

# **Bush adds political, security arguments to call for free trade agreements**

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WASHINGTON - President George W. Bush added geopolitical and national security arguments to his standard economic arguments when he called on Congress again today to pass free trade agreements with Columbia, Panama and Peru.

'The friends of America are waiting to see what Congress will do,' the president said, speaking to the White House Forum on International Trade and Investment. 'These trade bills are important economic and national security measures.'

In a veiled reference Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez and his allies such as Bolivia's Evo Morales, Bush warned that 'champions of false populism in the region are watching Congress. They will use any failure of Congress to approve these agreements as evidence America will never treat democracies in the region as full partners.'

The Peru agreement has passed the House Ways and Means Committee 39-0 and is expected to pass the full House with a comfortable majority, but the Columbia and Panama deals are stalled.

Columbia is being held up because Democrats are concerned about the killings of labor leaders there. President Bush wants to reward Columbian president Alvaro Uribe for his help in fighting drug trafficking.

The president said: 'It is not acceptable to pass one trade agreement and let the others languish. It's not fair to pick out one country.'

Bush also argued for passage of the trade agreement with South Korea as promoting fair treatment for US investors, more transparent regulation and settlement of disputes under international law.