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BAUCUS MEETS WITH COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT, HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR U.S.-COLOMBIA FTA, RENEWING ANDEAN TRADE PREFERENCES

Finance Chairman Tells President Santos He's Committed to Passing Colombia FTA, ATPA

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today met with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos. Baucus told President Santos he is committed to passing the U.S. – Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as soon as possible this year. He also talked with President Santos about the devastating flooding that has ravaged much of the country and pledged to continue working to renew the Andean Trade Preferences Act, which will boost the country's economy, helping accelerate rebuilding and recovery. Baucus is traveling to Colombia and Brazil this week, along with more than a dozen Montana ranchers, farmers and businessmen and women, to identify ways to boost U.S. exports to the two countries and create the jobs America's economy needs to strengthen the economic recovery.

"Today I reiterated to President Santos my commitment to passing the Free Trade Agreement between our two countries as soon as possible this year," said Baucus. **"Programs already exist for Colombian products to come to the U.S. duty free, but ranchers, farmers and business owners in Montana and across the country are at a disadvantage because their products don't enjoy that same benefit. Passing the Colombia FTA will create new markets for American products, increase demand and create jobs in the U.S., which is why we need to act quickly. During my trip, I met with labor leaders and criminal prosecutors, and I told President Santos that it is important for Colombia to build on the progress it has made protecting labor rights and reducing labor violence and this FTA will accelerate this progress. I also made a commitment to President Santos to continue fighting to renew the Andean Trade Preference Act to help Colombia's people and increase opportunities for both our economies to grow."**

Baucus has been a leader in Senate efforts to pass the Colombia FTA to expand access to the Colombian market for ranchers, farmers and businesses in the United States. More than 10,000 U.S. companies, most of which are small businesses, export to Colombia and would benefit from increased access to that market.

Programs exist to permit most Colombian exports to the United States to receive duty-free treatment, so the FTA would level the playing field for ranchers, farmers and businesses in Montana and across the United States. The Colombia FTA is particularly critical to U.S. agricultural producers. Historically, Colombia has been a top export market for U.S. wheat producers, but despite its advantages, the United States is already losing its share of the Colombian wheat market to Argentina and Canada. The U.S. share of the Colombian wheat market has already dropped from 73 percent in 2008 to 43 percent in 2010, and U.S. farmers could lose the entire market if the FTA is not approved soon. The Colombia FTA would also benefit U.S. manufacturing firms by immediately eliminating duties on 80 percent of exports to Colombia, with the remainder eliminated over time.

Baucus has also been a leader in Senate efforts to renew the Andean Trade Preference Program (ATPA), which encourages Andean countries, including Colombia, to diversify their economies and shift away from illicit drug production by giving their goods duty-free treatment in the U.S. market. In 2010, more than \$14.4 billion in imports entered the U.S. market duty free under ATPA. ATPA renewal is particularly timely and important in helping Colombia confront the devastating flooding that has affected many regions of the country. More than 300 Colombians have died in this devastating flooding, millions of homes have been damaged and hundreds of thousands Colombians have been left homeless. Baucus plans to tour the flood-affected areas during his trip and again renew his commitment to extend the Andean Trade Preference Program.

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