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TRANSCRIPT:

United States Trade Representative Ron Kirk
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Headquarters of the World Trade Organization
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AMBASSADOR KIRK: Good morning. Thank you all for joining us.

Let me first begin by expressing my very sincere gratitude to the Director-General and the wonderful staff here at the WTO for welcoming me on my initial visit to the World Trade Organization as the United States Trade Representative. I have had a very successful and productive week, had an opportunity to meet with, I understand, over half of the members representing the delegations here in the WTO, and I also want to extend my thanks to our Ambassador Peter Allgeier and our great team here at the U.S. Trade Representative's Mission here in Geneva.

From my very first meeting with my colleagues involved in GRULAC to my dinner last night with Commissioner Catherine Ashton from the European Union, I've had an opportunity to engage in some very frank and candid but useful discussions with many of our trading partners and I very much appreciated their sense of engagement and their willingness to share with me some of their very candid thoughts about some of the issues that challenge those of us in the global trading community.

Of course one of the key topics of our discussions has been the intentions of the United States with regard to the Doha Development Round. The United States continues to review the negotiations. In fact part of my rationale for being here this early in my tenure is a continuation of that review and to try to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of many of our partners of where we are in the negotiations and the best path for us to go forward.

But as I have discussed Doha this week with my colleagues, I will share with you some of the points I have made from the U.S. perspective.

First of all, and most importantly, President Obama and I are both committed to a successful conclusion to the Doha Development Round. We see it not only as a critical component of what the President believes should be an overall, worldwide response to the current economic crisis, but it's also critical to the sustenance of many of our least developed countries.

To us, success means a balanced and ambitious agreement with meaningful market access gains for all involved.

The United States is critically aware that this is a development round and we do not believe that the least developed countries should share the biggest burden of this or make the sacrifices necessary in order to bring Doha to a successful conclusion.

We do believe, however, that there is an opportunity for leadership among many of the advanced developing countries, to make the kind of choices that are required for those of us who choose to seek leadership here at the WTO.

While the United States stands ready to work toward a successful conclusion to Doha, we humbly recognize that our participation is not the only factor necessary to bring this round to a successful conclusion. It will take hard work and cooperation from all the negotiators at the table to reach the successful conclusion we all desperately desire. We should all be willing to consider changes to the process that could put the negotiations on a more direct path to success. The United States does not believe that we should start the Doha Round over or change its underlying mandate. We also don't believe that we should throw out all of the hard work that's been done. We seek to build on the progress that we've made and find the best way forward, and we collectively want to think about a new path to address the remaining issues.

These have been the most substantive points of my discussions and interventions with my colleagues this week. I've also enjoyed a number of informal bilateral exchanges with various of our trading partners and had a number of very useful meetings with WTO officials including Director-General Lamy with whom I've shared much of what I shared with you all today. Recognizing the shortness of our time and your readiness to engage me, I'll be happy to take your questions. And I do thank you all for your patience in accommodating us in terms of this press conference this morning. Thank you.

QUESTION: You mentioned today and you did mention in your Georgetown speech a couple of weeks ago the importance of advanced developing countries stepping up to the plate and contributing. Did you hear anything from them this week, in particular from Brazil, India or China, which gives you reason to believe that they've accepted this message and will be making better efforts to meet U.S. demands? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR KIRK: I'm encouraged that all of the countries that you mentioned I have had an opportunity to engage with and share our thoughts going forward thus far. And I would suggest to you, Dan, that I think they will all analyze and review Doha from their own unique perspectives. But we will continue to press and make the case that we believe that as the

emerging economies that they are, in particular Brazil, India, China and to some degree South Africa, they can play I think a very unique and productive role in us finding a path to go forward.

QUESTION: My question is perhaps on the timing issue. This might take a while still. You are reviewing your policy as well internally. What is the U.S. strategy, for example, for the Americas since this might, let's say it takes a year, year and a half or even two years to complete. Are you going to follow bilateral strategies to have bilateral agreements as well? Or this is basically it, the WTO?

AMBASSADOR KIRK: In the spirit of this morning I'm going to take that as one very long question, Jamil. Let me take them backwards and try to do it briefly.

I think all of you would recognize that with any change in administration there is some requisite period of time to develop your strategy, both in terms of tone and substance and how you want to proceed. Overall, what we have sought to do at the U.S. Trade Representative's Office is not take a tactical approach to that and decide whether we wanted to just go forward with Panama or Colombia in the case of agreements with South America, or Doha, or Korea. But in addition to our work on Doha what we have done is take a step back and try to look holistically at what we would like an Obama administration's trade policy to look like. So in that spirit we have looked at a number of things and charted the path in which we want to go forward.

With respect to Doha, we are driven by a couple of firmly established principles. One, the President strongly believes that the best help that we can give to some of the least developed nations is to get to a successful conclusion of the Doha Round as soon as possible. Many of them are suffering tremendously because of the economic downturn, and while that pain is being felt obviously in the United States and China and others, the pain in the least developed countries is almost unbearable. So one, we have an overarching theme that we'd like to get them relief as soon as possible.

Secondly, we are not arrogant enough to believe that by our showing up now, that everyone is going to wait to hear what we have to say and we're going to get to that conclusion. Part of our getting there has to be a thoughtful engagement of our trading partners to see if we can't begin to find some ways that we can narrow the gaps of differences that we might have that have prevented us to getting to a successful conclusion.

So we haven't set a definitive timeline. We know everyone wants relief now, but we believe the substance of our talks will drive the process which will ultimately define the timeline.

QUESTION: Listening to your opening statement, there's a lot of continuity from the message we received from the previous administration in terms of the need for market access but also balancing it with consideration for least developed countries, yet a need for the advanced developing countries to step up. When you came here to Geneva, since you've been here, what have you learned from some of these officials about their disappointments or what they felt was lacking in the previous administration's approach to the Doha Round? And in what ways are you hoping to address those concerns?

AMBASSADOR KIRK: Brad, I will tell you the most important lesson and welcome lesson is how enthusiastically my colleagues were waiting to hear from the United States. What I have found here was somewhat what I expected, that most of our global partners, whether it has been through the G8 or through the United Nations, have enthusiastically celebrated the change in tone and style from the Obama administration from the previous administration.

What I find somewhat curious, though is that that change in tone and style is not only welcomed but almost joyously celebrated in terms of our approach to engaging our partners on issues of national security, in terms of our engaging our partners through the G8, but that in the one fora that I might have expected differently here at the WTO, the one place that we are sort of being asked to stand still in terms of where the previous administration left off, is with respect to Doha. And in making that observation to a number of our colleagues, I think it has at least relaxed some of their apprehension about the time we've taken to have a review and what we might consider as changes that could be helpful to moving forward, as something that should be welcomed as part of that change in tone that they've come to appreciate in the new administration.

I hope that is responsive to your question.

QUESTION: Mr. Kirk, what do you think about some countries stop the import of U.S. pork (in response to) influenza H1N1? Please tell me your opinion.

AMBASSADOR KIRK: I was especially grateful, I think it was a week ago Saturday, that with the strong leadership of Director-General Lamy and the WTO, that the WTO, the World Health Organization, the OIE, and a number of organizations, all reiterated that based on the existing science of what we know there was no reason to conclude that the consumption of prepared pork products would in any way make anyone likely to get the H1N1 virus, and that any country that acted to restrict the imports of pork or swine or live hogs from the United States or Canada or Mexico should only do so based on the sound scientific phytosanitary standards established by the WTO. So we are appreciative of that and the United States believes there is no reason whatsoever for anyone to be concerned about the consumption of prepared pork products. And we would hope that in light of what is a very legitimate and very serious now worldwide health crisis, that none of our partners within the WTO would act precipitously to gain from that in a financial way and cause further erosion to a world trading community that's already seeing a significant decline.

QUESTION: Ambassador Kirk, could you say something more about what you meant by a change in process that might help bring the Doha Round to a successful conclusion?

AMBASSADOR KIRK: Frances, I guess I start with the basic presumption -- Well, let me say this in response to Brad's question. The most welcoming lesson I've learned here, first of all, is the sincerity, the commitment and the passion of the members of the WTO towards a successful conclusion of the Doha Round. And contrary somewhat to my, I guess, basic belief as a mayor that everything can be done more quickly than not, that an extraordinary amount of effort and time has gone into trying to make that happen.

Having said that, with respect to the good substantive work that has been done, obviously something needs to happen differently to get us to a successful conclusion. And inasmuch as the last three times we have come together for whatever reason and tried to bring a conclusion to the Doha Round we have not been able to do so. What I have inartfully suggested to my colleagues, perhaps whether it's a bicycle or the bus or whatever vehicle we've all been loaded on to to try to get to Doha, hasn't gotten us there. Perhaps we should think less about the vehicle but make sure we keep everybody, what's important, is in the bus, not the vehicle. If we need to look at a different delivery mechanism, let's be open to do that. But let's not sacrifice the basic underlying principles, but make sure that we're open to whatever it is that might drive us to a successful conclusion.

QUESTION: Ambassador, I was wondering, sir, the perception in some business circles is that while leaders are flip-flopping on the Doha issue, in November they set a deadline for modalities to be reached in the Washington meeting. In April in London they set no deadline.

And I have an issue with reference to your comments about an early relief of assistance to the poorest countries in the world. African countries have been waiting from the United States for four years to hear what you're going to deliver up front as agreed in Hong Kong on cotton. When do you think the African countries can get your answer? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR KIRK: One, I won't try to be a spokesman for all of the world leaders or the G20. That might be a bit ambitious even for the United States.

With respect to Africa, I am very proud of the track record of the United States in terms of our conscious efforts through AGOA, through trade capacity assistance, and through USAID for Trade being one of the largest contributors to that process, to engage our African brothers and sisters in a way that leans more towards commerce and trade rather than traditional foreign aid. We will continue to drive that process.

Secondly, we continue to believe that whether it's the issue of cotton or any other issue associated with Doha, they will best be resolved in the context as we've all agreed on with the completion of that Doha Round.

QUESTION: Will you please tell me, if President Obama said to President Medvedev that the United States would facilitate Russia's accession to the WTO, whether you are going to undertake some steps to make this process move.

AMBASSADOR KIRK: President Obama and your Russian President had a very productive meeting at the G20 Summit in London in which President Obama did reconfirm the United States' support for Russia's accession to the WTO. Now there is a defined path for that to happen. In our office working with our counterparts in Russia, frankly, Russia has done a remarkable amount of good work on a number of those issues. However, there are a number of issues in which Russia frankly has kind of made a U-Turn and gone backwards. But we believe the responsibility for addressing that is with Russia, and not the United States.

We've had very candid conversations with our colleagues, particularly on agriculture, and you heard the reference earlier to the H1N1 crisis and Russia's banning of products from the United States and Canada. And I think the more quickly that Russia can address those issues, the more collaboratively we'll be able to work on the issue of accession.

QUESTION: Given the two lunches and the two dinners, several dinners that you had, the general message that you have got is that a change in the process is not much warranted and this is not the time to go for a change in the process.

Many countries are also asking what is the U.S. contribution to the Doha Round? U.S., they say, have got a range of flexibilities, whether it's countercyclical payments in agriculture or for your sense to tariffs. Can you elaborate or illuminate us on what exactly is the U.S. contribution to the Doha Round?

AMBASSADOR KIRK: Anyone that reads and has followed this process understands the United States has one of the most open markets to all of our developing countries that in most cases, particularly the least developed countries, in almost most cases have about 98 percent access to our markets.

What we believe can be helpful in bringing the Doha Round to a conclusion is to provide an opportunity for meaningful market access for all of the countries involved, including the developed and the, what we define as the advanced developing countries. And considering that we for the most part have opened our markets for some of the least developed countries, their next frontiers aren't going to be in the United States because they already have access. Where they can have an opportunity to have additional market access is places like India and China and Brazil and South Africa.

So we think it's important that those countries that are growing stronger be invited to the table to see if they can't be helpful in perhaps finding ways that we can create additional opportunities for all of us so that this is a win/win/win solution for all of the countries involved.

QUESTION: Could you give us an idea when you expect to conclude the review of trade policy that you're conducting? And going back to some of the earlier questions, would that review involve on process moving away from a focus on modalities to something more like a request of a bilateral process which has been raised by some people here?

AMBASSADOR KIRK: Jonathan, let me say in terms of our overarching review of our U.S. trade policy, we have for the most part kind of worked through that process.

Doha is a little bit different because of the extraordinary potential of it but also its complexities. That review was bumped up to the level of our National Economic Council. The first stage was our review within the U.S. The next stage has been and will be our continued engagement with our partners here at the WTO because we understand this is not simply a matter of the United States showing up and saying here's the silver bullet that we've all been searching for. So we will continue to engage our partners now and over the next several weeks to see if we can't

collectively come up with some common themes and maybe find that thread that helps us thread the needle to move forward.

We are not locked in, Jonathan, to any particular process in terms of whether we stick with negotiating existing modalities or go to scheduling. We are suggesting that we have to be open to all possibilities.

QUESTION: Two quick questions. First I'd like to know whether you saw sincerity, commitment and passion on the part of India? Are you concerned at all that isn't there as much as you'd like it to be?

Secondly, during your talks with Catherine Ashton I'd like to know whether on the tail of the successful solution for the beef hormone case you discussed what's the next case to have a negotiated solution to and whether Boeing AirBus came up. Thank you.

AMBASSADOR KIRK: Let me take the first question. I think I'd like to refrain from characterizing or trying to put in context any one particular country's intent or integrity in terms of going forward. I would say broadly, Catherine, that my reception could not have been better among all of my colleagues, and I have genuinely enjoyed, first of all, the opportunity to meet them on a personal level, and I would grant them the same benefit of the doubt in terms of their expression of their passion, their intents regarding our work here at the WTO as I would hope they would grant me as well.

With respect to my dinner with, I don't know if I should call her Baroness or Commissioner Ashton, it was much more celebratory than anything else, in that I was, through sheer accident of good timing, fortune, as you know, within six hours of my having been confirmed in this position a little less than two months ago I had the opportunity to have dinner and meet Commissioner Ashton. And while we didn't agree on anything substantively at that time, what we did agree was that considering the extraordinary success of the relationship in this case between the United States and the European Commission in terms of trade, we both considered it a tragedy to some degree that the relationship, because of the nature of you all's work, is almost singularly defined by our disputes at the WTO. And lost is the fact that this is an incredibly successful trade relationship on which hundreds of thousands of jobs are dependent and people are doing good, solid business every day.

Within that context we agreed that to the degree we could begin to pick up the phone and engage one another directly on some very difficult issues and get any of them resolved, that would be a much, much welcomed change in our relationship.

Obviously the first example of that was the beef dispute. So last night, frankly, was an opportunity for us to celebrate and thank our two negotiators who were most responsible for that, and commit ourselves then to reviewing broadly what might happen next. We did not try to define or identify any one matter that might be the subject.

But I think we've at least set a welcome template between the United States and EU and hopefully some of our other partners will look at that and say we don't have to wait four or five years for all these to move through the dispute settlement process.

Forgive me, but we must catch a plane. Thank you all for being so kind and for your patience. If I didn't talk to you today, we'll have a chance to talk to you on future trips.

Thank you.

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