

Washington, DC— Today Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore), a member of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade, issued the following statement in response to President Bush sending the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement to Congress.

“Since before my time on the Ways and Means Committee, I have been trying to facilitate an honest conversation about trade that takes into account both the upsides and downsides of global markets and trade agreements. This is the reason that I voted against the divisive Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and, working with my colleagues to include strong labor and environmental protections, in favor of the Peru Free Trade Agreement. An honest trade policy can no more ignore the very real concerns people have about job security and environmental protection, than it can disregard the potential gains from an open and dynamic economy.

“As I announced in February, the prism through which I view the pending agreement with Colombia is whether it will advance our moral responsibility to help put Colombian society back together again after years of civil war and human rights abuses. I said then, and I still believe, that more must be done to end the violence and impunity for attacks on labor leaders. I offered to work with interested parties on all sides of the issues to develop mechanisms that ensure the benefits of the trade agreement are contingent on sustained and deepened progress on the freedom of workers to organize. Since then, news reports of the demonization of human rights defenders as supporters of the FARC and allegations of cover-ups of extrajudicial killings by the Colombian government have only reinforced my belief that this trade agreement is not ready for consideration.

“However, the President’s decision to send the Colombia Free Trade Agreement up for a vote without the agreement of Congressional leadership goes beyond the specifics of this trade deal and places at risk future cooperation on much more important trade policy initiatives, such as the Doha Round of WTO negotiations or the inevitable trade impacts of a binding international climate change agreement.

“It is completely irresponsible for this lame duck president to jeopardize the entire Congressional-Executive trade policy structure and the system of informal consultations which underlie it. Such a decision would seriously imperil the authorization of a new ‘fast-track’ system under President Bush’s successor and would be a stumbling block in the efforts led by Chairman Rangel and Speaker Pelosi to establish a new, bipartisan consensus on trade policy. The President’s move serves no one’s long term-interests, except those who want to

see a return to the divisive and partisan atmosphere that marked the 2002 Fast Track and 2005 CAFTA votes.

“If the President goes forward with forcing a vote, he can expect a strong and unambiguous response from Congressional Democrats. If, instead, he shows a willingness to work with Congress and the Colombian Government to strengthen and improve the agreement, I expect that he would find willing and interested partners on Capitol Hill. I strongly urge the President to make the right choice.”