

[Who Supports the U.S.-Colombia Trade Agreement?](#)

By John Murphy

The answer: Lots of people. The Chamber is delighted that the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is winning broad support; President Obama will reportedly speak about this important accord in tonight's State of the Union address.

However, less attention has been given to the growing support for the two Latin FTAs. So here's a quick summary, with an emphasis on Colombia, in honor of the visit to Washington (and to the Chamber) by Colombian Vice President Angelino Garzón this week.

Bipartisan support for the U.S.-Colombia and U.S.-Panama FTAs has been growing in Congress. Among Republicans, support is broad and deep:

- House Speaker John Boehner, Ways and Means Chairman Dave Camp, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, and Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch have long been outspoken supporters of the FTAs.
- House Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee Chairman Kevin Brady said this week: "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."

Support is also coming from leading Democrats, including:

- Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, who said this week: "We have delayed action on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement for too long -- now is the time to resolve outstanding issues and approve the Free Trade Agreement so American ranchers, farmers and workers can have a chance to compete."
- "I would hope that the Colombia and Panamanian agreements would be considered either contemporaneously or prior to consideration (of) the Korean agreement," then-House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said last June.
- Last June, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pledged "a very intensive effort to try to obtain the votes to get the free trade agreement with Colombia finally ratified."

More than 1,000 companies and business and agriculture organizations representing every sector of the U.S. economy and every state in the union have joined the Latin America Trade Coalition, which is pressing for approval of the U.S.-Colombia and U.S.-Panama FTAs. In fact, more than 400 state and local chambers of commerce support the two agreements. There is almost no opposition to the two agreements in the business community.

More than 50 agricultural groups representing U.S. farmers and ranchers who produce everything from apples to zucchini have called vigorously for Congress to approve the two agreements, with no sector of American agriculture in active opposition. The American Farm Bureau Federation estimates the U.S.-Colombia and U.S.-Panama FTAs will boost U.S. agricultural exports by more than \$1 billion once fully implemented.

More than 100 national and local U.S. newspapers have endorsed the agreements in the four years since the FTAs were signed. The New York Times wrote two years ago that

“Congress should pass the Colombian free-trade agreement now” (“Pass the Colombian Trade Pact,” November 17, 2008). The Washington Post more recently editorialized: “This is getting ridiculous... The Obama administration, supposedly intent on boosting exports and the domestic jobs they create, must stop equivocating and add Panama and Colombia to its free-trade priorities in the new Congress” (“Losing out in Latin America,” December 21, 2010).

Thomas “Mack” McLarty III, who served as chief of staff to President Clinton, and Nelson Cunningham, who was an aide to President Clinton and to then-Sen. Joseph Biden, wrote this week in the Wall Street Journal that “the president should commit to advancing the pending trade agreements with Colombia and Panama right now, instead of leaving them until later as some in his administration would prefer. Why bother taking a half-measure on trade?”

The U.S.-Colombia FTA was endorsed in 2008 by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the national voice of the mayors of more than 1,000 American cities; the American Legislative Exchange Council, the nation’s largest nonpartisan association of state legislators; and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the largest and oldest Hispanic organization in the United States. Five former Commanders of the U.S. Southern Command have called for approval of the U.S.-Colombia FTA.

I could go on, but you get the point. The door is open, and the support is there in Congress and across the country: The White House just needs to take a deep breath and move forward.