

# McCain Heads to Colombia to Emphasize Trade, Security Link

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Republican John McCain arrives in Colombia today on a three-day Latin American trip to emphasize his support for free trade, even as he concedes many U.S. voters are concerned their jobs may wind up being exported.

"I have to convince them that we will provide new job opportunities in the new economy," McCain, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, said while campaigning in Pennsylvania yesterday. "I understand it's very tough."

McCain, 71, is scheduled to meet with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe tonight in Cartagena and will travel tomorrow to Mexico City to talk with Mexico's President Felipe Calderon.

The effect of trade on U.S. jobs is a top issue in industrial states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan, which also are battlegrounds for McCain and Democrat Barack Obama in the presidential campaign. The three states each have lost more than a quarter of their manufacturing jobs in the last eight years and labor groups, many of which are supporting Obama, are blaming free trade accords for the decline.

"McCain does have the opportunity to take the optimistic, pro-trade mantra," said Ed Gresser, a trade official in the Clinton administration and now an analyst at the Progressive Policy Institute, a research group in Washington affiliated with the Democratic Leadership Council that supports trade. Still, making those arguments in Mexico and Canada means "he risks being seen as taking the side of foreigners."

## Political Divide

McCain has stuck by his support for free trade, while Obama said during his primary race against New York Senator Hillary Clinton that he would press Canada and Mexico, two of the biggest U.S. trading partners, to rework portions of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Obama also has urged Congress to reject pending accords with Colombia and South Korea.

Trade is an unusual point of contention in presidential politics, said Carla Hills, the U.S. trade representative in President George H.W. Bush's administration.

“This is the first time we've had trade in play as a divisive issue, because for 60 years we've had bipartisan agreement” that trade benefited the U.S., she said in a speech in Washington.

That consensus is waning. Almost half of Americans, 48 percent, say trade is bad for the U.S. economy, up from 30 percent in 1997, according to a May survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in Washington.

McCain said he would thank Uribe and Calderon for advancing toward “a more free and open society” and assure them of his commitment to Nafta and passage of the accord between Colombia and the U.S., which has been hung up in Congress.

### **Link to Security**

The Arizona senator also is framing the trade debate as a national security issue and highlights the need to boost the economies of U.S. trading partners as a way to help the economy, control illegal immigration and curb drug trafficking.

In the case of Colombia, McCain applauded Uribe's efforts against the Marxist-inspired Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, which has been waging a four-decade battle against the Colombian government.

McCain said the trip was not political, though his campaign is paying for it. “It's more about my ability to govern as president, my ability to lead,” he said.

It is his second foray outside the U.S. during his presidential campaign. He made a pitch for Nafta on a trip to Ottawa last month.

During the primaries, Obama, 46, an Illinois senator, said Nafta should be renegotiated to enhance labor and environmental protections under the threat of a U.S. withdrawal. He has since softened that stance, telling Fortune magazine in a June 18 interview that he favors “opening up a dialogue” with Canada and Mexico.

McCain's support of trade will help Obama, said Lori Wallach, president of Global Trade Watch, a group which opposes free-trade agreements.

“It's one thing to have that view, it's another thing to wave it around like a pair of red underwear,” Wallach said, calling trade a “wedge issue” that may push factory workers toward Obama.

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