

## Rothman Fight Leads to Greater Accountability on Aerial Fumigation in Columbia

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### Rothman Fight Leads to Greater Accountability on Aerial Fumigation in Columbia Language Establishes Guidelines, Verification to Ensure Health of Colombian People

Washington, DC -- Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) today announced that there will be greater accountability for U.S.-supported aerial drug eradication efforts in Colombia. Rothman successfully fought to include language to the House Foreign Operations Appropriations bill to address numerous health and environmental safety concerns. The language, which Rothman worked on with Foreign Operations Subcommittee Chairman Jim Kolbe (R-AZ), directs the Secretary of State to provide a report to Congress by January 1, 2002, which examines the health and environmental effects of the aerial fumigation of coca and opium poppy plants, the raw materials for cocaine and heroin, respectively. The State Department report will also establish guidelines and verification methods to ensure that future aerial fumigation efforts do not harm the health of the Colombian people, their water supply, or legal crops. There will be quarterly reports to inform Congress of the progress of the program as well as all fumigation operations, beginning with operations conducted as of October 1, 2001 which will be in the initial report.

"By including vigilant reporting to protect the health of the Colombian people, their environment and legal crops, this language improves Plan Colombia, effective this Fall" Rothman said.

Rothman cited widespread unaddressed allegations of health and environmental concerns as reasons why greater accountability is necessary. Between August, 2000 and May, 2001, Colombia's Public Ombudsman has received 1,158 reports of damage to human health, the environment and food crops allegedly caused by fumigation. This is consistent with reports by the media, human rights groups and environmental organizations, including the World Wildlife Fund and American Bird Conservancy.

Rothman, a supporter of Plan Colombia, believes that aerial fumigation plays an important and legitimate role in the eradication of coca and opium poppies.

The aerial fumigation in Colombia is being conducted with Roundup, an herbicide which contains the chemical glyphosate. There are many allegations that it is being applied inconsistent with the label instructions. In addition to stating that Roundup should not be applied to water, the product's label states that it should be aerially applied only under ideal circumstances.

However, aerial application is often impossible under combat conditions over the Colombian jungle. Media reports, including a January, 2001 Washington Post article, confirm that aerial application is often misapplied at high altitudes where it is impossible to ensure accuracy.

"I do not blame the pilots for wanting to be safe and spraying at high speeds or high altitudes," Rothman said. "However, we're not talking about smart bombs here- the higher you are, the faster you go, the more chemicals will land in the wrong place."

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