

# Colombia Trade Pact Unlikely This Year

Congress to work through health care, energy before ratifying trade agreement

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The U.S. Congress is unlikely to ratify the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement in 2009 because it is focusing on health care reform and energy-related legislation, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke said Tuesday.

"It's pretty doubtful" that the pact will be ratified this year, Locke told reporters in Santiago at the third Americas Competitiveness Forum, despite the fact that the Obama administration wants to strengthen U.S. trade ties with Latin America. "It's in everyone's economic interest to have trade agreements and lower tariff barriers," Locke said.

Protectionism "can only lead to retaliation and eventually to trade wars, Locke said. However, Locke supported the recent decision of the Obama administration to impose safeguard duties on imports of Chinese tires, noting that in doing so, the U.S. was only enforcing the terms of China's accession agreement with the World Trade Organization. "This was much more about enforcing the trade agreement and not about protectionism; (trade) must be on a level playing field," Locke said.

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