From the Jacksonville Business Journal:

Local business leader meets with White House officials to push international trade

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Andrew East of AET Solar is bringing the First Coast's need for free trade straight to the White House.

East, executive vice president, was invited to the White House — and then invited back — to speak with officials about the importance of international trade for his Green Cove Springs company, and how Presidential power over trade authorization can help companies like his.

“It would remove additional barriers to entering those markets,” East said. “It lets us participate in a global marketplace where American goods are more competitive.”

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East said there were several key ways European and Transpacific trade agreements could help his company, a major manufacturer of solarthermal collectors.

“It allows us to enter markets more cost effectively,” East said.

United States and Europe have similar testing regimes, but they differ slightly in when one test is performed. East said to carry multiple certifications for different regions of the globe would be very costly. With the new free trade agreements, there would be reciprocity for certification bodies.

“It would streamline that process without the need for additional certifications,” East said.
Another benefit would be the removal of tariffs, which adds costs for merchandise to be sold in other continents.

“If those barriers to trade were removed,” he said, “we could offer our goods at a more cost competitive rate.”

Another benefit would be an improved trade position for the region, which would benefit companies throughout the area.

“I think these agreements offer more goods and services to flow through ports,” East said. “That just lowers logistics costs to the market.”

At the White House last week, East and other small and medium business representatives travelled with Business Forward, an organization that specializes in bringing small business leaders to brief presidential economic advisers on the situations they face.

While there, East met with Michael Froman, an ambassador and U.S. Trade representative, the deputy secretary of commerce, the first president of the Export-Import bank and Tom Vilsack, the secretary of agriculture, among others.

In about two weeks, East said he plans to return to meet with the assistant to the president for public engagement and intergovernmental affairs and the director of the national engagement council.

“We can help provide some perspective to the administration,” East said, and added that his company is protected from downturns in the domestic market because so much of its growth revenue comes from export sales.

East also said he was pleased there is a regional push for exporting in Northeast Florida.

“It has tremendous impacts on the local economy,” East said of exporting. “All ships will rise when that tide comes in.”

Jensen covers logistics, manufacturing and defense