



AMERICANS for TAX REFORM

Grover G. Norquist
President

May 15, 2008

To: Senator Dick Ackerman

Re: SJR 29 US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement

Dear Senator Ackerman,

I wanted to write to you today to thank you for introducing SJR 29 in support of passage of the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. You are absolutely correct about the benefits of the trade deal to California's economy.

As you know, over 90 percent of Colombian goods enter the United States duty free thanks to the Andean Trade Preference Act, the FTA would simply start to level the field for US goods entering Colombia. The benefits to both nations are undisputed. But this is an election year and trade has become a hot-button issue in many races.

The recent history of Colombia is one that should inspire everyone, moving from a drug-dominated, underground economy to a free-market, capitalist economy in as short a period as they have is a remarkable accomplishment. President Uribe is to be applauded for his efforts and achievements in this area. But that does not mean there aren't still many obstacles to be overcome. President Uribe needs the support of his United States allies, both politically and economically, not more than ever. Passage of the US-Colombia FTA would provide a significant boost in both arenas.

Unfortunately, last month Leadership in the US House of Representatives violated the terms under which the deal was negotiated and, for the first time ever, removed the timetable from a trade agreement, essentially changing the rules in the middle of the game. The justification for this political maneuver was the reported high level of violence against trade unionists in Colombia by extremists groups. The facts simply do not bear out this claim.

There was significant violence against trade unionists just a few years ago, but thanks to the efforts of the Colombian government, the murder rates among union members is now one-seventh that of the general population, about 5 per 100,000. While problems persist in Colombia, violence against union members is no longer one of them. Yet that was the argument made while stripping the FTA of the promised up or down vote.

With the help of resolutions like yours, and Assemblyman Mike Villines, we will be able to keep the pressure on Congressional Leadership to keep the word of the American people, to restore the credibility of our trade representatives and to restore sound free-market policy priorities to Washington. For that, I thank you, sir.

Sincerely,

Grover Norquist
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