



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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For Immediate Release

Friday, Aug. 1, 2003

Grassley, Colleagues Seek Consideration of a U.S.-Colombia Trade Agreement

WASHINGTON – Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Committee on Finance, and several of his colleagues today urged the United States Trade Representative to consider a U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement. The text of their bipartisan letter follows.

August 1, 2003

The Honorable Robert B. Zoellick
United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20508

Dear Ambassador Zoellick:

We are writing to ask for your serious consideration of initiating negotiations with Colombia on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as you consider possible future FTA candidates. While we recognize that your agenda is already extensive, there are compelling reasons to consider a bilateral agreement with Colombia.

Priority should be given to negotiating FTAs with those countries that offer the most immediate, durable and wide-ranging economic and trade benefits to the United States and that support our economic and political principles in the world community. Colombia certainly seems to meet these important criteria. It is the second most populous country in South America and its economy is larger than Chile or the combined countries of the proposed U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement.

As the government of Colombia continues to work to bring peace and rule of law to its territory, it is important that new economic opportunities are also made available. Strengthening the economic ties between the United States and Colombia will bring greater political stability, decrease the dependence of Colombia on U.S. financial assistance, and provide improved access for U.S. businesses to Colombia.

There is no question that important benefits are already being realized as a result of our strong and growing bilateral economic relations, particularly since the renewal and expansion of the Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA) last year. ATPA is promoting the stability and prosperity of Colombia and the Andean region as a whole, and is supporting the continuing efforts against drugs and terrorism in the area. In fact, in 2002 Colombia was the largest market for U.S. exports in the region, representing 52 percent of U.S. exports to ATPA countries. Additionally, in the first quarter of 2003, bilateral trade between the U.S. and Colombia increased by 23 percent.

A bilateral pact with Colombia offers the United States increased opportunities for expanding exports of goods produced by American workers, farmers and businesses and sets a basis for long term investment in bilateral trade. It offers a very real possibility of setting precedents and building common and coordinated interests that we can build upon in subsequent negotiations, including the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the Doha Development Agenda of the World Trade Organization.

Therefore, we appreciate your consideration and look forward to discussing further the possibility of initiating negotiations with Colombia on a U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Grassley
Chairman

Orrin G. Hatch

Bob Graham

John Breaux

Trent Lott