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Zane Proposes Adding Apparel to GSP

By Evan Clark

WASHINGTON — Bob Zane, chairman of the U.S. Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel, and senior vice president at Liz Claiborne, has urged the Bush administration to add apparel and textiles to a program that gives qualifying countries duty-free access to the U.S. market.

"If we're to do something to help developing countries, which is the goal of [the Generalized System of Preferences], then dealing with textiles and apparel represents a perfect opportunity," said Zane, testifying Thursday at a hearing of the interagency Trade Policy Staff Committee.

The panel is considering the renewal of the 30-year-old GSP at the end of next year. The program provides duty-free access to the U.S. in more than 4,650 products from 144 countries and territories. Until a broad system of quotas was phased out this year, apparel and textiles did not qualify for the program, although certain regions, such as the Caribbean Basin and Africa, have separate preference programs.

"The transition to a quota-free world has created great anxiety among many developing countries who fear that they cannot compete with larger textile-producing countries," Zane said. "Rather than try to create one new preference program after another in a piecemeal approach, which we all know is a draining and difficult uphill battle for the administration, the Congress and the business community, the GSP program offers the best vehicle to provide development assistance through trade."

Reducing duties would also help apparel and textile importers that Zane said are burdened by high tariffs, which ultimately cost the consumer \$27 billion annually, he contended.

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