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CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

**The Best Protection for both Colombian and
American Workers: Stronger, Market-Based
Democratic Institutions in Colombia**

**Testimony before the
Committee on Education and Labor
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My name is Jim Roberts. I am the Research Fellow for Economic Freedom and Growth in the Center for International Trade and Economics at The Heritage Foundation. Prior to joining Heritage in 2007, I served for 25 years as a Foreign Service Officer with the State Department and worked on a variety of economic and political issues in a number of Latin American countries. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

Colombia is one of America's best friends in the Caribbean–Andean region. The Colombian government – the oldest democracy in South America -- is solidly committed to its partnership with the United States and is following a similar path toward market-based democracy and strong rule of law that has made the United States the most prosperous nation in world history.

A decade ago Colombia was a nation wracked by violence and seized with fear, where drug kingpins, narco-funded leftist terrorists and guerillas, far-right paramilitaries, and an assortment of other gangsters operated with impunity, while government, military, and law enforcement officials cowered in their offices and barracks.

Today, by comparison, Colombia is again bustling with people who are excited to see their homeland growing more prosperous and, at last, more peaceful. The vast majority of Colombians are focused on enhancing their peace and prosperity by accelerating Colombia's incorporation into the globalized economy. Interestingly, many of these pro-globalization Colombians are unionized workers enjoying the prosperity created in recent years by the hundreds of thousands of jobs in Colombian export industries (e.g., cut flowers, mining, petroleum products, coffee, textiles, sugar, and bananas).

In the intervening years, many things changed, but they can be summarized in a few words: Plan Colombia, President Alvaro Uribe, and a new spirit among the Colombian people. Plan Colombia is a bold, multi-year program begun in 1999 by former President Bill Clinton and President Andres Pastrana, Uribe's predecessor. Through this plan, which was continued and strengthened under former President George W. Bush, the two countries began rebuilding the Colombian state. Plan Colombia has helped the Colombian government regain control of territory and extend security to the towns and the countryside. Progress has been especially dramatic since 2002 when President Uribe took office and Congress significantly increased U.S. funding for Plan Colombia.

A History of Violence

Colombia's tragic history of violence in the modern era goes back to at least 1948, when revolutionaries began rioting to protest the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a lawyer and somewhat populist leftist politician who was running for president against the conservative oligarchy then in power.¹

¹Brian Latell, *After Fidel: Raul Castro and the Future of Cuba's Revolution: The Inside Story of Castro's Regime and Cuba's Next Leader* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 101–106.

Thousands perished in the *Bogotazo*, as the riots came to be known, including Colombian soldiers, revolutionaries, and innocent bystanders. Colombia's major political parties were unable to put a stop to the extreme levels of violence (*La Violencia*) triggered by the *Bogotazo* until a decade later in 1958, after more than 200,000 Colombians had been killed. The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of violent leftist guerilla warfare groups such as the Marxist-oriented Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Colombian Liberation Army (ELN) and M-19 movement. During this insurgency by the FARC and ELN, drug cartels in Cali and Medellin dramatically increased cocaine production and smuggling. Drug traffickers enlisted guerrillas to make direct assaults on the government as occurred in October 1985. By the late 1980s, Pablo Escobar, the notorious leader of the Medellin Cartel, had become the seventh richest man and the most feared terrorist in the world. His power was such that he threatened "to usurp the Colombian state."²

Colombians' penchant for resolving disputes through violence has many root causes, including the longstanding existence of criminal and violent narco-terror/trafficking gangs; the Colombian government's lack of effective control in the past over much of its vast territory (the combined size of California and Texas); the fiercely independent and stubborn nature of the average hard scrapple Colombian, who must carve out a living from often rough and inhospitable terrain; and the long history of class warfare that has been stoked, organized, and funded by Marxist revolutionary groups over the past 60 years. Other countries in the region have also been disproportionately affected by violence, for many of the same reasons.

Colombia's Ongoing Struggle for Modernity and Prosperity

The FARC is a long-time enemy of Colombian democracy. Long isolated in the Colombian jungles, FARC leaders are out of touch with the 21st century. They reject market-based democracy, individual freedoms, urban life, and modernity in general. Their visions of Colombia's future would follow in the footsteps of the apostles of revolutionary violence from Mao Zedong to Che Guevara. Colombia government officials say that negotiations with the FARC are very difficult, since there is little the government can offer to them.

FARC continued to pursue the overthrow of the government of Colombia during the 1990s, but more worldly FARC members also turned to the lucrative and fast-growing businesses of drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion. The resulting violence led some far-right landowners in Colombia to form paramilitaries to protect their property in the absence of effective governmental authority. The government's negotiations with the FARC ended in 2002 after the FARC turned a safe haven twice the size of El Salvador into a laboratory for violence, misrule, drug trafficking, and kidnapping.³

The best known of the paramilitary groups was the United Self-Defense Forces of

²Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 15.

³Author's notes from visit to Bogota, Columbia, December 2007.

Colombia (AUC),⁴ which waged war against the left and the government in the general chaos generated by the armed left and the drug trade. AUC members engaged in a vicious guerrilla campaign against the FARC and the ELN, drug traffickers, and the Colombian army. Some AUC members were also corrupted by the temptation of easy money from narco-trafficking, and a significant number of large landowners in Colombia who sponsored paramilitaries were the drug lords themselves. The combination of FARC, drug traffickers, and paramilitaries nearly destroyed the Colombian state.

Defending Market-based Democracy in Colombia

The restoration of order and civilian authority has allowed President Uribe's free market policies to bear fruit, and economic growth in Colombia has taken off. The gross domestic product (GDP) has been growing at an increasing rate since Uribe took office, reaching an estimated 7 percent in 2007⁵ before falling back slightly last year in the wake of the worldwide economic slowdown. Colombia's economic growth has been spurred by the duty-free access it has enjoyed under the Andean Trade Preference and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA), [which] gives Colombia access to the U.S. market as a way to reduce poverty and fight the drug trade."⁶

The *2009 Index of Economic Freedom*, which was recently published by The Heritage Foundation and *The Wall Street Journal* and scored 179 countries worldwide, ranked Colombia's economy at 62.3 out of a possible 100 (with 0 equaling "repressed" and 100 indicating "free"), making it the world's 72nd freest economy. Colombia is ranked 15th out of 29 countries in the Latin America/Caribbean region.⁷ By comparison, neighboring Venezuela's score fell all the way to the bottom of the *2009 Index*, to 174th place (just ahead of Cuba)⁸, while Ecuador was not much higher ranked at 137th out of 179 countries.⁹

For the first time in memory people are enjoying the freedom of safely walking Colombia's once mean streets. Uribe's popularity has soared along with the economy, while the favorable rating of the FARC has plummeted to almost zero.¹⁰

The U.S. - Colombia Free Trade Agreement

To stabilize market-based democracy, President Uribe and former President George W. Bush negotiated the U.S.–Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which the two governments

⁴Peter DeShazo, Phillip McLean, and Tanya Primiani, *Back from the Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1997-2007* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2007), p. 6, at www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/071112-backfromthebrink-web.pdf.

⁵International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2008, at www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2008/01/weodata/index.aspx (April 9, 2008).

⁶Christopher A. Padilla, Under Secretary for International Trade, U.S. Department of Commerce "Outlook on the Americas 2008," remarks at Association of American Chambers of Commerce in Latin America, Coral Gables, Florida, January 24, 2008, at www.ita.doc.gov/press/speeches/padilla_012408.asp (April 14, 2008).

⁷Terry Miller and Kim R. Holmes, *2009 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company, Inc., 2009), pp. 135-136, at www.heritage.org/research/features/index/countries.cfm.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 423-424

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164

¹⁰ Author's notes from visit to Bogota, Colombia, December 2007.

signed in February 2006. It is much more than just a simple trade agreement. The Colombia FTA would help the United States complete a contiguous free trade zone along the Pacific Rim from Canada to Chile and further stabilize many Latin nations from Mexico through Central America and into the Andean region in their struggles against both the extreme poverty in segments of their populations and the malignant effects of narco-terror on their societies. Importantly, the FTA would also increase U.S. exports to Colombia and would seal a deeper partnership between two nations that are long-time friends and great defenders of market-based democracy. The FTA would fortify a bulwark against the rising tide of Chávism that nearly surrounds Columbia and threatens to undermine U.S. hemispheric interests.

Regrettably, Congress has delayed approval of the U.S.–Colombia FTA. Protectionist U.S. labor unions and anti-globalization leftist groups have joined with far-left allies in the region to try to block Congressional approval of the FTA.

On the surface at least, their main argument against the FTA is that a history of violence against leaders of Colombian trade unions and allegations that the Colombian government has tolerated or even sanctioned that violence should disqualify Colombia from further consideration for a FTA with the United States. However, these opponents conspicuously ignore the historical context of the violence (both within Colombia as well as in the region) as well as the considerable progress the Uribe government has made in reducing it.

Stronger Democratic Institutions in Colombia Will Reduce Violence

FTA opponents place heavy emphasis on the tragic history of violence against Colombian labor leaders and the alleged impunity for their government assailants. All of Colombian society, including union members, has clearly suffered from the horrifically high murder rate of the past few decades. However, more than half of all union members are in the Colombian public sector, with teachers comprising the largest union in the public sector. Given the nature of their work and the lack of any direct connection to paramilitaries sponsored by large landowners, most killings of teachers were likely the result of apolitical, “normal” motives (e.g., robbery and crimes of passion).

Over the years certain labor union members and leaders were undeniably targeted for assassination by paramilitaries and others in Colombia. Yet while the AFL-CIO reports the overall toll of violence against teachers and other union members, it fails note that the vast majority of the “2,500 murders of trade unionists since 1986”¹¹ occurred prior to 2001. According to statistics from the Embassy of Colombia, the number of murders of union members in Colombia has dropped drastically since 2001, one year before Colombian President Álvaro Uribe was sworn into office. In 2001 and 2007, union killings totaled roughly 200 killings annually. The number fell by half in 2003 and has declined since then.¹²

¹¹James Parks, “Act Now to Stop Colombia Free Trade Deal,” AFL-CIO Weblog, March 24, 2008, at <http://blog.aflcio.org/2008/03/24/act-now-to-stop-colombia-free-trade-deal> (April 5, 2008).

¹²Embassy of Colombia, “Progress Report: Strengthening the Rights, Benefits and Security of Unions,” October 2007, and the Colombia Ministry of Social Protection, cited in Daniel Griswold and Juan Carlos Hidalgo, “A U.S.–

By the time President Uribe took office in 2002, almost 29,000 Colombians were being murdered annually. Many politicians from Uribe's own political party were among the dead. While a few teachers were certainly killed because of their leftist ideology, a large number of the killings should not be included in the AFL-CIO's "union killings" figures. Many of the murders involved persons in union members' households, not the union members themselves. A high percentage of them occurred for reasons unrelated to union affiliation. As The Washington Post recently noted: "There were 17,198 murders in 2007. Of the dead, only 39 (0.226 percent) were even members of trade unions, let alone leaders or activists, according to the Colombian labor movement. (Union members make up just under 2 percent of the Colombian population.)"¹³

Strengthened Colombian Government Institutions Have Reduced Violence

Plan Colombia and a strong, market based economy have helped President Uribe's government to achieve many successes to reduce violence in Colombia.

Demobilization: The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative reports that more than 30,000 AUC and other paramilitaries have been demobilized since 2005, when the Colombian government implemented the Justice and Peace Law, which set the rules for the demobilization process.¹⁴

Truth and Reconciliation: Under the Justice and Peace Law of 2005, over 1600 bodies of some of the victims of the FARC and the AUC have been recovered and their families have been partially compensated with assets seized for a reparation fund. There are more people now in jail in Colombia for human rights violations that at any other similar (post-conflict) period in the history of any Latin American country.¹⁵

Violence Down: As the Center for Strategic and International Studies recently noted, the FARC and other drug-traffickers are on the run, and violence is down significantly. The government has "a legitimate state presence in all of Colombia's 1,099 municipalities" and "[t]he guerrillas have been driven out of many areas that they previously dominated and their military capability sapped by the resurgence of state security force."¹⁶

Extraditions up: Another indicator of the success of Plan Colombia, and a development also very helpful to U.S. law enforcement efforts in the war against drugs, is the dramatic increase in the number of significant narcotics traffickers extradited to face prosecution in the United States since President Uribe took office.

Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Strengthening Democracy and Progress in Latin America," Cato Institute *Free Trade Bulletin* No. 32, February 7, 2008, Figure 1, at www.freetrade.org/node/839 (March 17, 2008).

¹³Editorial, "Columbia's Case," *The Washington Post*, April 18, 2008, p. A14, at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/18/AR2008041802900.html (April 21, 2008).

¹⁴Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "Columbia FTA Facts," March 2008, at www.ustr.gov/assets/Trade_Agreements/Bilateral/Colombia_FTA/asset_upload_file144_13716.pdf (April 11, 2008).

¹⁵Embassy of Colombia, "Colombia: Actions to Advance Labor Justice and Labor Rights," Washington, DC, November 2008 (also available at www.colombiaemb.org).

¹⁶DeShazo *et al.*, *Back from the Brink*, p. viii.

Dropping Murder Rate: When President Uribe assumed power, violence was ripping the very fabric of the Colombian nation. However, the overall murder rate has dropped by 40 percent, kidnappings are down 83 percent, and terror attacks are down 76 percent.¹⁷ Plan Colombia has helped to cut cocaine production and smuggling significantly.¹⁸ The streets of Medellin, once ruled by Pablo Escobar, are now safe enough for visits by senior Bush Administration and congressional officials.¹⁹ The number of murders of trade unionists has dropped by 75 percent.²⁰ Although the number of trade unionist murders increased very slightly in 2008, to 32, the Uribe government has maintained and accelerated its efforts to reduce the level to zero.²¹

One pro-FTA Colombian union leader's courageous advocacy of the U.S.–Colombia trade agreement apparently cost him his life. Jairo Giraldo Rey was murdered in his hometown of Cali in November 2007, just before he was to travel to Washington with other pro-FTA Colombian union leaders to lobby Congress to pass the agreement. As reporter Monica Showalter noted, “Giraldo’s murder not only silenced an unexpected voice for free trade, it also jacked up union killings data to stoke the case in the U.S. against Colombia’s pact.”²²

Dramatic Drop in Extrajudicial Killings: A constant refrain heard from U.S. and Colombian leftist NGOs and unions is that the paramilitaries can still act with impunity and are protected by the Colombian government. This allegation is false.

While extrajudicial killings are still occurring, they have been greatly reduced. President Uribe made it clear from the day he took office that his government would not tolerate paramilitary activity and would prosecute criminals in the AUC and other far-right groups. In fact, nearly all of the paramilitaries have been demobilized and disbanded under the Uribe administration.

Furthermore, “[t]he Colombian government has tripled spending on protection for unionists, human rights activists, and other at-risk individuals and established a special unit to prosecute crimes against trade unionists.”²³ In 2008, the Colombian government spent US\$42

¹⁷Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, “Colombia FTA Facts.”

¹⁸U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 2008,” March 2008, at www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2008/vol1/html/100776.htm (April 21, 2008).

¹⁹Press release, “Secretary Gutierrez to Lead Fourth Congressional Delegation to Colombia,” U.S. Department of Commerce, February 28, 2007, at www.commerce.gov/NewsRoom/PressReleases_FactSheets/PROD01_005275 (April 5, 2008).

²⁰Hugh Bronstein, “Colombia Trade Deal Dead This Year, U.S. Unions Say,” *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2008.

²¹Embassy of Colombia, “Colombia: Actions to Advance Labor Justice and Labor Rights,” Washington, DC, November 2008 (also available at www.colombiaemb.org). See also José de Córdoba, “Colombia’s Uribe Says Passage of Free-Trade Pact Is Critical,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 4, 2008.

²²Monica Showalter, “U.S.–Colombia Deal Faces Labor Deceit,” *Investor’s Business Daily*, April 7, 2008, at www.investors.com/editorial/IBDArticles.asp?artsec=16&issue=20080407 (April 11, 2008).

²³Doug Palmer, “Labor Leaders to Visit Colombia As Bush Presses for Vote,” Reuters, February 7, 2008, at www.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idUSN0739641220080207 (February 19, 2008).

million on this security program to protect at-risk individuals.²⁴ Of the 9,400 individuals benefiting from individual protection schemes—which range from bodyguards and armored vehicles to cell phone networks—1,959 are unionists, which is an increase from 2006, when unionists accounted for 1,504 of the 6,097 individuals being protected.²⁵

The Prosecutor General's office has led the charge in dealing with past killings, resolving 73 cases of union member murder and convicting 156 individuals since 2001. In November 2006, a special labor Sub-unit was created in the Office of the Prosecutor General to focus on labor union killings and has since resolved 40 cases and convicted 67 people.²⁶ The unit has three specialized judges, 19 prosecutors, 22 additional lawyers, and almost 100 judicial police investigators.²⁷

Adoption of U.S. Legal System Model: With technical assistance from the U.S. government, beginning in 2004 Colombia switched from the Napoleonic inquisitorial legal system to the accusatory, open-court criminal trial procedures based upon U.S. and English common law. These reforms will strengthen Colombia's judicial system and make it more efficient with a speedier trial process. The transition to the new system will take time, however, and the first new law school students trained in the new procedures only graduated recently.²⁸

Improved Labor Standards: The AFL-CIO alleges that the Colombian government is “not in compliance with International Labor Organization (ILO) core labor standards.”²⁹ Yet a November 2007 ILO report concluded, based on a visit to Colombia, that the labor situation in Colombia is positive and that the government has made significant progress. The ILO report praised the “the cooperation of the Government of Colombia with the ILO officials in their work to conclude the Tripartite Agreement on Freedom of Association and Democracy.”³⁰

Opponents are also willfully blind to the many successes stemming from a wide variety of substantial USAID programs that are jointly funded with the Colombian government. These programs target development assistance to address the problems that festered during the “lost years” of rampant violence. These programs train all employers—small, medium, and large—in proactively ensuring compliance with all Colombian labor laws on occupational safety, child

²⁴ Embassy of Colombia, “Colombia: Actions to Advance Labor Justice and Labor Rights,” Washington, DC, November 2008 (also available at www.colombiaemb.org).

²⁵ Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, “Columbia FTA Facts,” and author's notes, meeting with U.S. Embassy officials in Bogota, Columbia, December 2007.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Embassy of Colombia, “Colombia: Actions to Advance Labor Justice and Labor Rights,” Washington, DC, November 2008 (also available at www.colombiaemb.org).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, “Worker's Rights, Violence, and Impunity in Colombia,” January 9, 2008, p. 8, at www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/globaleconomy/upload/colombia_briefing.pdf (April 5, 2008).

³⁰ U.N. International Labour Office, “Fourth Supplementary Report: Implementation Process of the Tripartite Agreement on Freedom of Association and Democracy in Colombia,” GB.300/20/4, November 1, 2007, para. 8, at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_087328.pdf (April 5, 2008).

labor, working hours, and other issues of concern to Colombian workers.

These programs are also intended to bring more workers into formal economy, where they can receive benefits and contribute to the tax base. USAID and the Colombian government are working cooperatively with business owners, but are also establishing protocols to enforce laws with a system of fines and incentives. The Colombian Labor Ministry is also funding programs to increase availability of vocational training programs.³¹

Improved Human Rights Record. Human rights activists opposed to the FTA have faulted the Colombian government's treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).³² However, some of those persons labeled as IDPs by the left are actually economic migrants who have gravitated to large cities in search of work and a better life, as is common in many developing countries. Furthermore, numerous neutral observers have noted tremendous progress on human rights in recent years. Retired General Barry McCaffrey, former commander of the U.S. Southern Command and Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, visited Colombia in October 2007 and reported that "[t]he human rights situation has improved immeasurably during the President Uribe tenure."³³

According to a report from the Colombian government:

Impressive progress has been made in poverty reduction, education and health since 1999. Increased stability has allowed the government to provide more and better services to the country's poor.

- Social spending represents 40 percent of the national budget
- Poverty levels have decreased since 1999 from 55 percent to 45 percent
- Programs have been developed to improve infant nutrition and health, encourage school enrollment, empower women, and provide food for millions of children
- More than 20 million of the country's poor receive full or partial health coverage
- Infant and child mortality have decreased
- Child immunizations have steadily increased
- Student completion of elementary school has increased to almost 100 percent,

³¹U.S. Agency for International Development, "FY 2006 Budget Justification to the U.S. Congress," s.v. "Colombia Program: Alternative Development," June 14, 2005, at www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/lac/pdf/co514-008.pdf (December 13, 2007), and author's notes, meeting with USAID officials, U.S. Embassy, Bogota, Colombia, December 5, 2007.

³²News release, "Colombia: Death Threats Drive Thousands from Their Homes Every Year," International Committee of the Red Cross, February 4, 2008, at www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/colombia-news-020408!OpenDocument (April 5, 2008), and Human Rights Watch, *Displaced and Discarded—The Plight of Internally Displaced Persons in Bogotá and Cartagena*, October 2005, at <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/colombia1005> (April 5, 2008).

³³General Barry McCaffrey, quoted in Embassy of Colombia (Washington, D.C.), *Colombia: Perspectives on Progress*, January 2008, p. 5, at www.colombiaemb.org/docs/2008perspectivesonprogressreport.pdf (April 5, 2008).

while the number of completing secondary school has also significantly risen.³⁴

The U.S. - Colombia FTA Will Lock-in Gains for Both Countries

My colleague at Heritage, Dr. Ray Walser, has noted that former Bolivian president Jorge Quiroga recently observed the irony that two key “commodity exports” (oil and cocaine) are entering the U.S. duty free from several countries in Latin America, while the U.S. Congress debates the duty-free entry of legal products from pro-American Colombia (which already has duty-free access to the U.S. market for most of its products through ATPDEA).³⁵

The FTA will spur additional economic development in Colombia and, just as importantly, push the Colombian government to build up and strengthen government institutions and judicial and economic regulation to ensure that continued economic progress will not depend on any particular political personalities.

As Dr. Walser has already reported to Congress, a full spectrum of the wisest voices—U.S. and Latin American presidents, former senior officials, both Democratic and Republican—and the Council on Foreign Relations, the Brookings Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, The Heritage Foundation, to name a few, as well as mainstream-media editorials are unanimous in urging swift passage of pending agreements with Colombia and Panama.³⁶ Colombia will certainly be willing to work with the Obama Administration and Congress to accommodate additional reasonable measures aimed at protecting labor and environmental standards.

If the Congress votes down the Colombia FTA, it will deliver a major psychological victory to the FARC, the narco-traffickers that the U.S. has battled for decades in Colombia, and other enemies of market-based democracy in the region. It will seriously risk the progress and momentum made by the Plan Colombia war on drugs on which the U.S. has spent hundreds of millions of dollars during the Clinton and Bush Administrations.

Inflicting economic punishment on a U.S. ally in the Andean region by defeating the FTA is not in the U.S. interests. Left-wing populism is fueled by poverty and lack of

³⁴*Ibid*, p. 11 (original bullet points).

³⁵ Ray Walser, Ph. D., “U.S Policy toward Latin America in 2009 and Beyond,” Testimony before The Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Committee on Foreign Affairs, United States House of Representatives, February 4, 2009

³⁶ (From Walser Testimony) Some examples recommending approval include: Jose Miguel Insulza, Secretary General, Organization of American States (OAS), “Recognize and Build on Our Progress,” *Americas Quarterly*, Fall 2008, pp 103–105, at <http://as.americas-society.org/article.php?id=1332> (January 28, 2009); Council on Foreign Relations, “U.S.–Latin America Relations: A New Direction For A New Reality,” Independent Task Force Report No. 60. pp. 17–19; “Rethinking U.S.–Latin Relations: A Hemispheric Partnership for A Turbulent World,” Report of the Partnership for the Americas Commission, November 2008, p. 22; and “Democrats Support Colombia FTA,” *Latin Business Chronicle*, April 21, 2008, at <http://www.latinbusinesschronicle.com/app/article.aspx?id=2314> (January 28, 2009).

opportunities, as seen in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia. To counter this possibility in Colombia, the development of strong democratic institutions must be accompanied by continued economic development and growth.³⁷

A defeated FTA might also force Colombia reluctantly into closer ties with a very eager and suddenly conciliatory Venezuela, which is already Colombia's second largest export market after the U.S., and Colombia cannot afford to ignore it. Chávez's dangling of petroleum carrots will not be ignored by the Colombians. If Colombia is spurned by the U.S., it will continue to seek trade agreements with many other countries (e.g., Canada and Mexico) and trading blocs, such as the EU, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market). This would only further isolate the U.S.

A failed FTA will lead Colombia and other Latin American countries to conclude that the U.S. is not a reliable partner. It will also fuel a return to narco-trafficking and other illicit activity by the urban and rural poor, who would not benefit from the many jobs that would be created by the legitimate alternative economic development that will be created by the Colombia FTA.

Congress should quickly approve the pending trade agreements with Colombia and Panama. These actions will send a strong signal that the new Congress and the Obama Administration will be adopting a forward-looking trade policy agenda that emphasizes the creation of new U.S. jobs through expanded export opportunities.

³⁷Griswold and Hidalgo, "A U.S.–Colombia Free Trade Agreement," Cato Institute, Center for Trade Policy Studies, February 7, 2008, at <http://www.freetrade.org/pubs/FTBs/FTB-032.pdf> (February 11, 2009)