

## **Rejecting trade treaty with Colombia won't bolster its stability**

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ISSUE: Free trade pact stymied by violence against labor.

Concerns about violence against organized labor in Colombia are valid. But so are concerns about violence, in general, in the South American country.

In fact, there's a reason why the term la violencia has been often used in Colombia to refer to decades of persistent violence. It's because, whether driven by a guerilla army determined to topple the government, or drug lords to defend their illicit trade, Colombians have suffered greatly as a result of the violence.

The United States has been an integral player in all this, on both sides. The U.S. government has supported the conflict against the drug cartels, most recently with the Plan Colombia aid package. U.S. consumers have supported the other side, the drug cartels, by purchasing cocaine and other narcotics.

For Congress to now say that it is disgusted by the violence, particularly against one sector of the Colombian population, and to use that argument to undermine a free trade treaty, is a travesty.

The free trade treaty ought to be considered on its merits. If it makes sense for the United States, then it should be approved.

In fact, lawmakers ought to take a wider view of the commercial pact beyond simple economics. For the United States to back out of the pact on political grounds would send the wrong message to a country that has been a key U.S. ally at a time when anti-U.S. critics, including Hugo Chávez in Venezuela next door, have increased their divisive vitriol.

Florida has much to gain from this treaty, in terms of financial services and trade through our ports. Our congressional leaders ought to be championing the treaty, not dissing it.

Unfortunately, there's a confused mix of economics and human rights advocacy. Shooting down a trade treaty with Colombia isn't the way to bolster stability and hasten an end to paramilitary attacks on civilians.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Raise human rights concerns, yes, but not by holding treaty hostage.