

EDITORIAL: California is the new Texas on border relations

Texas and California — two states that are big enough and diverse enough to be small countries — joined the United States before and after a war with Mexico in the mid-1800s. Since then, the two states' paths have diverged, as have their relationships with the nation's southern neighbor. Now those dynamics are changing yet again, possibly to California's benefit.

This state's relations with Mexico began to fray in the 1990s, when then-Gov. Pete Wilson led a campaign to vilify undocumented immigration, if not the immigrants themselves. Searching for an issue to help drive his reelection campaign and then an aborted run for president, Wilson backed Proposition 187, which sought to deny public services to people in the country illegally. He compared undocumented immigration to a foreign invasion and sent the National Guard to police the border.

Texas' approach at the time was very different, reaching out to Mexico to develop closer economic and cultural ties. Then-Gov. George W. Bush managed to articulate support for secure borders without demonizing those who sought to cross them without permission. Bush opposed Proposition 187 and courted his fellow governors south of the border, several of whom attended his first inauguration in Austin.

"May our friendship bring much good to both of our countries," Bush said.

Wilson's successor, Democrat Gray Davis, sought to repair California's relationship with Mexico, while Rick Perry, who followed Bush as governor of Texas, began over time to sound more and more like Wilson. Now, a generation later, the transformation is essentially complete.

As the Dallas Morning News recently reported, Texas is now seen widely as hostile to Mexico, while California is building ever closer ties with the country — and with the Mexicans who come here.

New Texas Gov. Greg Abbott announced after taking office that he would seek to extend his state's National Guard deployment at the border while beefing up a state police presence there, at a cost of \$700 million over two years.

In California, meanwhile, Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature hosted Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, and Brown has courted investment from Mexican business interests. California once again has begun issuing driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants, reversing a ban Wilson approved in 1994.

California's Dream Act laws now offer financial aid to undocumented students, and the state has limited the interaction between local law enforcement and immigration authorities in ways that have reduced deportations. Polls show that California voters are more accepting of immigrants than ever.

"California has displaced Texas as the spark plug in the bilateral relationship between the United States and Mexico," Arturo Sarukhan, a former Mexican ambassador to the U.S., said in a recent talk to the World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth, the Morning News reported. "Now California is the one, from a public policy point of view, leading the way in terms of how to rethink, engage and create new trans-border ties with Mexico."

Texas remains the biggest U.S. trading partner with Mexico, with California a distant second. But that could change. If Mexican businesses, investors and entrepreneurs feel unwelcome in Texas, it would be natural to focus more of their attention here.

Meanwhile, even if there were no economic benefit, California's evolution has been worth it. Building close ties with Mexico, rather than engaging in a war of words, or worse, is the right thing to do.

