

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

August 6, 2012

The Honorable Ron Kirk
United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Kirk:

I am writing in regards to the ongoing process of getting input and driving consensus in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations and, in particular, the imperative of assuring the greatest possible transparency in that process. I have received requests from labor, social justice and environmental groups in my district for USTR to provide the public with increased transparency including summaries of the current proposals. The Obama Administration has taken positive measures to increase transparency and improve stakeholder outreach. But more can always be done and I wanted to offer some input in this regard.

President Obama has put forward ambitious standards for this 21st Century trade agreement to create jobs for American workers and level the playing field for American businesses. These must include the standards of the historic May 10th agreement and be the starting point for any negotiation on labor and environment standards. These enforceable standards go a long way towards keeping the playing field truly fair. If this agreement is done right, businesses and workers in my home state of Washington will be able to take full advantage of the TPP agreement, and it will truly grow the middle class.

As negotiation of the TPP texts reach critical points in the upcoming months, it is increasingly critical that stakeholders – including civil society groups and non-governmental organizations – have access to the U.S. officials negotiating on issues important to them. This is essential for getting a result that will work for Americans, and promote American values and interests. Recently, I have heard concerns that access to U.S. negotiators is becoming more limited. I hope that you are able to find ways to expand this access.

Similarly, on a broader note, I urge you to consider whether the trade advisory system -- which currently has nearly 700 citizen advisors and 28 separate committees – is in need of an update to better reflect the diversity of American views and interests. For example, I have heard concerns that only one NGO is represented on any of the sixteen Industry Trade Advisory Committees or six Agricultural Policy Advisory Committees. It is worthwhile to examine whether this imbalance in representation on those committees can and should be corrected.

Finally, while your office has engaged in consultations with committees of jurisdiction as you proceed with the TPP negotiations, it is important that regular and broader consultations also be held with Member offices who work on, and have specific interests, in matters being negotiated.

Only if there is such a broad-based effort to gain the input of the broadest number of people, and to build the broadest consensus, will TPP succeed at being a truly 21st Century agreement.

I look forward to continuing to work with you and your office to ensure that any TPP agreement is the best deal possible for the American people.

Sincerely,


Jim McDermott
Member of Congress