



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement**

President John F. Kennedy once said: "Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners, and necessity has made us allies."

President Kennedy's words describe our relationship with Colombia. The United States and Colombia are neighbors in the Americas. Washington, D.C. is as close to Cartagena, Colombia as it is to Columbia Falls, Montana.

And while geography has made us neighbors, history has made us friends. The United States and Colombia are the two oldest democracies in the Western Hemisphere. When Colombia declared its independence from Spain in 1810, the United States was the first country to recognize its new sovereign neighbor. The historical roots of our friendship run deep.

As history made us friends, economics has made us partners. Last year, the United States exported goods worth \$12 billion to Colombia, our third-largest market in South America. And Colombia buys more U.S. farm products than all but one country in South America. In fact, we trade more goods and services with Colombia than we do with Russia, Spain and other larger economies.

Rather than compete, our economies complement each other. Colombia buys wheat, cars, machinery and aircraft from the United States. We buy flowers, coffee, oil and clothing from Colombia. Our economic relationship with Colombia has helped U.S. businesses grow and has created jobs for American workers.

And while economics has made us partners, necessity has made us allies. A decade ago, Colombia was on the brink of collapse. Armed conflict raged, drug traffickers flourished, violence against workers flared and the economy stagnated. Vital U.S. national interests were at risk. As allies, the United States and Colombia joined forces to respond.

The United States pledged its support for "Plan Colombia." Under that plan, we provided more than \$7 billion to Colombia to fight drug trafficking, spur development and protect human rights.

We expanded the Andean Trade Preference Act to provide more duty-free access to the U.S. market for Colombian products. We created new opportunities for the Colombian people, and new alternatives to the illegal drug trade.

With our help, Colombia has achieved impressive results. Since 2002, homicides have decreased by 46 percent, kidnappings have declined by 93 percent, terrorist attacks have fallen by 70 percent and more than 50,000 former combatants have laid down their arms.

But we have unfinished business with our friend and ally. In 2006, the United States and Colombia signed a free trade agreement. It was overwhelmingly approved by Colombia.

The International Trade Commission estimates this agreement will boost the U.S. economy by \$2.5 billion, but it awaits action by the United States.

Our approval of the FTA has been delayed by legitimate concerns for the rights and safety of Colombian workers. During decades of armed conflict, Colombian workers were subject to threats, intimidation and violence.

I traveled to Colombia earlier this year to gauge first-hand the progress Colombia has made to address these concerns. This progress is real, it's impressive and it will be enhanced once the FTA takes effect.

The FTA commits both parties to protect fundamental labor rights. This commitment is fully enforceable, just like the commercial provisions in the agreement. And this commitment is far stronger than those in Colombia's FTAs with other countries, including Canada and the European Union.

Colombian President Santos has also agreed to do far more. Last month, President Obama and President Santos agreed to a Labor Action Plan. In that plan, Colombia committed to a series of concrete steps to strengthen labor rights, improve protection of workers from violence, and increase prosecutions of the perpetrators of violence.

The Action Plan has been embraced by all of the major labor unions in Colombia. And a prominent Colombian labor group in fact called the Action Plan the most significant labor rights development in Colombia in 20 years.

The Action Plan is also enforceable. It is divided into three stages to ensure that Colombia meets each of its core commitments.

Last week, the Administration notified Congress that Colombia has met the first stage of commitments. As a result, Congress and the Administration are now working on the bill to implement the FTA.

The second stage of commitments are due by June 15. Once these are met, we understand that the Administration will be prepared to formally submit the FTA to Congress for a vote.

And the third stage of commitments are due by December 15. Once Colombia implements these commitments, and others related to the FTA, the Administration will certify to Congress that Colombia has taken the necessary steps to allow the FTA to enter into force.

We are now poised to approve our FTAs with Colombia, Panama and Korea. As we move forward with these FTAs, we also must help American workers meet the challenge of global competition. To do so, we must ensure that Congress enacts a robust, long-term extension of Trade Adjustment Assistance in tandem with the FTAs.

Colombia is our neighbor, our friend, our partner and our ally.

So let us work together to implement the Labor Action Plan. Let us move forward quickly and approve the FTA. Let us extend Trade Adjustment Assistance. And let us create new opportunities that will improve the economies and the lives of people in both of our countries.

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