

# NATIONAL FOREIGN TRADE COUNCIL, INC.



## Word from the President

By Bill Reinsch  
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This month's commentary will focus on what's ahead. Now that the three FTAs are behind us (except for implementation, which we will follow closely), and the APEC meeting and US-EU summit have come and gone, discussion of next moves has begun to heat up. A few days ago, Ambassador Kirk said the Administration would be seeking negotiating authority for the TPP agreement. At the US-EU meeting, the two sides agreed to a far reaching work program to determine how they could best further improve trade relations. Everything was to remain on the table, up to and including a free trade agreement. Announcements by Japan, Canada, and Mexico that they want to join the TPP talks have renewed interest in our trade relationships with all three. Last May, President Obama proposed a partnership with the EU to promote jobs and growth in the Mideast-North Africa region. Continuing its tradition of being a thought leader on trade policy, the NFTC has turned its attention to a number of new issues as well.

First, building on our work creating and running the Middle East Free Trade Coalition and our management of the US-Libya Business Association, we are working closely with USTR to put some meat on the bones of the President's MENA initiative. This has been and will continue to be a difficult area for doing business. While the "Arab Spring" has brought high hopes of a movement toward more accountable and democratic governments, in the short run it has increased the uncertainty about the region's future and encouraged many businesses to wait and see how events unfold before making substantial commitments. Chuck Dittrich of our staff will be working with our members to see what their goals are the region and how we can help them achieve them.

In a previous President's word I have talked about one of NFTC's achievements that I am proudest of – our draft trade negotiating authority bill. We prepared that in 2008 anticipating that a new President would seek renewal of the expired authority early in his term. That did not happen, but it now appears that the Obama Administration has realized it needs this authority if it is to accomplish anything else on the trade front in the future. As a result, we have already begun meetings with our members to dust off our bill and update it in light of the new issues that have arisen in the past three years. If anyone not already involved in that process wants to join our efforts, please let me know.

One of our significant accomplishments this past year was the issuance of a paper on cross border data flows. This document, which is notable for the breadth of its support among service providers, manufacturers, financial institutions, and content creators, lays out a detailed set of priorities for dealing with the growing propensity of governments to erect roadblocks to the movement of data, adversely affecting virtually everybody who does business on the internet. We are currently in the process of presenting our paper to the Administration and doubtless will have more to report on this in the future.

Similarly, we have also put out a paper on trade priorities in environmental goods and services, an issue of great importance to a number of our members who have developed products and services in that sector. As I write this, Jake Colvin is in Durban, South Africa, at the UNFCCC meeting with a number of our members working to combat the efforts of some other nations to weaken intellectual property protections for green technologies. This complements perfectly our cross-border data work, which also emphasizes the need for strong IP protection.

In that same space, our Global Innovation Forum is also working directly with the Obama Administration to develop an agenda for a 21st century innovation policy.

Finally, we have also begun the process of revitalizing our WTO Project. Sadly, it is not realistic at this point to ask companies to continue to support a project exclusively focused on the Doha Round, although we have not given up hope that some way can be found to resurrect it. However, the WTO itself remains the most important trade organization in the world, and there is much we can do both to support its battle against protectionism and to advocate for new initiatives

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that can move forward while the Round is stalled. We have asked Stuart Harbinson, our representative in Geneva, to prepare a memo on non-MFN agreements that are permitted within the WTO, and we have begun a process with our members who participate in this Project to determine what initiatives we want to support going forward consistent with WTO rules. If you want to join that dialogue, Jake Colvin is the person to see.

This is not our whole agenda by any means – for example our ongoing TPP work continues – but these items are examples of the NFTC’s efforts to shape critical thinking on trade policy as it begins to evolve more rapidly. We welcome your help in that effort.