

**November 7, 2007**

**EDITORIAL**

## **Pass the Peruvian F.T.A.**

Congressional Democrats took their time, but more than a year after it was originally signed, the free trade agreement between the United States and Peru is finally due for a vote in the House of Representatives today.

Democrats should vote for it. While the agreement is expected to pass on the strength of a majority of Republican votes, it would be a pity if Democratic leaders were not able to muster a substantial number of votes in favor of a deal they played such a large role in making — one that is likely to boost American jobs and help relations with an ally in a challenging region of the world.

The Peruvian agreement has had a tortuous journey, entangled in the growing Democratic hostility toward trade. Peru had to amend the original deal to add commitments on labor rights and the environment. Charles Rangel, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, had to work hard to bring some of his colleagues on board.

Despite these efforts, some estimates put Democratic support at less than 100 votes.

Democrats are right to worry about the stagnation of workers' wages and to be concerned about those who lose their jobs because of increased competition from cheaper labor overseas. But these problems should be addressed through better education and training, a more robust social safety network and more progressive taxation to mitigate the impact of stagnating wages. Throttling trade would hurt more people than it would help.

The Peruvian deal would help expand trade between Peru and the United States, which today stands at about \$9 billion. It would give American businesses greater access to Peru's markets in everything from grains to tractors and other machinery.

Perhaps more important, the agreement would strengthen an essential ally in the combat against illegal narcotics in the Andes and tighten relations with one of the United States' few remaining friends in South America — where Venezuela's Hugo Chávez is gaining allies by spreading oil

wealth around. In an open letter, all eight living former secretaries of state urged Congress to approve the Peru deal.

There are other trade agreements waiting in the wings with South Korea and Panama, and Congress should approve them. The pending deal with Colombia should also pass once the government of Álvaro Uribe demonstrates progress in bringing to justice the paramilitary leaders guilty of human rights violations and their backers in the Colombian government.

A group of Democratic leaders from the Clinton administration and Congress recently sent a letter to Congressional Democrats pointing out that rejecting the trade agreements signed in Latin America “would set back regional U.S. interests for a generation.”

Their argument also works on a bigger map. It would be a folly for the United States to turn its back on trade. Democrats, who have taken control of Congress and might soon take the White House, should not lose sight of that fact.