

US team in Antigua to discuss gaming dispute

Deputy United States Trade Representative (USTR) Ambassador John Veroneau is expected to arrive in Antigua and Barbuda today to begin high-level talks with Minister of Finance and the Economy, Dr. Errol Cort, on the longstanding trade battle between the two countries over internet gambling.

According to a statement released yesterday by the Ministry of Finance, Ambassador Veroneau will lead a six-member high-level delegation from the United States and the talks will centre around ongoing settlement talks relating to the internet gambling dispute between Antigua and Barbuda and the US.

Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Dr. John Ashe is also expected to be on island for the talks.

It was noted that this was the most senior US trade delegation to visit Antigua and Barbuda to hold talks with the government on the internet gaming issue and this comes as yet another deadline for the deferral of the matter at the WTO passed on Friday.

Despite the repeated deferrals, the minister of finance has indicated that he is very encouraged by the proposed visit and remains hopeful that the parties could arrive at an amicable settlement to this long outstanding dispute.

Asked how close Antigua and Barbuda and the US are to a final settlement on the gaming issue, Dr. Cort told the SUN he would be in better position to answer that once the meetings have been concluded. "But," he added, "I think it is a positive sign that a very high-level US delegation is visiting Antigua and Barbuda to engage in these talks."

Dr. Cort said the in-depth meeting with the USTR officials is likely to continue into Tuesday.

The USTR delegation is scheduled to leave Antigua and Barbuda on Tuesday afternoon.