

Following up on pledge /article.php?id=948 that he would press for congressional approval of a bilateral trade deal with Colombia, President George W. Bush sent <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080407-5.html> legislation to the U.S. Congress to implement the pact. During a speech on the White House lawn, Bush called passage of the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) “urgent for out national security reasons.” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080407-1.html>

Once TPA legislation arrives in Congress on March 8, the House of Representatives has 60 days to vote on the pact and the Senate has an additional 30 days. “Many in Congress have tremendous respect for the progress that President [Alvaro] Uribe has been able to make under difficult circumstances,” <http://thehill.com/leading-the-news/bush-sends-colombia-trade-pact-to-congress-2008-04-07.html> said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) in reaction to the news that the deal was headed for congressional approval. However, Reid warned that the White House decision to push through a vote jeopardized the bill’s chances of succeeding. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) made similar statements last month. <http://speaker.house.gov/newsroom/pressreleases?id=0563> Sensitivity over the deal was demonstrated by the resignation of Mark Penn, chief strategist for Senator and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, after release of information that he had lobbied on behalf of the deal. <http://blogs.usatoday.com/onpolitics/2008/04/clinton-repeats.html>

Despite protestations from some Democratic congressional leaders that the Bush administration is pushing through a vote, a White House spokesperson noted that, in the 16 months since the signing of the TPA, that “there hasn’t been a trade agreement that has had more communication between the administration and Congress as extensive as this one.” [http://ustr.gov/assets/Document\\_Library/Press\\_Releases/2008/April/asset\\_upload\\_file109\\_14727.pdf](http://ustr.gov/assets/Document_Library/Press_Releases/2008/April/asset_upload_file109_14727.pdf) (PDF) U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab, speaking in a CNN interview with Lou Dobbs, pointed out that a majority of Colombian exports enter the United States without tariffs, the deal would open Colombia to United States goods. <http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/bestoftv/2008/04/02/ldt.intv.schwab.trade.cnn?iref=videosearch> A fact sheet from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative emphasizes that nearly 8,000 small and medium-sized U.S. companies export products to Colombia. [http://www.ustr.gov/assets/Trade\\_Agreements/Bilateral/Colombia\\_FTA/asset\\_upload\\_file372\\_13713.pdf](http://www.ustr.gov/assets/Trade_Agreements/Bilateral/Colombia_FTA/asset_upload_file372_13713.pdf)

Cabinet members professed their support and urged congressional approval of the deal as Bush signed documents to send the deal to Congress. The TPA would allow “improvements in areas such as dispute resolution, labor relations, transparency mechanisms and regulations to combat corruption,” wrote U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in the *Miami Herald*. <http://www.miamiherald.com/851/story/485772.html> In the *Wall Street Journal*, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice explained that, by approving the TPA, Congress could strengthen U.S. competitiveness and support a regional ally. [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120752405599893543.html?mod=googlenews\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120752405599893543.html?mod=googlenews_wsj)

For a full guide to the trade pact, read the Council of the Americas' resource guide to the bilateral deal. [/article.php?id=968](#) A recent article in *Poder* by COA Vice President Eric Farnsworth examines a path forward for trade policy in the Americas. [/article.php?id=935](#)