

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Scott Mulhauser/Erin Shields (Baucus)

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Julia Lawless/Antonia Ferrier (Hatch)

(202) 224-4515

BAUCUS, HATCH URGE U.S. TRADE REP TO MOVE ON COLOMBIA, PANAMA FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

Finance Leaders Ask Kirk to Identify Steps and Provide Timetable at Upcoming Committee Hearing

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Ranking Member Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) sent a letter today to United States Trade Representative Ron Kirk urging him to act quickly so that Congress can approve the Colombia and Panama Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). In the letter, the Senators called on Ambassador Kirk to identify at a March 9 Committee hearing any additional steps that Panama or Colombia should take and to provide an expeditious timetable for moving the agreements through Congress.

“We share your goal of opening export markets for U.S. workers,” the Senators wrote. “We believe one of the most effective ways to achieve that goal is through approval of our pending trade agreements with Panama and Colombia. U.S. exports to these markets have faced barriers for far too long. Panama and Colombia both made clear commitments to eliminate these barriers and open their markets, but the Administration has not taken action that would allow U.S. exporters to benefit from these commitments.”

Baucus [will travel to Colombia](#) next week to meet with senior government officials to discuss the pending U.S.-Colombia FTA and other key economic and trade issues.

The Finance Committee has jurisdiction over international trade. The full text of today’s letter follows here:

February 14, 2011

Ambassador Ron Kirk

United States Trade Representative

600 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Kirk,

We share your goal of opening export markets for U.S. workers. We believe one of the most effective ways to achieve that goal is through approval of our pending trade agreements with Panama and Colombia. U.S. exports to these markets have faced barriers for far too long. Panama and Colombia both made clear commitments to eliminate these barriers and open their markets, but the Administration has not taken action that would allow U.S. exporters to benefit from these commitments.

During a hearing on February 10, 2011, you testified that the President has directed you to immediately intensify engagement with Colombia and Panama to resolve outstanding issues so that these agreements can be brought before Congress as soon as possible. We welcome your engagement and seek to undertake Congressional consideration of these agreements in the near future. We understand that as part of your intensified engagement, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) will lead a U.S. government team to Colombia this week. And we understand that USTR will meet with Panama in the near future as well. We will be eager to learn the results of these meetings as soon as possible.

We welcome your agreement to testify before the Senate Finance Committee on March 9, 2011. At that time, we expect that you will come prepared to (1) identify specifically any additional steps that the Administration believes Panama or Colombia should take; and (2) provide a clear and expeditious timetable for moving both agreements through the U.S. Congress.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus
Chairman

Orrin Hatch
Ranking Member

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