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Dear Colleagues:

I want to congratulate you on establishing the New Zealand – United States Parliamentary Friendship Group. As co-chair of its counterpart in the United States Congress – the Friends of New Zealand Caucus – I look forward to working with you in continuing to further strengthen our countries' already excellent bilateral relationship.

While I am certain that we can work together on several areas of interest to both of our countries, I am most interested in finding a way for us to quickly begin negotiations toward a comprehensive free trade agreement. I believe that a U.S. – New Zealand free trade agreement would be in the economic and strategic interests of both countries.

The United States and New Zealand have enjoyed a close relationship and have been trading partners for almost 200 years. The U.S. is one of the largest investors in the New Zealand economy, covering sectors from agriculture to finance, chemicals and telecommunications. The United States is the second largest exporter of goods to New Zealand behind Australia, and it is estimated that U.S. merchandise exports will increase by 25% when a free trade agreement becomes a reality.

We are both mindful and grateful that New Zealand has been a solid partner with the U.S. during the last five years in the war on terror. We know that every member of New Zealand's Special Forces has served in Afghanistan hunting Al Qaeda, and the New Zealand Army was the first to take responsibility from the U.S. for leading a Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Bamyán Province in Afghanistan. I had the privilege of visiting this province a couple of years ago. New Zealand's engineers have been in Iraq, and a New Zealand navy frigate and aircraft have been involved in the Maritime Interdiction Operation in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman.

Although I am retiring from Congress in January, I plan to stay active in supporting negotiations for a U.S. – New Zealand free trade agreement and other areas of bilateral cooperation. In the meantime, I look forward to our new partnership.

Sincerely,

Jim Kolbe  
Member of Congress