Remarks by
U.S. Secretary of Commerce Donald L. Evans
Transatlantic Business Dialogue
Chicago, Illinois
November 8, 2002

[As prepared for delivery]

Thank you, Phil (Condit) and Sir Charles (Masefield), for inviting me. I'm the only thing standing between you and the next course, so I will be brief.

I am glad to see so many CEOs from Europe and the U.S. here this evening. Your presence speaks to the importance of this meeting. I was a CEO myself. I know the challenge you face when you decide to spend time away from your business and family. You do it because you are committed to a cause that is good for your company.

So I want to talk to you this evening about that commitment ... that stewardship ... and what it means to your company, your industry and your country. As leaders of private enterprise, you bear great responsibility. Responsibility to your shareholders … to your employees … to your customers … Responsibility to the free-enterprise system itself.

I spent my life working in business. As young man, I was what we call a "roughneck" on an oil rig. In other words, I was on the bottom rung of the ladder. I worked my way up to be CEO of the company. Now I am a public servant. It is my privilege to serve President Bush, and to serve the American people, as the Secretary of Commerce of the United States.

But let me tell you something: Each of you is as much a public servant as I am. You are stewards of capitalism. The caretakers of the free-enterprise system. Government must create the environment for the system to flourish. But you're the people who make it work. You build the businesses, produce the products, deliver the services, create the jobs, and meet the payrolls. You pilot the engine of economic growth and prosperity.

Your responsibility reaches far beyond your profit and loss statement. You direct businesses -- and business, in the words of American ethicist Michael Novak, is a "strategically central institution of social justice."
Business is essential, Novak says, to liberation of the poor through jobs and wealth creation, to the success of democracy and human rights, and to building a civil society.

You hold the key to opportunity and hope for a better life for many people. You play a crucial role in helping dreams come true ... for your employees, their families, your investors … all your stakeholders. And, by virtue of your leadership, you are setting the moral tone for civil society. That's an awesome responsibility. One which must not be taken lightly. And I would also point out that if businesses don't have honor in their own world, the odds of others doing so is negligible.

I know you are up to the task. The leadership in this room is powerful. At the same time as you provide model leadership of your companies, TABD is your forum to provide model leadership for global growth.

I appreciate the presence of my European counterparts here tonight, Pascal Lamy and Erkki Liikanen. We are all here because we believe in TABD. We believe in the power of this Dialogue. The Dialogue has proposed serious suggestions on how to improve the transatlantic economy. We thank you for that.

Tonight, however, I'd like to share my thoughts on a much broader mission I see for TABD. I want to challenge you to think big. To realize the potential you have to impact economic growth beyond the U.S. and EU ... to think globally as you move forward.
My challenge to you can be summed up quite simply: Let's upgrade the dialogue. Let's talk less about bananas and FSC ... and more about harnessing free enterprise to abolish poverty.

Let's talk about a world with no barriers to the flow of goods, services and agricultural products ... a world where people can build productive and prosperous lives for themselves and their families. That is my vision. But we in government can't do this alone. We need your help.

I understand that tomorrow I will hear about the extensive efforts you are making to help developing countries in their capacity building. I applaud these efforts.
Today I heard a recommendation for a study on impediments to integration of the transatlantic capital markets. I also understand that TABD is urging further regulatory cooperation ... and an ambitious agenda in the Doha round.

These are great ideas. But clearly it's going to take a cooperative effort by all to move them forward.

And my role - and the role of my good friends from the Commission - is to take your best ideas and make them happen. Your role is to continue to provide leadership and creativity - and to keep our feet to the fire.

For if the United States and the European Union, who share a $2 trillion relationship, don't show the rest of the world that it can be done, who will? Who will point the way to what is possible, if not us?

There are more than 3 billion people in this world who live on less than $2 a day. Free enterprise isn't even in their vocabulary. Yet it is free enterprise that holds the key to their liberation from poverty and despair and hopelessness.

This is where you come in. I believe the people in this room can play a big part in unlocking prosperity and hope. That is your job. That is your responsibility.

My challenge to you is simple, yet great: use that power. Let me emphasize this: Do not underestimate the impact TABD can have. It is powerful. Just as powerful as any agreement that springs from the Doha agenda.

The world is waiting for you. And you have my full support - and my deep appreciation - as you carry forward with your important mission.

Thank you, and God bless you.