

BENTON TWP.

It's not your father's Mexico, Calderon tells Econ Club

Former Mexican President Felipe Calderon addresses the Economic Club of Southwestern Michigan at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center on Tuesday.
Joe Rondone / HP staff



Former Mexican president says America's neighbor a very serious player

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BENTON TOWNSHIP — In today's global economy, it would be a big mistake for Americans to ignore Mexico's growing economic potential.

That was a key message former Mexican President Felipe Calderon had for the Economic Club of South-

western Michigan on Tuesday night.

Due to several steps taken by his administration from 2006 to 2012, he said, Mexico now has a vital economy and a strong, growing middle class.

"We are today a more modern society, a middle class society — finally," he said.

That new middle class is helping drive Mexico's economy, and has made Mexico the 11th largest economy in the world, Calderon said.

The rise of the Mexican middle class also means

more opportunities for trading with the United States.

Calderon pointed to Whirlpool Corp., which he said has doubled its operations in Mexico since 2002. About 20 percent of Whirlpool products are made in Mexico, he said.

"What's good for Mexico is good for Whirlpool," he said.

It is crucial for the United States to improve its relations with its neighbor to the south as Mexico's economy is expected to continue to grow at a good pace, he

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said.

"Mexico is among the next global shapers," said Calderon, now a professor at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Calderon outlined some of the reforms his administration took to help improve the Mexican economy.

At the end of 2008, despite the world recession and a drop in domestic oil production, Calderon decided to boost tax revenue and reduce the deficit.

Meanwhile, the government invested in roads, schools and housing. It set up a program to help lower-income families pay for

house down payments. One in four houses in Mexico have been built in the last 12 years, he said.

Mexico also waged a war against government bureaucracy. It was able to strip the country of 16,000 regulations and decrease the time needed to start up a business from 58 days to 9 days, between 2008 and 2013.

"We deregulated the economy," Calderon said.

The result is a stronger, more competitive economy that is now able to be a major player in the global economy, he said.

The ties between Mexico and the United States need to be strengthened, he said.

"We are partners. We are allies," he said.

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