



For Immediate Release
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Hispanic Leaders Urge the Senate to Conclude the Re-Authorization of The Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA)

-- National groups highlight ATPA's pivotal trade, economic and national security considerations, and commend President Bush and the Senate's leadership for reaching a bipartisan consensus to act expeditiously in the next few days --

Washington, D.C. – The Board of Directors of The Latino Coalition (TLC) and the Hispanic Business Roundtable (HBR), joined other Hispanic groups today on Capitol Hill to voice the groups' strong endorsement for the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA), and the related legislation currently under consideration on the Senate Floor.

The Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA) expired in early December 2001, and the adverse impact clearly is being felt in all four ATPA beneficiary countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. "Immediate action is essential to prevent significant losses to Andean and U.S. companies dependent on the existing relationships in the U.S.-Andean trade flows", said HBR President Mario Rodriguez. "ATPA is essential to strengthen and stabilize the legitimate economies of the Andean countries, and has a 10-year old positive track record. ATPA is a win-win for all sides."

"ATPA has been and should continue to be a cornerstone of U.S. policy to combat drug trafficking and associated terrorist operations in our hemisphere. The Andean region is our first line of defense against drugs in America's streets," said TLC President Robert De Posada. "This is a vital economic and national security tool for the U.S., which has the added value of encouraging entrepreneurship and self-reliance in Peru, Colombia, Bolivia and Ecuador, as well as in America's main street."

Since 1991, the ATPA has facilitated the United States in its fight against drug production and trafficking. More importantly, the ATPA has fostered critical cooperation between the United States and Andean countries in counter-narcotics and regional security efforts. Strengthening the legitimate economies of drug-producing countries is crucial to providing employment alternatives to illegal crop cultivation and drug trafficking and to keeping democracies stable in the region. As the increase in illegal drug activities also coincides with an increase in terrorist activities, a renewed and expanded ATPA program also will serve to undermine this threat.

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“The facts indicate that the Senate must reauthorize and expand ATPA,” said Rodriguez, who adds that the initiative “has generated 53.2 billion in new output and \$1.7 billion in new exports since its enactment. Between 1999 and 2000 U.S. exports to ATPA countries rose by 75%. Furthermore, the program has created approximately 140,000 new legitimate jobs in the region. The expiration of ATPA already is having an immediate and very negative impact on the export industries that have blossomed under the benefits of this program, as well as industries that support this trade,” concluded Rodriguez.

The Hispanic leaders voiced their consensus that additional delays in the Senate would translate threaten to undermine U.S. national security interests in the Andean region, depriving it of a powerful tool in the war against terrorism and a proven economic development initiative. “Failure to act now puts democracy and stability in the region at peril,” De Posada added.

The Latino Coalition is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, D.C. TLC was established in 1995 to address policy issues that directly affect the well being of Hispanics in the United States. For more information on The Latino Coalition please visit our website at www.TheLatinoCoalition.com

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