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WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Trade Representative Susan C. Schwab today expressed appreciation for action in Congress passing and President George W. Bush signing legislation to extend the Andean Trade Preference Act:

"I appreciate action by Congress and the President in extending Andean trade preferences for eight months. This preference program has helped alleviate poverty and created economic opportunities for citizens of developing countries and strengthened our economic and political relationships with those countries.

"I want to thank Chairman Rangel, Ranking Member McCrery, Chairman Baucus and Senator Grassley for their leadership on this and other trade issues. I look forward to working with them on the passage of the Peru and Colombia trade agreements during this extension period. The trade agreements offer important opportunities to further strengthen the United States' trade relationship with these Andean countries and provide duty-free access to these markets for American businesses, farmers and ranchers."

Background:

In 1991, the U.S. Congress authorized duty-free benefits for four Andean nations (Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia) under ATPA to help in their fight against illegal drug production and trafficking by expanding their economic opportunities. As part of the Trade Act of 2002, Congress renewed and enhanced the trade preferences for all four countries under the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA), which expired on December 31, 2006. Before its expiration last December, Congress passed a six month extension to June 30, 2007.

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