

Statement By U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk On Congressional Passage Of Trade Agreements, Trade Adjustment Assistance And Key Preference Programs

Washington, D.C. – United States Trade Representative Ron Kirk today released a statement following congressional approval of the U.S.-Korea, U.S.-Colombia, and U.S.-Panama trade agreements, as well as Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) reforms, the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), and the Andean Trade Preferences Act. President Barack Obama is expected to sign the initiatives into law in the coming days. From Ambassador Kirk:

“This President has gotten trade policy right. These agreements, made better at the President’s insistence, will strengthen and expand ties with strategic partners in Asia and Latin America even as they support tens of thousands of jobs here at home, from shop floors to farms to service firms across our country. TAA reforms will ensure that workers get retraining and assistance for the 21st-century jobs they want and need. And the simultaneous passage of key preference programs upholds our commitment to partner with the world’s poorest countries for economic growth.

"Taken together, these initiatives are the leading edge of a job-creating trade agenda that will open markets, level the playing field for our businesses and workers, and champion America’s working families in an age of tough global competition. They deserve the historic and widespread support they received in Congress tonight. We will continue our work to rebuild an American consensus on trade."

In 2010 and 2011, the Obama Administration worked with Korea, Colombia, and Panama to successfully address outstanding issues related to each of the three agreements. In particular, the Administration secured: greater U.S. access to the Korean auto market; significantly increased labor rights and worker protections in Colombia; and enhanced tax transparency and labor rights in Panama. The Administration has been clear that once approved by Congress, agreements will enter into force only if trading partners are meeting their commitments. USTR will commence immediately the necessary work to bring the agreements into force as soon as possible.

TAA provides training and support for American workers who are negatively affected by trade and is traditionally in place as trade agreements pass. It is designed to help workers, firms, farmers and fishermen transition to alternative employment. The legislation approved today is consistent with the goals of the 2009 law that improved the scope and effectiveness of the program – for instance, covering Americans employed in the services sector in addition to U.S. manufacturing workers. TAA is an essential component of President Obama's balanced trade agenda.

GSP promotes economic growth in the developing world by providing preferential duty-free entry for products from designated beneficiary countries and territories; they also support American jobs and improve American competitiveness since many American businesses use imports under these programs as inputs to manufacture goods in the United States. The Andean Trade Preferences Act was enacted in December 1991 to help Andean countries in their fight against drug production and trafficking by expanding their economic alternatives.

