

Korea is already our largest importer for military equipment, and they live in a very dangerous part of the world. They are right next door to China and close to bordering on Russia, just across the straits from Japan, and they are potentially—they have been and they will be our most important ally. But we have given higher foreign military sales status to three former Soviet Union States and five countries from the Warsaw Pact, none of which are as good friends as South Korea.

I have filed a bill, S. 1846, the United States-Republic of Korea Defense Cooperation and Improvement Act of 2007, that would give them the status of NATO plus 3, so we could continue to expand on our vital defense trade with them. He says this is his top priority. We are already cooperating with them. There is new cooperation. There is an opportunity to build an even stronger ally in the region to help keep that region safe, peaceful, and secure.

Secondarily, for Korea, we also need to approve the United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement. Free trade is one of the best ways we have of assuring that other countries get the development they need, we can develop our friendship we have and improve our economy and theirs. A Korea-United States trade agreement would give lower tariff barriers, and get rid of many of them, to keep our agriculture, machine goods, and high-tech goods from going into South Korea. We need to do that.

But there are political objections. That brings me to the third important point: Colombia. Colombia has pending with the United States a United States-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. As I have just said, trade and commercial ties are one of the most effective arrows in our quiver of smart power. In Colombia, it is an affirmation of support to our friends. They are our strongest ally on an increasingly left-leaning continent—another area where they are our best friends in a dangerous area.

The administration of the President of Colombia, President Uribe, finds itself surrounded by states determined to undermine Colombia's burgeoning democracy. The states around them provide safe haven to insurgent terrorist groups, allowing them freedom to maneuver in border areas, and they even provide monetary support for drug and terror activities against President Uribe's government in Colombia. If we are serious, as we must be, about maintaining peace, security, and stability in Latin America, the northern part of Latin America, we must work with them.

Free trade will not only expand our economic and commercial ties, but it will strengthen the critical cultural ties and strategic alliances, and that will lead to a more peaceful and stable world.

At a time when America's image is suffering in the world and our economy at home is slumping, we should be

helping our friends and allies and expanding our export opportunities to create jobs here.

If the Democratic leadership in Congress is so concerned about improving America's image abroad and helping our slumping economy, why don't we start by helping our friends? We can do that by opening up markets for exports. Friends like Colombia and Korea are fighting terrorism, embracing America's values. It is a solid security rock for us to build upon.

In Colombia, the interdiction of two high-value targets—senior terror planners and former operators—is a testimony to the Uribe administration's commitment to ending terror in his country. It is important to remember that the terrorist group FARC currently holds more than 700 political and military prisoners. Three of them are Americans. Yet our Democratic colleagues, through all their rhetoric, seem to care more about improving our image with rogue regimes such as Syria and Iran than helping our friends in places such as Colombia and Korea. Their rejection of the free-trade agreements damages our strategic alliances and says to the world that the United States is closed for business. And it does so at a time when we need to be open for business, open for better ties.

So why, in light of the economic and strategic benefits of the Colombia FTA, are the Democrats determined to delay and deny these benefits? Why, through their actions, are they emboldening Venezuelan leftist Hugo Chavez and undercutting the President of Colombia, who is a friend? President Uribe has done more to reduce violence in Colombia than any modern leader in Bogota, including crimes against labor unionists. He has pushed back Marxist guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC, and the National Liberation Army, the ELN. He has reduced crime and substantially improved Colombia's security and economic situations, with official statistics showing murders plummeting by as much as 50 percent and kidnappings by as much as 75 percent.

Today's Wall Street Journal, which I will submit later, is entitled "Delaying and Denying." They sum it up like this:

What is it about Democrats and Hugo Chavez? Even as the Venezuelan strongman was threatening war last week against Colombia, Congress was threatening to hand him a huge strategic victory by spurning Colombia's free trade overtures to the U.S.

This isn't the first time Democrats have come to Mr. Chavez's aid, but it would be the most destructive. The Venezuelan is engaged in a high-stakes competition over the political and economic direction of Latin America. He wants the region to follow his path of ever greater state control of the economy, while assisting U.S. enemies wherever he can. He's already won converts in Bolivia and Ecuador, and he came far too close for American comfort in Mexico's election last year.

Meanwhile, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe is embracing greater economic and political freedom. He has bravely assisted the

U.S. fight against narco-traffickers, and he now wants to link his country more closely to America with a free trade accord. As a strategic matter, to reject Colombia's offer now would tell everyone in Latin America that it is far more dangerous to trust America than it is to trash it.

Mr. President, continuing to deny and delay Colombia TPA will be a great disadvantage to America's economy, damage our reputation in Colombia and throughout Latin America, undercut a key ally in President Uribe, and further embolden anti-American dictators like Hugo Chavez, ultimately resulting in a less secure and stable Latin America.

Mr. President, I call upon and urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to let us bring up for a vote and pass the Korean free-trade agreement and the Colombia free-trade agreement. Not only will that benefit us economically, it will strengthen the U.S. image throughout the world and help build a stable, strategic ally in Colombia that can stop the threat of more regimes committed to the Marxism that Cuba so famously demonstrated, which brought destruction and hardship to the people of Cuba.

These are important foreign policy matters. One leader in the majority on the other side of the body said: Well, politically, we cannot do it. Politically, we cannot help those who help us? Politically, we cannot pass a bill that will keep our country safer by passing the FISA bill? Politically, we cannot help an ally such as South Korea, which is in a very strategic position? And politically, we cannot help Colombia, which is fighting narcotraffickers as well as the efforts by Hugo Chavez for spreading a Marxist regime and the totalitarian government which impoverishes and denies rights to his citizens?

Mr. President, the time to act is now. I urge my colleagues on both sides to make these matters a serious concern and see if we can do the job for which we were elected—to help keep our country safe and secure.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the editorial from the Wall Street Journal of today, March 10, 2008, called "The Chavez Democrats" be printed in the RECORD, along with a similar and very compelling article on the op-ed page of the Washington Post, by Jackson Diehl, called "The FARC's Guardian Angel," be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Wall Street Journal, Mar. 10, 2008]

THE CHAVEZ DEMOCRATS

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