



H.R. 6028 – Merida Initiative to Combat Illicit Narcotics and Reduce Organized Crime Authorization Act of 2008

FLOOR SITUATION

H.R. 6028 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Howard Berman (D-CA) on May 13, 2008. The House Committee on Foreign Affairs ordered the bill to be reported, as amended, by voice vote on May 22, 2008.

H.R. 6028 is expected to be considered on the floor of the House on June 10, 2008.

SUMMARY

H.R. 6028 authorizes the President to provide assistance to Mexico and Central American countries (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Haiti and the Dominican Republic) for law enforcement and security assistance, and the enhancement of law enforcement and the bolstering of civilian institutions in an effort to combat illegal narcotics and organized crime. H.R. 6028 authorizes a total appropriation of \$1.6 billion over FY 2008-2010 for the purposes of the Act. This bill provides no cash payments of any kind.

Law Enforcement and Security Assistance in Mexico: This bill authorizes \$350 million for 2008, \$390 million for 2009, and \$40 million for 2010 for counternarcotics and counter-organized crime activities in Mexico. Authorized activities include building Mexican law enforcement capabilities, aiding Mexican armed forces in its counternarcotics support role, and supporting the judicial branch of the Government of Mexico. Other authorized assistance includes aerial surveillance equipment, interdiction training, transport helicopters, computer infrastructure, and the expansion of intelligence databases.

Enhancing the Rule of Law and Civil Institutions in Mexico: H.R. 6028 authorizes \$120 million for 2008, \$100 million for 2009, and \$110 million for 2010 for institution building activities, anti-corruption initiatives and human rights promotion in Mexico. Examples of authorized assistance include courts management, prosecutorial capacity building, anti-money laundering programs, and human rights education and training. Support for greater transparency in the Mexican legal system and job creation programs are also authorized under this provision.

Law Enforcement and Security Assistance in Central America: This bill authorizes \$60 million for 2008; \$80 million for 2009; and \$80 million for 2010 for counternarcotics, counter-organized crime, counter-trafficking, and law enforcement capacities in Central America. Authorized activities include combating illegal trafficking, maritime security support, youth gang prevention activities, and police professionalization and equipment assistance.

Enhancing the Rule of Law and Civil Institutions in Central America: H.R. 6028 authorizes \$40 million for 2008; \$50 million for 2009 and \$95 million for 2010 for enhancing the rule of law and strengthening civil institutions on Central America. Authorized activities include courts management, prosecutorial capacity building, witness protection programs, prison management and human rights training.

Authorized Domestic Appropriations: This provision additionally authorizes \$15 million to the Attorney General for the Project Gunrunner initiative for 2008-2010. These resources would be used to prosecute individuals involved in firearms trafficking. \$9.5 million is also authorized for 2008-2010 for increased Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives coordination with Mexican law enforcement.



Limitations on Assistance: This legislation stipulates that no assistance to Mexican or Central American armed forces or law enforcement unit is permitted if that unit has committed gross violations of human rights, or there is credible evidence of such. This requirement can be waived if the Secretary of State determines that the respective government is taking effective measures to bring the responsible parties to justice.

H.R. 6028 further requires that equipment and material assistance is used by foreign governmental officials who have been approved by such government to perform counternarcotics activities. Foreign governments are also directed to develop systems to provide an accounting and inventory of the equipment and materials provided by the United States.

Oversight and Reporting Requirements:

Within 60 days of enactment, the President must report to Congress on the specific metrics of achievement for the activities of this Act. The President is also directed, within 180 days of enactment, to report to Congress on the implementation and success of measures taken under the Act. H.R. 6028 requires the President to report within 180 days to Congress on measures taken to address United States demand-related aspects of drug-trafficking.

Merida Initiative Coordinator: H.R. 6028 directs the President to designate a Coordinator of United States Government Activities to Implement the Merida Initiative within the Department of State.

Termination of the Act: This legislation terminates the authority of the Act after September 30, 2010.

BACKGROUND

The Merida Initiative was announced by the United States and Mexico on October 22, 2007. The Merida Initiative expands regional cooperation to combat drug trafficking organizations and transnational crime syndicates. The Initiative is named for the city in Mexico where President Bush, Mexican President Calderon, and former Nicaraguan President Ortega discussed regional security challenges.

This legislation authorizes \$1.6 billion for 2008-2010, which represents a \$200 million increase over the Administration's requested funding level.

The Mexican portion of the aid package is intended to complement U.S. and Mexican domestic efforts against drug, human, and weapons trafficking. The Central American component of the Merida Initiative aims to increase capacity of the governments to inspect and interdict unauthorized drugs, goods, arms and people.

According to the State Department, Mexico is a major foreign supplier of marijuana and methamphetamine to the United States. In addition, 90% of all cocaine entering the U.S. transits through Mexico. Recently, rivalries between drug trafficking organizations have resulted in increased violence within Mexico, especially along the United States border. Over the first five months in 2008, there were over 1,300 drug-related killings in Mexico.

[Department of State - The Merida Initiative](#)

COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that "enacting H.R. 6028 would cost \$1.5 billion over the 2008-2013 period, assuming appropriation of the authorized amounts."

[Full CBO Cost Estimate](#)

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