

Reason for Optimism for the Trade Agenda

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We have some sense of optimism on the state of the U.S. trade agenda today. On Friday [The New York Times ran an editorial](#) urging the Administration to move quickly on all three pending free trade agreements (FTAs) with Colombia, Korea and Panama.

The Colombian government is facing the first of several deadlines as laid out in the “action plan” they reached with the Obama Administration recently – and I’m betting they’ll deliver completely and flawlessly. And when they do, we would argue that there should be no delay in beginning the approval process of that agreement in Congress. The Korea FTA is ready to go as well, and it can join the Colombian agreement in receiving quick Congressional consideration (they can share a cab to the Hill, perhaps).

But leave room in that cab for the Panama agreement. Today [USTR Kirk sent a letter to Congress](#) indicating that USTR “has completed its preparatory work on the Agreement and stands ready to begin technical discussions with Members of Congress on the draft implementing bill and draft Statement of Administrative Action.” That means, let’s get to work on Panama. USTR Kirk has already sent such a letter on Korea. Following the April 22 action plan efforts by Colombia, could we see such a letter on the Colombia FTA as well? Within a few days, all three free trade agreements could be able to begin the journey to Congress for approval. We think “should” rather than “could.”

And it should be swift and bipartisan approval – there is strong support for all three agreements in Congress. President Obama has spoken in support of Korea and Colombia, and we expect he might have something similar to say about Panama now that the Tax Information and Exchange Agreement (TIEA) has been ratified. The longer we wait, the longer barriers to our manufactured goods exports remain in place, even as some of our competitors race to implement their own agreements that will give them preferential treatment. The U.S. International Trade Commission estimates that \$13 billion annually in new exports will be the result of the three agreements. \$9 billion or so of that will be in manufactured goods exports. That means jobs in factories all around the country.

As Ways and Means Chairman David Camp says in [a news release today](#), “The more we delay, the more we lose. The time to act is now.” Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee Chairman Kevin Brady adds “We are on the home stretch, and I welcome the opportunity to show the world that we once again have a market-opening trade agenda that creates U.S. jobs.” The NYT editorial noted “[t]hese agreements are good for the American economy and good for national security. Congress should waste no more time and approve them.”

We couldn’t agree more. Congratulations to the Martinelli Administration in Panama for quickly moving the TIEA through its ratification process. They’ve delivered what they were asked to do. We fully believe the Santos Administration in Colombia will just as quickly deliver what they’ve been asked to do in the recent action plan before April 22. With these actions, they should join Korea and move to Congress, where they will have a warm reception. Chairman Camp has repeatedly called for passage of all three FTAs by July 1, a proposal we strongly endorse. Put all three FTAs in a cab and drive them straight to Capitol Hill. Because when it comes to removing foreign barriers to U.S. manufactured goods — the meter’s running.