

# Kirk Sees Progress on Panama, Colombia

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U.S. Trade Representative met with presidents at Summit of Americas

U.S. Trade Representative Ronald Kirk told reporters Monday that progress is being made on pending free-trade deals between the United States and both Panama and Colombia.

Kirk accompanied President Barack Obama to the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago last weekend where he met privately with Panama's president, Martin Torrijos, and Colombia's president, Álvaro Uribe, to discuss the two trade agreements, both long stalled in Congress. Both countries are eager to finalize the deals, Kirk said, and he's working "in good faith" to do so.

Regarding Panama, Kirk said he is focusing largely on strengthening its labor rules, and to a lesser degree addressing concerns by some members of Congress about Panama's tax laws. Panama holds its next presidential election next month, and Kirk said that may provide a "window to move more forcefully."

As for Colombia, Kirk noted that Colombian President Uribe puts a high priority on the deal, which has been held up by concerns by Democrats and U.S. unions about violence targeting local labor activists. Deflecting widespread concerns that the Obama administration is cool on the agreement, Kirk said the U.S. is interested in finalizing the deal, too. "It was a very, very good, productive meeting," Kirk said, "My own personal thought as a mayor and as a lawyer is that when you've got two willing partners, that's a pretty good recipe for getting a deal done."

Kirk also said there is no need for the United States to reopen the North American Free Trade Agreement to address concerns raised by President Obama and others during last year's presidential campaign. "The president has said we will look at all of our options, but I think they can be addressed without having to reopen the agreement," Kirk said.