
Border dialogue turns into forum on illegals, fence

By Sandra Dibble

STAFF WRITER

March 16, 2006

A meeting of civic, business and government leaders from both sides of the border yesterday was intended to foster economic integration of San Diego County and Baja California. But participants in the Forum Fronterizo soon found themselves addressing a very different topic: illegal immigration and the proposal for a new border fence.

“Building a wall is an anachronism,” said Jessie J. Knight Jr., president and chief executive of the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce. “Nobody can possibly believe that this is the solution. . . . There are other ways to ensure security.”

The Forum Fronterizo, sponsored by the San Diego Dialogue, a public-policy institute at the University of California San Diego, drew more than 300 participants.

Organizers called for the fomenting of cross-border clusters to develop such industries as software, biomedical devices and pharmaceuticals by drawing on resources on both sides of the border.

The Borderless Innovation project was introduced earlier this year in a San Diego Dialogue report that advocates the creation of a Cross-Border Innovation and Competitiveness Center.

The proposal has won the endorsement of Baja California Gov. Eugenio Elorduy Walther, the keynote speaker at yesterday's event.

“San Diego and Baja California have the potential to become a global showcase

for how two nations can collaborate,” Elorduy said.

He also weighed in on the proposed border fence, saying, “We do not best meet these challenges by focusing our energies on building a wall to further divide us.”

The governor said proponents of stricter enforcement shouldn't use the issue “as a political banner because you're in a midterm-election scenario from here to November. . . . Look at it as a human-rights situation.”

The purpose of the Borderless Innovation project is to show that collaboration with Mexico is beneficial for San Diego, said Kenn Morris, project director with San Diego Dialogue.

“It's much more dynamic, and it's in our best interest if we want to compete with the rest of the world,” Morris said. “It's really that regardless of what you think about Mexico or Baja California.”

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger was invited but was unable to attend. Fabian Nuñez, speaker of the California Assembly, canceled because of negotiations in Sacramento to place a record-setting public bond measure on the June election ballot.

The San Diego Union-Tribune was one of a dozen sponsors of the event. Others included Bajagua LLC, a San Diego County company that wants to build and operate a sewage treatment plant in Tijuana, and the accounting firm Deloitte & Touche.

■ **Sandra Dibble: (619) 293-1716; sandra.dibble@uniontrib.com**

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