

**President Barack Obama
Speaker of the House John Boehner
House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell:**

**Dear Mr. President; Speaker Boehner; Minority Leader Pelosi; Majority Leader Reid;
Minority Leader McConnell.**

The signatories to this letter are 6 former United States Trade Representatives; 2 former White House Envoys to the Americas; and 10 former Assistant Secretaries of State for the Western Hemisphere. We have served in these positions under 6 U.S. Presidents, Democratic and Republican, including Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush 41, Clinton, and Bush 43.

We are united in our belief that prompt ratification of the pending Free Trade Agreements with Colombia and Panama is in the national interest of the United States. Colombian and Panama have been strong, faithful allies to the United States. For example, Colombia has partnered with the United States to help the Mexican government defeat violent drug cartels along the U.S.-Mexico border. In Afghanistan, at U.S. request, Colombia has provided counter-narcotics training and assistance to the Karzai government. And Colombia Chairs the U.N. Committee implementing U.S. backed sanctions against Iran.

It has been over 5 years since the U.S. negotiated its FTA with Colombia and nearly 5 years since Panama. Further delay in ratifying these agreements risks damaging our relations with Colombia, Panama, and throughout the hemisphere by raising doubts about America's reliability as a partner. Prompt ratification will send the positive message that the United States stands by its allies and values its relationships in the Americas.

Ratification of these agreements also will open markets for exports of U.S. products and help spur economic recovery and job creation here at home. Conversely, failure to ratify these agreements will further diminish U.S. exports and market share in Latin America and lead to further loss of U.S. jobs. The record of the last several years clearly supports this view.

Colombia has been the largest purchaser of U.S. agricultural products in South America. In the five years prior to 2008, U.S. exports of wheat, corn, soybeans, soy oil were expanding 38 percent per year, accounting for nearly \$4 billion a year in U.S. exports. In recent years, however, while the United States failed to move forward to ratify its trade agreement with Colombia, Colombia concluded trade negotiations with Canada, Chile, and the European Union, and implemented new trade agreements with the Mercosur bloc: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Each of these countries is a competitor with the United States for agricultural exports to Colombia.

As a result, between 2008 and 2009, total U.S. exports of agricultural products to Colombia dropped by 48%. That decline in U.S. exports continues with an additional drop of 45% in 2010. We have seen U.S. exports plummet while Colombia's imports of those products have held steady and Argentina and Brazil's sales to Colombia have climbed by over 20 percent. In dollar figures, U.S. exports of corn, wheat, and soybeans to Colombia dropped from \$1.1bn in 2008 to \$343mm in 2010, a decline of 68%. That nearly \$700 million in lost exports costs U.S. jobs.

With the implementation of Colombia's agreement with Argentina, U.S. market share in the Colombian market for corn, wheat, and soybeans, where Argentina and the United States primarily compete, fell from 71% in 2008 to 27% through the first 10 months of 2010. During the same period, Argentina's market share jumped 37% nearly matching the 44% loss in share by the United States. Unless the Administration and Congress act quickly, when Canada's agreement with Colombia comes into effect this year, American farmers and ranchers risk losing more of their market share and sales.

In the case of Panama, over 88% of U.S. exports of consumer and industrial products to that country will become duty free immediately upon ratification of the U.S.-Panama Free Trade Agreement. Key U.S. sectors which will receive duty free treatment immediately include aircraft, construction equipment, fertilizers, medical and scientific equipment. In addition, more than half of U.S farm exports to Panama will become duty free immediately giving American farmers and ranchers an advantage over competitors in Canada and the EU. An analysis by the U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) estimates that if the U.S. ratifies its FTA with Panama, U.S. exports of grain to Panama will increase by 61%; cars and light trucks by 43%; meat products by 62%; and processed foods by 36%. While opening these markets to U.S. exports, these FTA's also require Colombia and Panama countries to treat U.S. investors with fairness and transparency

The time to ratify the Colombian and Panamanian FTA's is long overdue. Therefore, we respectfully urge you to agree on a firm deadline for ratifying the Colombian and Panamanian Free Trade Agreements within the first half of 2011.

Respectfully yours,

Signatories:

United States Trade Representatives:

The Honorable William Brock 1981-1985 (also former Senator, Congressman, Secretary of Labor)

The Honorable Clayton Yeutter 1985-1989 (also former Secretary of Agriculture)

The Honorable Carla Hills 1989-1993 (also former Secretary of HUD)

The Honorable Mickey Kantor 1993-1996 (also former Secretary of Commerce)

The Honorable Charlene Barshevsky 1996-2001

The Honorable Susan Schwab 2006-2009

Special Envoys for the Americas

The Honorable Thomas F. McLarty 1996-1998 (also former White House Chief of Staff; Counselor to the President)

The Honorable Otto Reich 2002-2004

Assistant Secretaries of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs *

The Honorable Harry Schlaudeman 1976-1977 (also former Ambassador to: Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Nicaragua)

The Honorable Terence Todman 1977-1978 (also former Ambassador to: Argentina, Costa Rica)

The Honorable Viron Vaky 1978-1979 (also former Ambassador to Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela)

The Honorable Langhorne Motley 1983-1985 (also former Ambassador to Brazil)

The Honorable Bernard Aronson 1989-1993

The Honorable Alexander F. Watson 1993-1996

The Honorable Jeffrey Davidow 1996-1998 (also former Ambassador to Mexico, Venezuela)

The Honorable Peter Romero 1998-2001 (also former Ambassador to Ecuador)

The Honorable Otto Reich 2001-2002 (also former Ambassador to Venezuela)

The Honorable Roger Noriega 2003-2005

(*The title for this position was Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs until 2001 when Canada was added and the Bureau was renamed Western Hemisphere Affairs)

