

U.S.-Australia FTA Signing

**U.S. Trade Representative
Robert B. Zoellick
Andrew Mellon Auditorium
May 18, 2004**

Well thank you very much Congressman Dooley and Congresswoman Dunn, not only for your support with us today but your support over many, many months and over the past number of years. And I also want to thank Chairman Crane, and Congressman Brady. Again, we've got some of the strongest free traders in the Congress with us today, and we wouldn't be here without their support

It is a real pleasure to be here with my colleague – and good friend – Minister Mark Vaile, who has been an exceptional leader in our common effort to make the U.S.-Australia Free Trade Agreement a reality.

My good partner and friend, Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman, who played a key role in our work, is also here today.

And I am delighted that we also have the opportunity to be joined by many representatives of the business community; and a number of other distinguished guests on this historic occasion: the signing of the U.S.-Australia Free Trade Agreement.

To be able to represent the United States today is a special honor for me.

For I have the privilege to be able to follow in the footsteps of generations of Americans and Australians who have established a special partnership between our two democracies.

Both our countries are proud that we have offered opportunity to immigrants from diverse cultures, that we believe that the common man can achieve the uncommon dream – and have the right to do so.

Australians and Americans have been willing to stand up for that special belief in humankind – that is what has drawn us together, arm in arm, to fight together, to suffer together, and even to die together.

We have done so in distant Europe, even though Europe sent many Americans and Australians from its shores in ships of sadness.

We have done so in the Asia-Pacific, because we believe there is a yearning for freedom in all societies, including those with cultures and histories very different from our own.

And now we are doing so in Afghanistan and Iraq because Australians and Americans will never accept that tyranny is the natural order.

Yet, while we are proud of our history, Australia and America, as immigrant societies that have built new nations, are not chained to our past.

We look ahead to what we can build.

And so today we are building something new and exciting together.

For years, some Americans and Australians have wanted to look beyond our security ties, beyond our political alliance, to deepen our economic and societal partnership.

Particularly with the passing of that generation of Diggers and Yanks who fought together in World War II, some Australians and Americans have urged that we commit to open new venues for our societies to work together, invest together, learn together, create together, and grow together.

I am grateful that President Bush “41,” President Bush “43,” and Prime Minister Howard gave me the opportunity to be an agent for those committed Australians and Americans: to help launch the idea of this venture in 1992, to negotiate it over the past year, and to sign it in 2004. They are true leaders.

The United States will gain much from this new economic partnership, our first free trade agreement with a developed nation in 16 years. For most of the last decade, Australia’s growth has outstripped the rest of the developed world, including the United States.

No idea worth pursuing comes without its own special challenges.

And, believe me, working through a closing round of three intensive weeks – two of which involved every day and night sessions by Ministers and our senior colleagues – reminds me why I admired all those great Australian long distance runners when I was growing up.

At least the Australians will know what I mean when I say that, to me, Mark Vaile and Michael Thawley were the Ron Clark and John Landy of negotiators: they set a brutal pace, but were gentlemen throughout.

One reason I think our teams persevered was that we knew we had the backing of – and a responsibility to – all of you and many others.

So I am pleased that many of you could with us today to celebrate this achievement.

Most particularly, I want to recognize the hard working professionals from USTR and the many other U.S. government agencies that helped craft this agreement.

Because we relied on more than 100 colleagues from across the U.S. government, I am sorry that I cannot thank all of you by name – but I am deeply grateful for your skill, your spirit, and your service.

I need to single out the chief U.S. negotiator, Ralph Ives, the leading engineer of this accomplishment. Ralph's creativity, his perseverance, his decency – and especially his humor, make him an extraordinary leader.

I also want to give a special thanks to Deputy USTR Josette Sheeran Shiner and Chief Agricultural Negotiator Al Johnson, without whom we would not have succeeded. Each assumed responsibility for some of the toughest issues – working closely with Congress and our many constituencies, as well as with our Australian counterparts. One could not ask for better partners.

I hope my thanks to these leaders, as well as to Australian Ambassador Michael Thawley; skillful lead negotiator, Steve Deady; and the ever-steady and helpful Ashton Calvert, will represent my thanks to both teams.

As much as I would like to say that today is the finish line, much of this long race remains to be run. In both the United States and Australia, we must now turn our attention to winning approval of the agreement from our respective legislatures.

In the United States, we are here today only because Congress passed Trade Promotion Authority in 2002, and because so many members of the Senate and the House of both parties have offered us unflinching support. I am pleased in particular that we could have some of these key Members of Congress are here with us today.

The work of negotiating this historic agreement could not have come this far without the support we received from the business and farm leaders in both our nations. I know many of your are with us today.

But I cannot give you my thanks without also asking for your help yet again. Businesses and their workers are the ones who can best tell the powerful story of trade. Together we need to present to the Congress and the Parliament the importance of trade in terms of jobs, and growth, and opportunities. Millions of Americans and Australians depend on vibrant and growing trade for their jobs. The U.S-Australia FTA will only add to that number.

Now, there is a hard-headed economic reality that supports this free trade agreement. More than 99% of the manufactured goods traded between the United States and Australia will be duty-free on day one in this “Manufacturing FTA.” This is the most significant immediate reduction of industrial tariffs ever achieved in a U.S. free trade agreement.

As a result of this new freedom, trade between our nations is projected to rise by billions of dollars, creating more economic opportunity in both the United States and Australia.

And as a new publication of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce illustrates, these trading opportunities are for small businesses too.

We are very proud of what amounts to a state-of-the-art agreement. In addition to freeing trade in industrial goods, the new FTA removes barriers to agricultural products, investment, government procurement, and services while increasing protection for intellectual property and freeing electronic commerce.

But even as this FTA will speed planes and ships and megabytes across the Pacific, America and Australia are looking beyond to our shared interests in opening global trade.

The day we concluded the negotiations in February, I got on a plane to travel around and up and down the world.

Now some have said that after two challenging weeks with our tenacious Australian partners, my only refuge was to get 32,000 miles away – but in fact we were trying to reinvigorate the Doha WTO negotiations.

And we are now making progress on that front, too.

Just a few days ago, Minister Vaile and I were in Europe, pressing forward the worldwide reduction of barriers to agriculture, goods, and services in the WTO negotiations.

So by signing this agreement today, we are again sending the signal that the United States and Australia are committed to moving forward, opening trade through all avenues.

Of course, once this agreement is passed in both countries, others will turn this opportunity into a reality.

The FTA is only a framework – which will be filled in by millions of private citizens whose ingenuity, whose drive, and vision are the true engines of transformation.

That is especially fitting for our two countries, which have prized individual liberty and demonstrated the achievements that are possible when governments see their role as freeing people to strive to make their own dreams.

Thank you ... and we are counting on you.