

HIGHLIGHTS-USTR nominee Kirk positions on trade

Reuters
Mar 16, 2009

WASHINGTON, March 16 (Reuters) - The Senate is expected to vote this week on the confirmation of former Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk to be U.S. trade representative. Below are excerpts of his written and oral remarks to the Senate Finance Committee last week:

U.S. TRADE ENFORCEMENT

"The first order of business for the administration on trade is to ensure strong enforcement of the rules under our existing agreements."

"Enforcement of our trade laws and our rights under international agreements is not protectionism."

DOHA ROUND OF WORLD TRADE TALKS

"The Doha negotiations are, obviously, the largest ongoing trade negotiation. Assessing the appropriate next steps is a top priority. A successful outcome is one that opened significant new market opportunities for American workers, farmers and businesses, without the United States having to make the lion's share of the concessions to get a package."

"Much of the current deadlock in the Doha negotiations can be traced to the continuing question of whether key emerging markets such as China, Brazil, and India will make new market-opening commitments."

CHINA'S INDUSTRIAL POLICIES

"China's export restrictions on raw materials continue to generate serious concerns for us, as do other Chinese industrial policies. I can assure you that one of my top priorities will be to ensure that we aggressively defend our WTO rights and benefits vis-a-vis China and our other trading partners. We will use bilateral engagement, as well as the full range of WTO tools in our efforts."

CHINA'S CURRENCY PRACTICES

"The Treasury Department is responsible for issues pertaining to other countries' currency practices and will make its determination concerning China's currency in its semi-annual report to Congress on international economic and exchange rate policies."

"If confirmed, I will work closely with the other senior officials in the administration to develop a comprehensive and integrated policy to address the full range of China's trade policies that impact the United States.

"As part of this comprehensive effort, of course, we will need to review China's actions for consistency with its WTO obligations. I will aggressively pursue WTO action whenever that approach will be the most effective and appropriate means to address U.S. concerns."

CHINA'S LABOR PRACTICES

"China's labor practices are a matter of serious concern and we will work with the Department of Labor and the Department of State to examine the issue."

COPYRIGHT PIRACY IN CHINA

"I will press China hard to make significantly greater progress on the issue of copyright piracy."

U.S.-CHINA GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT TALKS

"I will make it very clear to China's economic leadership that to fulfill its WTO commitment to accede to the GPA (Government Procurement Agreement), it will have to meet the high standards of coverage set by the United States and other GPA Parties. We will not accept China's accession on any terms that are less than fully reciprocal."

FOREIGN CONCERNS ABOUT 'BUY AMERICAN'

"China, Russia, Brazil and India maintain 'buy national' policies that significantly restrict participation by U.S. firms in their procurement. The United States does not have obligations to allow any country to participate in our government procurement unless that country has agreed to allow U.S. suppliers fair and reciprocal access to their procurement."

PANAMA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

"I am going to ... ask the staff to present to me what they and our counterparts at the Department of Labor think is necessary for Panama to do (to improve its labor laws) before we can comfortably send the agreement to Congress for ratification. Initial conversations with experts indicate that while that list exists, it is not long. I cannot say whether or not you should expect a bill before Easter. We need to present a list to the Panamanians and assess their willingness to address the issues promptly. I can say that nothing we ask should require a change to the text of the agreement."

COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

"President (Barack Obama) has indicated that he expects to see (Colombia do) more to address ongoing violence against labor leaders and others in Colombia ... We will need to address them before the agreement is sent forward for approval and before implementation."

"We will work with the Department of Labor, Department of State, and Congress to assess the exact labor law reform or other changes necessary to bring Colombia into compliance with the commitment to allow for the effective exercise of the right to organize free from fear."

SOUTH KOREA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

"We are well aware of the concerns with the auto provisions and will work with you to address them."

"To date, the failure to create a basis to move the agreement forward constitutes a major missed opportunity of the last several years."

"The president has said, and I agree, the agreement as it is simply isn't fair and if we don't get that right, we'll be prepared to step away."

CLIMATE CHANGE TRADE IMPLICATIONS

"We will work with the State Department and other agencies to press countries such as India and China to take strong action through a new global climate change agreement."

"It will be critical that any U.S. climate change legislation address concerns with carbon leakage and competitiveness, yet do so in a way that does not generate serious trade tensions and that is consistent with our international obligations." (Reporting by Doug Palmer; Editing by Eric Walsh)