

## **Editorial: Peru trade deal done; two more need action**

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### **San Antonio Express-News**

In the wake of Hugo Chávez's electoral setback in turning Venezuela into a socialist dictatorship, Congress has sent the right message to one Latin American nation.

The Senate voted overwhelmingly last week to pass a free trade agreement with Peru. The Senate vote follows passage by the House last month by a similarly large margin.

The pact will benefit consumers and workers in both countries. Eighty percent of U.S. exports to Peru will become duty free immediately.

In addition to solidifying the duty-free status of most Peruvian goods, the agreement creates new environmental and labor standards in Peru — standards that Democratic leaders in Congress fought to toughen.

Beyond the impact on the two countries, the U.S.-Peru agreement's expansion of Western Hemispheric free trade offers a compelling free market alternative to paternalistic and socialistic efforts to fight poverty. Creating more and better paying jobs in Latin America and improving the standard of living is far preferable to making poor citizens permanent wards of the state.

On this note, Congress can follow through by finally passing two other long-delayed free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama. Prosperity is a powerful antidote against authoritarian rulers pushing failed economic policies. Free markets empower free people and free societies.

The least the United States can do for friendly democracies in Latin America is bolster them with free trade agreements that, at the same time, also bolster our own economy.