



The Barr Code (<http://blogs.ajc.com/bob-barr-blog>)

Mexican president insults U.S., Congress cheers

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When Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister of Great Britain, addressed a joint gathering of the United States Senate and House of Representatives less than three weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, it was a speech delivered at the right time, in the right place, to the right people. It helped strengthen and define Allied resolve for the looming battles against Nazi Germany and the Japanese Empire.

Yet, among the many speeches delivered over the decades by foreign heads of state to the Congress of the United States, Churchill's December 26, 1941 address was the exception to the rule. Most foreign leaders who are afforded this honor deliver largely forgettable lectures about how wonderful are the ties between their nations and ours; and often in support of receiving financial or military support from Washington.

Few foreign leaders, however, possess the audacity exhibited earlier this month by Mexico's President Felipe Calderon when he spoke to the House and Senate in joint session. In his speech, Calderon as much as blamed the tide of extreme violence sweeping Mexico in recent months on the United States. Calderon specifically singled out our government's failure to reinstate the Clinton-era gun ban, which expired in 2004, as a major reason why some 23,000 citizens of his country have died as a result of drug-fueled violence since he became president in 2006.

In criticizing what he clearly viewed as a legislative "failing" of the Congress to pass gun-control legislation, Calderon crossed a line normally not breached by visiting heads of state – at least publicly. Foreign leaders generally are more sensitive to the protocol that you don't openly meddle in another nation's domestic political agenda.

The administration of President Obama may have urged Calderon to step into this fray as its surrogate; having correctly concluded that openly pushing the gun-control agenda this cycle would likely hurt not help Democratic candidates for Congress.

Calderon added insult to injury, when he offered as evidence of America's complicity in Mexico's rampant drug-cartel fueled violence, the fact that "more than 80 percent of [guns and assault weapons seized in Mexico] came from the United States." In reality, this "fact" is not a fact at all, but rather a figure demonstrably proved to be false. The "80%" figure (often boosted to as much as 90%) surfaced early in 2009, and was initially cited without challenge by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), officials at ATF (the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives), and media personalities.

These bloated figures — offered as "proof" that lack of sufficient gun control in the US was fueling drug-cartel violence in Mexico — subsequently were shown to be completely false. The vast majority of firearms fueling Mexico's violence were never able to be "traced" in the first place; and of those that were, they were shown largely to have entered Mexico's burgeoning black market not from the US but from China, Russian organized crime groups, Spain, Israel, guerrilla groups in Colombia, and elsewhere. The Mexican military, itself rife with corruption, is another source of purloined armaments for the drug cartel; though, of course, Calderon failed to mention this.

Thus, we witnessed a foreign leader accept an invitation to address a joint meeting of the United States Congress, and then criticize that body for not passing particular domestic legislation based on false and discredited data. One might have hoped that such audacity would have elicited if not a "boo," at least a raised eyebrow from the congressional audience. National pride might have drawn at least stony silence. Instead, the Democratic majority — or at least most of them — actually stood and applauded the insults delivered by Calderon. They might as well have stood and said, "thank you, Señor; may we have another, Señor." How do you say "spineless" in Spanish?

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