

Washington, DC— Today Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), a member of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade, issued the following statement on the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement:

“Colombia’s recent history and the story of the U.S.-Colombian relationship are both tragic and complex. The many challenges facing Colombia and American interests in the region will not be solved either by the passage or rejection of this trade agreement. However, I believe that we have a special obligation to the people of Colombia because of the harm we’ve caused Colombians through our inability to manage our own drug problem in the United States. Together with the misguided and misdirected sums we’ve spent on a militarized war on drugs, it almost destroyed their society. This particular responsibility is at the root of my thoughts on the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

“As Democrats have made clear, the effective exercise of core labor rights is key to ensuring that the benefits of trade help lift workers up. I find the current trends in Colombia to be heartening, as there has clearly been a shift away from the days when the combined impact of government, paramilitaries, rebels, and narco-traffickers made union organizing near impossible. I applaud the Colombian government for their substantial efforts and achievements.

“However, I cannot support the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement at this time or in this form. While the trends are good, there is still much to be done to ensure that workers are free to organize and to end the effective impunity for human rights abuses. There continues to be shocking and unacceptably high levels of violence, particularly against union members and labor organizers, and much more must be done to bring the perpetrators to justice. We cannot discount the progress that has been made, but neither should we stop insisting that much more must be done.

“One of the keys to attracting my support will be the development of mechanisms to ensure that the benefits of the trade agreement are contingent on sustained and deepened progress on the freedom of workers to organize. The legacy of attacks targeting those working for economic justice makes it necessary that there be real follow-through on efforts to prosecute those

responsible for the violence, reform the judicial system, eliminate the influence of the paramilitaries in government, and ensure workers' safety and their rights. I trust that with goodwill on all sides we can come to an agreement on the mechanisms that will allow me to eventually support this agreement.

“This debate is not just about a trade agreement, but about how to put a damaged society back together again. We have both a moral responsibility and an abiding interest in making sure we get this right.