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## US Envoy: 'Gaps Remain' Between US, Vietnam In WTO Bid

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HANOI (AP)--Sticking points still remain in bilateral negotiations between the U.S. and Vietnam on Hanoi's bid to join the World Trade Organization, said U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Michael Marine on Thursday

Talks in Geneva earlier this month have "helped narrow the gaps considerably, but gaps remain," he told reporters. "Now both sides have gone away with a much clearer understanding of what needs to be done. With homework about what can be done, what can be offered to eliminate all the gaps, to come to a deal.

When the next round of negotiations are scheduled "will depend on how well that homework is done," he said.

Hanoi has already concluded bilateral talks with the EU, Japan, South Korea and China, among others, but still has to finish negotiations with the U.S. and a handful of other members.


Vietnam has repeatedly stated its goal of membership by the end of 2005, but several sticky issues remain, including market access concerns over trading and distribution and intellectual property rights protection.

Marine said he would not completely rule out Vietnam's chances of joining by year's end, but noted that a key U.S. Congressional vote on permanent normal trading relations - which is required in conjunction with a WTO bilateral deal - is unlikely before December.

"We've made that very clear to the Vietnamese because we know what the schedule is like. There's so much work left to be done before the package can be completed," he said.

In addition, Vietnam's own National Assembly must revise several major laws to conform with WTO rules, and that legislation won't be passed until its next session in November at

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the earliest, he said.

Marine also said that Vietnam's implementation of its bilateral trade deal with the U.S. has not been entirely satisfactory. Though Vietnam has made progress, it still falls short in several key areas such as enforcement of intellectual property rights and market access issues, he said.

"When Congress considers the WTO package, ...one of the things that will receive close scrutiny is the track record on the BTA. That's been part of our message to Vietnam. They need to keep that in mind and move ahead with implementing provisions of the BTA on time and also fully," Marine said.

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