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## Free trade pact faces new delays, opposition

### CAFTA

Proponents of a free trade pact with Central America had hoped to win its passage in May, but that schedule may be slipping amid stubborn opposition in Congress.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said Monday that while the trade agreement remains a top priority for the Bush administration, he could not say when President Bush would submit the implementing legislation to Congress.

"I don't believe a time line has been set," Gutierrez said.

At a breakfast meeting with journalists, he said he was confident the White House would prevail once it had fully made its case.

"We are just getting the facts out" now, he said, though nearly a year has passed since negotiators completed the Central American Free Trade Agreement, also known as CAFTA.

The White House announced Monday that President Bush will meet in Washington on May 12 with leaders of each of the countries involved: President Abel Pacheco of Costa Rica, President Leonel Fernandez of the Dominican Republic, President Tony Saca of El Salvador, President Oscar Berger of Guatemala, President Ricardo Maduro of Honduras and President Enrique Balanos of Nicaragua.

CAFTA opponents, led by labor unions and U.S. sugar producers, say Americans would be harmed by increased competition from low-wage countries with lax environmental protections.

Proponents include makers of cheeses, snacks, pork products and other processed foods; grain farmers; pharmaceutical companies, and textile makers who sell yarn and fabric to Central Americans.