



For Immediate Release  
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**Senate Floor Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)  
Regarding the United States-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement**

John F. Kennedy said: "Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer."

President Bush today intends to submit the implementing legislation for the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. He will do so against the will of Congress. And he thus did not seek the right answer. He did not even bother with the Republican or the Democratic answer. The administration simply chose the easy answer.

The administration's easy answer is also the wrong answer. It is the wrong answer for American workers. It is the wrong answer for the administration's relationship with Congress. And it is the wrong answer for Colombian workers.

The Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement is a good trade agreement. It will level the playing field for America's exporters. It will open up a new export market for American products, including Montana beef, wheat, and barley. And it will bolster a close ally in a troubled region.

Expanding trade and supporting Colombia are important priorities. And that is why the administration should have handled this agreement the right way.

Had the administration sought the right answer, it would have worked harder to support my top priority — American workers. Had the administration not rushed forward with the easy answer, we could have had Trade Adjustment Assistance in place before considering this agreement.

We need expanded and effective TAA for America's workers. That means ensuring that America's service workers — not just its manufacturers and farmers — receive the help that they need. Service workers make up 80 percent of our workforce. They have helped to build and support the knowledge-based economy that is the engine of America's growth. They work hard. And they deserve our support in return.

Expanded and effective TAA must also cover workers whose jobs have been shipped offshore, not just as a result of trade agreements. It must raise the health care tax credit to make it affordable and accessible. And expanded and effective TAA must double the training funds available to our workers.

Were the administration serious about this agreement, it would not have resorted to the easy procedural answers either. In high school civics class, they teach that the Constitution grants Congress the power to regulate foreign commerce. Congress entrusted this power temporarily and conditionally to the administration under Trade Promotion Authority. Congress did not write a blank check.

By submitting the agreement now and against Congress's will, the administration abuses the power that Congress granted it. By forcing Congress to consider this agreement now, the administration offends the trust of Congress and violates the compact that is the essence of fast track.

When Congress extended Trade Promotion Authority — what people call “fast track” — it did so on the condition that the administration would consult with Congress about the text of proposed agreements before it sent them up. Congress set up an informal markup process to apply before the administration formally sent up the legislative language.

The administration has now completely bypassed that process. And now, Congress has no opportunity to affect the language of the proposed agreement. The administration has said “it's my way or the highway.”

Procedural checks and balances are the cornerstone of the Congressional-Executive relationship. And they are the cornerstone of Trade Promotion Authority. Democratic and Republican administrations have respected this cornerstone. But today, this administration shattered this cornerstone. By so doing, they further diminish our trust.

And by sending up the implementing bill today, the administration failed to deliver the right answer for Colombia's workers. Colombia's workers must know that they can safely pursue equality and justice in the workplace — free from the violence that has plagued Colombia in the past.

The Colombian government has made great strides in this area. And the enforceable labor provisions in the U.S.-Colombia trade agreement are a critical step to ensuring further progress. But we must make sure that the Colombian Government takes these obligations seriously. It must show that these obligations are not just paper promises.

The normal congressional fast-track process of hearings and informal markups — which the administration has short-circuited — is an important time for Congress to air concerns and exercise its leverage. It allows Congress to ensure that the Colombian Government is committed to prosecuting labor violence.

It gives us real leverage to seek commitments from the Colombian Government and the administration to create a work environment in Colombia grounded in law and backed by action.

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And it also allows Congress the chance to help the Colombian Government, through funding provisions included in the implementing bill, to create an environment where those who seek a better life through employment can flourish.

Short-circuiting the process and forcing a premature vote on a trade agreement does nothing to help Congress to accomplish these goals.

The President's unprecedented handling of the U.S.-Colombia trade agreement raises extraordinary questions about how we can move this agreement forward. For America's workers, for the relationship between Congress and the President, and for the Colombian people, Congress must now find answers.

Finding the right answer has never been easy. By submitting this agreement as it did, and when it did, the administration has sought the easy answer. But in the end, the administration has simply made it harder to find the right answer.

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