

Bush nominates deputy USTR with Korea FTA agenda

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WASHINGTON – A field specialist with long experience as a senator's aide and a member of the International Trade Commission (ITC) was nominated Wednesday as deputy U.S. trade representative, leading the administration's effort to pass a major pact with South Korea.

Deanna Tanner Okun, a Republican from Idaho, was named to replace Karan Bhatia, who left the USTR last month. Bhatia was the chief negotiator of the South Korea-U.S. free trade agreement (FTA) that was signed in June. Seoul has already submitted the deal for National Assembly ratification, but Washington is not expected to seek congressional passage until sometime in the spring, after the approval of two pending FTAs with Latin American countries.

The deputy USTR would be put in charge of mustering legislative support for the South Korea FTA, one of the administration's key goals for next year.

Okun served two separate terms as vice chairperson of the ITC and also as the commission's chairperson for two years from June 2002. Before that, she was counsel for international affairs to then-Sen. Frank Murkowski, with an emphasis on East Asian affairs.

She also was an associate attorney at a Washington, D.C., law firm.

USTR Susan Schwab welcomed her nomination and called for prompt confirmation.

"Commissioner Okun's expertise and insight on trade make her an excellent choice for this key position," Schwab said. "Her background on trade issues as a Senate aide and attorney will ensure she will hit the ground running on key issues on the administration's trade agenda."

"We have a great deal to accomplish in 2008, so I hope the Senate will move quickly on her nomination," she said.