

Trip to Mexico ices woman's views on free-trade proposal

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A Lawrence resident says her recent trip to Mexico further convinced her that freer trade between the United States and its southern neighbor could only boost the economies of both countries.

Esther Valladolid Wolf said the trip also provided her a different view of the United States and showed her that the countries could learn a lot from each other.

She was one of 11 women invited to Mexico City on Feb. 6 and Feb. 7 as part of Mexico's Program for Mexican Communities Abroad. The women represented the Mexican American Women's National Assn., or MANA, which promotes the social, educational and economic advancement of Hispanic women. Wolf is a founding member of the Kansas City chapter of MANA.

Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari even met with the group, which spent considerable time discussing the economic impacts of U.S.-Mexican trade.

WOLF NOTED that the trade has been good for Kansas farmers and beef producers: Mexico is the second-largest market for U.S. meat exports, and imports from the United States account for about 25 percent of Mexico's wheat consumption.

But some people are concerned that with greater production sharing under a looser trade agreement, more U.S. jobs could be transferred to Mexico. Another concern is that many Hispanic Americans could be hurt by such job displacement.

Wolf said that when assessing the effects of greater U.S.-Mexican cooperation, a more important question is, "How many jobs will stay in the continent and not be placed in Asia?"

She added that "it makes sense to be hooking and linking ourselves up with the whole continent," especially since European countries are joining forces in the European Community.

WOLF SAID the Mexican president was hoping that as his

country's economy improved, fewer Mexicans would head north to take jobs in the United States.

"He wants to export products, not people," Wolf said.

However, for those U.S. jobs that are displaced because of production sharing or changes in technology, "We need to make sure that there are monies available to train these people to other jobs."

Wolf, 51, said other discussions with Mexican officials helped her to see the United States and Mexico in a somewhat different light.

For instance, some officials said the United States didn't have much room to criticize Mexico for its pollution problems, especially those of Mexico City.

"They don't have a military complex, so they don't have nuclear waste," Wolf said. "And I've been to Los Angeles when the smog is bad, so we can't throw dirt."

ON THE OTHER hand, the Mexican officials said Americans were being too critical of themselves in other ways.

"They did talk to us a lot about the fact that our nation is the strongest nation in the world and still has a lot of potential of affecting the global economy," Wolf said. "They said that with the

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Esther Valladolid
Wolf**

recessionary times, we are sort of being hard on ourselves."

Wolf said she hoped Mexico and the United States would exchange ideas for keeping rural communities economically healthy.

"What kind of an economic program do you have in a little community that will allow it to

maintain itself?" Wolf said.

Wolf, who served four years as the state's secretary of aging under former Gov. Mike Hayden, recalled one Kansas town's simple method of ensuring that isolated, elderly residents wouldn't be left unattended for very long if they were unable to get up from a bad fall.

The elders would leave a telephone message on one resident's answering machine every morning and afternoon, and the absence of a message could mean that an elder was in trouble.

SOME MEXICAN and U.S. rural communities should be able to help each other because, Wolf said, "the services needed are the same."

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