

## **Defending Democratic Values We Share With Colombia**

*President Bush Commends President Uribe On His Commitment To Provide A Better Future For Colombian People, Urges House Speaker Nancy Pelosi To Allow A Vote On U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement*

**Today, President Bush honored Colombia's Independence Day.** Colombia and the United States have had a long history of close ties in the nearly two centuries since the United States and Colombia forged a friendship. It is the responsibility of free nations to support one another against those who would undermine freedom, and the United States is committed to the security of Colombia and to defeating the forces of terror. Approving the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement (FTA) is one the most important steps that America can take to show its support for Colombia. The U.S.-Colombia FTA will advance our national security and bring economic gains for both countries. Congress should give this steadfast ally the support it deserves and quickly act to approve this agreement.

### **The United States And Colombia Have Worked Together To Combat Violence And Instability**

**President Alvaro Uribe has been a strong and capable partner in fighting drugs, crime, and terror.** He has demonstrated that he is deeply committed to providing a better future for the people of Colombia. Since President Uribe took office in 2002, the Colombian government reports that homicides have dropped by 40 percent, kidnappings by more than 80 percent, and terrorist attacks by more than 70 percent.

- **Earlier this month, President Uribe and his Administration scored an impressive triumph.** Members of the Colombian military successfully rescued 15 hostages – including three Americans – being held by the FARC. The success of this rescue mission underscores the progress the Colombian government has made. Just this past Sunday, more than a million Colombians marched in their nation's streets, calling on the FARC to release its remaining hostages and stop practicing terror.
- **Reforms to Colombia's criminal justice system have improved the effectiveness of the justice system and dramatically increased conviction rates.** Since President Uribe took office, Colombia has also extradited over 680 criminal suspects – mostly for drug trafficking – to the United States. Just this May, President Uribe extradited 15 paramilitary leaders to the United States to face drug trafficking and other charges.
- **Labor conditions in Colombia have significantly improved.** Homicides of labor unionists dropped 80 percent, from approximately 186 in 2002, the year Uribe took office, to fewer than 40 in 2007. In response to concerns over attacks on labor unionists, the Prosecutor General's Office established a sub-unit to examine these cases. In addition, approximately 1,950 labor unionists are receiving protection under the Colombian Ministry of Interior and Justice's \$39.5 million protection program. One third of this program's budget – \$13.1 million – goes to protect this group.

### **Colombia's Economy Is Rebounding, And People's Lives Are Improving**

**Last year, Colombia's economy saw the largest growth rate in nearly three decades.** Unemployment and poverty are at their lowest levels in a decade.

**Colombia has laid the foundation for bringing government services to areas retaken from illegal armed groups and increased investment in alternative development, human rights protection, and social services.**

### **To Demonstrate America's Good Faith, Congress Must Approve The Colombia Free Trade Agreement**

**The single most important step we can take to strengthen our relationship with Colombia is for Congress to approve the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement that our countries signed more than a year and a half ago.** Over the past six years, President Uribe has transformed his country from the brink of a failing state to a stable democracy with a growing economy. He has partnered with the United States in the fight against drugs and terror and done everything the United States asked of him, including revising the free trade agreement to include some of the most rigorous labor and environmental protections in history.

- **Opening markets is extremely important during this time of economic uncertainty.** Last year, exports accounted for more than 40 percent of America's total economic growth. Over 90 percent of imports from Colombia enter our country duty-free, but the 10,000 American businesses that export to Colombia – including 8,000 small and mid-sized businesses – face tariffs of up to 35 percent, with rates even higher for some agricultural products. Once the agreement is in effect, Colombia will eliminate tariffs on more than 80 percent of U.S. exports of industrial and consumer goods immediately and 100 percent of U.S. exports over time.
- **Tariffs imposed on U.S. exports to Colombia are estimated to have exceeded \$1.1 billion while the trade agreement has awaited Congressional approval.** Failure to approve the free trade agreement is hurting American businesses that want to sell their products in Colombia. Leveling the playing field would make American products more competitive in Colombia and support higher-paying jobs here in the U.S.
- **Approving the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement is an urgent national security priority.** While the FARC has seen its power reduced, the terrorists are still actively plotting against the Colombian government. It is in America's interest to stand by Colombia in the face of this threat, and the best way to do so is for Congress to allow a vote on the Colombia free trade agreement.