

WASHINGTON, D.C.— U.S. Rep. Harry E. Mitchell today voted to combat Mexican and Central American drug trafficking by beefing up law enforcement on both sides of the border. The Merida Initiative to Combat Narcotics Act, H.R. 6028, would train security forces, and prevent guns and drugs from traveling across the U.S. border.

The bill passed by a bipartisan vote of 311-106 and now moves to the Senate.

President George W. Bush and Mexican President Felipe Calderon developed the initiative in 2007. The legislation allows funding to train security forces, provide equipment and strengthen law enforcement on both sides of U.S. - Mexico border. While pleased with the passage of the bill, Mitchell expressed disappointment that the President is poised to pull National Guard troops off of the Arizona border before additional Border Patrol are fully deployed.

“I applaud the passage of today’s bill to fight crime and keep our country safe, but I also call on President Bush to extend Operation Jump Start,” said Mitchell. “We should not take one step forward and one step back when it comes to securing our borders. We could pay a hefty price if the President refuses to realize we cannot tolerate a further drawdown of National Guard along our border.”

The legislation would authorize \$1.5 billion dollars over the next six years to train security forces, provide equipment and strengthen law enforcement on both sides of the border.

Mitchell offered an amendment to extend Operation Jumpstart in May, but it was not included in the FY2009 Defense Authorization Act.

Mitchell Praises Bill to Combat Mexican Drug Trafficking

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The amendment would extend the National Guard presence indefinitely until additional Border Patrol is deployed. Mitchell joined a bipartisan Congressional group from Arizona, encouraging the President to renew Operation Jump Start before it expires July 15, 2008.

Mitchell also wrote President Bush in August and February urging him to maintain the National Guard's border presence. On April 22, Governors Janet Napolitano of Arizona, Bill Richardson of New Mexico and Arnold Schwarzenegger of California asked Congressional leaders to extend and fully fund the operation. Napolitano had previously written to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff asking him to continue the operation.