

Statement of Michael Punke  
Nominee for Deputy United States Trade Representative  
and U.S. Ambassador to the World Trade Organization  
Before the Senate Committee on Finance  
November 4, 2009

Thank you Chairman Baucus, Senator Grassley, and distinguished Members of the Finance Committee.

I am honored and humbled to be sitting here today, and I am grateful to President Obama and to Ambassador Kirk for the confidence they have placed in me. Senator Baucus, I want to offer my personal thanks to you for giving me my first government job in trade, eighteen years ago. If confirmed, I will work every day to vindicate the trust placed in me.

I am particularly proud to have members of my family with me today: my parents, Butch and Marilyn Punke of Torrington, Wyoming; my brother, Tim, of Seattle, Washington; my wife, Traci; and my kids – Sophie and Bo. I am grateful beyond words for their support.

Whoever serves as U.S. Ambassador to the World Trade Organization builds on sixty years of bipartisan American leadership to create a rules-based, multilateral system of international trade. That system, born in the long shadow of world war, has made an enormous contribution to worldwide economic growth and stability.

The question we face today is, can the WTO evolve along with the dramatic changes of our dynamic, global economy?

President Obama and Ambassador Kirk have called for an outcome in the ongoing DOHA Round of WTO negotiations that is both balanced and ambitious, with meaningful new market access for all involved. As members of this committee are well aware, we have not yet achieved that goal.

From my meetings and conversations with Members, with your staffs, and with various stakeholder groups, I understand very clearly: No deal is better than a bad deal. The potential of trade in the abstract is easy to describe. But the challenge lies in making that potential tangible for America's workers, farmers, ranchers, and businesses.

If confirmed, I will approach this challenge with an orientation that is neither naïve nor despondent. I believe a good deal is doable. But we will not do a deal at any cost.

Having worked on the hill, I understand intuitively that it is impossible to achieve success in trade without the joint efforts of the legislative and the executive branches. And from studying history, I know that all of our most important trade agreements have been the product of bipartisan support.

I hope and believe that the experiences of my career have equipped me to succeed in this job. I've seen trade issues from the perspective of two branches of government, from three federal agencies, as an attorney in the private sector, and as the owner of a small business.

But none of my professional experiences has been more important than the perspective I've gained during the past six years, living in Montana, watching the impact of trade in the lives of every-day Americans. I've watched Montana goods – by the trainload – roll toward overseas markets. I'm friends with the farmers, ranchers, miners, and entrepreneurs whose jobs depend on those exports. But I've also watched lumber mills close, and seen the impact of those job losses ripple through the heart of a community.

The job of the Office of the United States Trade Representative is to advocate, every day, for every one of those people, for every American. As members of this committee know, there is no agency in government that fields a more talented, more dedicated staff. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly and proudly as a member of that team.

I thank the Members of the Committee for your consideration.