



The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Meetings in Honolulu: A Preview

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The United States will host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's (APEC's) 19th Economic Leaders' Meeting in Honolulu, HI, on November 12 & 13, 2011. APEC was founded in 1989 to facilitate trade and investment liberalization in the Asia-Pacific region. During the four days prior to the Economic Leaders' Meeting, APEC will hold the fourth Senior Officials Meeting for 2011, the Finance Ministers Meeting, and the APEC Ministerial Meeting. President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner, and U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk are expected to attend their respective meetings. These meetings will culminate a year in which the United States hosted dozens of meetings.

Although the United States was among APEC's founding members, some U.S. officials have been frustrated with APEC's approach to trade and investment liberalization and facilitation. From its inception, APEC has used a consensus-based, non-binding approach in which its members unilaterally adopt non-discriminatory liberalization and facilitation measures. In much of its trade policy, the U.S. government has generally utilized an approach based on negotiated binding agreements applicable only to the parties to the agreement. As such, there has been frequent discussion about APEC's proper role in U.S. trade policy.

This discussion remains relevant in 2011 as three other multilateral fora have become increasingly important to the United States. The United States, along with eight other APEC members, is attempting to negotiate a comprehensive regional trade agreement—commonly referred to as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—that the Obama Administration has promoted as a model free trade agreement for the 21st century. In addition, the 6th East Asia Summit (EAS), to be held in Bali six days after the APEC Leaders' Meeting, will be the first at which the United States will participate as a full member. Reflecting the growing importance the U.S. government places on relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), President Obama is scheduled to attend the 3rd U.S.-ASEAN Summit, also in Bali, the day before the EAS Summit. The rising prominence of other Asian or Asia-Pacific events has also brought into question APEC's relevance and the necessity of the President's attendance at the annual Leaders' Meeting.

As host in 2011, the United States chose three main themes for the year—economic growth, green development, and cooperation and convergence of trade regulations. In addition, it is expected that there will be one or more major announcements regarding progress on the TPP negotiations during the Economic Leaders' Meeting. For more than a year, the Obama Administration has stated that it hopes substantial progress will be made on the TPP agreement in time for the APEC meetings in Honolulu. More recently, Japan's new Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has indicated that his country is contemplating joining the TPP negotiations.

Congressional interest in APEC has generally focused on three issues—implications for U.S. trade policy in general, potential effects on relations with China, and budgetary matters. The voluntary unilateral trade and investment measures offered or agreed to by the United States at the annual Economic Leaders' Meetings may have implications for U.S. trade laws and regulations, as well as for the federal budget. For example, in the 112th Congress H.R. 2042 is intended to help advance the U.S. commitment in 2007 to join the APEC Business Travel Card program. In addition, U.S. initiatives under the auspices of APEC may impact relations with China. Finally, as an APEC member, the United States contributes to the organization's operational

budget, and as host for 2011, the United States was responsible for much of the funding for the APEC meetings held throughout the year.

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