

# **Bush: Still chance for Colombia, South Korea pacts**

By Doug Palmer  
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WASHINGTON - The current political climate makes it difficult to win congressional approval of free trade agreements with Colombia, South Korea and Panama, but there is still a chance the deals will pass, President George W. Bush said on Friday.

"I haven't given up hope that the Colombia free trade agreement is going to make it to the floor of the Congress," Bush said in a speech on the White House lawn to a group of business people, manufacturers, exporters and lobbyists.

Bush said other world leaders have told him they were perplexed and alarmed about the implications of the House of Representatives' vote last month to indefinitely postpone action on the Colombia free trade agreement

"Once the tone of amazement passes, then there's a serious tone of concern -- concern that about the United States becoming protectionist, concern about the United States losing its confidence ... And all I can tell them is politics is too strong right now," Bush said.

U.S. voters will choose a new president in November. While Bush did not mention either Democratic presidential candidate by name, both Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. Hillary Clinton oppose the pending trade deals. Republican presidential candidate Sen. John McCain supports the agreements.

Union groups have been fighting the Colombia agreement especially hard, and many auto-state lawmakers strongly oppose the South Korea agreement because they believe it would hurt U.S. automakers.

Bush was flanked by U.S. products -- including a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, a Caterpillar frontloader and baskets of fruits and vegetables -- that would all get duty-free treatment under the trade pacts.

**'LET THERE BE AN OPEN AND HONEST DEBATE'**

He argued the agreements made economic sense at a time when exports account for a big portion of U.S. economic growth, and he warned that rejecting the pact would damage relations with allies in Latin America and Asia.

"My call on the leadership in the House is to let this trade agreement get to the floor. Let the representatives of the people decide. Let there be an open and honest debate about the merits of this piece of legislation," Bush said.

After approving the Colombia agreement, Congress should act on the South Korea and Panama pacts, he said.

The fate of the Colombia free trade agreement has been up in the air since Bush submitted it to Congress last month against the advice of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.

Rather than follow longstanding "fast track" procedures that guarantee a yes-or-no vote on trade agreements within 90 days, Pelosi pushed through a rule change that allowed her to indefinitely delay action on the Colombia pact. She and other House Democrats had been insisting Colombia do more to stop killings of trade unionists before Congress votes on the pact.

Bush has accused Pelosi of effectively killing the Colombia agreement unless she agrees to schedule a vote, although he did not repeat that line on Friday.

But "obstructing an important piece of legislation -- not even allowing it to come to the floor for a vote -- is not what the people expect," Bush said.

Pelosi has said Congress could vote on the Colombia pact, but only after addressing domestic economic concerns.