

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

Colombia Free Trade Agreement Shut Down

At a time when our national economy is struggling with sky-rocketing gas prices and a slowing job market, the House Democratic majority chose to indefinitely delay the Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA), a bill that would make it easier for American businesses and workers to compete globally.

In an unprecedented move, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi sought a rules change to prevent an up-or-down vote on the agreement and stop consideration of the bill.

As established by the Trade Act of 1974, Congress has a maximum of 90 legislative days to vote on a trade agreement once the president sends it to the Congress.

Last week, however, the House majority voted to remove the so-called "fast-track" requirement,

effectively changing the law under which trade agreements are considered.

Since 1991, Congress has allowed Colombian products virtually duty-free access to the U.S. market; however, U.S. products delivered to the Colombian market face stiff tariffs.

During this time, U.S. workers and business have paid over \$1 billion in tariffs to sell products in the Colombian market while Colombian workers and businesses have paid almost nothing to sell in the U.S.

Currently, only 2.7 percent of American exports to Colombia are duty-free compared to the more than 99 percent of Colombian goods entering the American markets without any tariffs.

According to the office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "America's trade with Colombia reached \$18 billion in 2007, making Colombia our fourth largest trading partner in Latin America and our largest export market for U.S. agriculture products in South America."

"In 2007, total U.S. goods exports to Colombia reached \$8.6 billion. The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement will provide particular benefits to U.S. farmers and ranchers by immediately eliminating Colombia's duties on high quality beef, cotton, wheat, soybeans, key fruits vegetables and many processed foods upon entry into force of the agreement."

Since 1991, Congress has voted to give Colombia and other Andean countries one-way duty-free access to the U.S. market. This problem was created by an act of Congress, and Congress should act to remedy it.

Unfortunately, instead of allowing an up-or-down vote on the bipartisan trade agreement, Speaker Pelosi chose to change the rules and use the FTA as a means to gain leverage for some of her own priorities in this election year.

This partisan stunt hurts American workers, farmers, and businesses by denying them access to new markets. This trade agreement deserves an up-or-down vote.

Boise Recycling Program Wins National Award

The 2008 American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) has awarded Boise, Inc.'s Jackson, Alabama paper mill its Business Leadership Recycling Award, which recognizes outstanding

school, business, and community recycling efforts.

Boise Jackson processes 120,000 tons of recovered papers each year at its own recycling facility. The mill funds in-school recycling programs in Clarke and Washington counties, providing large blue recycling containers that are placed throughout the counties' schools.

Students at each school assist with sorting and placing paper in the collection containers for pick-up by Boise Jackson. While the program was only fully implemented in the fourth quarter of last year, five tons of high-quality sorted white ledger paper have already been collected from local schools.

For more than a decade, Boise Jackson employees have visited local schools as part of a Recycling Road Show that provides students with hands-on demonstrations of paper recycling.

Nearly 4,000 students have seen examples of the many different types of paper that can be recycled, learned how the process works, and even had the opportunity to create their own pulp and make a sheet of recycled paper.

In recognizing Boise Jackson for its extraordinary recycling efforts, AF&PA President and CEO Donna Harman said, "The program that Boise, Inc. has created at its Jackson facility is an outstanding example of the on-going commitment our members have to paper recycling."

"It will take innovative and creative programs such as this one to reach the new 60 percent recovery goal set by the industry for 2012."

I commend Boise Jackson and its employees for their continued leadership in recycling as well as for setting a standard of excellence in helping to improve our environment for future generations.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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For release the week of Monday, April 14, 2008. For more information please contact Mike Lewis at (202)225-4931.