

Bush requested a two year extension of the "fast-track" implementing legislation (a detailed explanation of "fast-track" can be found in the Annexes), citing the need to facilitate the work of U.S. trade negotiators engaged in the Multilateral Trade Negotiations and the NAFTA negotiations with Mexico and Canada. Both the Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee reported to the full Senate and House on May 14, 1991 their recommendations that resolutions denying this authority be defeated. The House of Representatives approved this recommendation by a vote of 231 to 192 on May 23, 1991. Senate approval followed on May 24 by a vote of 59 to 36.

Ministerial launch

With the U.S. Administration having secured its necessary "fast-track" authority, Ministers in the three countries turned their attention to the substantive launch of the negotiations. Mexico's Commerce and Industrial Development Minister, Dr. Jaime Serra Puche, and United States Trade Representative Carla Hills accepted the invitation of International Trade Minister Michael Wilson to host the inaugural ministerial meeting in Toronto, Ontario on June 12, 1991.

The Toronto meeting afforded the three ministers the opportunity to discuss in detail many of the procedural and substantive issues necessary to ensure an effective launch of the negotiations. Ministers agreed to a general timetable for the NAFTA negotiations. They noted that their priority was to achieve a comprehensive agreement, broad in scope, that would confer real benefits to its participants. The negotiations, they stressed, will take as long as is required to achieve a balanced, mutually beneficial result. In order to achieve this, ministers agreed that it is necessary to maintain close and continuing political "oversight" of the negotiations. To this end, they agreed to be in frequent telephone contact and to meet face-to-face as often as necessary.

In order to organize the negotiations, ministers agreed to establish six major negotiating groups: market access; trade rules; services; investment; intellectual property; and dispute settlement. It was further agreed that a number of specific sub-groups would be established under the aegis of the major negotiating groups. The sub-groups would afford the three countries the opportunity to examine individual issues in depth. A listing of the groups and sub-groups is found below.

Negotiating Groups

- I Market Access
 - a) tariffs/non tariff barriers
 - b) rules of origin
 - c) government procurement
 - d) agriculture