

Brady Statement For the Record: Hearing on the Pending Free Trade Agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea and the Creation of U.S. Jobs

Tuesday, January 25, 2011

There has been a lot of speculation that trade may be one area where bipartisanship can carry the day. I think that is right: this is an area in which Republicans and Democrats should be able to work together to create thousands of good-paying American jobs. I hope that the President is serious about moving a more ambitious trade agenda forward, because, as I've been saying for several months now, he'll find a willing partner in House Republicans.

The first step in this partnership is to find a way to get the three pending free trade agreements approved and implemented without further delay. A lot of very good bipartisan work went into resolving the autos issues that had initially raised concerns in the U.S.-South Korea trade agreement. I hope we can work together in a similar bipartisan manner to quickly move the Colombia and Panama agreements forward.

Expanding opportunities for U.S. exporters and workers is a key tool in getting our economy back on track and getting more Americans back to work. Together we can and must press ahead on multiple fronts so we can compete to win abroad. Opening new markets for our goods and services is essential for us to achieve the Administration's goal of doubling U.S. exports by 2014, which the President has said will create two million new jobs.

Opening new markets through these agreements represents considerable new economic opportunity for American businesses, workers, farmers, ranchers, and consumers. At the same time, the agreements help further our critical strategic partnerships and advance broader American foreign policy interests.

The Administration deserves a lot of credit for its careful auto negotiations, which resolved most of the opposition to the South Korea agreement. I'm disappointed, though, in the state of our pending Latin American trade agreements. I'm very concerned that the Administration's silence on the trade agreements with Colombia and Panama suggests to those countries – and to the world – that the United States has no Latin American trade agenda and is an unreliable trading partner.

Panama has made real and meaningful progress in increasing transparency in its financial sector, culminating in the Tax Information Exchange Agreement it signed with the U.S. Treasury late last year. But the Administration has not mentioned a schedule for submitting that agreement to Congress.

As for Colombia, I am extremely concerned about the Administration's failure to set a timetable and work plan for resolving outstanding concerns and submitting the agreement to Congress. We've seen no roadmap, no timetable, and no communication by the Administration to Colombia about what it wants the Colombians to do. This must change. I also believe that we and the Administration must acknowledge the tremendous progress that Colombia has made on violence, including against members of labor unions.

The Administration's absence from the Latin American region is both troubling and mystifying. Some of our greatest trade policy successes have occurred right here in our hemisphere. This absence has created a vacuum that others, like Canada, the EU, and China, are rushing to fill, to the detriment of American workers and American companies, who are being left behind because of our failure to act on these agreements. As we sit idly by, countries in the region are negotiating trade agreements with each other and with some of America's biggest competitors. Let me be clear: While I welcome the President's commitment and action on the South Korea agreement, we need the same commitment and action from him on the Colombia and Panama agreements, and we need that now.