

Pelosi, Hoyer, Rangel, and Levin Statement on Trade: "We cannot support the Colombia FTA at this time."

For Immediate Release

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Washington, D.C. – House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles Rangel, and Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee Chairman Sander Levin issued the following statement today on Democratic trade policy

Peru and Panama

“The Peru-U.S. Free Trade Agreement that Peru’s legislature ratified this week is an historic accomplishment in trade policy and in our bilateral relationship with a strong friend in a region vital to U.S. economic and national security. The agreement has great potential to strengthen the economic ties between our two great countries and to improve standards of living in both countries. It also reflects long-standing Democratic priorities with the inclusion of enforceable, internationally recognized labor rights and environmental standards.

“We have every expectation that, in the coming weeks, both the Peruvian Parliament and U.S. Congress will do whatever it takes to make certain that the agreement is implemented fully. In the United States, the Constitution confers upon Congress the authority to regulate foreign commerce under Article I, Section 8. In that regard, Chairman Rangel intends to lead a bipartisan delegation of Members of Congress to Peru and Panama this August to meet with representatives of those countries’ respective legislatures and executive branches, and to provide them the opportunity to confer with Members of Congress.

“We are hopeful that this trip will lead to the swift passage this fall in Peru and Panama of the necessary legislation to change laws and implement fully the respective agreements, so these agreements can come into effect promptly thereafter.

South Korea

“Tomorrow, the United States and the Republic of Korea will sign a free trade agreement. Properly negotiated, a South Korea-U.S. FTA (KFTA) would provide key benefits to American workers, farmers, and businesses.

“Unfortunately, the KFTA as currently negotiated is a missed opportunity. The agreement does not address in an effective manner the persistent problem of non-tariff barriers, particularly those blocking access of U.S. manufactured products in South Korea’s market. That is particularly the case in the automotive sector where last year, South Korea exported more than 700,000 cars into the U.S., while the United States exported fewer than 5,000. These numbers illustrate deep-seated and fundamental problems in market access and a heavily one-sided trading relationship that can be expected only to undercut support for the agreement far beyond the automotive sector.

“As a consequence, we cannot support the KFTA as currently negotiated.

Colombia

“With regard to the Colombia FTA, the House of Representatives recently passed the 2008 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, which redirects U.S. foreign assistance in Colombia. All of us regard Colombia as a crucial ally in a region that deserves our active engagement, and the bill represents an effort to have U.S. funds help address the root of numerous problems there. There is widespread concern in Congress about the level of violence in Colombia, the impunity, the lack of investigations and prosecutions, and the role of the paramilitary. Issues of this nature cannot solely be resolved through language in a trade agreement.

“We believe there must first be concrete evidence of sustained results on the ground in Colombia, and Members of Congress will continue working with all interested parties to help achieve this end before consideration of any FTA. Consequently, we cannot support the Colombia FTA at this time.

Trade Policy

“We will continue working to improve our trade policy, while at the same time addressing the increased economic insecurity faced by American families. We expect to move forward in the near future with legislation to address the growing imbalance in trade with China, strengthen overall enforcement of U.S. trade agreements and U.S. trade laws, as

well as overhaul and improve support to ensure that American workers and firms remain the most competitive in the world.

“Our legislative priorities do not include the renewal of fast track authority. Before that debate can even begin, we must expand the benefits of globalization to all Americans, including taking the actions outlined above. We hope that the Administration will join us in these efforts.”