

US, Peru to sign free trade pact Friday

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WASHINGTON — US President George W. Bush will host Peru's President Alan Garcia on December 14 to sign a free trade pact between the two countries, the White House announced Tuesday.

"Peru is a staunch ally of the United States and has demonstrated unequivocal support for democracy, human rights, and the expansion of economic opportunity in the Western Hemisphere," White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the Senate approved the free trade deal, capping nearly two years of effort by Bush's Republican administration.

The free trade agreement was modified under pressure from the Democratic-controlled Congress in May to take into account environmental and human rights concerns.

Bilateral trade between the United States and Peru amounted to 8.8 billion dollars in 2006, according to US government data.

Nearly all products from Peru already have duty-free access to the United States. The new deal will allow Americans reciprocal access to the growing Peruvian market.

To date, the pact with Peru is the only one of the pending free trade agreements the White House has submitted to Congress for approval. The remaining three, with Colombia, Panama and South Korea, face a tougher fight in the legislature.

In addition to signing the trade agreement, the two presidents will discuss "how like-minded countries can work together to better promote democracy, human rights, and social justice," Perino said.