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## USTR Zoellick Notifies Congress of Intent To Initiate Free Trade Negotiations With Australia

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CANBERRA - United States Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick today announced he has formally notified Congressional leaders of U.S. objectives and goals for negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) with Australia. Zoellick made the announcement after meeting today with Australian Prime Minister John Howard and Trade Minister Mark Vaile in Canberra. The negotiations will begin 90 days after today.

"We believe the United States has much to gain in pursuing a negotiation with Australia. The increased access to Australia's market that an FTA would provide would further boost trade in both goods and services, enhancing employment opportunities in both countries," wrote Zoellick in the letter to Congressional leaders. "We plan to use our negotiation with Australia to strengthen these commercial ties and address barriers that U.S. exports face today."

On Wednesday, November 13, President Bush provided Zoellick with the statutory authority to notify Congress of the Administration's intent to enter into negotiations with Australia.

The letter highlighted the importance of making progress on agriculture issues in the context of the negotiation. Zoellick wrote, "We will work hard to facilitate the export of U.S. food and agricultural products to the Australian market and to address the full range of issues facing U.S. agriculture exports."

An FTA with Australia also would further deepen the already close cooperation between the United States and Australia in advancing U.S. objectives for the multilateral negotiations currently underway in the World Trade Organization (WTO). "We believe that an FTA would further unite and strengthen the alliance of countries leading the effort toward global trade liberalization," Zoellick wrote.

As part of the Administration's ongoing consultative relationship with Congress, Zoellick sent letters to the Speaker of the House, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and Congressional Trade Leaders.

In addition to bilateral meetings with Australian government leaders, Zoellick is in Australia to attend an informal World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting of Ministers responsible for trade from 25 WTO members on November 14 - 15.

From Australia, Zoellick will travel to Singapore, where the final stages of negotiations continued this week on a U.S.-Singapore FTA. He will then meet with ASEAN trade ministers in Manila to discuss the recent U.S. proposal to enhance trade ties between the U.S. and ASEAN countries (Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative).

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