

June 10, 2008: Merida Initiative to Combat Illicit Narcotics and Reduce Organized Crime

The Honorable Loretta Sanchez

MERIDA INITIATIVE TO COMBAT ILLICIT NARCOTICS AND REDUCE ORGANIZED CRIME AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2008

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Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 6028, the Merida Initiative to Combat Illicit Narcotics and Reduce Organized Crime Authorization Act of 2008. H.R. 6028 creates a foundation for future cooperation in assisting our neighbors to the south in combating the rise of organized crime.

This legislation is a good starting point but much more work will need to be done, including significant transnational and interagency cooperation, in order to ensure the success of the Merida Initiative. I was disappointed that the House Homeland Security Committee was not included in the development of this bill, despite the fact that the Department of Homeland Security will play a large role in the Initiative by coordinating its agencies that are already assisting Mexico and other foreign governments to address smuggling, trafficking and violence on our borders.

Last week the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism, which I have the privilege of chairing, had a hearing entitled "The Merida Initiative: Examining U.S. Efforts to Combat Transnational Criminal Organizations." This hearing highlighted the importance of the Merida Initiative in stemming the growing transnational crime in the United States and on our borders. For example, in my home district in Orange County, CA, gang violence is on the rise as a result of the huge presence of the largest transnational gang in the United States, Mara Salvatrucha, in Los Angeles County. It is reported that there are over 900 members of Mara Salvatrucha in Los Angeles County, and many of these gang members are in the United States illegally. The rise of this type of gang in the United States can be linked to a practice by many of the drug cartels of "contracting out" drug, ammunition, and weapon smuggling activities to these gang members. The Homeland Security hearing emphasized that many agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security will need to work together closely to stop these growing transnational crime networks.

H.R. 6028 must ensure interagency cooperation within the United States in order to succeed abroad with the foreign governments we seek to assist. As I stated earlier, much more needs to be done in order to help stem the violence along the U.S. and Mexican border, but this bill helps build the necessary foundation. I urge my colleagues to support this bill and to help ensure further cooperation between the key departments involved in its implementation