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Ron Kirk outlines job creation path at Dallas gathering

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The government is focused on forging trade agreements and exports as key tools to creating jobs across the country, U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk said Friday in Dallas.

“Trade can enhance economic recovery and grow jobs” by helping U.S. companies expand or enter new markets, said the former Dallas mayor. He spoke to the nonprofit Dallas Friday Group, a nonpartisan public affairs organization.

“One way to grow and create more jobs here is to sell goods around the world stamped with ‘Made in America,’ ” Kirk said. “Our trade numbers are going up. Trade balance is still a challenge.”

U.S. exports totaled \$1.48 trillion last year. Imports were higher, creating a \$558 billion trade deficit.

When President Barack Obama took office, he set a goal to double U.S. exports by the end of 2014 to support 2 million U.S. jobs. The nation was ahead of schedule in the first 23 months, but the global economic slowdown has affected that pace, Kirk said.

Obama’s goal is realistic, said Mike Peng, a management professor at the University of Texas at Dallas. He recently wrote a paper on why U.S. exports are so competitive.

“Years ago, Germany was the world’s export leader, then it was dethroned by China,” Peng said. More recently, the United States overtook Germany to rank second behind China, he said.

Free trade agreements with Colombia and South Korea took effect earlier this year, and one with Panama still is waiting to take effect. The United States also is negotiating a new trade agreement with the European Union and another called the Trans-Pacific Partnership with eight countries (Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam).

Texas led the nation in exports last year, with about \$250 billion worth, according to the International Trade Administration. The Dallas-Fort Worth area accounted for 13 percent of those exports, ranking No. 9 among metro areas nationally.

Kirk said his biggest concern is that a large percentage of Americans don't think free trade agreements benefit this country or create jobs.

"Of course, trade agreements create jobs here," Peng said. "In general, trade agreements are win-win for both sides."

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