

Pasadena Star-News San Gabriel Valley Tribune Whittier Daily News

Lobby Mexico on extradition

Saturday, July 30, 2005 - SOME 3,000 murder suspects have fled the United States to Mexico. They have yet to be extradited.

All Americans, and especially residents of Los Angeles County where 200 of those suspects originated, should demand the White House intervene to press Mexico to change its extradition laws, an open invitation to criminals.

Commit the most heinous of crimes, the policy intimates, and you'll find a safe haven in Mexico. Molester priests, millionaire rapists and cop killers have all been sheltered there.

At least some of our representatives including David Dreier, R- Glendora, Gary Miller, R-Brea, and Adam Schiff, D-Pasadena, are working toward persuading Mexico's independent Supreme Court to revisit its October 2001 ruling that added life without parole to its original 1978 treaty that prohibits returning criminals to the United States if they could face the death penalty.

Dreier has even argued the need to update the treaty before the Mexican Supreme Court without success and recently he, Miller and other area representatives voted for U.S. pressure as part of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act that passed overwhelmingly in the House.

But without any type of high- level negotiation, Mexico is likely to remain obstinate in its refusal to extradite those who face life in prison without parole. We wonder, would 40-year sentences with the possibility of parole satisfy? Probably not.

And Mexican officials wonder why U.S. citizens want stronger border protections. It's not just about keeping out those who attempt to illegally enter the United States, but rather keeping Mexican nationals from fleeing justice here.

Residents of Los Angeles County still await the return of Armando Garcia, suspected in the 2002 killing of Los Angeles County Sheriff's Deputy David March, shot and killed during a traffic stop in Irwindale. Garcia had been deported four times before the fateful encounter with the Temple Station deputy and is also wanted for two attempted murders in Baldwin Park.

Some say Americans' renewed anger at the influx of illegals into our country has piqued Mexican citizens. But that's just a straw man in our view. If we opened the borders and welcomed all who desired to come, we very much doubt the Mexican Supreme Court justices would change their minds.

They say their extradition policy is based on humane treatment of prisoners and that their justice system advocates rehabilitation rather than punishment. This moral high road has yet to intersect in the Mexican prison system.

Yet, we can't help but think the Mexican people are with Americans when it comes to seeing killers get the justice they deserve on either side of the border. Would they rally to rehabilitate the serial killer who has taken the lives of so many women in Ciudad Juarez?

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice ought to broach the subject of extradition with Mexico's administration and soon. The only renegotiation we'd like to see is that Mexico be given no say in the U.S. justice system, just as we do not presume to tell Mexico how to treat American citizens who commit crimes in that country.

The timely turnover of those accused of crimes in the United States is another "trade treaty" the administration should vigorously pursue worldwide.