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Opening Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
At the Markup of the Colombia, Panama and South Korea Free Trade Agreements and Four
Nominations
As prepared for delivery

John Quincy Adams once said, "Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish."

Our free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea are nearing the end of a long journey. We have faced difficulties and obstacles along the way, but thanks to the patience and perseverance of many, we overcame them. And we are now poised to give these agreements our final approval.

The Colombia, Panama and South Korea trade agreements will create tens of thousands of American jobs. They will give our ranchers, farmers, workers and businesses a competitive edge in three lucrative, fast-growing markets. They will increase U.S. exports by \$13 billion and boost our GDP by more than \$15 billion. They are what our economy needs right now.

The journey of these agreements began during the previous Administration. They negotiated robust commitments to open markets for American manufactured goods, farm products and services.

In 2007, Congress continued the journey when we negotiated the May 10 bipartisan trade deal. That deal amended these trade agreements to include the strongest labor and environmental provisions of any trade agreement in the world.

But after the agreements were signed, obstacles remained. American ranchers, workers, and businesses still could not compete on a level playing field. American beef and autos faced entrenched barriers. Labor conditions in Colombia had improved, but problems persisted. And serious concerns remained about tax evasion and money laundering in Panama. President Obama and his Administration worked with Congress to tackle these problems.

We improved access for U.S. beef by creating a fund to promote beef sales in Korea and committing to remove unscientific barriers. We eliminated more non-tariff barriers on U.S. autos in Korea. We negotiated a Labor Action Plan with Colombia to protect workers and worker rights. And we signed an agreement with Panama to improve tax transparency.

With these concerns addressed, only one hurdle remained: Renewing Trade Adjustment Assistance, or TAA.

When workers lose their jobs because of foreign competition, TAA gives them the job training, income support and health benefits they need to find new employment. Since 2009 alone, nearly 450,000 American workers have been eligible for TAA. And despite the Great Recession, more than half of these workers have found new jobs.

TAA has been a pillar of American trade policy for five decades. It has broad support. But the program expired in February. Congress has never voted to approve one trade agreement, much less three, without the worker protections of TAA in place. Without TAA, Congress could not pass the trade agreements.

But perseverance again paid off. In June, I negotiated an agreement with my good friend Dave Camp, the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Our agreement renewed all of the core provisions of TAA. Two weeks ago, the Senate approved our agreement with 69 votes. That vote removed the last obstacle and allowed the President to submit the trade agreements to Congress.

No one has worked harder to get these trade agreements approved than American farmers. Take Gordon Stoner, a wheat farmer from Overlook, Montana. In May, Gordon left his wheat farm in the middle of spring planting to testify before this Committee about the Colombia free trade agreement.

He told us that American farmers are losing the Colombian market to their competitors from Argentina, Brazil, and Canada. He explained that these countries have signed their own deals with Colombia that give their farmers a competitive advantage over ours. But Gordon, like all American farmers, is nothing if not patient and perseverant. He told us that if we approve the Colombia FTA, our farmers will recapture this vital market.

The International Trade Commission agrees. They estimate that the Colombia agreement will increase the value of U.S. grain sales to Colombia by up to 80 percent.

Finally, we cannot forget the patience and perseverance of our FTA partners. Earlier this year, I visited Colombia and met with President Santos, members of his cabinet, labor leaders and businessmen and women.

I saw a country healing from the wounds of war and expanding its economy. I saw a country returning land to poor farmers and compensating victims of violence. And I saw a country stemming the flow of illegal narcotics and the violence that accompanied it.

In just ten years, Colombia has moved from the brink of being a failed state to becoming a leading nation in the hemisphere. Despite this progress, the outlook for U.S. approval of the Colombia FTA was very much in doubt at the time of my visit in February. The Colombians were deeply and rightly concerned. But I gave them my word that the three FTAs, including the Colombia FTA, would move forward together, or not at all. Today, their patience and perseverance have paid off.

The Committee is also considering the nominations of four trade officials today. Each of the nominees has also shown uncommon patience and perseverance in reaching this point.

Michael Punke, a distinguished Montanan, has been nominated to be Deputy U.S. Trade Representative and Ambassador to the World Trade Organization. Islam Siddiqui has been nominated to be the Chief

Agricultural Negotiator in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Paul Piquado has been nominated to be the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Import Administration. And David Johanson has been nominated to be a member of the International Trade Commission.

Each of these nominees has the energy, skill, creativity, and commitment to fulfill the important roles they have been asked to perform. I strongly support each nominee and hope that the Senate will act quickly to confirm them.

So today as we take a major step forward to advance America's trade agenda, let us remember the wisdom of John Quincy Adams. Let us show once again that difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish in the face of patience and perseverance. Let us approve the free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea. Let us boost U.S. exports and create jobs here at home. And let us favorably report these four nominees to help carry our trade agenda forward.

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