



Washington Fair Trade Coalition

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Working on behalf of people and the planet for a fair global trading system

August 13, 2014

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LABOR LEADERS WANT RESULTS, NOT PROMISES, IN TRADE DEALS

Seattle, WA – The Washington Fair Trade Coalition joined regional labor leaders August 12 for a meeting with US Trade Representative Michael Froman, where they called for new trade policies to reverse the 20-year race to the bottom started with NAFTA. The meeting, convened by US Rep. Adam Smith, brought together a wide range of private and public sector unions, as well as US Rep. Derek Kilmer.

Bad trade policies have shipped living-wage jobs overseas, eroded wages, and weakened job security. “Our reality is, in the last 15 years every mill in Washington State that has either closed completely or has been downsized, the equipment gets dismantled, then shipped overseas and brought back online producing the very same products that we used to make in America,” Greg Pallesen, Vice President of the Association of the Western Pulp and Paper Workers, told Ambassador Froman at the meeting.

Angela Marshall, with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 46, added “Our members don’t export, but we are affected just like all workers. When some workers are making \$0.40 an hour, standards go down for all of us. We’ve performed this grand experiment, where we were promised that trade agreements will raise labor standards around the world, and it hasn’t worked.”

Ambassador Froman is on a cross-country tour promoting two massive trade agreements currently in closed-door negotiations: the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which includes 12 countries from around the Pacific Rim, and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the European Union.

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At the meeting, Ambassador Froman argued that progress has been made in the last few years, while acknowledging that we have a long way to go. He assured labor leaders, “You should feel that labor is at the table. There is no group, industry, or civil society group I meet with more.” He also observed that 20 years ago labor interests were side agreements, while now they are built into trade agreements and enforceable by the same mechanisms as commercial rights. “Through these agreements... we are pursuing what I am convinced will be the most progressive set of trade agreements in history.”

Labor sees it differently. Lynne Dodson, Secretary Treasurer of the Washington State Labor Council, observes, “Access does not equate to influence.” Rich Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO and a member of the Labor Advisory Committee (LAC) on Trade Policy and Negotiations, expanded on this in a letter to Congress earlier this year. He wrote, “Over the course of the several years of negotiations for the TPP, the LAC has provided scores, if not hundreds, of specific suggestions... few, if any, of these suggestions appear likely to be incorporated into the now almost completed agreement.”

The complete secrecy of these negotiations further short-circuits political engagement. “Because we cannot share what little we do know with our membership or the larger public, we cannot use the traditional tools that civil society uses to offset the power of economic elites: education, organization, and mobilization of the public.”

Together, these trade agreements would set global standards for labor, environmental, public health, and other critical public policy areas.

“This may be our last chance to get trade right for a generation or two,” says the Washington Fair Trade Coalition’s Gillian Locascio. “Since NAFTA, corporate interests have been writing the rules and our families and communities are suffering for it. Labor and the rest of civil society are saying loud and clear – we need a new, accountable, transparent process that puts public interests on equal footing with investor interests.”

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