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## **Senate votes 92-5 for Ron Kirk as U.S. Trade Representative**

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Former Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk won overwhelming approval by the full Senate Wednesday to become the Obama administration's new U.S. Trade Representative, the top U.S. trade negotiator. Calling on fellow senators to vote for Kirk, Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) said before the vote that "He will remain constantly on the lookout for America's workers. He will shine a spotlight on trade violations. He will vigilantly enforce our international agreements. And he will speed our economic recovery by opening markets for American exports."

The Senate's lopsided 92-5 vote for Kirk is helpful at a time when Kirk faces major trade issues. Most immediately, Kirk will need to deal with Mexico's decision to impose retaliatory tariffs starting March 19 on selected U.S. exports to Mexico in response to the U.S. cancelling a pilot program that allowed Mexican trucks to operate north of the border. The cross-border trucking program was a first step toward implementing a provision in the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which had been intended to permit Mexican trucks to make deliveries in the U.S. starting in 2000.

As Dallas Mayor, Kirk was a NAFTA supporter. Now he will be responsible for dealing with concerns raised by President Obama's campaign rhetoric about seeking to renegotiate NAFTA to add labor and environmental provisions.

As shown by senator's questions in his confirmation hearing 10 days ago, Kirk also faces immediate pressure to move ahead with the pending free trade agreements with Panama, Colombia and South Korea. In his responses, Kirk noted that while the Panama FTA may be finalized relatively soon, it is likely to be more difficult to complete the Colombia and South Korea FTAs.

Another major issue facing the new USTR is the Doha Round of international trade negotiations, due to resume in Denmark in December. In his confirmation hearing, Kirk said that the administration's priorities include "working with our trading partners to advance the Doha Round negotiations." In other response indicating Obama administration priorities on the trade front, Kirk said in the hearing that:

- “...this Administration will work to ensure that the United States continues to be a leader in advancing the rules-based international trading system.”
- “...we are mindful that the benefits of trade are diffuse while the costs are concentrated.”
- “We must ensure and provide for a fair hearing and fair treatment for all American industries and workers. On a level playing field, our workers and entrepreneurs are the best in the world. If confirmed, I will work toward reaching consensus on agreements that promote a more open and fairer trading system and advance the interests of America's working families.”
- “I respectfully submit that two strong steps toward restoring domestic confidence in open markets are a real and renewed commitment to enforcement of our trade rules, including those addressing labor and the environment, as well as a new commitment to a reformed Trade Adjustment Assistance program that truly helps all workers displaced by trade.”
- “The President and I believe that our mission is not simply to increase American exports, as important as that is, but to ensure that the way we promote trade reflects our country’s values about economic progress and justice, including through the advancement of internationally recognized labor and environmental standards.”

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