

**Statement of Ambassador Ron Kirk, U.S. Trade Representative
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative**

Before the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee

“Keeping America Competitive: Federal Programs that Promote Small Business Exports”

June 26, 2009

Senator Landrieu, Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to join you today. This event is an excellent opportunity to talk about the small and medium-sized enterprises and their large and growing footprint in our international trade.

I look forward to hearing directly from a number of those small business owners today. Their voices should weigh heavily with us, because their work has enabled American goods to compete internationally.

More than a quarter of a million U.S. firms export goods. Ninety-seven percent of those firms are small to medium-sized businesses with fewer than 500 employees, and more than two-thirds have fewer than 20 employees. These are homegrown enterprises. They exist in cities and towns all across America, and they have an incredible amount of potential.

Here in Louisiana, trade is an important ingredient in a growing economy. More than 2,371 Louisiana businesses exported goods in 2006, with small and medium-size companies accounting for more than a third of the state’s total exports. Just last year, nearly \$60 billion worth of U.S. exports passed through the Port of New Orleans, destined for markets around the world. And enterprise at the Port itself has been estimated to support more than 160,000 high-quality jobs.

Obviously, trade is a profitable slice of our economy, and we must continue to open up new opportunities for American entrepreneurs.

I want to stress up front that improving small business access to new overseas markets is a priority for USTR. If we can make trade work for those small businesses, we can make trade work for all American families.

It’s already working for business owners all across Louisiana, and I want to take a moment to congratulate one of them, Ralston Pittman Cole. Ralston was recently named Louisiana’s Small Business Exporter of the Year for his work at EMD Services International, and it’s important to recognize good work when we see it. Ralston and others like him are fueling economic growth and job creation across the state.

But we’re not here just to congratulate successes; we are here to figure out how to help more Louisianans find success. It’s a long process. That is why I’ve joined Senator Landrieu and my colleagues from SBA, Export-Import Bank, and Commerce today for this event.

At USTR, our work is centered on one goal: creating high-quality jobs to support America's families. Because if Americans are willing to work hard, trade should work for them. We can do that by opening new markets to American goods and services, both by negotiating new agreements and by ensuring that foreign governments live up to their existing promises.

This is critical work that benefits American businesses across the country that increasingly rely on markets abroad to grow their businesses.

Today, I want to talk about a few of the things we are doing to specifically benefit the tens of thousands of small and medium-sized firms among those businesses. We have made their concerns top priorities in our trade negotiations. We are working to make trade information more accessible. And we are seeking to expand small businesses' representation on our advisory committees.

In our negotiations, we are actively addressing issues such as customs facilitation, non-tariff barriers to trade, and intellectual property rights. These issues are big concerns for small businesses. When they market their goods abroad, they want to know that those goods can compete fairly with local producers and that their innovations will be safe from infringement.

We are also working to make trade information more available both at home and abroad. We are increasing transparency by enabling online access to trade information. We recently launched a new, user-friendly website with critical information for small exporters, including information about export promotion and solutions to problems they may encounter in the global market.

This is an especially beneficial tool for small firms that lack the resources of large companies to hire trade consultants and lawyers in order to do business overseas.

Additionally, we are seeking to further expand small business representation on our statutory trade advisory committees to better reflect small businesses' views and priorities within USTR. We have made it a priority to ensure that the voices of small business are heard consistently throughout our trade negotiations and as they feel enforcement or other issues arise.

USTR is working hard to ensure that small businesses are able to take full advantage of our trade agreements and the opportunities they provide. We are partnering closely with the Department of Commerce and the Small Business Administration to reach out to networks of small businesses around the country to talk to them about the benefits of trade and the resources available to them through USTR.

As we move forward, we will continue to explore more effective ways to address the needs and concerns of small businesses. I am making a promise today that small businesses can count on finding a sympathetic ear and an eager ally in the USTR. And I look forward to hearing both their challenges and their success stories.

Thank you.