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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

March 7, 2005

The Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 5854
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

I am writing to request the expedited publication of trade data by the Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration. It is critical for this time-sensitive information to be released in a prompt manner so that the China safeguard mechanism can be used effectively and so that American jobs can be protected.

The 1995 WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) included an agreement by the United States and all other WTO members to progressively phase-out quotas on textile and apparel imports over a 10-year period. At the time the initial phase-out was agreed to by the United States and other WTO members, China was neither a member of the WTO nor envisioned to become a member anytime in the near future. Since 2002, when China joined the WTO, China increased its market share from 9 percent to more than 70 percent in just 36 months.

The final phase-out of these quotas occurred on January 1, 2005, and China is anticipated to quickly gain a similar market share in these product categories unless the U.S. government uses the China textile safeguard in an effective manner. The fact that the surge from China is "anticipated" rather than "demonstrated" exemplifies my point: that the time currently taken to publish the data interferes with the ability of the U.S. Government to make timely assessments.

The textile industry is very important to my home state of North Carolina. The industry has already suffered significant job losses and plant closings. If China follows current trends, it is estimated by the textile industry that 650,000 American textile and apparel jobs will be lost within two years. This would have a disastrous effect on the textile industry, including a potential closure of 1,300 more textile plants, many of which are in North Carolina.

The China safeguard mechanism needs to be used in a seamless manner that provides for prompt action on import data compiled by the International Trade Administration. A system needs to be developed that allows public access to trade data and regulations in a timelier manner. The current delays and lengthy administrative process is unacceptable. The industry and the Department of Commerce need to know how and when import surges enter the United States. Moreover, once China realizes the United States is serious about using the safeguard mechanism, it will be more likely to agree to a comprehensive agreement on textile imports.

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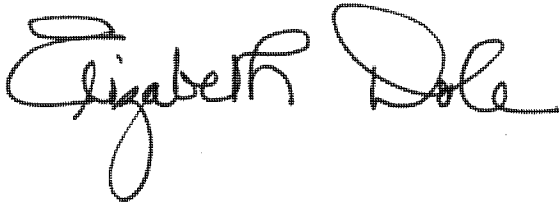
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Thank you in advance for the consideration of this request. I hope that you will act quickly and develop an expeditious system for providing this critical information to the textile industry and the public. Please inform me expeditiously of your progress as well as any changes required of law or regulations to this end. I can be reached at (202) 224-6342 if I can be of further assistance.

With my warmest best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elizabeth Dole". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "E".