FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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For more information contact:
Jeffrey Porter (207) 541-7430
Perry Newman (207) 791-0378

Maine Council Appointed by U.S. Commerce Secretary to Promote
Export of Products and Services

Portland, Maine – U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke today announced the appointment of a newly established council designed to promote exports of Maine goods and services. The Maine District Export Council (Maine DEC) will work with Maine businesses to address important issues related to trade and exporting. It will focus on business outreach and advocacy initiatives with the goal of stimulating economic growth by supporting firms interested in exporting to foreign markets.

The Maine District Export Council will serve as one of 56 councils around the country. Its mission is to contribute leadership and international trade expertise that complements the U.S. Commercial Service’s export promotion efforts by counseling businesses on the exporting process and conducting trade education and community outreach. The Maine council will work in close cooperation with the Commerce Department and the Maine International Trade Center.

“The creation of the Maine District Export Council provides another vehicle for promoting Maine’s economic growth through export-led business strategies,” said Jeffrey Porter, director of the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Export Assistance Center in Maine. “The members appointed to the council bring extensive knowledge and experience related to international trade and will serve as a valuable resource for Maine’s business community.”

“One of our first objectives will be to host focus group sessions with Maine businesses to learn more about the obstacles and issues hindering Maine exports,” said Perry Newman, chairman of the newly-appointed Maine DEC and president of Atlantica Group, an international trade consulting firm based in Portland. “The members of the council all have valuable experience working with companies engaged in foreign trade. But we want to reach beyond the collective experience of council members and hear from members of Maine’s larger business community. For the council to fulfill its role, we need to know what’s hindering and what can help strengthen Maine exports.”

Newman identified some of the problems that can hamper Maine exporters. These include getting credit, protecting intellectual property abroad, complying with U.S. export-control policies and understanding foreign tariffs and protectionist policies.

Another goal of the Maine export council will be to increase awareness about the resources available to Maine firms. Besides the hands-on support provided by the Maine International Trade Center, the U.S. Commerce Department offers a number of valuable programs. One service called Gold Key lines up interested buyers for a company trying to get into a foreign market. Other resources, such as financing available through the U.S. Export-Import Bank and the U.S. Small Business Administration can help transform business opportunities into realities.

“Export growth is a key job-creating strategy in our economy,” said Commerce Department’s Porter. “Increased exports will stimulate both economic growth and job growth. Our goal is to utilize the council’s collective expertise to help local businesses expand their international orientation and develop
export-driven strategies. In a global economy, Maine firms need to identify prospects in foreign markets and aggressively pursue them.”

The most recent trade data suggests that Maine exports are picking up after a downturn in 2009. Merchandise exports from Maine to foreign markets rose significantly in the first half of this year (Jan-June 2010), compared to 2009. Last year in the face of global recession, Maine exports dropped to $2.3 billion worth of goods, down from a peak of $3 billion in 2008 and the lowest level in the past six years.

Porter noted that exports include far more than manufactured goods.

“When people think of exports, the first things to come to mind often are manufactured goods or agricultural products. But a big part of American exports consists of services and intellectual property. In fact, services account for about a third of all U.S. exports and that percentage has been growing. Many Maine businesses that provide professional and technical services, including management and consulting, ought to explore export opportunities.”

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Appointed to the Maine DEC are: Peter Anania, President, Anania & Associates; Janine Cary, Executive Director, Maine International Trade Center; Morris Fisher, President, CBRE, The Boulos Company; Dan Forte, President, Global Import/Export Solutions; Amy Johnson, Consultant; Kathie Leonard, President/CEO, Auburn Manufacturing; Suzanne McCormick, President/CEO, United Way of Greater Portland; Jean Maginnis, Founder/Executive Director, Maine Center for Creativity; Wade Merritt, Vice President, Maine International Trade Center; Muriel Mosher, Vice President for Government and Public Relations, Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership; Perry Newman, President, Atlantica Group LLC; Beth Shissler, Owner, Sea Bags, Inc.; and Alden Turner, Senior Area Manager, U.S. Small Business Administration.