timmy Finn. "I agree with his policies, however, I think he's moving a little too fast." Trump has a somewhat tortured history with CPAC, an annual convention that's part ideological pep talk, part political boot camp for activists. Over the past six years, he's been both booed and cheered. He's rejected speaking slots and galvanized attendees with big promises of economic growth and electoral victory.

### Aggressive style

At times, he has seemed to delight in taunting them. "I'm a conservative, but don't forget: This is called the Republican Party, not the Conservative Party," he said in a May interview on ABC's "This Week." Matt Schlapp, chairman of the American Conservative Union, which hosts CPAC, said Trump's aggressive style is more important than ideological purity. "Conservatives weren't looking for somebody who knew how to explain all the philosophies. They were actually looking for somebody who would just fight," he said. "Can you think of anybody in America who fits that bill more than Donald Trump?"

The tensions between Trump's brand of populist politics and conservative ideology will be on full display at the three-day conference, which features panels like "Conservatives: Where we come from, where we are and where we are going" and "The Alt-Right Ain't Right At All." — AP



**WASHINGTON:** In this photo, US President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting on the Federal budget in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington. —AP