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# OPINION

## Support Mexico

BY RICH LOWRY

President Barack Obama went to Mexico and, unlike many of his presidential predecessors, didn't stay in a remote resort, but in the midst of Mexico City, the sprawling metropolis of 20 million.

The visit — Obama's first stop in Latin America — and the locale — the capital where an American president hadn't visited in 12 years — sent the signal that the United States is committed to a country that is a punching bag in American domestic politics, but an indispensable ally in a region buffeted by revolutionary left-wing politics.

A recent Pentagon analysis raised the prospect of Mexico becoming a failed state. That dire, frequently repeated phrase can be misleading. The Mexican state is threatened, but not failed. President Felipe Calderon wants to do all the right things.

Drug violence has escalated because he rejected the *modus vivendi* previous Mexican leaders honored with the cartels and criminal gangs. So long as they didn't interfere in politics, they were left to their illicit pursuits. Calderon rightly considered such powerful play-

ers operating outside the rule of law intolerable.

He has undertaken a courageous fight, with all of Mexican officialdom — at least the uncorrupted portion — under threat. In contrast to the traditional Latin American way of internal warfare, Calderon is respecting civil liberties. And he has sought to continue to reform the increasingly open Mexican economy.

Mexico is perceived in the U.S. as the inevitably hopeless sad sack south of the border. This image ignores its slow upward trajectory. Calderon is better than his predecessor, Vicente Fox, who was better than his predecessor, Ernesto Zedillo, and so on. It is in our interest to foster this (hardly inevitable) trend. In 2006, Calderon narrowly beat Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a Hugo Chavez sympathizer.

Obama has echoed a theme of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on her Mexican trip — that Mexico's drug-trafficking problem emanates from north of the border, the source of dollars to buy the cartels' drugs and of guns to arm them. But Americans aren't going to stop using drugs, nor are we going to decriminalize them to collapse their market price. Even if the supply

of American guns dried up overnight, the rest of Latin America bristles with surplus weaponry.

No, the ultimate solution is within Mexico. The country is fundamentally engaged in a war of counterinsurgency. As the classic theorist of such wars, Bernard Fall, wrote, "When a country is being subverted it is not being outfought; it is being outadministered." Mexico has to assert lawful governmental authority in areas where the cartels dominate and improve its governmental capacity — something neglected by the Merida Initiative — across the board.

It can be done, as demonstrated by our other central ally in the region, Colombia. It truly faced state collapse a few years ago, confronting a drug-fueled insurgency that controlled parts of the country and fielded organized troops. Aided by the massive Plan Colombia from the U.S., President Alvaro Uribe outfought — and outadministered — his country's enemies. President Calderon can do the same — provided we stand by him. ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the *National Review* and co-author of the new spy thriller "Banquo's Ghosts."

## GUEST OPINION

### The arts are not supplemental; they are fundamental

There is not another county in the state, probably not another county in the nation, that has been home to two of the most creative individuals to grace the planet in the past century: Robert Rauschenberg and Thomas Edison. How tragically ironic it would be, therefore, if Lee County was to become the county that cut art and music from the curriculum in its public schools.

In 2008, The Florida Chamber of Commerce established the Innovation Caucus with the goal of making Florida a Top 10 Innovation State by the year 2030. In a 2006 study for Congress prepared by the Conference Board, U.S. employers identified "creativity and innovation" as the top skills needed by new hires to succeed in the workplace. CEO Jonathan Spector offered the following in his testimony to Congress: "Innovation, creativity and related skills such as entrepreneurship are clearly top concerns of the senior executives as innovation is crucial to competition, so is creativity integral to innovation." (from Robert Lynch's article, "Harnessing the Power of the Arts," Public Man-

agement, October 2008)

So, we need to ask ourselves how we plan to train our future work force so that they develop into these innovative employees that are in such high demand. It is the arts that train our students in new habits of mind that are fundamental to innovation. Studying and practicing the arts rewires our brains so that we think in terms of patterns, relationships and context. Too often, students are taught to compartmentalize knowledge: They learn about economics in one course and ecology in another without ever having the opportunity to examine how these disciplines intersect. And yet, in order to solve issues of climate change without creating unintended economic challenges, we need people who can forge linkages across both of these disciplines. This is what the arts train us to do: To combine information from multiple disciplines and apply it in original ways.

Unfortunately, many people tend to think of the arts as icing on the cake, a delicious luxury. We need to correct this misperception. The arts are not supplemental; they are fundamental to

creating the next generation of problem solvers, the next generation of innovators and the next generation of business leaders, because the arts do not emphasize a single skill set, they cultivate the whole person. They generate supple and flexible minds necessary to succeed in any professional endeavor. These are the kinds of minds that both Mr. Rauschenberg and Mr. Edison possessed, and I hope we will honor their legacies by keeping the teachers who are specifically trained to cultivate more of these minds in Lee County.

There is one other crucial benefit to teaching the arts, unrelated to the argument I have been building thus far, but quite relevant to a nation that is engaged in a seemingly endless war. This idea is best expressed by the graphic artist Milton Glaser, who said: "If you like Mozart, and I like Mozart, then we have already found common ground and the likelihood that we will kill each other has been diminished." ■

— Wendy Chase  
Fort Myers

## MOMENTS IN TIME

- On **April 29, 1944**, the last "Our Gang" film, "Dancing Romeo," is released. The first film, featuring a band of mischievous youngsters, was produced in 1922. In all, more than 100 "Our Gang" films were made. Later, they were shown as TV comedies under the name "The Little Rascals."

- On **April 30, 1927**, the Federal Industrial Institution for Women, the first women's federal prison, opens in Alderson, W.Va. All women serving federal sentences of more than a year were to be brought there, with the

vast majority imprisoned for drug and alcohol charges imposed during the Prohibition era.

- On **May 2, 1972**, Steven Spielberg begins filming "Jaws." The production, which used three mechanical sharks to great effect, enthralled audiences and grossed \$458 million in its theatrical release.

- On **May 1, 1931**, President Herbert Hoover officially dedicates New York City's Empire State Building. The entire 102-story building went up in just over a year, under

budget (at \$40 million) and well ahead of schedule. During certain periods of building, the frame grew an astonishing four-and-a-half stories a week.

- On **May 3, 1960**, the musical comedy "The Fantasticks" opens in an off-Broadway playhouse in New York's Greenwich Village. The show, about a young man and woman whose ostensibly feuding parents are actually scheming to bring the couple together, became the longest-running musical of all time and is still running today. ■