

Remarks by Ambassador Ron Kirk

**May 6, 2010
7th Annual U.S.-Asia Pacific Council Washington Conference
Washington, DC**

“Thank you, Dr. Morrison. And thank you to Ambassador Roy of the US-Asia Pacific Council for hosting this great conference today.

“Perhaps instead of hello, I should have started this speech with a big ‘aloha.’ We are all looking forward to the APEC 2011 Leaders meeting in Hawaii. Frankly, I’m not sure whether the President is more excited about laying the cornerstone for a new foundation of economic engagement in the Pacific next year, or getting some of his favorite shave ice!

“I’m just kidding – as you all know, the President is quite serious about renewing American leadership in the world and especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

“I want to thank Dr. Morrison for his outstanding leadership in helping us plan to host APEC for in 2011. We in the Obama Administration are certainly looking forward to working with your team over the next 18 months.

“As we prepare for this work together, I would like to offer some perspectives on:

“How economic engagement fits into the President’s overall strategy in the Asia-Pacific region.

“And how the work we at USTR are doing in the region – successfully hosting APEC and launching a Trans-Pacific Partnership – complements our overall economic policy and puts us on a path toward the President’s goal of doubling American exports and growing American jobs.

“Finally, I will address specifically the vital role that all of you here can play in our efforts to reach these goals.

“Let me begin by congratulating the East-West Center on its 50th anniversary.

“At the time of your groundbreaking in 1960, wars in Japan and on the Korean Peninsula were still fresh in the minds of most Americans. War in Southeast Asia had yet to begin in earnest, and President Nixon was years away from going to China.

“Today we find a very different picture in the Pacific with respect to U.S. interests. The Cold War is over, the guns of war have gone quiet – and the economic engines have revved up.

“Over the past 50 years, the Asia-Pacific region has experienced unparalleled economic growth. China, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Republic of Korea are among the most dynamic economies in the world. And, the region as a whole now accounts for more than half of global GDP.

“So today, while the United States promotes peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, we are also seeking to refresh and refine our commitment to economic prosperity for the people of every Pacific nation.

“Last year President Obama on his first trip to Asia emphasized that the United States is a Pacific nation, and he has tasked this Administration with an agenda that renews American leadership in the region.

“On trade issues, this responsibility falls primarily to me and our team at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR).

“A few months ago, the President signaled his personal commitment to expanding trade by signing an executive order creating the National Export Initiative (NEI).

“The National Export Initiative is an unprecedented whole-of-government approach to meet the President’s goal of doubling the amount of U.S. exports over the next five years, which will create two million American jobs.

“USTR and our partner agencies across the government are working to implement the National Export Initiative. We are consulting with Congress and stakeholders all the way, and reaching out to the American people to explain what we’re doing, and why.

“This open and honest approach is consistent with President Obama’s goal of providing greater transparency in government.

“And we have a good story to tell about trade. A lot of people are skeptical about this – but the fact is that trade leads to more and better jobs for American workers. In the last half of 2009, U.S. exports alone accounted for nearly half of American economic growth. And the data shows clearly that businesses that export grow faster, add jobs quicker, and pay higher wages. So, there is a strong case for boosting exports to create jobs – and we can’t afford to leave any jobs on the table.

“With respect to the Asia-Pacific region, in particular, more than 60 percent of American exports go to this region.

“Experts predict that most growth in consumer sales in the coming decade will be on the Asian side of the Pacific Rim.

“And we want to access that growth for American businesses and workers.

“Let me turn now to some of the specifics of how we intend to accomplish the bigger picture goals I’ve just laid out.

“First of all, we are working in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum or APEC to expand trade opportunities by addressing issues related to U.S. objectives to grow jobs, expand exports, and stimulate the trade-driven growth of small- and medium-sized businesses.

“To that end, in 2010, we are working closely with our Japanese colleagues to achieve concrete and significant deliverables for this year that will set the stage for ambitious results in 2011 when the United States hosts APEC.

“Specifically, we are focused on:

“Advancing key and pressing trade and investment issues, including in the area of standards and technical barriers to trade, that we can use as building blocks for 21st century trade agreements.

“Taking steps to make it cheaper, easier, and faster to trade in the region, including by eliminating obstacles to the flow of goods through supply chains and improving the transparency and accessibility of APEC economies’ customs information.

“Addressing barriers to trade and investment in environmental goods and services, with a particular focus on non-tariff barriers.

“In 2011, the United States will host the APEC forum, and we plan to leverage this unique opportunity to demonstrate America’s commitment to playing a stronger and more constructive role in the Asia-Pacific region, including on crucial trade and investment topics.

“We also see APEC 2011 as an opportunity to tell our story on trade, and educate people about the benefits of exports to our economic growth and our ability to grow jobs, and the importance of staying engaged with the Asia-Pacific.

“We have selected Big Sky, Montana as the location for the 2011 APEC Trade Ministers’ meeting. Bringing the trade ministers to the American West will give us the chance to showcase the diversity of American business, but it will also provide us the format to talk about how important the dynamic Asia-Pacific is to the health of our economy.

“We are planning for APEC 2011 to be significant both in symbol and substance.

“Our planning comes at a time when the President is eager to seize this unique opportunity to articulate a Trans-Pacific agenda for shared peace and prosperity.

“APEC 2011 has the potential to be watershed moment in U.S. economic engagement in the Asia-Pacific, so we are going to be both bold and ambitious when we host.

“We are also pursuing a new formal trade agreement with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, through which we hope to build what will become the largest, most dynamic trade collaboration of our time.

“The President and I intend for the Trans-Pacific Partnership to be our first 21st century trade agreement – one that creates and retains U.S. jobs, integrates U.S. companies in Asia-Pacific production and supply chains, and promotes new technologies and emerging economic sectors.

“A 21st century trade agreement should also create more opportunities for small- and medium-sized enterprises, while also giving priority to labor and environmental protections and fostering development.

“We launched discussions for the TPP in March and will have the next round in June.

“We are also working to deliver economic and strategic trade benefits and opportunities by resolving outstanding issues on the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement, in an effort to move it forward at the appropriate time. When it goes into effect, this agreement will create billions of dollars in new market access for American exporters and strengthen our ties with an important partner in the region.

“And whether it is the TPP, APEC 2011, or our efforts with all our Asia-Pacific partners throughout the year, all of you have a vital role to play in our efforts.

“The scholars in this audience do an unparalleled job of facilitating research, education, and communication among experts and key stakeholders.

“And you business leaders have an unmatched breadth and depth of knowledge and experience.

“As we build the agenda for APEC 2011, you will all provide the intellectual capital, working relationships, and practical knowledge we need to succeed.

“USTR sees APEC 2011 as a dual opportunity – not only to go after our goals in the Asia-Pacific, but also a chance to educate the American public about the benefits of trade, even as we educate our Pacific trade partners about the needs and concerns of American stakeholders.

“In conclusion, I invite you to close your eyes and imagine with me what this meeting might be like fifty years from now.

“When the next generation of global leaders gathers here in 2060, what will our economic relationship look like?

“Will it be balanced? Will it be sustainable? Will we be bringing home all the benefits of trade that we have promised to our citizens?

“The outcomes of APEC 2010 and APEC 2011, and the decisions we make in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, will have a dramatic impact on the answers to those questions.

“We are approaching a dynamic moment in this growing relationship, and there is much work to be done.

“I look forward to working with you to realize our vision of prosperity across APEC.”