

Mexico's drug fight merits U.S. support

OUR OPINION: CONGRESS SHOULD APPROVE AID PACKAGE FOR NEIGHBOR

OPINION
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The \$1.4 billion proposal unveiled by the Bush administration on Monday to combat narcotics trafficking in Mexico deserves speedy approval in Congress. Some members of the House are miffed that lawmakers weren't consulted about the contents of this package, but they should not let pique overcome common sense. The United States shares a 2,000-mile border with Mexico and has a huge stake in boosting Mexico's ability to overcome the death-dealing gangsters who have turned parts of Mexico into arenas of violence.

Dangerous drug trade

There was a time when Mexico viewed the drug trade only through the prism of geography. It was merely a conduit for traffickers who sought to profit from the insatiable U.S. demand for Colombian cocaine, which was none of Mexico's business. It had nothing to gain by getting in the way of South American traffickers. But Mexico has now learned the hard way that turning a blind eye to drug-inspired violence doesn't work. The narcotics trade destroys everything it touches.

Today, from Nuevo Laredo to Tijuana to Acapulco, Mexico's police forces and soldiers are engaged in a deadly battle against Mexican drug cartels for control of cities. The dead number in the thousands, and the violence is intensifying.

The U.S. interest in helping Mexico could not be more self-evident. Controlling the traffic in Mexico keeps drugs off U.S. streets. It allows Mexico to bring its own territory under control. And it provides an opportunity for the United States to strengthen the bonds of cooperation with an important neighbor.

The package crafted by the White House and the government of Mexican President Felipe Calderón is designed to provide cash, training and equipment, but carefully limits direct U.S. participation south of the border. State Department officials have said there would be no U.S. planes or helicopters on the ground. Interdiction over Mexican airspace will be handled by Mexican authorities.

Drug cartels suffering

The case for helping Mexico is strengthened by the vigor with which President Calderón has undertaken the fight against drugs. No Mexican leader has devoted as many resources to this cause, nor been so quick to extradite Mexican drug gangsters wanted in the United

States. The drug cartels know that they are in the fight of their lives. So is Mexico. The United States can stand by and watch, or it can help. The choice is obvious.