

Ron Kirk

U.S. Trade Representative and Former Mayor of Dallas

Ambassador Ron Kirk is the former United States trade representative (USTR), the former mayor of Dallas, and the first African-American to fill those roles. Dubbing his city the “Capital City of NAFTA,” he understands the political and economic demands of running the fourth largest metropolitan area in the country. As mayor, he served two terms from 1995–2002 and was among a group of political leaders who called for permanently normalizing trade relations with China. With nearly 20 influential years in politics and as a respected member of President Obama’s Cabinet, he was the principal advisor, negotiator, and spokesperson on trade issues and an important member of the economics team. He is now frequently sought-after for his expertise on politics and trade and can be seen nationwide on top-tier media outlets.

A political insider with a reputation of being a coalition builder, Kirk is boisterous and entertaining as he analyzes the current political environment and offers insights into how to get past the Washington gridlock and improve our economic future. With a unique vantage point from his time in both national and local politics, he tells hilarious stories and offers audiences a unique perspective on the top political issues of the day, including revealing his thoughts on upcoming elections and the direction he would like to see for the country. Exclusively represented by [Leading Authorities speakers bureau](#), Kirk addresses politics, trade, jobs, and the economy.

USTR. Kirk served as USTR from 2009–2013, and with 95% of consumers living outside of the U.S., he played an essential role in the country’s economic recovery. He led negotiations to complete trade deals with South Korea, Colombia, and Panama and was on the frontlines of enforcing trade rules with China. President Obama stated, “From bringing home new trade agreements...and negotiating to open up new markets for American businesses, to cracking down on unfair trade practices around the world, he has been a tremendous advocate for the American worker.”

In 2010, he scored an important victory, as South Korea and the U.S. completed a free-trade agreement that eliminated most tariff exports and solidified one of America’s most important alliances. Kirk also garnered bilateral free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama, worked to persuade China to do more to crack down on intellectual property rights violations, and advanced the ambitious regional Trans-Pacific Partnership talks, a U.S.-led free trade pact with 10 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Before leaving the White House, Kirk worked on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, an agreement between the United States and the 27-nation European Union that would cover half the world’s economic output. He believes that trade, particularly with the EU, is essential to the recovery of the U.S. economy.

Trailblazer. With a law degree from the University of Texas, Kirk went to work for Senator Lloyd Bentsen and later was named the secretary of state of Texas by former Governor Ann Richards. He held that position until he was elected as the mayor of Dallas, the first African-American to hold that position. He was also Texas’ first black nominee for Senate in 2002. Kirk was named one of “The 50 Most Influential Minority Lawyers in America” by *The National Law Journal* in 2008 and one of the nation’s top government relations lawyers by *Best Lawyers in America*. He is a recipient of the University of Texas Distinguished Alumni Award, the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Outstanding Public Service Award, the Young Texas Exes Award, and the Austin College Distinguished Alumni Award. Ambassador Kirk also received an honorary doctor of humane letters degree from Austin College and the Mickey Leland Leadership Award from Texas Southern University. Ambassador Kirk was born and raised in Austin, Texas, where he received his B.A. degree in political science and sociology from Austin College in Sherman, Texas. He received his law degree from the University of Texas School of Law in 1979. Ambassador Kirk is admitted to practice law in Texas and the District of Columbia.