

# U.S. to push on Doha, Bush trade deals: Kirk

By Doug Palmer  
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WASHINGTON - The Obama administration is committed to concluding long-running world trade talks and wants to move forward on trade deals with Panama, Colombia and South Korea negotiated by former President George W. Bush, U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk said on Thursday.

"Now is the time to revive global trade, and to lay the groundwork for an even more robust, more open trading system in future decades," Kirk said in what was billed as his first major policy speech since taking office last month.

"To get our economy back on track, we need to increase exports," Kirk said at the Georgetown University law school.

But with many Americans doubtful of the benefits of trade, it was also time to "take a new approach," Kirk said.

That meant rigorous U.S. enforcement of trade agreements to ensure countries honor commitments to open their markets and ensuring U.S. workers who lose their jobs because of trade know the government will "have their backs," he said.

The United States also must help small and medium-sized companies export more, Kirk said, noting that 97 percent of American exporters have fewer than 500 workers.

President Barack Obama tapped into strong anti-trade sentiment during last year's election by criticizing the North American Free Trade Agreement and opposing trade deals the Bush administration negotiated with Colombia and South Korea.

But with U.S. exports plummeting along with the rest of global trade, Obama has joined other world leaders in warning against the danger of protectionism.

## LABOR PROTECTIONS

In meetings with leaders of Canada and Mexico, Obama has said he wants to add stronger labor and environmental protections to NAFTA without unraveling the pact.

Kirk said the Obama administration believed there was strong bipartisan support in Congress for a Panama trade deal left over from the Bush administration and was looking for new solutions to concerns that have blocked the pacts with Colombia and South Korea.

Opponents of those deals say pursuing the pacts would cause a split among Democrats that could damage Obama's ability to accomplish other legislative goals.

"This is absolutely outrageous and a serious mistake," said Rep. Mike Michaud, a leader of a group of 54 lawmakers, most of them Democrats, in the House of Representative who have called for major changes in U.S. policy.

The White House, if it submits the agreements to Congress, will likely have to rely heavily on Republican votes to get them approved, especially in the House.

Kirk, who also promised to bring more transparency to U.S. trade policy, did not take questions after the speech. Aides told reporters he was scheduled to meet with Georgetown students and already had a news conference on Monday.

The United States also wants a successful conclusion to the long-running Doha round of world trade talks, "and in coming weeks we will have more to say about how we think Doha can finally move forward," Kirk said.