

Negotiators Brief Stakeholders at Dallas TPP Talks

05/14/2012 - 9:52am

Yesterday, lead negotiators from each of the nine Trans-Pacific Partnership countries sat down for a briefing and conversation with dozens of stakeholders interested in the progress, process, and substance of the 12th round of TPP talks happening outside Dallas, Texas this week. Some highlights:

Barbara Weisel, Assistant USTR for Southeast Asia and the Pacific and the lead negotiator for the U.S. opened the briefing with an apology to all the moms working at the TPP round on Mother's Day... and then provided an overview of Saturday's stakeholder presentation event. Weisel noted that initial feedback indicates the new format provided the opportunity for more in-depth, substantive exchanges between stakeholders and negotiators, and that feedback from presenters at the event will be factored into stakeholder presentation planning for the next round of TPP talks. Those, she said, will occur the first week in July at a U.S. location to be finalized soon.

Weisel said that good progress has been made thus far by a number of negotiating groups (see USTR's daily readouts at www.ustr.gov to see what negotiating groups are meeting on what days) and that one negotiating group, discussing small and medium-sized enterprises, has finished its talks and will not have to meet in upcoming rounds. She noted that the negotiators on every topic have tried to be as available as possible to stakeholders in crafting negotiating positions and that they will continue to seek to do so as they consider counterproposals and work to revised text. She also noted that the trade ministers of the TPP countries will meet in a few weeks in Kazan, Russia on the margins of the meeting of APEC ministers related to trade.

The floor was opened for questions and a robust exchange followed lasting well past the hour originally allotted for the conversation, which featured questions from stakeholders at the table and in audience chairs including leaders from the AFL-CIO, Citizens Trade Campaign, Coalition for a Prosperous America, the Emergency Committee for American Trade, Friends of the Earth, Grocery Manufacturers Association, Maine Citizens Trade Policy Commission, Public Citizen, and the Sierra Club – among others.

The first question, from Citizens Trade Campaign, was a request that text be made available to the public so that stakeholders could have more informed positions when speaking with negotiators. Weisel said that while the U.S. position is that constantly evolving TPP chapter texts cannot be released to the public, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative has been and remains committed to discussing in-depth with a wide range of stakeholders the formation of U.S. positions, the substance of negotiations as they take place, and how issues should be handled by negotiators as talks continue.

Other topics for questions, which were answered variously by Weisel and chief negotiators from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam, included the status of discussions as to whether Japan, Mexico and Canada will join the TPP talks - Weisel noted that chief negotiators are briefing each other in Texas this week on the status of bilateral consultations with those countries - and what type of consultations the governments do with their environmental ministers on the issue of investor-state dispute settlement provisions. The chief negotiators also answered several questions on domestic procurement provisions and the balance being sought on intellectual property rights and Internet freedom in the TPP's intellectual property chapter. Because of particular interest and concerns surrounding provisions on investor-state dispute settlement and state-owned-enterprises, Weisel said that there will be further stakeholder briefings on those issues - in addition to a broad U.S.-only stakeholder briefing session - when U.S. negotiators return to Washington, DC following this round of negotiations.