

# Border leaders to weigh labor, security issues

Hispanic legislators, business group join forces

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AUSTIN — Forging an uncommon alliance Wednesday, the state's largest business organization and a group of Mexican-American state legislators called on Congress to adopt immigration reform that keeps Mexican laborers coming to Texas.

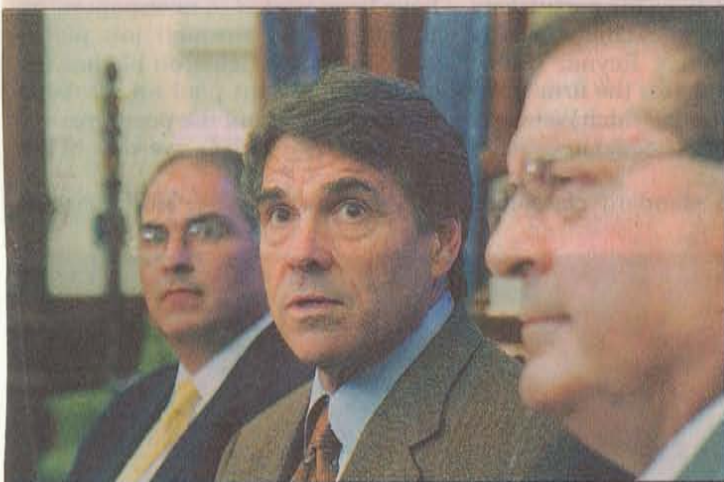
They announced their plan on the eve of the annual Border Governors Conference, at which 10 U.S. and Mexico governors are expected begin meeting today on mostly border security and immigration issues.

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■ A list of the U.S. and Mexican governors set to attend the Border Governors Conference today.

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Harry Cabluck/The Associated Press

Gov. Rick Perry, center, responds to a question during a news conference Wednesday in Austin. Perry is preparing to host other governors from U.S.-Mexico border states in a two-day meeting that begins today. Mission Mayor Norberto Salinas listens at right.

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The Texas Association of Business and the Mexican American Legislative Caucus said they lean toward the U.S. Senate's immigration reform bill, which allows workers already here to eventually become citizens without granting amnesty.

The two groups also called for Congress to provide employers a reliable way to check immigration status and secure borders against terrorists, but not against workers who feed the U.S. economy.

"I can tell you that we need protection from drug dealers, we need protection from terrorists, but we don't need protection from dishwashers and maids and babysitters and gardeners," said Caucus Chairman state Rep. Pete Gallego, D-Alpine.

If the United States has an orderly system by which immigrants can come to work, it can regain control of its borders and focus on keeping out criminals, said Bill Hammond, president and CEO of the Texas Association of Business.

"The only way that we will be able to secure our borders is to allow enough immigrants to come over that meet the needs of the employers of this state and this nation," he said.

State Rep. Veronica Gonza-

les, D-McAllen, was among the lawmakers who emphasized the importance of border security, but to the exclusion of workers who contribute to the economy.

"It takes about 11 years for you to be able to bring your child to the United States," she said. "When you have laws like that, no wonder people are finding illegal means to bring their families, to join their families in the United States."

Later in the day, Republican Gov. Rick Perry briefed reporters on what he expected to discuss today and Friday with governors, saying border security would likely be the largest discussion point, though economic development, environmental issues, transportation and other topics will also be discussed during the closed-door conference.

Rio Grande City Mayor Kevin Hiles, Mission Mayor Beto Salinas and Perry's chief of border affairs, Brownsville native Buddy Garcia, were at Perry's side during the briefing.

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