

**WASHINGTON** -- Mexico's denial of a U.S. request to extradite five Mexican bankers charged in an American-led drug and money laundering sting is an outrage, said U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL).

Bachus, who authored a resolution passed by the House last June praising the sting -- codenamed "Operation Casablanca" -- is asking President Clinton to get the decision reversed when he meets with Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo this weekend so the bankers can be tried in the U.S.

"This refusal by Mexico to extradite these individuals is an outrage and evidence that Mexico does not take our partnership as seriously as it should," Bachus said in a letter to President Clinton released today. "Our agents risked their lives in Operation Casablanca for the people of both the United States and Mexico."

After U.S. Customs agents charged 26 Mexican bankers with money-laundering for drug cartels following the sting, some Mexican officials including its attorney general threatened to indict and seek the extradition of the U.S. agents involved.

That threat led Bachus to introduce a resolution, passed by the House last June, praising the U.S. agents and putting the House on record that it would not support any attempt to extradite them to Mexico.

"Drug trafficking has ruined countless lives in both the U.S. and Mexico. Our agents deserved praise from Mexico -- not the threat of prosecution -- for their work," Bachus said.

Bachus also criticized Mexico for curtailing its drug enforcement activity over the past year, noting that drug arrests, seizures and investigations in Mexico have all declined.

"This record indicates that Mexico is only paying lip service to drug traffic eradication while enjoying a host of economic and trade preferences from the United States," Bachus wrote in his letter to the President.

Bachus's letter comes just days before President Clinton must certify whether Mexico is "fully cooperating" with the U.S. in the war against drugs. Congress has thirty days to approve or reject the President's decision. If Congress rejects certification for Mexico, the country would lose some financial aid and trade benefits.