

Knowing your interest in international trade, I wanted to bring to your attention this week's meeting between President Obama and Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. The two leaders met to discuss U.S.-Colombian relations and the already negotiated free trade agreement (FTA) between our two countries. I'm disappointed to say that after the meeting, despite some personal compliments for President Uribe, President Obama appears to have again moved the goalposts on the U.S.-Colombian FTA, saying that more needs to be done to protect labor leaders and human rights.

Blocking the agreement ignores the tremendous progress brought about by President Uribe. The Heritage Foundation describes him as "the architect and anchor for much of Colombia's positive changes over the last decade." His efforts have changed how Colombia has dealt with the drug trade. Under his leadership human rights have improved considerably, with violence dropping significantly thanks to a renewed commitment to law and order. I believe a stronger relationship with the United States will only further Colombia's progress. By passing the FTA and strengthening both economies, we will be better able to speed up the human rights changes we wish to see in Colombia. Equally important, U.S. influence in Central and South America has been slipping, while Europe, China, Russia, and Iran have expanded their trade relations in those areas. By delaying passage of the FTA we leave ourselves vulnerable to being frozen out of an already volatile region that in some places has become less friendly to the United States.

It is also important to note that Colombia currently has full access to our markets, yet U.S. producers do not have full access to theirs. The FTA would simply level that playing field, breaking down barriers to trade for U.S. producers and manufacturers, including farmers and ranchers in Northern California. During such a serious economic downturn, we need to do everything we can to promote economic opportunities for American workers, farmers, and small businesses.

Trade helps the United States maintain our position as the world's economic leader by creating and supporting American jobs and bolstering economic growth here at home. I do not believe we can afford to stand idly by as other countries are moving ahead to conclude agreements that would give their workers and businesses a competitive advantage over ours. We need to pass the U.S.-Colombian FTA now.

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