September 6, 2001

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—SENATE

State, the fire season in Montana again reminds us that we must be deeply grateful for the hard and dangerous work these firefighters do, work that takes them away from their homes and their families to protect the people of Montana and the West.

Let me honor the four firefighters who lost their lives battling fires in Montana.

On August 31, 2001, three men died in a helicopter crash near the Fridley Fire just south of Livingston, MT. The pilot was Rich Hernandez, 37, originally from California. Santi Avrotx, only 28, was originally from Spain and had been living in Hillsboro, OR. Their crew chief was Kip Krigbaum, 45, of Emmett, ID.

On September 3, David Ray Rendek, just 24 years of age, was struck when a falling snag while working on a small fire in Bitterroot National Forest, near Hamilton, MT.

David graduated from high school in Victor, MT, and attended classes at the University of Montana, in Missoula with his sister. I have been told he was a passionate advocate about the outdoors and was a dedicated firefighter. I am very sorry his family and Montana have lost such a promising young man.

My deepest sympathies and condolences go out to the family and friends of these four men. We in Congress honor their memory and the ultimate sacrifice they made for the people of Montana. We are very sorry for their loss.

Unfortunately, the fires in Montana continue. Dedicated fire crews continue to battle hostile weather conditions and high winds.

Montana fires have consumed over 90,000 acres. The largest fires are the Fridley Fire near Livingston and the Moose Fire near Ronan, Blackfeet Nation and Northern Cheyenne. Air Support includes 9 helicopters and 3 air tankers. Other Montana crews include: Glacier Park, Bitterroot Hot Shot Crew, Trapper Creek Job Corps, Kootenai National Forest and Flathead National Forest.

The Fridley Fire has burned over 26,800 acres, and it is approaching the Gallatin Divide, increasing the threat to the Bozeman water supply. Over 1,000 people are fighting this fire.

As of September 5, the Moose fire has burned more than 58,000 acres. There are 33 20-person crews currently battling the Moose Fire.

Fourteen are Montana crews and several crews come from Montana’s Indian Country—the Rosebud Sioux, Ronan, Blackfeet Nation and Northern Cheyenne. Air Support includes 9 helicopters and 3 air tankers. Other Montana crews include: Glacier Park, Bitterroot Hot Shot Crew, Trapper Creek Job Corps, Kootenai National Forest and Flathead National Forest.

The force of the Moose Fire is tremendous. It is burning in and around Glacier National Park.

Four of these were Mexican nationals, for the first time, for the first time, for the first time.

Mr. President, I appreciate your attention. I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to put the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MEXICAN PROGRESS IN THE DRUG WAR

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I have come to this Chamber because I want to make a few comments of welcome to President Vicente Fox. I had the pleasure of speaking with him at Secretary Powell’s lunch yesterday and listening to him in the House of Representatives in the joint session this morning.

Because I have been critical of Mexican efforts to arrest cartel leaders, to vigorously prevent the laundering of drug money, their refusal to extradite a single Mexican national on drug charges, and because of the widespread corruption within the ranks of Mexican law enforcement, I thought I should come to the Chamber today while President Fox is in our country to say recent reports I have had indicate there has been truly a dramatic change in Mexico.

I believe he is to be commended for that. It looks as if he is responsible for an entirely new attitude on the part of his country in the fight against drugs.

I wish to take a few moments to commend him and to say how important this is to the United States and to the people of this country.

We all recognize that we have a demand problem in this country. In fact, there is even a growing demand problem in Mexico today as well. But, nevertheless, the flood of narcotics across the border represents a major problem for both our nations. It brings with it also collateral problems in the United States and in Mexico: violence, corruption, and, even, as we have seen, the brutal torture and murder of literally hundreds of public officials, judges, prosecutors, journalists, and any who dare either to cross the cartels or stand in their way.

It is fair to say that these major consequences of the drug trade require that we solve the problem together. Simply put, the Fox administration has made more progress in the war against drugs over the last 6 months than the Government of Mexico made over the previous 9 years.

I would like to share some examples, some specifics, if you will, of the progress made by Mexico through the leadership of this brave new President.

For one, the Fox administration, not one major Mexican national drug cartel member had ever been extradited to the United States on drug charges—not one, ever—despite a whole list of pending requests.

Since President Fox took office, however, this has changed dramatically. In fact, I had the privilege, at the Davos World Economic Summit, in January, to meet briefly with President Fox. At that time I handed to him directly a list of requested extraditions, prepared by our Drug Enforcement Administration. He said he would take action. I did not really believe him at the time, but he has.

After years of court battles, earlier this year the Mexican Supreme Court ruled that Mexican nationals could, indeed, be extradited to the United States.

Since January, 14 fugitives have been extradited to our country from Mexico. Four of these were Mexican nationals, and three of the four, for the first time, for the first time, for the first time.

Because I have been critical of Mexican efforts to arrest cartel leaders, to vigorously prevent the laundering of drug money, their refusal to extradite a single Mexican national on drug charges, and because of the widespread corruption within the ranks of Mexican law enforcement, I thought I should come to the Chamber today while President Fox is in our country to say recent reports I have had indicate there has been truly a dramatic change in Mexico.

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have worked in this area for years believe extradition is a major deterrent to the cartel leadership. The defendant in the Supreme Court case, Everardo Arturo Paez Martinez, is a key member of the Arellano Felix cartel. The United States has been requesting his extradition for years. He was extradited to the United States to stand trial. He is here today. Miguel Azevedo Martinez-Martinez, an accused drug trafficker, was extradited and is awaiting trial in San Diego. Martinez is a principal figure in the Joaquin "Chapo" Guzman Organization. This Sinaloa-based cartel is believed responsible for smuggling tons of cocaine and other illicit narcotics into the United States over many years, and for trying to build a 1,400-foot tunnel from Tijuana to Otay Mesa in California.

Rafael Camarena Marcias has also been extradited to the United States. He was responsible for successfully building a tunnel between Agua Prieta, Sonora, and Douglas, AZ, through which up to 2 tons of cocaine flowed every day.

Extradition has always been the most visible and effective sign of how seriously the Mexican Government is taking the fight against drug cartels. I am very proud to say thank you to President Fox and to the Government of Mexico for their cooperation in this regard.

It is not easy for Mexico to target these individuals and send them to the United States for trial. It is politically difficult, for many in Mexico do not believe that Mexican citizens should face trial in the United States, and it is difficult for personal safety reasons as well.

Let me give an example. The lawyer who represented Everardo Arturo Paez in opposition for 3 years and who failed to prevent his extradition was found murdered. That is the reward for not succeeding with a cartel. I am told that others may well be in personal jeopardy as well.

President Fox’s leadership has given the entire country new courage to stand against the cartels, their killers, and their traffickers.

In addition to extraditing those already under arrest, the Mexican Government has also made new arrests of certain leaders of Mexican cartels. Adan Amezquita, one of the three Amezquita brothers, was arrested in 1997, but he was freed by a corrupt judge who has since been fired from the bench. Amezquita was rearrested by Mexican officials this past May.

Why are they important? The Amezquita brothers are major methamphetamine traffickers. They are responsible single-handedly for the introduction and expansion of meth throughout this country. Indeed, the cartel and its nationals still run meth labs throughout the United States.

In cooperation, the Governor of Quintana Roo, Mario Villaneuva, who was arrested while he was still Governor, asked to serve out his term of Governor. However, the Governor appeared the day after he left office and has been gone. Well, he was arrested in May for major drug crimes in Cancun, and today he is in a maximum security prison in Mexico.

In February, the government dismantled an entire cell of the Arellano Felix cartel, perhaps the most vicious cartel operating right out of Tijuana. They arrested 7 of its leaders. They seized 8 houses, 18 vehicles, 19 firearms, and communication devices.

Seizures of illegal drugs have been on the rise. Some of them are at an all-time high. In February, the Mexican Government seized 14 tons of marijuana in cookie boxes; in April, another 121 tons. In May, they seized 8.8 tons of cocaine aboard the fishing vessel Forever My Friend, and the 10 crew members have been transported to San Diego; in May, another 12 tons of cocaine aboard a vessel flying a Belize flag. Overall, this past year, 24 tons of cocaine have been seized from fishing vessels as a result of cooperation between Mexico and the United States.

The Mexican Government has also addressed the serious issue of internal corruption. The captain of the Mexican Army, Luis Abudis Murga, was sentenced to 17 years in prison for assisting the Carillo Fuentes cartel. Retired general, Jorge Mariano Maldanado Vega was sentenced to 26 years for aiding the same organization. And Mario Silva Calderon, former agent of Mexico’s national police, was sentenced to 36 years in prison for similar activity.

As Donnie Marshall, former head of the DEA, testified before the drug committee of the 106th Congress, no one country can possibly combat the wealth and sophistication of these major drug trafficking organizations. Only by cooperating and sharing locally gathered intelligence and assets can we hope to succeed.

That is why I am so encouraged by the progress being made by the Fox administration.

In the past I know that American law enforcement and even Mexican law enforcement felt that the other side could not be trusted. Now finally that is changing. A new 117-member Mexican organized crime unit, which works hand in hand with our DEA, has fostered new relationships and trust between the agencies of our two nations. It is only with this type of cooperation that we can hope to defeat the drug cartels and stem the flow of illegal drugs onto the streets.

Before I yield the floor, I would like to note that Senator Fox made earlier today regarding passage of S. 219, the Dodd certification legislation.

Let me be clear: I continue to support the certification process. We have nothing to replace it. I happen to believe it has some salutary value. Because President Fox has asked, I would be prepared to support a suspension of the certification process with regard to Mexico for the 3 years as requested by President Fox. I would do so because he asks in the new spirit of cooperation between our two nations. I would be very pleased to work with my colleagues to pass such legislation immediately.

I am not, however, prepared to abandon the process entirely with respect to all countries, as S. 219 would do. There are many places in the world where progress has not been made. Syria, Iran, Burma, and Afghanistan are just a few examples of continuing major problem countries. Only a robust certification process gives Congress and the President the tools we need to encourage change in these nations.

I hope the Senator from Connecticut would work with me on a compromise that would address only Mexico so we can move forward on this issue.

In closing, I again welcome President Fox to the United States. We look forward to working with him in our continuing mutual fight against the drug cartels. I personally, deeply, say thank you and salute this brave and courageous President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from California for her fine words. It was a superb speech. President Fox gave today in joint session.

MAGDALENA MEDIO

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, sometimes one speaks in the Senate Chamber and is not sure what exactly the effect of it all is—maybe more than sometimes.

I am speaking today on behalf of a lot of the human rights workers and social service workers and community development workers, civil society people in Colombia. I am hoping—I will be very straightforward about it; I don’t think this is illusion—that the words of a Senator on the floor of the Senate that I am about to make the non-sententious words. It is about a priest and about a very important organization, of which two members have been brutally murdered in the last 35, 40 days, communicates a message that our Government cares about, communicates a message that our Government cares about human rights in Colombia, and about the importance of the Government and the military defending civil society individuals.

I rise today to speak out on behalf of many defenseless human rights workers, community economic development workers, in our neighbor Colombia, who are besieged by the growing paramilitary