

■ Opening Markets and Bolstering Trade

Ensuring Better Global Conditions for U.S. Companies

by Market Access and Compliance

There is good news for U.S. businesses and workers. The U.S. government is liberalizing trade and opening markets through the passage of trade promotion authority and subsequently the negotiation of free trade agreements.

President George W. Bush has said, "We want to open global markets so that our farmers and ranchers and workers and service providers and high-tech entrepreneurs can enjoy the benefits of a more integrated world." President Bush is committed to free and fair trade, because international trade is an engine of economic growth. In the 1990s, exports accounted for roughly a quarter of all U.S. economic growth and some 12 million jobs for American workers.

Donald Evans, secretary of commerce, has taken the president's message to heart and has asked William H. Lash III, assistant secretary of commerce for market access and compliance, to ensure that foreign markets are open and free of trade barriers. Evans has emphasized that not only do we want markets to remain open, but we also need to ensure adherence of our counterparts to more than 260 existing U.S. trade agreements.

Assistant Secretary Lash heads the Market Access and Compliance

unit within the International Trade Administration of the U.S. Commerce Department. Lash, along with a staff of foreign market experts, is charged with enforcing existing trade agreements as well as identifying and removing trade barriers and unfair trade practices in foreign markets. Since joining the ITA in August 2001, Lash has raised more than 450 market access and compliance issues with foreign counterparts.

"President Bush and Secretary Evans are businessmen, they understand the fine line between success and failure, and my office is aggressively engaging foreign governments to ensure we give U.S. businesses every opportunity to succeed," says Lash.

Grant Aldonas, under secretary of commerce for international trade, adds, "We must be willing to confront and dispute the trade barriers and other obstacles facing our workers and firms in the international marketplace, and we must ensure that the rules of the game are clear and that the players follow the rules."

Lash explains, "Through aggressive engagement, we will ensure a level playing field for American businesses."

More specifically, Lash has made reaching out to the business

community a priority. In addition to tasking his team to travel to all 50 states, Lash himself has committed to travel to one state per month. The most effective way of assisting the business community is to ask the business community what problems it is experiencing. "It is as simple as that," says Lash. "We need businesses to tell us what their problems are overseas, so we are able to pinpoint areas where we should engage."

Lash and his staff have also significantly enhanced the Trade Compliance Center (part of Market Access and Compliance), adding business and congressional outreach to its portfolio, as well as creating a Web site (www.export.gov/tcc) at which businesspeople can report trade barriers encountered overseas.

Finally, Lash has created outreach task forces within the Market Access and Compliance offices for Europe and the Western Hemisphere. These task forces are designed to reach out to the U.S. business community to uncover barriers to doing trade within specific regions of the world.