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Hoyer Wants Panama, Colombia FTAs Too

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md) urged the White House yesterday to send Congress all three pending free trade agreements, saying the FTAs with Colombia and Panama should be submitted either in advance of or along with the South Korea trade pact that President Obama now wants finished later this year (WTD, 6/29/10).

Mr. Hoyer told reporters he is glad the Administration wants to settle outstanding issues with Korea so it can be sent the pact to Congress for final approval either later this year or next.

The House Democratic leader said he made clear to White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel that the Colombia and Panama trade deals deserve equal attention with Korea, even though they are not as economically significant. "I would hope that the Colombia and Panamanian agreements would be considered either contemporaneously or prior to the consideration of the Korean agreement," he said.

Mr. Hoyer acknowledged he got no promises from the White House.

The Administration is committed to moving ahead with Colombia and Panama - but unlike with Korea, there is no timeline for getting the two Latin American pacts to Congress, Assistant Secretary of State Arturo Valenzuela said at a program sponsored by the Brookings Institution. Mr. Valenzuela said he is "confident" the two agreements will move forward.

Speaking to the NDN think tank a day earlier, Mr. Valenzuela said that it is up to Congress to decide when the trade agreements can move because lawmakers have concerns about the deals.

Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO yesterday reiterated its strong opposition to the US-Korea FTA. In a statement it said, "the agreement would exacerbate our already lopsided trade relationship with South Korea, putting at risk thousands of good US jobs in the auto, steel and other industrial sectors. The agreement phases out tariffs on goods and services between the two countries, but does not go nearly far enough in eliminating the nontariff barriers that currently prevent American products - especially autos - from entering the South Korean market fairly."

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