
Interview: Erik Fleming

'Mexico Is Watching California With a Magnifying Glass'

Erik Fleming is a second-term Mississippi State Representative and former State Senator, and Democratic Committee chairman of Hines County, which includes the state capital of Jackson. With Brian Lantz, a LaRouche movement leader in the Southwest, Representative Fleming travelled to Monterrey, Mexico in late May to intervene against the World Bank push for energy deregulation there. He was interviewed on June 6 by Paul Gallagher.

EIR: You went, in the last ten days, to Mexico—to Monterrey—as a Representative in the state legislature in Mississippi, and you met with members of the Nuevo León state legislature. Can you, first, give us the background of your service with regard to the general welfare in the United States?

Fleming: My commitment to the general welfare of the United States, is that I look at the American dream not as having a house and a car and all that, but the elevation of the human existence. I think that every human being deserves the right to be as powerful, as intelligent, as gifted as they should be. My job as a state legislator, following the oath that I took, is to make sure that people have that opportunity. In dealing with issues, we have to take the side that would reach that goal, elevating human beings rather than devaluing them.

And so I was down in Monterrey discussing several issues, but the main issue I talked with the state congressmen about, in Nuevo León, was the energy deregulation issue.

EIR: You were there with Brian Lantz, who is a leader of the LaRouche movement in the U.S. Southwest. This is something that has been identified by LaRouche as a major national and international principle—this fight against energy deregulation. What's your view of it there, and what did you discuss with the leaders in Mexico?



Fleming: I frankly told them that deregulation is a terrible, bad, ridiculous idea. Mexico's situation is a little different from that of the United States; the government has control of the oil and natural gas pipelines, and so on. And what they're trying to do—El Paso Corp. and Enron—is they're trying to buy that control from them, and convince them to deregulate and let that gas and oil be on the free market. That would be a total 180° turn for Mexico. I told them it would be disastrous. Just look at what is happening in California, with the lack of power supply and planning; and not only have prices gone through the roof, but the two main power companies are financially crippled. The state is trying to salvage that, spending about \$70 million per day, trying to buy power for the state. It's just a total disaster.

What the legislators picked up on, when we talked about it, was the fact that natural gas and oil that they're producing for their own country, will be shipped off—especially natural gas, right now, to deal with California's situation and whatever else is going on—and there may be a shortage, not just a price problem, but an actual shortage of natural resources for the citizens of Mexico. As they said, that is not in their best interest. They had to put a cap on prices for natural gas, because they tried to keep up with the standard market price internationally, but when they saw that it was getting too high for their residents to afford, they stepped in and put a cap on it. I told them, if you deregulate, you can't do that any more.

They're watching the California situation with a magnifying glass; and they're also paying attention to the investigation that's going on, of El Paso Corp.; and the hint of impropriety has got them concerned. If there's actually anything that turns up in the investigation, that solidifies that El Paso Corp. and Enron were involved in any kind of price manipulation and gouging, then that's really going to send an alarm to them, and it will be hard for them to sell the idea of deregulation—even if they wanted to. I think that just the fact, that those two corporations have positioned themselves to be the players in this—not even the government of Mexico, which is considered conservative, will risk losing control of the politics, by engaging in any kind of business with those folks.

EIR: Our publication has reported that the World Bank, on

May 24, released a large number of recommendations, or directives, to Mexico on energy. Can you discuss those, in terms of what the people you met with were saying? In California, deregulation means deregulation of both production and transmission of electrical energy and natural gas. Is that what is being directed upon Mexico now?

Fleming: That's exactly what's being imposed. And further, it's control. Because, as I said, the government controls the natural gas pipelines right now—it's not a private venture doing it, it's a government enterprise. So if they deregulate, they lose that control, and the speculative market comes into play. It was interesting—I couldn't follow point-by-point every detail of this, because unfortunately, my Spanish is not good, but it was pretty obvious, that a lot of the World Bank recommendations were transformed into President [Vicente] Fox's national plan of development.

EIR: He had adopted them already?

Fleming: Yes. In the campaign, there were some issues he didn't even address. But now, by the time he's come out with his national plan of development for 2001, it mirrors a lot of the issues of the World Bank; several of the papers picked up on that.

The ironic thing, is that the people of Mexico understand the relationship between the country and the World Bank; and with anybody I talked to, when I mentioned the World Bank or the IMF [International Monetary Fund], I got this real negative response. The people understand that the World Bank is robbing that country, and is depriving them of their financial resources to do the things that they need to do to develop.

EIR: You met with members of the state legislature there. Were they members of President Fox's party, the PAN, or other parties, or both?

Fleming: We met with representatives of three of the four major parties: the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party]; the PAN [National Action Party], which is Fox's party; and the PT [Workers Party]. The PAN representative was very non-committal but very attentive, and asking the right kind of questions to be able to report back to President Fox and members of the ruling party, the concerns about deregulation. He was the one who introduced the legislation to put the price caps on natural gas. The PRI and PT representatives were very much in support of what I was saying against deregulation. They're not in favor of it. They were refreshed to hear an American legislator come, and tell them why deregulation was a bad idea.

EIR: In Mexico, is the situation like that in the U.S., where now, the broader population has become aware that there is a national energy policy fight, and that it pits the welfare of California, other states, the nation, against Texas-based energy companies linked to Bush: Is the deregulation issue un-

derstood in Mexico in a similar way?

Fleming: I think by the elected officials. The general public understands more this World Bank-IMF relationship. The general public has a disdain for the World Bank, because they understand that a good portion of their budget—anywhere from 40-60%—is going to pay a debt that they don't owe any more. The average person I talked to, from college students to taxicab drivers (who are pretty educated taxicab drivers, by the way; many of them have engineering degrees there), they are just appalled by how that institution is allowed to continue to hold their country in a financial kidnapping, to hold them hostage. If the World Bank says that deregulation is a good idea, then the reaction from the people, right away, is, "We don't think so, because you haven't been acting in our best interests."

EIR: Was your trip noted by the media there?

Fleming: Oh, yes. Especially the day that we met with the congressional representatives; it was full coverage—TV cameras and microphones all over the place. They covered it. We had a press conference to let everyone know what our position was on the issue. Right after the press conference, we had the meeting. And both events were well covered, so we felt that the message got out there.

As a matter of fact, part of the media pressure, I guess, was to see if they were going to allow me to meet with President Fox, sometime in the future. There wasn't any commitment then, but there was some serious consideration about that. He needs to understand—talking about the general welfare—that his country is in a very vital position in the world economic situation. If they surrender their national resources, then they'll be no better than a colony in Africa, with the natural resources they have, and the fight that they had to have in South Africa, to have any indigenous control there. And even, to some extent, they still don't have the control, because the IMF is playing a major role in trying to curtail whatever self-determination they have there.

It's the same fight. If we don't inform and educate our brothers and sisters there in Mexico, as to how serious this is, and what the big picture is, then they'll fall into the same trap as every other country—including our own.

It would be an honor, but it would [also] be worthwhile, to sit down with the President, and try my best to explain that, and see if it motivates him to take some action, in a positive way, for his people. . . .

EIR: You've been on the Democratic National Committee, and had national responsibility earlier in the Young Democrats. What is your view of the changes which have been set off now, around the Jeffords change of party, and what this will mean for the Democratic Party, and particularly for those involved in these fights that LaRouche has started?

Fleming: Well, I'm hoping that the Democratic Party will

start really acting like Democrats again. Each party has their own wings, and from time to time, those wings have control. The Democratic Party has always tried not to block people out, but just to allow ideas to come, and then we hash them out, and debate them, and go for them.

But what has happened with this DLC, the Democratic Leadership Council phenomenon that got Bill Clinton elected, and so on, was a drastic move toward being Republicans. And whereas there were some issues that I could identify with, the overall tone, was very dangerous.

Because in America, we need to have a clear definition of where people stand. We can't have people trying to appease everybody. If your idea is one thing for the general welfare, and the other person has another idea, then that's fine—that's what we're supposed to do. But don't try to straddle the fence on every issue. And that's where this DLC comes across as being this new, broad-based thing, and all that—but all it is, is just lowering the threshold of expectations.

EIR: The idea of “two Republican Parties” competing with each other.

Fleming: Right. The Democratic Party, especially under Roosevelt, and especially with Kennedy and others, has been—is supposed to have been the party that is open to the people, accountable to the people, and that believes that people need a helping hand, every now and then. When the times dictate that government should intervene, it should intervene, and nobody should disrespect that. They should expect that from their government. They expect governments to act when the nation is threatened in a military sense. They should expect the government to defend the nation in an economic sense as well.

That's where we are now. We hope that Jeffords' switch will allow a lot of those ideas that are being proposed by Mr. LaRouche, and others in the Democratic Party, to rebuild and strengthen the nation economically as well as from a social standpoint—that that faction and leadership will now be allowed to wheel and deal in the Washington political scene; and through Daschle's leadership, we'll be able to incorporate our ideas, even in President Bush's agenda. Even though President Bush's whole tenure is stacked on a house of cards, and eventually it's going to fall, the way our process works right now, we've got to respect the fact that he's in there, and try to work with him, and to work around him, when necessary.

I think the Democratic Party, now, is in a position to do that, especially in the Senate. The Senate was designed as the deliberative body, anyway. It was designed to be the body that could stop the train coming from the House of Representatives, coming from the White House, and say, “Wait a minute; what's in the best interests of the nation?” And I think now, with a Democratic majority in that body, you've got those brakes that we need on the speeding car.

Egypt Seeks Nuclear Power for Third World

by Hussein Al-Nadeem

Egypt was the host for “The International Seminar on Status and Prospects for Small and Medium-Sized Reactors,” on May 27-31. The seminar was co-organized by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Egyptian Nuclear Power Plants Authority, and was attended by 150 experts and industrialists from 45 countries.

The theme and the purpose of the seminar were indicated in the opening speeches of Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Ebeid and IAEA Director General Mohammed El-Baradei. Ebeid, whose speech was read by Egyptian Energy Minister Dr. Ali El Saiedi, said: “One-third of world population does not have energy resources. . . . Economic and technological development and the enormous population growth in the developing nations create a great demand for energy supply. If we want to alleviate poverty, we must work together to build a climate for investment that will create jobs, provide sustainable growth, and help develop and deploy advanced energy technologies.” He emphasized that “Egypt is among countries that are particularly interested in SMRs [small and medium reactors] as an electricity source and for water desalination plants, which are highly energy-intensive facilities.”

The Prime Minister added: “The use of nuclear energy as a crucial element in the energy systems of the developing countries will contribute to providing the energy supplies which do not emit greenhouse gasses. . . . The use of nuclear reactors to meet part of the energy needs and water supplies requires a commitment to a number of crucial conditions to develop and implement them successfully. These conditions are: long-term commitment to nuclear programs and their requirements, which the state has to develop and provide, such as basic infrastructure, technological knowledge base, and nuclear safety.”

IAEA Director El-Baradei said: “The demand for a higher standard of living is increasing everywhere—yet an estimated 2 billion people still lack access to electricity. Dramatic increases in electricity demand are expected over the next several decades—with the growth rate in the developing countries expected to be three times faster than in industrialized countries.” He stressed that “a total reliance on fossil fuels and large hydroelectric facilities is not sustain-