

is undeliverable. Suspensions of this type follow prescribed development to locate the individual. In such cases, SSA first makes a reasonable effort to locate the beneficiary and then sends a notice to the beneficiary's last known address advising him or her that benefits will be stopped if he or she does not respond within 15 days. If these efforts fail, and there is no response from the beneficiary, benefits are suspended.

In situations where benefits are suspended for whereabouts unknown, unless the presumption of death after 7 years is used to terminate benefits, the benefits can remain in suspension indefinitely. Studies by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) indicate that suspensions should be resolved as a deterrent to fraudulent payment to the wrong individuals. In addition, studies by SSA show that suspensions for lack of address are usually resolved within 24 months, and that benefits left in suspense for longer than 24 months, because the continuing eligibility of the beneficiary cannot be determined, are rarely ever resolved. SSA now has the capability to indicate the reason for suspension on its payment records. Where that reason is whereabouts unknown and benefits are in continuous suspense for at least 7 years, SSA will assume that the reason the beneficiary failed to request payment during that 7 year period is death.

Terminating entitlement for presumed death ensures that suspended payments will not be fraudulently issued to someone other than the beneficiary. That is because erroneous terminations for death can be reinstated only after a face-to-face interview with the beneficiary. However, payment of suspended benefits does not involve the same stringent development before release of payment and is more vulnerable to fraud. By applying the presumption of death policy to terminate entitlement, SSA will ensure that a final resolution to suspension occurs for those cases which otherwise would remain in suspension indefinitely.

Following continuous suspension for 7 years based on whereabouts unknown, entitlement will be terminated for presumed death. Absent evidence to the contrary, death will be presumed to have occurred on the date of disappearance, the date ending the 7 year period, or some other date depending upon what the evidence shows is the most likely date of death.

Policy Interpretation

SSA will presume that a beneficiary has died and will terminate entitlement

after the individual's payments have been suspended continuously for 7 years or more because the individual's whereabouts are unknown. This policy interpretation will apply to all individuals whose entitlement is not based on disability. The policies for terminating entitlement for disabled beneficiaries whose whereabouts are unknown are addressed in 20 CFR 404.1594. This policy interpretation on presumed death termination, however, will apply to those individuals who have been converted to retirement benefits following an established period of disability. If the benefits are suspended for whereabouts unknown based on a reported disappearance by a first party reporter, that is, a relative, another beneficiary on the record, or a representative of the beneficiary who is an acceptable reporter, the date of presumed death generally will be the date of disappearance, barring some convincing evidence that establishes a more likely date of death.

For cases where suspension for whereabouts unknown originated through undeliverable mail, and benefits have remained in suspension for a period of 7 years or more, the date of presumed death will be the date SSA determined that the individual disappeared, barring some evidence to the contrary.

Effective Date: This Ruling is effective upon publication in the **Federal Register**.

Cross-References

Program Operations Manual System, sections GN 02605.055 and GN 00304.050.

[FR Doc. 99-9226 Filed 4-13-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4190-29-P

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE

Request for Public Comment Regarding Negotiations on Market Access and Other Issues in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Under the Free Trade Area of the Americas

AGENCY: Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR).

ACTION: Request for comments and notice of public hearings.

SUMMARY: The interagency Trade Policy Staff Committee (TPSC) will convene public hearings and seeks additional public comment as part of its efforts to develop proposals and positions concerning the agenda of the third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO), including

articles that may be the subject of market access negotiations. A request was made in March 1999 to the U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) to consider various scenarios for the modification, reduction and or elimination of duties on all articles in the Harmonized System Tariff Schedule of the United States (HTSUS), in the context of WTO or FTAA negotiations. This is the second invitation by the TPSC seeking public comment with respect to the development of the agenda, scope, content and timetables for negotiations or further work in the WTO, including additional consultations with non-governmental stakeholders. The Administration seeks views on the broadest possible range of issues for consideration, including possible subject matter and approaches to any new negotiations or future work in the WTO. The WTO General Council has been instructed to prepare recommendations regarding the launch of further trade negotiations and work in the WTO, which will be considered and approved by WTO Members meeting at their next Ministerial to be held in the United States during the fourth quarter of 1999. The TPSC request for public comments and convocation of public hearings regarding the FTAA negotiations will be issued at a later date.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For procedural questions concerning public comments and/or public hearings contact Gloria Blue, Executive Secretary, Trade Policy Staff Committee, Office of the United States Trade Representative at (202) 395-3475. All other questions concerning the WTO negotiations should be addressed to the agency's Office of WTO and Multilateral Affairs at (202) 395-6843; questions concerning the FTAA negotiations should be addressed to the agency's Office of Western Hemisphere Affairs at (202) 395-6135.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. Background

A. WTO Negotiations

On May 18-20, 1998, the World Trade Organization (WTO) held its second ministerial conference in Geneva, Switzerland, along with a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the post-World War II multilateral trading system. President Clinton, and a number of heads of state or government addressed the gathering, and WTO Members accepted the U.S. invitation to host the third ministerial conference in late 1999. That meeting will be held in Seattle on November 30-December 3, 1999.

The general Ministerial Declaration, agreed on May 20, 1998, instructs the WTO's General Council to begin preparations for the launch of negotiations and consideration of the WTO's forward agenda for approval at its 1999 ministerial meeting. A second Declaration, also agreed on May 20, 1998, commits Members to not impose customs duties on electronic transmissions and calls for the establishment by the General Council of a work program in the WTO on the trade-related aspects of electronic commerce. To prepare for U.S. participation in the General Council meetings, the TPSC requested public comment (63 FR 160, August 19, 1998).

The United States has participated actively in the preparations to date with the benefit of substantial comments from, and consultations with, the statutorily mandated advisory committees established pursuant to section 135 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended. In August 1998, the Trade Policy Staff Committee published a solicitation for public comment regarding the development of the agenda, scope, content and timetables for negotiations or further work in the WTO, including additional consultations with non-governmental stakeholders. The Administration sought views on the broadest possible range of issues for consideration, including possible subject matter and approaches to any new negotiations or future work in the WTO. U.S. Submissions regarding the work of the WTO can be found on the USTR Web site at www.ustr.gov. In preparing for the submissions, the Administration requested comments on the following issues, and additional comments on these issues is relevant to the hearings that will now be convened by the TPSC.

Implementation of Existing Agreements and Work Programs

Additional views are requested with respect to experience in implementation, including where WTO Agreements have been successful in addressing U.S. interests, and in areas where changes would facilitate better enforcement and adherence to rules and commitments, or otherwise advance U.S. policy objectives. Particular attention is drawn to the various rules encompassed in the GATT 1994 (all GATT Articles), the Marrakesh Protocol to the General Agreement, the Agreements on Agriculture, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Textiles and Clothing, Technical Barriers to Trade, Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMS), Antidumping Practices, Customs Valuation,

Preshipment Inspection, Import Licensing, Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, Safeguards, the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS), Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), the Understanding on the Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes, Trade Policy Review Mechanism and Ministerial Decisions and Declaration, including those undertaken at Marrakesh. Thus far, implementation has been a major issue in the preparatory process.

Mandated Negotiations

Additional comments are requested regarding U.S. priorities for the Agreements concluded as part of the Uruguay Round that contain express agreement to conduct further negotiations. The Agreement on Agriculture contains provisions for further negotiations and identifies issues for consideration, including market access, domestic support and export subsidies. The General Agreement on Trade in Services provides for further negotiations on specific commitments to liberalize trade in services. The Agreement on Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) provides for negotiations in certain areas. For all of these mandated negotiations, particular attention should be given to the range of additional issues not mentioned in the Agreements that should be considered, and the modalities for conducting further negotiations. It is noted that the advice from the U.S. International Trade Commission noted above includes all agricultural articles.

Reviews of Existing Agreements and Work Programs

Comments are requested regarding U.S. priorities pursuant to the Agreements from the Uruguay Round that specifically provide for reviews and other work as part of their individual work programs: Agriculture, Antidumping, Customs Valuation, Dispute Settlement Understanding, Import Licensing, Preshipment Inspection, Rules of Origin, Trade and the Environment, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Safeguards, Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, Technical Barriers to Trade, Textiles and Clothing, Trade Policy Review Mechanism, Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMS), and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The Committee on Trade and the Environment has thus far been the focal point for consideration of environment-

related issues in the WTO. The Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) and the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, for example, contain review provisions as a first step in taking further decisions with respect to the Agreements. Comments received thus far have drawn attention to the improvements necessary to the operation of the various Agreements and Work Programs.

Singapore Ministerial Work Program

Comments are requested on what, if any, next steps should be taken with respect to the issues raised in the context of the work of the working groups established on trade and investment, trade and competition policy, transparency in government procurement and the exploratory work undertaken by the WTO regarding trade facilitation. Particularly relevant are next steps in the above-mentioned areas, including the nature and scope of any future work. In the case of procurement, Ministers at Singapore directed the General Council to identify the elements for a multilateral transparency agreement, which the United States believes could be realized this year. The Working Groups on competition and investment were extended into 1999 and have not yet completed their work.

Integration of Least-Developed Countries

Comments are requested on ways to facilitate the participation of least developed countries in the WTO, taking into account work that has been conducted to integrate the technical assistance provided by various international organizations, including the WTO. The Administration sought views with respect to additional initiatives related to capacity building in least developed countries, market access opportunities, and the possible graduation of countries from preferences.

Electronic Commerce

Consistent with the Declaration issued at the May 1998 WTO Ministerial Conference, additional comments are solicited with respect to the commitment by WTO Members not to impose customs duties on electronic commerce and the agreement to establish a work program for further consideration of the relationship between trade and electronic commerce.

Other Trade Matters of Interest

Consistent with the Ministerial Declaration, comments are also solicited with respect to the range of issues where the United States might choose to seek,

or be asked to join a consensus, to add additional items to the WTO's post-1999 agenda for negotiations or further work. The Administration indicated our strong interest in considering the broadest range of issues as the agenda for the next century is developed. The issues identified thus far include:

(1) *Industrial market access:* comments are requested with respect to conducting further tariff negotiations and possible modalities for such negotiations (e.g., pursuit of additional sectoral initiatives to reduce or harmonize duties, the application of formula or request/offer approaches and related issues). (Further negotiations on market access are already envisioned for products covered by the Agricultural Agreement.) This is relevant to the request made of the ITC.

(2) *Consultations with Non-Governmental Stakeholders:* Additional comments are requested as to possible approaches that the WTO could undertake with respect to non-governmental stakeholders. In his speech to the WTO, President Clinton challenged the WTO to consider improving the opportunities for the public to participate in the development of the WTO's forward agenda, and to develop a more regular mechanism for consultation. The WTO has begun to take steps to broaden the interaction with non-governmental organizations in the regard, including the dissemination of information received from such organizations to the WTO's membership. Similarly, a number of steps have been taken by the United States to promote greater transparency in the operation of the WTO that would be of benefit to stakeholders (e.g., with respect to making WTO documents more available to the public).

(3) *Relationship Between Trade and Labor:* Additional comments are requested regarding various approaches to be considered in developing a consensus for further consideration of this issue on the WTO's forward agenda. WTO Ministers at Singapore renewed their commitment to the observance of internationally recognized core labor standards, noting that economic growth and development fostered by increased trade and further trade liberalization contribute to the promotion of core labor standards. At the same time, they recognized the important role of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in this area and rejected the use of labor standards for protectionist purposes, and agreed that the comparative advantages of countries, particularly low-wage developing countries, must not be put into question. Section 131 of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act,

addresses U.S. activity in the WTO in this area.

(4) *Institutional Issues:* Additional comments are requested on the general institutional improvements that the United States should be contemplating for the WTO, particularly as its membership expands to nearly 160 early in the next century. Achieving greater transparency in the WTO's operation has already been identified as a priority issue for the Administration. The United States has consistently sought to expand the range of WTO documents available to the public, and is continuing to promote broader derestriction of documents in a more timely fashion, including in the areas of access to dispute settlement panel reports. Similarly, as the membership expands to include Members with less experience operating as market economies, new challenges arise to the WTO's system of operations and its decision-making process. As a result of the Uruguay Round, the WTO entered into cooperation agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to ensure greater coherence in international economic policy; further cooperation may be desirable.

B. FTAA Negotiations

On December 11, 1994, President Clinton and the 33 other democratically-elected leaders in the Western Hemisphere met in Miami, Florida for the first Summit of the Americas. They agreed to conclude negotiations on a Free Trade Area of the Americas by the year 2005, and to achieve concrete progress toward that objective by the end of this century. Since that time, the 34 Western Hemisphere ministers responsible for trade have met on several occasions, most recently in March 1998 in San Jose, Costa Rica.

At the San Jose meeting, the trade ministers recommended that the Western Hemisphere leaders initiate the negotiations and provided them recommendations on the structure, objectives, principles, and venues of the negotiations. On April 18-19, 1998, President Clinton and his 33 counterparts initiated the Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations at the Summit of the Americas meeting in Santiago, Chile. The leaders agreed to the general framework proposed by the 34 trade ministers, which include the establishment initially of nine negotiating groups to be guided by general principles and objectives and specified objectives as agreed by the ministers in March 1998.

The work of the negotiating groups began in September 1998. In

anticipation of that activity, the TPSC requested public comment (63 FR 128, July 6, 1998) on what should be the U.S. positions and objectives with respect to each of the negotiating groups. The **Federal Register** notice also stated that USTR would seek additional public comment separately on other issues related to the FTAA, including the economic effects of the removal of duties and nontariff barriers to trade among FTAA participating countries. As noted above, this request for public comment will be issued separately at a later date.

2. Advice From the U.S. International Trade Commission Regarding Market Access

On March 15, 1999 the U.S. Trade Representative, pursuant to Section 332(g) of the Tariff Act of 1930, requested that the U.S. International Trade Commission ("Commission") provide advice to the President, with respect to each item listed in the HTSUS where tariffs remain in effect after full implementation of the results of the Uruguay Round or subsequent WTO agreements, as to the probable economic effect of modification of tariffs on industries producing like or directly competitive articles and on consumers, based on the following parameters and scenarios: (1) the effect resulting from changes in dutiable imports from all U.S. trading partners if all tariffs were reduced by at least 50 percent, with tariffs of 5 percent reduced to zero; (2) the effects resulting from changes in dutiable imports from all U.S. trading partners if tariffs were eliminated; and (3) the effects resulting from tariff elimination on dutiable imports from FTAA trading partners alone.

These scenarios either replicate the tariff proclamation authority provided under the Omnibus Trade and Tariff Act of 1988 and the 1974 Trade Act, or provide information for possible WTO sectoral duty elimination initiatives and FTAA tariff negotiations. At the same time, it should be noted that this request by no means implies that we intend to take action on all of these tariff measures. It merely indicates our interest in obtaining factual advice from the Commission on the probable economic effects of their reduction or elimination.

The USTR requested that the Commission provide its advice no later than November 17, 1999.

3. Public Comments and Testimony

In conformity with section 133 of the 1974 Trade Act, the regulations promulgated under the 1974 Act and the regulations of the Trade Policy Staff

Committee (15 CFR part 2003), the Chairman of the TPSC invites the written comments and/or oral testimony of interested parties in public hearings on the possible market access commitments along with other issues for negotiation or further work in the WTO, as described above. Parties should not resubmit submissions presented in response to the August 1998 FR notice.

4. Requests To Participate in Public Hearings

Hearings will be held on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, May 19–21, in Washington, D.C.; Monday and Tuesday, June 7 and 8 in Chicago, IL; Thursday and Friday, June 10 and 11 in Atlanta, GA; Monday and Tuesday, June 21 and 22 in Los Angeles, CA; and Thursday and Friday, June 24 and 25 in Dallas, TX. The number of days for each hearing may change depending on the volume of requests to testify. The time and location of the hearings will be announced at a later date.

Parties wishing to testify orally at the hearings must provide written notification or their intention by Wednesday, May 5, 1999 to Gloria Blue, Executive Secretary, Trade Policy Staff Committee, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, Room 122, 600 Seventeenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20508. The notification should include: (1) The specific hearing to be attended; (2) name of the person presenting the testimony, their address and telephone number; and (3) a brief summary of their presentation, including the product(s), with HTSUS numbers, and/or other subjects to be discussed.

Those parties presenting oral testimony must also submit a written brief, in 20 copies, by noon, Wednesday, May 12, 1999. Remarks at the hearing should be limited to no more than five minutes to allow for possible questions from the Chairman and the interagency panel. Participants should provide thirty typed copies of their oral statement at the time of the hearings. Any business confidential material must be clearly marked as such on the cover page (or letter) and succeeding pages. Such submissions must be accompanied by a nonconfidential summary thereof.

5. Written Comments

Those persons not wishing to participate in the hearings may submit written comments, in twenty typed copies, no later than noon, Wednesday, May 26, 1999 to Gloria Blue, Executive Secretary, Trade Policy Staff Committee, Office of the U.S. Trade Representatives, Room 122, 600 Seventeenth Street, NW,

Washington, DC 20508. Comments should state clearly the position taken and should describe with particularity the evidence supporting that position. Any business confidential material must be clearly marked as such on the cover page (or letter) and succeeding pages. Such submissions must be accompanied by a nonconfidential summary thereof.

Nonconfidential submissions will be available for public inspection at the USTR Reading Room, Room 101, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, 600 Seventeenth Street, NW, Washington, DC. An appointment to review the file may be made by calling Brenda Webb at (202) 395–6186. The Reading room is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Frederick L. Montgomery,
Chairman, Trade Policy Staff Committee.
[FR Doc. 99–9288 Filed 4–13–99; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 3901–01–M

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

RTCA Special Committee 172; Future Air-Ground Communications in the VHF Aeronautical Data Band (118–137 MHz)

Pursuant to section 10(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (Pub. L. 92–463, 5 U.S.C., Appendix 2), notice is hereby given for a Special Committee 172 meeting to be held May 4–7, 1999, starting at 9:00 a.m. The meeting will be held at RTCA, 1140 Connecticut Avenue, NW., Suite 1020, Washington, DC 20036.

The agenda will be as follows:
Tuesday, May 4: (1) Plenary Convenes at 9:00 a.m. for 30 minutes; (2) Introductory Remarks; (3) Review and Approval of the Agenda. (9:30 a.m.) (4) Working Group (WG)–2, VHF Data Radio Signal-in-Space Minimum Aviation System Performance Standards, continue work on VDL Mode 3. Wednesday, May 5: (a.m.) (5) WG–2 continues work on VDL Mode 3; (p.m.) (6) WG–3, Review of VHF Digital Radio Minimum Operational Performance Standards Document progress and furtherance of work. Thursday, May 6: Plenary Reconvenes at 9:00 a.m.: (7) Review Summary Minutes of Previous Plenary of SC–172; (8) Reports from WG–2 and WG–3 on Activities; (9) Report on ICAO Aeronautical Mobile Communications Panel 6; (10) EUROCAE WG–47 Report and discuss schedule for further work with WG–3; (10) Review Issues List and Address Future Work; (11) Other Business; (12)

Dates and Places of Future Meetings; (p.m.) (13) WG–13 continues. Friday, May 7: (14) WG's Continue as Required.

Attendance is open to the interested public but limited to space availability. With the approval of the chairman, members of the public may present oral statements at the meeting. Persons wishing to present statements or obtain information should contact the RTCA Secretariat, 1140 Connecticut Avenue, NW., Suite 1020, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 833–9339 (phone); (202) 833–9434 (fax); or <http://www.rtca.org> (web site). Members of the public may present a written statement to the committee at any time.

Issued in Washington, DC, on April 8, 1999.

Janice L. Peters,
Designated Official.
[FR Doc. 99–9300 Filed 4–13–99; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 4910–13–M

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

Reports, Forms and Recordkeeping Requirements; Agency Information Collection Activity Under OMB Review

AGENCY: Federal Highway Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: In compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*), this notice announces that the Information Collection Request (ICR) abstracted below has been forwarded to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and comment. The ICR describes the nature of the information collection and its expected burden. The **Federal Register** notice with a 60-day comment period soliciting comments on the following information collection was published on November 5, 1998 [63 FR 59837].

DATES: Comments must be submitted on or before May 14, 1999.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nelda Bravo, LTAP Program Manager, (202) 366–9633, Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590. Office hours are from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Local Technical Assistance Program Extent of Coverage

Type of Request: Approval of a new information collection.