

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Obama Initiative Seeks Shift to Export-Driven Economy

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. economy has been characterized as consumer-driven, but President Obama believes a new growth model is needed and has developed an initiative to shift the economy over the next five years toward more exports, says U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk.

One reason for shifting to a trade-driven economy is to lessen the impact of rapid economic swings from robust growth to recession, Kirk said. Another factor is that export trade could add 2 million jobs to the economy, Kirk added.

The United States and most of the industrialized world are recovering from one of the deepest recessions on record.

"In 2010, as the world's economy recovers, export-driven growth will continue to multiply," Kirk said in a speech in Washington March 9. "Our administration has laid out an aggressive agenda to seize the full measure of opportunities before us. President Obama has set a very ambitious goal for us to double our exports in the next five years."

Some economists believe that in the last quarter of 2009, exports alone accounted for more than half of U.S. economic growth. A year ago, the U.S. economy fell 6 percent rate at the height of the global recession, but in the last quarter the economy grew by approximately 5.7 percent, and U.S. exports grew by 18 percent.

U.S. exports in 2009 totaled \$1.55 trillion, falling from \$1.83 trillion in 2008.

The emphasis on exports coincides with a broader finding by the Group of 20 advanced and emerging economies in the aftermath of the recession that affected nearly every nation. The G20, which held 2009 summits in London in April 2009 and Pittsburgh in September 2009, held that those nations that are export-driven need to allow for greater consumption, while nations that are largely consumer-driven, such as the United States, need to foster greater export trade.

The objective is to create a framework designed to shrink surpluses in export-rich countries such as China and boost savings in debt-laden nations, including the United States, to develop a balanced global economy less susceptible to varying economic fluctuations.

TRADE AGENDA

Kirk said the National Trade Initiative proposed by the president can expand jobs, but it is also dependent on creating new market access for U.S. exporters. "We can do that in a couple of ways," Kirk said. "One is by enforcing America's existing trade rights through our existing agreements, and also negotiating new trade opportunities."

The new push toward an export economy is bolstered by a firm commitment to the global rules-based trading system, as well as U.S. intent to exercise and defend its rights within that system, he said. But Kirk acknowledged that this will not be easy to accomplish. It also demands that the administration convince Americans to restore their belief in the value of U.S. trade policies.

An effective global trading system that is rules-based can promote international growth and multilateral cooperation during the good times, but when the global economy suffers, as it has for two years, the rules-based system can help keep trade flowing, Kirk said.

TRADE DEFICIT CONTINUES

According to a recent report by the U.S. Commerce Department, the U.S. trade deficit in 2009 totaled \$380.66 billion, the smallest trade imbalance in eight years. That was because a recession that began in December 2007 sharply cut into imports, lessening demand as consumers spent less on nonessentials. But government economists believe that will shift in 2010 as the U.S. economy recovers and demand for imports exceeds U.S. export sales, the Commerce Department reported.

The trade deficit with China, the largest with any nation, in 2009 was \$226.83 billion, down 15.4 percent from the record set in 2008 of \$268.04 billion, the Commerce report said.

The Commerce report also said that a factor supporting U.S. exports in 2009 was that the decline in the dollar against the euro and other foreign currencies made American-made goods more competitive to consumers abroad.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said at a recent congressional hearing that the United States cannot be competitive in foreign markets without the benefits of strong trade agreements.

For the farm sector, expanding global exports is critical. In 2009, agricultural exports totaled \$100 billion, and that helped support a rising agricultural trade surplus, Kirk said in a recent speech in Washington. While the global recession dampened farm exports as it did most other

sectors of the economy, Kirk said, the recovery will increase every kind of trade.

U.S., Indonesia Partner on Disaster Preparedness, Response

Indonesia, United States work together to rebuild, enhance coastline safety

By Derek Kent
Staff Writer

Washington — Almost immediately after the 8.8-magnitude earthquake off the coast of Chile on February 27, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) issued tsunami warnings or watches for 53 countries with Pacific coastlines, allowing millions of coastal residents to be evacuated ahead of the potentially deadly wave.

The response to the Chilean earthquake was far different from that to the devastating 9.1-magnitude earthquake in December 2004 off the coast of Northern Sumatra. That quake generated a tsunami that killed more than 230,000 people in 14 countries and left more than 1 million more displaced.

In 2004, the United States and Japan had tsunami early warning systems that covered the Pacific Ocean, where 85 percent of tsunamis have occurred, according to the Honolulu-based International Tsunami Information Centre, but earthquakes, undersea landslides and explosions can generate tsunamis in all of the world's oceans, inland seas and large bodies of water.

With oversight and coordination from the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), and with technical and financial help from many nations, the Indian Ocean alone now has 73 seismic stations and more than 60 coastal sea-level stations. Australia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and the United States have installed deep-ocean tsunameters in the region to detect tsunami waves traveling across the ocean.

"The international community has made tremendous progress since the horrific 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami," said U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration Administrator Jane Lubchenco in December 2009. "Ongoing NOAA research, development and deployment of tsunami detection and prediction systems, 24-hour tsunami warning centers, and education — the key to tsunami preparedness — ensure improved protection of lives and property."

BILATERAL COOPERATION

On February 23, 2007, Badan Pengkajian dan Penerapan Teknologi (BPPT) — the Indonesia Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology — and

NOAA signed an agreement to strengthen early-warning capacity for a range of hazards and cooperate on tsunami-detection technology and warning systems. Indonesia is the most tsunami-prone country on Earth.

As part of the agreement, NOAA deployed two deep-ocean assessment and reporting of tsunamis (DART) systems in the Indian Ocean, and Indonesia committed to maintain the DART systems as part of the Indian Ocean tsunami warning system. The U.S. State Department also provided \$1 million for engineering training and visits to the United States for BPPT engineers, allowing them to work with NOAA experts to transfer the DART technology.

NOAA and the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta also established the Indonesia Tsunami Early Warning System (Ina-TEWS) Public-Private Partnership, offering U.S. corporations doing business in Indonesia a chance to contribute financially or in other ways to the warning system. The partnership seeks funds for up to 10 U.S. DART tsunameters to be deployed at eight stations, with two held in reserve to replace any that are damaged or require repair.

NOAA maintains similar agreements with the Russian Federation, China, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Romania, Mexico and Canada, in addition to a cooperative network with countries in the Caribbean.

UNITED STATES CONTINUES TO HELP

No warning system can prevent naturally occurring hazards like earthquakes, volcanoes and storms, although early-warning systems can minimize the loss of life and destruction that accompanies these hazardous events by giving people time to prepare. Despite the best warning systems, these natural phenomena still can cause immense destruction and loss of life.

Although lives cannot be replaced, the international community can come together after these disasters to save lives, provide emergency assistance and rebuild destroyed infrastructure. Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States provides assistance and disaster relief to countries throughout the world.

Five days after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the U.S. government pledged \$350 million for humanitarian and recovery assistance. The United States was also the first on the ground in Aceh, Indonesia, providing essential food, water and sanitation facilities. A total of \$656 million in federal U.S. funding has been approved for the Tsunami Recovery and Reconstruction Fund, and American private citizens and organizations have

provided more than \$1.8 billion in cash and in-kind donations.

More than five years after the devastating quake and tsunami, many now cautiously point to Aceh, Indonesia, as a success story. According to Badan Kesenambungan Rekonstruksi Aceh (BKRA) — the Reconstruction Continuation Agency for Aceh — by mid-2009, more than 140,000 houses, 3,700 kilometers of road, 36 airports and seaports, 1,600 schools, and 900 government buildings had been built, and more than 70,000 hectares of farmland restored. USAID continues to partner with Indonesian communities, government, civil society organizations and businesses to improve education, protect the environment, spur economic growth and meet health challenges.

“The people of Kajhu thank you for all of the support provided to us,” 28-year-old Ismet Nur told an American Red Cross volunteer in early 2009. “From temporary shelters and housing reconstruction to water and sanitation support and community trainings, the scope of the assistance that has been given is huge. It has helped us rebuild everything from the beginning. After the tsunami, we started from zero in this place ... but look at where we are now.”

Women of Courage Honored at State Department

Michelle Obama, Secretary Clinton recognize champions of human rights

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — First lady Michelle Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton honored women human rights activists from around the world with this year’s Women of Courage awards at a special ceremony March 10 at the State Department.

“These 10 women have overcome personal adversity, threats, arrest and assault to dedicate themselves to activism for human rights,” said Melanne Vermeer, the State Department’s first-ever ambassador-at-large for global women’s issues, in introductory remarks. “From striving to give more voice to politically underrepresented women in Afghanistan to documenting human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, these heroic individuals have made it their life’s work to increase freedom and equality in the world.”

The awardees this year are Shukria Asil of Afghanistan, Colonel Shafiqah Quraishi of Afghanistan, Androula Henriques of Cyprus, Sonia Pierre of the Dominican Republic, Shadi Sadr of Iran, Ann Njogu of Kenya, Dr. Lee Ae-ran of South Korea, Jansila Majeed of Sri Lanka, Sister Marie Claude Naddaf of Syria and Jestina Mukoko

of Zimbabwe.

The Women of Courage award was established in 2007 by then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to recognize and honor women around the globe who have shown exceptional courage and leadership in promoting women’s rights and advancement.

Clinton said the stories of this year’s honorees are a reminder of how much work there is to do before human rights are respected and protected by all governments. She told the Women of Courage awardees: “We are standing with you. ... We here at the State Department and [the Obama] administration are trying to be good partners. ... We look forward to building relationships with you.”

Clinton emphasized that the United States will be watchful of the awardees’ safety. “We send a message to your governments, who may not be thrilled that you are here, that we will be watching them as well.”

Michelle Obama lauded the awardees for taking risks and facing hardships few people are willing to endure. She noted that among the invited guests in the room were young women from a local school and from the White House mentoring program, which pairs young people from area high schools with White House staff mentors for a year.

“Listen closely,” Obama told the young women, “because if these women can endure relentless threats, then surely you can all keep going. ... None of you are too young to start making a difference.” She urged the young American women to take inspiration from the Women of Courage awardees.

Speaking on behalf of all the awardees, Jestina Mukoko of Zimbabwe said the Women of Courage award is “a solidarity message that unites women all over the world. ... By accepting this award, we confirm that women have a place in the fight for equality and justice.”

Also speaking at the awards ceremony was Andrea Jung, chairman and chief executive officer of Avon, a 125-year-old company that got its start by providing women with opportunities for economic independence through the sale of cosmetics. Jung announced that the Avon Foundation for Women is presenting a \$500,000 grant to the U.S. Department of State Secretary’s Fund for Global Women’s Leadership for programs designed to help end violence against women.

Jung also said the foundation is donating another \$1.2 million to Vital Voices, a nongovernmental organization aimed at training women the world over for leadership. That grant will bring together women leaders from 15

countries to share insights in furthering the progress of women in fields such as business, government and law enforcement.

Muslim and Arab Americans Learn Importance of Being Counted

Census Bureau answers questions at Georgetown University

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. Constitution requires that a census be taken of the American people every 10 years. The purpose? To determine the number of representatives in the U.S. Congress and to allocate federal funds appropriate to the needs of communities.

This month, the U.S. Census Bureau is sending questionnaires to millions of homes. Each form asks 10 questions designed to understand who lives in each household. As with previous censuses, questions on the 2010 U.S. Census form are sparking debate among Americans.

Like many of their fellow citizens, Muslim and Arab Americans have concerns about the census. How will their information be used? Who will be able to use their information?

To make their concerns known, and to answer questions in an open forum, Muslim and Arab-American organizations are partnering with the U.S. Census Bureau nationwide to urge their communities to participate in the census. Events are being held all over the United States where representatives of the Census Bureau meet with different communities and answer their questions.

One of these events was held March 8 in Washington, where Muslim Americans asked questions and voiced their opinions about the 2010 census with Census Bureau officials and community leaders. Sponsored by the American Muslim Interactive Network (AMIN) in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, the "U.S. Census 2010: Muslim Voices Matter" event featured a panel discussion and question-and-answer session.

Held at the Rafik B. Hariri Building at Georgetown University, the panel included U.S. Census Center Assistant Manager Philip Lutz, Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center community outreach director Imam Johari Abdul-Malik and DC Counts Director Maurice Henderson from the office of Washington's mayor.

Lutz addressed a concern shared by Americans of all backgrounds — the confidentiality of the census.

"There is a fear that filling out a census form will lead to something bad," Lutz told the audience, but stressed this is not true. "The census is used only for statistical purposes and it cannot be used with any other federal agencies." Fliers distributed to audience members by the Census Bureau read "Keeping your answers confidential is our solemn oath."

Lutz said personal information gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau cannot be shared with government agencies. Even federal law enforcement agencies are prohibited from accessing personal data.

During the question-and-answer session, audience members asked about census confidentiality. Could new laws make personal data available to the federal government?

Alejandro Beutel, the Muslim Public Affairs Council government affairs liaison, said that America's legislative process is shaped by its citizens through engagement with elected officials. If people disagree with legislation — enacted or proposed — they have the power to change it.

Another issue for some Americans is how they define their race on the census form. One of the questions asks about the race of household members, but currently "Arab" is not given as an option. Many Arab Americans feel their ethnicity should be one of the choices on the census forms. Therefore, many Arab Americans are mobilizing their communities to check the "Some other race" box on census forms and write in "Arab."

Beutel highlighted the Samoan-American community as an example of how to be counted. Although they number approximately 60,000 nationwide, Samoans worked hard to be represented on census forms, according to Beutel.

"Contact your local government representative and lobby for your ethnicity to be placed on the census," Beutel said.

Abdul-Malik's remarks during the event further highlighted community participation. Citing examples from the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad that support censuses, he said Muslim Americans need to get involved.

"We ask the minimum number of questions to get the maximum amount of information to help this nation," Abdul-Malik said, stressing the positive uses for census data in strengthening America. "Maslaha, meaning the common interest, is the Arabic word that should encourage Muslims to be involved in the census," he said.

Lutz said the Muslim-American community is responding positively to the 2010 U.S. Census. Partnerships are being formed across the nation between the Census Bureau and

Muslim-American organizations to ensure that everyone is counted.

AMIN's founder, Hazami Barmada, said she was inspired to participate in promoting the census when she noticed a lack of socio-economic and ethnic diversity at other census-related events. After Barmada contacted the Census Bureau to plan the Muslim Voices Matter event, a census official met her the next day. Just over a week later, the Georgetown University event was held.

"I know you have done some work with the mosques," Barmada recalled telling the Census Bureau, explaining her organization is not religious, but serves as a forum to create understanding among different faiths. "But I think it is also really important to work with community organizations that are not religious-based per se."

To advance messages from the event, Barmada said plans are in the works to make a YouTube video. She also hopes her organization will work with the Census Bureau to distribute materials provided at the evening's event to the wider community.

"Hopefully, in dialoguing with them further, I want to see how we can help disseminate these packages to different community groups beyond mosques and community centers," Barmada said.

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