

# Obama Picks Punke to Be U.S. Ambassador to WTO

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WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama intends to nominate Michael Punke to be U.S. ambassador to the World Trade Organization, the White House said on Thursday.

The nomination, which must be approved by the Senate, fills a key slot on Obama's trade team as long-running world trade talks are showing renewed signs of life.

Punke would take over from long-time U.S. trade diplomat Peter Allgeier, who has stepped down as ambassador to the WTO after several years in Geneva, where day-to-day negotiations in the long-running Doha round of world trade talks take place.

Punke was a senior policy adviser in the U.S. Trade Representative's office in the mid-1990s after a two-year stint in the White House under former President Bill Clinton.

He began his government career in 1991 as international trade counsel to Senator Max Baucus, a Democrat who is currently chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

Most recently, Punke has pursued a career as a novelist and history writer in addition to working as an adjunct professor at the University of Montana, according to his website at [www.michaelpunke.com](http://www.michaelpunke.com).

The nomination comes as U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk is in Delhi for meetings with other top trade officials on the Doha round of world trade talks, now in their eighth year.

Those talks have shown little progress since a July 2008 meeting in Geneva, which came close to reaching a breakthrough but instead ended in failure.

*(Reporting by Patricia Zengerle and Doug Palmer; editing by Eric Beech and Vicki Allen)*