

Members of the public may attend the meeting up to the capacity of the room. Interested persons may seek information by contacting Mr. David Deaver, U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (G-MOC-4), 2100 Second Street, SW, Room 1116, Washington, DC 20593-0001; telephone: (202) 267-0502; email: ddeaver@comdt.uscg.mil.

Dated: December 20, 1999.

Stephan M. Miller,

Executive Secretary, Shipping Coordinating Committee, Department of State.

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OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE

Request for Public Comment Regarding Negotiations Toward a Free Trade Area of the Americas

AGENCY: Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR).

ACTION: Request for comments.

SUMMARY: The interagency Trade Policy Staff Committee (TPSC) seeks public comment as part of its efforts to develop proposals and positions concerning toward the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The TPSC seeks public comment with respect to all aspects of the FTAA negotiations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For procedural questions concerning public comments, contact Gloria Blue, Executive Secretary, Trade Policy Staff Committee, Office of the United States Trade Representative at (202) 395-3475. All other questions concerning the FTAA negotiations should be addressed to the agency's Office of Western Hemisphere Affairs at (202) 395-5190. Additionally, the official FTAA website (www.ftaa-alca.org) contains information regarding the FTAA process, including official documents.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. Background

FTAA Chronology

Miami Summit of the Americas. On December 11, 1994, President Clinton and the 33 other democratically-elected leaders in the Western Hemisphere met in Miami, Florida for the first Summit of the Americas. They agreed to conclude negotiations on a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) no later than the year 2005 and to achieve concrete progress toward that objective by the end of this century. The Miami Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action announced the agreements reached by the leaders at the first

Summit of the Americas. With respect to the FTAA, the Plan of Action states in part:

We will strive to maximize market openness through high levels of discipline as we build upon existing agreements in the Hemisphere. We will also strive for balanced and comprehensive agreements, including among others: tariffs and non-tariff barriers affecting trade in goods and services; agriculture; subsidies; investment; intellectual property rights; government procurement; technical barriers to trade; safeguards; rules of origin; antidumping and countervailing duties; sanitary and phytosanitary standards and procedures; dispute resolution; and competition policy.

The Plan of Action also states:

Free trade and increased economic integration are key factors for sustainable development. This will be furthered as we strive to make our trade liberalization and environmental policies mutually supportive, taking into account efforts undertaken by the GATT/WTO and other international organizations. As economic integration in the Hemisphere proceeds, we will further secure the observance and promotion of worker rights, as defined by appropriate international conventions. We will avoid disguised restrictions on trade, in accordance with the GATT/WTO and other international obligations.

San Jose Ministerial. The 34 Western Hemisphere ministers responsible for trade met on March 19, 1998 in San Jose, Costa Rica. At the San Jose meeting, the trade ministers recommended that the Western Hemisphere leaders initiate the negotiations and provided them recommendations on the structure, objectives, principles, and venues of the negotiations. In this context, the trade ministers proposed the creation of nine negotiating groups and three non-negotiating committees and groups. They also established the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) to guide the work of the negotiating groups and decide on the overall architecture of the FTAA agreement and to address institutional issues.

Trade ministers also reiterated that the FTAA negotiations will take into account the broad social and economic agenda contained in the Miami Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action with a view to "contributing to raising living standards, to improving the working conditions of all people in the Americas and to better protecting the environment." The San Jose Ministerial Declaration, as well as the Miami Declaration, can be accessed through the official FTAA website (www.ftaa-alca.org).

Santiago Summit of the Americas. On April 18-19, 1998, President Clinton and his 33 counterparts initiated the

Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations at the Summit of the Americas meeting in Santiago, Chile. The leaders agreed to the general framework proposed by the 34 trade ministers, which included the establishment of nine negotiating groups to be guided by the principles and objectives agreed by the ministers in San Jose.

The nine negotiating groups established by the FTAA countries are responsible for the following areas of the negotiations: (1) Market access; (2) investment; (3) services; (4) government procurement; (5) dispute settlement; (6) agriculture; (7) intellectual property rights; (8) subsidies, antidumping and countervailing duties; and (9) competition policy. In addition to the nine negotiating groups, three non-negotiating committees and groups were established. They are: (1) The Consultative Group on Smaller Economies; (2) the Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society; and (3) the Joint Government-Private Sector Committee of Experts on Electronic Commerce. The negotiating groups and non-negotiating committees and groups began meeting in September 1998.

Toronto Ministerial Meeting. On November 3-4, 1999, the FTAA ministers met in Toronto to review the progress made by the negotiating groups during the first phase of the negotiations and to determine the next steps to be taken in the FTAA process. The ministers in Toronto expressed approval of the progress made by the negotiating groups and directed them to begin preparing draft texts of their respective chapters, to be completed by the next meeting of FTAA ministers in April 2001.

Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society. At the 1998 meeting in San Jose, the trade ministers jointly recognized and welcomed the interests and concerns expressed by a broad spectrum of interested non-governmental parties in the hemisphere and encouraged these and other parties to provide their views on trade matters related to the FTAA negotiations. In order to facilitate this process, the ministers agreed to establish the aforementioned Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society. The TPSC published a **Federal Register** notice on July 29, 1998 (63 FR 40579) requesting comments on the operation of the Committee, which was mandated to receive, analyze, and report on the full range of comments received from civil society from throughout the

hemisphere. At its first meeting in October 1998, the Committee approved an open invitation soliciting views from the hemisphere's public. The open invitation was placed on the FTAA website and countries agreed to use national mechanisms to disseminate the invitation further. In the United States, the invitation was disseminated through a variety of means, including press releases, letters to advisory committees and public meetings.

Prior to the Toronto Ministerial Meeting, the Committee prepared a report for the Ministers describing the submissions it received from the public. This report has been published on the official FTAA website (www.ftaa-alca.org). Executive summaries of the submissions have also been published on the Department of State website (www.state.gov/www/issues/economic/current_issues.html).

Joint Committee of Experts on Electronic Commerce

At the 1998 meeting in San Jose, the trade ministers noted the rapid expansion of Internet usage and electronic commerce in the hemisphere. In order to increase and broaden the benefits to be derived from the electronic marketplace, they agreed to establish the aforementioned Joint Government-Private Sector Committee of Experts on Electronic Commerce to make recommendations in this area. The TPSC published a **Federal Register** notice on August 5, 1998 (63 FR 42090) requesting comments on the operation of the Joint Committee. Prior to the Toronto Ministerial meeting, the government and private sector experts from throughout the Western Hemisphere prepared a report with over 40 recommendations on how to increase and broaden the benefits of electronic commerce. The Joint Committee's report has been published on the official FTAA website (www.ftaa-alca.org).

2. Advice From the U.S. International Trade Commission Regarding Market Access

On March 15, 1999, the U.S. Trade Representative, pursuant to Section 332(g) of the Tariff Act of 1930, requested that the U.S. International Trade Commission ("Commission") provide advice to the President, with respect to each item listed in the HTSUS where tariffs will remain in effect after full implementation of the results of the Uruguay Round and subsequent WTO agreements (such as the Information Technology Agreement), as to the probable economic effect of modification of tariffs on industries producing like or directly competitive

articles and on consumers, based on three scenarios, two of which pertain to the WTO, and the third of which pertains to the FTAA. Those scenarios are: (1) The effects resulting from changes in dutiable imports from all U.S. trading partners if all tariffs were reduced by at least 50 percent, with tariffs of 5 percent reduced to zero; (2) the effects resulting from changes in dutiable imports from all U.S. trading partners if tariffs were eliminated; and (3) the effects resulting from tariff elimination on dutiable imports from FTAA trading partners alone.

3. Public Comments

In conformity with the regulations of the Trade Policy Staff Committee (15 CFR part 2003), the Chairman of the TPSC invites the written comments of interested parties on all aspects of the FTAA negotiations. This includes comments regarding the possible effects of elimination of tariffs on dutiable imports from FTAA countries (scenario 3).

Prior to initiation of negotiating group activity, the TPSC requested public comments (63 FR 128, July 6, 1998) regarding U.S. positions and objectives with respect to each of the negotiating groups. On April 14, 1999, the TPSC announced that it would seek additional public comments in the future on issues related to the FTAA, including the economic effects of the removal of duties and nontariff barriers to trade among FTAA participating countries (64 FR 18469).

The TPSC is now seeking public comments on any aspect of the FTAA negotiations, including the economic effects of the removal of duties and nontariff barriers to trade among FTAA participating countries.

Those persons wishing to submit written comments, should submit twenty (20) typed copies, no later than noon, Monday, February 7, 2000, to Gloria Blue, Executive Secretary, Trade Policy Staff Committee, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, Room 122, 600 Seventeenth Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20508. Comments should state clearly the position taken and should describe with particularity the evidence supporting that position. Any business confidential material must be clearly marked as such on the cover page (or letter) and succeeding pages. Such submissions must be accompanied by a nonconfidential summary thereof.

Nonconfidential submissions will be available for public inspection at the USTR Reading Room, Room 101, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, 600 Seventeenth Street, N.W., Washington, DC. An appointment to review the file

may be made by calling Brenda Webb at (202) 395-6186. The Reading Room is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Frederick L. Montgomery,

Chairman, Trade Policy Staff Committee.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

Environmental Impact Statement: Council Bluffs, IA

AGENCY: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), DOT.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The FHWA is issuing this notice to advise the public that an environmental impact statement will be prepared for a proposed viaduct and roadway project in Council Bluffs, Pottawattamie County, Iowa.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Philip Taylor, Assistant Transportation Engineer, Federal Highway Administration, Iowa Division Office, 105 6th Street, Ames, Iowa 50010, Telephone: (515) 233-7307. Harry S. Budd, Director, Office of Project Planning, Iowa Department of Transportation, 800 Lincoln Way, Ames, Iowa 50010, Telephone: (515) 239-1391. Mr. Greg Reeder, City Engineer, Council Bluffs Public Works Department, 209 Pearl Street, Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503 Telephone: (712) 328-4635.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

An electronic copy of this document may be downloaded using a modem and suitable communications software from the Government Printing Office's Electronic Bulletin Board Service at (202) 512-1661. Internet users may reach the Federal Register's home page at: <http://www.nara.gov/fedreg> and the Government Printing Office's database at: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara>

Background

The FHWA, in cooperation with the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) and the City of Council Bluffs, Iowa will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the proposed construction of a viaduct on Avenue G over the Union Pacific and Chicago, Central and Pacific railroad corridor that bisects Council Bluffs, Iowa. The proposed project begins at 16th and Avenue G and extends east to 8th Street. From 8th and