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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6350

TELEPHONE: (202) 224-5175 FAX: (202) 224-5619

July 20, 2012

The Honorable Ron Kirk
United States Trade Representative
Office of the President
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Kirk:

I am writing to thank you for accepting my invitation, issued in a letter I sent to you on March 5, 2012 and again reiterated in a Senate Finance Committee hearing on March 7, 2012, to visit and tour the New Balance factory in Skowhegan, Maine. I appreciated the call on Tuesday of this week to tell me personally that you would be visiting New Balance in September or early October of this year, in order to see firsthand how the only remaining athletic shoe manufacturer in the United States is fighting to remain competitive and support American workers.

As I have highlighted to you on many occasions, the ongoing Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) negotiations could have a devastating impact on the domestic footwear industry, and in particular the New Balance factories in Skowhegan, Norridgewock, and Norway, Maine. I am extremely proud that three of New Balance's factories are in Maine, but the impact of any tariff reductions could also be disastrous to the company's 38 other small business suppliers around the nation and the 10,000 jobs they help to support.

New Balance's best selling athletic shoe, the well-known "990" model, is manufactured with thread from Hendersonville & Marlon, North Carolina; collar foam from Jessup, Maryland; laces from Portsmouth, Ohio; textile fabric from Pine Grove, Pennsylvania; woven labels from Pittsfield, New Hampshire; lining from Spartanburg, South Carolina; reflective material from Brownwood, Texas; heat transfer labels from Westborough, Massachusetts; and pigskin from Hartland, Maine, just 20 miles from the Skowhegan factory. These small towns across America depend on footwear-related manufacturing jobs, and the elimination of duties on Vietnamese and Malaysian footwear could give these countries an overwhelming competitive advantage that could put domestic manufacturers at a potentially insurmountable disadvantage.

When you visit New Balance in the coming months, I urge you to talk to the workers about their tremendous efforts to remain competitive and innovative, so that they can continue making shoes in America, despite overwhelming competition from producers in China, Vietnam, and other countries, where more than 28,000 jobs in the footwear industry have gone since 1997

alone. You will hear firsthand how TPP negotiations threaten "Made in the USA" footwear, and most importantly, the lives of New Balance workers, their families, and their communities.

Thank you for your commitment to visit New Balance early this fall, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that these remaining footwear manufacturing jobs are not outsourced as a result of the TPP agreement.

Sincerely,

OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senator

OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
MAINE

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DEPUTY WHIP

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–1903

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FINANCE

INTELLIGENCE

RANKING MEMBER, SMALL BUSINESS

March 5, 2012

The Honorable Ron Kirk
United States Trade Representative
Office of the President
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Kirk:

I am writing to formally invite you to visit and tour the New Balance factory in Skowhegan, Maine. At a time when so many American manufacturers are struggling, the Skowhegan facility recently added 40 new jobs, providing stability and economic opportunities for a challenged community.

As you know, the American footwear industry has declined significantly over the past 30 years as most domestic manufacturers have moved production overseas to China, Vietnam, and other countries. According to the domestic industry, since 1997 alone, more than 28,000 jobs in the footwear industry have gone overseas – and today 99 percent of all the footwear sold in the United States is imported. With only a handful of manufacturers and suppliers left that make rubber and plastic footwear in this country, I am proud that the only company that still manufactures athletic shoes in the U.S. has three of its factories in Maine. I believe it is a testament to American workers that these companies have kept their manufacturing here in the U.S., while their competitors have relocated overseas where workers earn a fraction of the hourly wages that U.S. manufacturers receive at home. Collectively, the remaining American footwear producers still employ more than 4,000 U.S. workers despite enormous pressure on businesses to cut costs and maximize profits.

Mr. Ambassador, by visiting this facility, you would be provided a unique glimpse into the American manufacturing sector, particularly the footwear industry. Additionally, you will be able to hear directly from American workers and business owners about the impact the ongoing Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) negotiations could have on the industry, and in particular the Skowhegan factory. In a time when many businesses are looking for opportunities to grow, I would encourage you to tour a facility that has not only continued to develop their domestic manufacturing operations, but continues to creatively produce new products and create additional job opportunities in the Northeast.

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AUBURN, ME 04210
(207) 786-2451

AUGUSTA
40 WESTERN AVENUE, SUITE 408C
AUGUSTA, ME 04330
(207) 622-8292

BANGOR
ONE CUMBERLAND PLACE, SUITE 306
BANGOR, ME 04401
(207) 945-0432

BIDDEFORD
227 MAIN STREET
BIDDEFORD, ME 04005
(207) 282-4144

PORTLAND
3 CANAL PLAZA, SUITE 601
PORTLAND, ME 04101
(207) 874-0883
MAINE RELAY SERVICE
TDD 1-955-3323

PRESQUE ISLE
169 ACADEMY STREET, SUITE 3
PRESQUE ISLE, ME 04769
(207) 764-5124

IN MAINE CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-432-1599

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Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you, so that I may be able to coordinate my travel with your visit.

Sincerely,

OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senator

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 16, 2011

The Honorable Ron Kirk
United States Trade Representative
Office of the President
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Kirk:

We are writing to urge you to consider the needs of the domestic rubber and plastic footwear industry as you negotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). Specifically, as you enter the next phase of these negotiations, we ask that you insist on maintaining long-standing duties on a small amount of imported footwear that permits continued domestic footwear manufacturing, and defends American jobs.

As you know, the American footwear industry has declined significantly over the past 30 years as most domestic manufacturers have moved production overseas to China, Vietnam, and other countries. According to the domestic industry, since 1997 alone, more than 28,000 jobs in the footwear industry have gone overseas – and today 99 percent of all the footwear sold in the United States is imported.

Today, there are only a handful of manufacturers and suppliers left that make rubber and plastic footwear in this country. These companies have kept their manufacturing in the U.S. while their competitors have relocated overseas where workers earn a fraction of the hourly wages that U.S. manufacturers receive at home. Collectively, the remaining American footwear producers still employ more than 4,000 U.S. workers despite enormous pressure on businesses to cut costs and maximize profits.

However, as the Administration moves forward with the TPP negotiations, we remain very concerned about the damage that duty reductions for the core products of the domestic footwear industry could have on jobs in this country. In fact, the elimination or reduction of certain duties with respect to a TPP negotiating partner like Vietnam, which is one of the largest foreign footwear producers in the world, could shut U.S. manufacturers out of the market and have a devastating effect on the lives of our constituents and their communities.

Our U.S. manufacturers depend on approximately 20 long-standing duties under the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States that are levied on certain imported footwear products in an effort to help level the playing field so that real competition is possible. Therefore, as members representing the communities in which footwear products are manufactured, we believe these duties are appropriate and should be maintained to allow U.S. workers to compete.

Mr. Ambassador, our manufacturers have done everything possible to keep and create new jobs in the U.S. As you continue to negotiate the TPP, we urge you to take these duties off the negotiating table and allow the thousands of American workers to continue to produce high-quality footwear here at home.

Thank you for considering our views. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Olympia J. Snowe
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Scott P. Brown
United States Senator

Mark L. Pryor
United States Senator

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 10, 2011

The Honorable Ron Kirk
United States Trade Representative
Office of the President
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Kirk:

As negotiations to expand the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) continue, we would like to express our strong support for provisions that will enable the continued operation of rubber footwear manufacturing in the United States.

We are concerned that a Trans-Pacific free trade agreement that does not exclude duty cuts for the core products of the domestic rubber footwear industry would give imports from footwear-producing countries with low hourly wages, such as Vietnam, an overwhelming competitive advantage that would severely threaten production and employment in this country. In fact, the Rubber and Plastic Footwear Manufacturers Association, which represents domestic producers as well as suppliers of components for the industry, has stated that "The elimination of duties on Vietnamese rubber footwear, no matter how long the phase-out period, would give that country such an overwhelming competitive advantage that what is left of this domestic industry would have no alternative other than to shift its production from towns in Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Illinois, Arkansas, and California to Vietnam, resulting in unemployment for 3,000 Americans in markets where other jobs are not waiting for them." The inclusion of other footwear-producing countries in the TPP, such as Malaysia, and the possible inclusion of countries like Thailand or Indonesia, would pose a similar challenge if duty cuts for the domestic industry's core rubber footwear products are not excluded.

While most footwear manufacturers have outsourced production jobs, those that continue to manufacture in the U.S. depend on duty rates Congress adopted many years ago on the recommendation of the U.S. Trade Representative. These duty rates have remained in place in the Kennedy, Tokyo, and Uruguay Rounds of trade negotiations, and our government has consistently recognized that they level the playing field and are essential to the preservation of American jobs.

While we may have differing views on our nation's trade policies, we are united when it comes to ensuring that these critical footwear manufacturing jobs remain in the U.S. As you consult with Congress and domestic stakeholders regarding the TPP negotiations, we look forward to working with you to ensure the continuation of American footwear manufacturing and the thousands of jobs it supports here at home.

Sincerely,

Olympia J. Snowe
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Scott P. Brown
United States Senator