

## (April 8, 2008) Lipinski Criticizes President's Move to Force Vote on Colombia Trade Agreement

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Urges Colleagues to Vote against the Trade Bill

[Washington, D.C.] Today, Congressman Dan Lipinski strongly criticized the President's decision to send the U.S. — Colombia Trade Agreement to Congress without Congressional support, and urged his colleagues to vote against the trade deal. This decision by the President represents an unprecedented decision to forgo established protocols dictating that the President first consult Congress before submitting a trade agreement for a vote.

"It is simply reprehensible that the President would push such a trade deal at a time when middle-class American families are already feeling the effects of a slumping economy," said Rep. Lipinski. "This trade agreement would expose Americans to more economic uncertainty and add to the job loss and wage stagnation that has occurred since the implementation of NAFTA. I strongly condemn the President's decision to force a vote on this bill and I urge my colleagues to join me in opposing this agreement when it is brought before the full House of Representatives for a vote."

NAFTA, the trade agreement between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, was hailed as a victory for America's economy when it was implemented in January of 1994. However, since its implementation, outsourcing from the United States to Mexico and Canada has directly led to a net loss of 879,280 American jobs including over 47,000 jobs in Illinois. During the same period, real wages for most working Americans have remained stagnant.

In addition to job loss concerns, however, much of the opposition to the Colombia trade deal stems from Colombia's reputation as the most dangerous country in the world to be a union member. In 2007, nearly 40 union members were murdered in Colombia and another 11 have already been killed this year. Rep. Lipinski and others have gone on record opposing any trade deal with Colombia while such human rights abuses exist.

"Colombia has a shocking record of intimidation and violence towards labor leaders, and an equally appalling record of failing to fully investigate and end those abuses," said Rep. Lipinski. "President Bush should be working with Colombian leaders to protect worker rights and investigate abuses, not exasperating the problem by forcing through a trade agreement with no real labor or human rights provisions."

The U.S. &ndash; Colombia Trade Agreement was negotiated under the President&rsquo;s fast-track trade authority. This authority requires Congress to hold a vote on any trade agreement within 90 days of its submission to Congress by the President. It also prohibits Congress from filibustering or amending the trade agreement. Although the President&rsquo;s ability to negotiate new agreements under fast-track authority expired in July 2007, the authority&rsquo;s provisions still apply to agreements such as the Colombia Trade Agreement that were negotiated prior to the expiration.