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STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Commission on International Trade & State Sovereignty
MINUTES

Tuesday, September 8, 2015

1:00-3:45 pm; Burlington, VT

Commission Members Present: Sen. Ginny Lyons, Rep. Kathy Keenan, David Anger, Krista Conley, Jon Erickson, Dennis LaBounty, Ted Mudd, Thea Schwartz, Steve Shepard

Other Active Participants: Gail Stevenson and Patricia Preston, Vermont Council on World Affairs; Megan Sullivan, Office of Congressman Peter Welch; Chrissy Gilhuly and David Hall, Vermont Office of Legislative Council; Annie Noonan and Andrea Huffy, Vermont Department of Labor (by telephone)

A. Introductions of Members and Participants

B. Discussion:

1. Following introductions, David Hall reviewed with the Commission its authorizing legislation and charge, 3 V.S.A. § 23..

2. Next, Gail Stevenson and Patricia Preston presented an overview of the mission and activities of the Vermont Council on World Affairs, an independent 501(c)(3) organization affiliated with the Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce. The Commission discussed potential future meetings of the Commission with dignitaries from Africa and Europe on October 26 and November 20.

3. Next, Megan Sullivan presented an update on international trade issues under discussion at the federal level and ongoing for Vermont's business community, including:

(a) the expiration of the legislative authority for the federal Export-Import Bank, and the prospect of attaching reauthorization to a continuing resolution;

(b) ongoing efforts by President Obama to normalize trade relations with Cuba, and the prospects for Vermont dairy farmers and pharmaceutical and telecommunications firms to benefit from new trade opportunities;

(c) the recent Congressional approval of fast track authority coupled with reauthorization of trade adjustment assistance;

(d) the status of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, which was not resolved in summer 2015, as scheduled, due in part to significant disputes over pharmaceutical intellectual property and tobacco provisions; resolution of the agreement is expected to be further delayed by upcoming Canadian and U.S. elections;

(e) the status of the Trans-Atlantic Free Trade Agreement, which is also significantly delayed due to ongoing issues in the European economy, including the Greed debt crisis and refugee crisis;

(f) approval of the nuclear deal with Iran and prospects for Vermont businesses in the aviation industry if trade restrictions are eased;

(g) issues concerning Vermont's points of entry with Canada, including ongoing discussions on upgrades at Derby Line and Highgate.

4. Next, Annie Noonan and Andrea Huffy provided an overview of the type and scope of benefits and services available to dislocated workers through the Department of Labor and the trade adjustment assistance program and also provided an update on the closing of the Comfort Colors facility in Northfield.

C. Action Items

The Commission requested the following further information and actions:

1. Background information on the Export-Import Bank, its mission, and activities, in order to determine whether the Commission will submit a letter to Congress in support of reauthorizing the Bank.

2. Research on the tax benefits to Keurig Green Mountain from moving its commodity purchasing headquarters from Vermont to Switzerland.

3. Research on whether there has been any support for harmonizing the federal Toxic Substances Control Act with more stringent European toxics standards in the context of the Trans-Atlantic Free Trade Agreement.

4. Conduct a doodle poll on dates for meetings in October, November, and December, and Commission members submit ideas for agenda items.

D. Motions

No motions were made during the meeting.

Minutes prepared by David P. Hall, Esq., Legislative Counsel