

THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
Washington, D.C. 20230

March 10, 2006

The Honorable John F. Kerry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kerry:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Department's effort to assist in the recovery of businesses and support of victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The Department of Commerce is committed to supporting American businesses and is sensitive to the devastating losses for victims of the hurricanes. Immediately following Hurricane Katrina, the Department's Trade Promotion and United States and Foreign Commercial Service (Commercial Service) turned its Trade Information Center into a call center for businesses affected by the hurricane. Over 40 Commercial Service employees, several of whom were deployed to the disaster areas, volunteered their time and effort in the immediate aftermath.

Commercial Service staff was also directed to serve in affected areas to work proactively with state and local officials to develop export seminars, trade missions, trade-show pavilions, and other promotional programs. Its overseas offices will recruit and lead foreign-buyer delegations to industry shows in the region. In addition, a conference will be held in New Orleans on March 30, 2006, to tap export opportunities with the multilateral development banks, both to revive tourism revenue and to provide ready access of information for companies along the Gulf Coast.

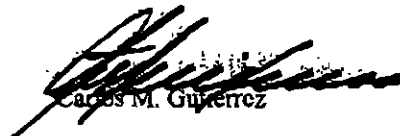
The Commercial Service will use funding from the congressionally mandated Rural Export Initiative to assist rural companies in areas impacted by the hurricanes. This assistance can only be used for rural companies.

In response to your request for reduced or waived fees for products and services, the Commercial Service has the ability to reduce or waive fees through the end of Fiscal Year 2006 within the exemption from the Office of Management and Budget's A-25 requirements granted in the Fiscal Year 2006 appropriation.

In addition, the Department has also established the Hurricane Contracting Information Center (HCIC). The HCIC provides a central point of reference for businesses, especially those that are local, minority or women-owned, and small and medium-sized enterprises, to register for and become aware of federal contracting opportunities in the Gulf Coast. While the HCIC does not award contracts, its mission is to ensure that businesses understand the process and are aware when opportunities become available. To learn more about the HCIC, please visit <http://www.rebuildingthegulfcoast.gov> or call 1-888-4USADOC.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me or Nat Wienecke, Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 482-3663.

Sincerely,



Carlos M. Gutierrez