

# The Studiously Avoided 'I' Word

by Jill Stewart

Forgive me if I missed the media coverage of the international dustup between California State Senator Gloria Romero of Los Angeles and the Mexican government the other day. The media downplays stories it perceives as “blaming the victim,” particularly on the hands-off topic of illegal immigration.

Liberal Democrat Romero has gone against the tide before. Now she’s rattling cages over the 28,672 foreigners in California prisons who cost taxpayers a staggering sum to feed and house, one-half of whom are illegal aliens from Mexico.

It’s exceedingly rare to hear the term “illegal aliens” in the bustling Sacramento Capitol. In an example of what George Orwell called newspeak, California politicians believe that if they don’t publicly name this contributing cause of our ongoing fiscal crisis, it will vanish.

It’s not just silly pols who keep mum. The widely respected Chief Legislative Analyst Elizabeth Hill rarely notes any cost to California

taxpayers due to illegal immigrants. It’s too difficult, too politically hot.

So while these largely non-taxpaying residents heavily use taxpayer-financed services and infrastructure, from our jammed roads to our overwhelmed courts, hardly anyone says anything.

Chuckles John Stoos, aide to Republican state Sen. Tom McClintock, the fiscal watchdog from Thousand Oaks, “Oh yes, it will definitely go away if we don’t study it. Works for me!”

This avoidance behavior got a workout at Romero’s prison system hearing in Los Angeles recently. Polite but clearly worried diplomats representing the local consulates of Canada, Germany, and Sweden all testified, even though each of those countries has few prisoners in California prisons.

Nevertheless, they were present to help fix a badly flawed country-to-country prison transfer program that the Schwarzenegger Administration hopes can one day send as many as 6,400 eligible prisoners home – mostly back to Mexico. Each one costs taxpayers \$31,000 to feed and house, every single year that they remain in California.

Most diplomats who testified said they want to more quickly transfer convicted people home so that, as Canadian diplomat Myra Pastyr-Lupul said, such prisoners can “take advantage of our

programs to ... reintegrate into Canadian society.”

Need I say that the behavior of the Canadians, Swedes and Germans stood in stark contrast to that of the Mexicans? In a bizarre bit of public theater that reminded me of my year in Czechoslovakia in 1991, where I observed bumbling ex-Communist officials firsthand, the Mexican government boycotted Romero’s hearing, offering up one of the lamest official fibs I’ve ever heard.

Romero explained to the audience that Mexican officials never responded to Romero’s invitation to testify at the hearing – odd behavior in and of itself. That morning, Romero’s aide had telephoned the Mexican consulate, down the road in L.A., to find out when they would arrive at the hearing.

As Romero noted for the record, Mexican officials responded that “because of budgetary concerns, they could not fly the appropriate consulate [official] from Mexico” – so nobody was coming. Said Romero: “I am very disappointed at their failure to participate ... to first of all give me even the courtesy of a phone call that they were not showing up.”

The peeved Romero went on to explain that in her invitation to the Mexican consulate, “We stressed that a local consulate official was sufficient.”

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I'll admit, I audibly guffawed over the bit about how Mexico, the country, can't afford an airline ticket to Los Angeles.

I checked, just in case something had happened to airline prices in the Known Universe. But nope, a roundtrip from Mexico City to L.A. is still a bargain.

Mexican diplomats live very well, and the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles is a classy joint, reflecting its ample funding from the home office. Let's just say that the federal government of Mexico can well afford a trip, indeed a very lavish trip, to Los Angeles. Not that Romero needed a diplomat from Mexico City anyway.

For years, the Mexican government has done nothing but doubletalk on illegal immigration. On the prisoner issue, Mexico very strictly limits the transfer of criminals from prisons in California and other states – yet the Mexican government absurdly insists it has no such limits. Pathetic. According to the California Board of Prison Terms “all other nations accept all of their prisoners for transfer.” All of them. Except for Mexico.

Thus in 2003, Mexico took back only 109 prisoners from the entire United States. Yet 17,500 of California's prisoners alone are Mexican nationals, including some 14,000 illegal aliens. Moreover, Mexico flatly refuses to take back any prisoner who has managed to lurk in the U.S. for longer than five years. Just because.

U.S. and California officials are so sick of Mexico's behavior that proposals are afoot to tweak the various complex treaties between the U.S., Mexico, Canada and

Europe, in order to force Mexico to play ball.

It's not as if wholesale prisoner transfers will occur. Under international treaties, prisoners must volunteer to go home. But at a savings to taxpayers of \$31,000 per foreigner per year, we'll take any volunteers we can get.

During five years of the do-nothing Gray Davis Administration, by my calculations, California taxpayers spent \$4 billion dollars housing and feeding foreign convicts – roughly half of them illegal aliens from Mexico. So under Davis we spent \$2 billion just on Mexican illegal aliens in prison, and that bill is metastasizing as we speak, with no end in sight. You'd agree that kind of dough would pay for scads of road-building in our decaying cities, tons of school textbooks, and a plethora of tax rebates to rev up California's economy.

In newspapers the day after this bizarre December 16 public hearing, I found no coverage of the international dustup between Sen. Romero and Mexico. Maybe I missed it. But I fear the worst: there was little or no media coverage.

The California media are complicit, along with Sacramento politicians, in often keeping mum about illegal immigration and its cost to California taxpayers. Reporting on a story that news reporters see as “blaming the victim” makes California journalists very uncomfortable.

Media queasiness has effectively shut the public out of this debate, allowing the discussion to be dominated by the hard-left

and hard-right.

The hard-left, typified by certain blowhard members of the Latino Caucus in our legislature, in 2003 absurdly demanded driver's licenses for illegal aliens with no restrictions or background checks. The hard-right, typified by strident anti-immigrant groups in Washington, D.C., demands such ridiculous things as a mass military on our border.

If the middle got any real chance to speak, we'd talk about how the solution won't be found in Washington or Sacramento, but in Mexico City, with the Mexican legislature and President Fox or, far more likely, his successor.

Mexicans come here illegally because Mexico's economy is designed to create very few jobs, as well as to severely repress the creation of a middle class, which remains small. It's a purposefully sick system which Mexico's elected leaders and rich ruling families have protected for decades. No Mexican leader, including the grossly disappointing President Fox, has shown the stomach for altering a socialist, throwback economic structure best left in the 1930's.

Equally damaging, the rule of law in Mexico is so weak that few financial lenders will jump in to help create a major entrepre-neurial class in Mexico – the best way to for the nation to escape Third World status.

Lenders have little confidence that if they back a Mexican company that wants to expand, or if they underwrite a plan to develop commercial property in Mexico, their investment won't be stolen by

corrupt mafia types in some courtroom fiasco overseen by a corrupt judge. That's what happens when the rule of law is a joke – as it is in Mexico's courtrooms.

Mexico will remain Third World while China surges forward, as long as corrupt judges run the legal system and socialism rules the legislature.

The rich ruling families and legislature clearly prefer that Mexico not develop itself, but instead rely on cash from California immigrants who send billions of dollars home to Mexico each year (making U.S.-earned cash the second- or third-largest income source for Mexico, after its oil revenues).

This "crutch economy" is a terrible thing, ensuring massive poverty even as elected leaders in California and Washington coddle Fox and Mexico's powerful ruling families.

Fox has turned out to be horribly weak – a buckler and flip-flopper unable to motivate any serious change. Why do I never, ever, read about these crucial issues in California media? Oh, that's right, it's blaming the victim.

As long as Mexico's ruling class ducks the responsibilities of the modern world – even shirking such simple if unpleasant tasks as attending a hearing into how to fix prison transfer policies – Mexico will remain its own tragic victim.

But apparently, nobody told Romero that silence is the rule among elected Sacramento politicians regarding the costs of illegal immigration. That December day in Los Angeles, she publicly criticized the Mexican government,

presented data on the staggering \$500 million to \$800 million a year paid by California taxpayers to house foreign prisoners, and basically opened a can of worms.

Somebody, please give this woman an award. •