

Impact of the TPP on Climate and the Environment

Environmentalists Reject Obama's Call For Expanded Trade Powers

By Zach Carter, Huffingtonpost.com

January 24, 2015

WASHINGTON — Nearly 50 environmentalist organizations sent a letter Wednesday to every member of Congress, urging them to oppose granting President Barack Obama “fast-track” authority to pass new free trade deals.

The letter, signed by the Sierra Club, the National Resources Defense Council, Earthjustice and dozens of other groups, comes the morning after Obama pressed for that power in his State of the Union address.

“Today’s trade agreements ... are about much more than tariffs and quotas and have significant implications for our environment, public health, and global climate,” the letter reads, drawing attention to “rules that would grant foreign corporations the right to sue governments, in private tribunals, over environmental, public health, and other laws and policies that corporations allege reduce the value of their investment.”

Environmental groups are particularly concerned about the Trans-Pacific Partnership — the most significant trade pact since the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement. The Obama administration has insisted that the deal will include strong labor and environmental protections, but leaked drafts of the pact have only deepened opposition to the deal among traditionally liberal organizations. In a private meeting with congressional Democrats last year, Ambassador Michael Froman, the top White House trade official, backtracked from prior public vows to ensure strong environmental safeguards.

On Tuesday night, Obama argued that the TPP was critical to curbing China’s growing geopolitical power.

“China wants to write the rules for the world’s fastest-growing region,” Obama said. “That would put our workers and businesses at a disadvantage. Why would we let that happen? We should write those rules.”

Critics of the deal emphasize that regimes with notorious human rights records in Brunei, Malaysia in Vietnam will be difficult to corral, even if the formal terms of the agreement live up to Obama’s promises.

The administration is currently seeking “fast-track” powers, otherwise known as Trade Promotion Authority, which would require Congress to vote on any trade deal Obama negotiates by an up-or-down vote, without offering amendments. Few on Capitol Hill believe the TPP can be enacted without fast-track.

On Tuesday, several Democrats pushed back against Obama’s trade agenda, and said they would demand a host of conditions for fast-track, if they granted it at all. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) told The Huffington Post that a bill granting the president fast-track powers would also require that the pact include language banning currency manipulation. Currency manipulation language would significantly alter the deal’s impact on Japan, the world’s third-largest economy. Like China, Japan buys large amounts of U.S. debt in order to drive down the value of its own currency. The cheaper currency value, in turn, makes labor in Japan cheaper than in the United States, without lowering living standards for Japanese workers.

This is the full letter:

January 21, 2015

Dear Member of Congress:

As leading U.S. environmental and science organizations, we write to express our strong opposition to “fast track” trade promotion authority and to urge you to oppose any legislation that would limit the ability of Congress to ensure that trade pacts deliver benefits for communities, workers, public health, and the environment.

Fast track empowers the president to send already-signed trade agreements to Congress for straight up or down votes with limited debate and no amendments. Fast track was originally designed in the 1970s when trade agreements focused on traditional trade issues such as cutting tariffs and lifting quotas. Today’s trade agreements, however, are about much more than tariffs and quotas and have significant implications for our environment, public health, and global climate.

Under negotiation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), for example, are rules that would grant foreign corporations the right to sue governments, in private tribunals,

over environmental, public health, and other laws and policies that corporations allege reduce the value of their investment; rules that would require the United States Department of Energy to automatically approve exports of liquefied natural gas to countries in the pacts with no analysis to determine whether exporting natural gas is in the public interest; and a system for “harmonizing” regulations that could significantly weaken public health and environmental protections by offering new opportunities for foreign governments and corporations to intervene early on in our rule-making process.

This new, expansive, model of trade requires a more inclusive and open process to set the terms of how such pacts are negotiated, approved, and implemented. The old fast track is simply not 1 For more information on our proposed elements for a new model of trade authority, see the civil society letter signed by nearly 600 organizations to Senator Wyden. appropriate given the scope and subject matter covered by today’s pacts. Moreover, we believe it is particularly inappropriate to give fast track authority to agreements that are both far along in the negotiation process and that have been negotiated with an astonishing lack of transparency.

U.S. involvement in trade negotiations should be guided by democracy, transparency, political accountability and must lead to a ‘race to the top’ that provides real protections for communities, workers, and the environment. A new model of trade that delivers benefits for most Americans, promotes broadly shared prosperity, and safeguards the environment and public health is possible. To achieve such goals, however, fast track must be replaced with a new system for negotiating and implementing trade agreements that includes a Congressional role in selecting appropriate trading partners; the publishing of government submissions and composite texts during the negotiations; Congressional certification that trade goals have been met before trade negotiations can conclude; and Congressional authorization for the executive branch to sign and enter into trade agreements.

We once again urge you to oppose fast track legislation and replace the outdated fast track procedures with a new trade negotiating and approval process that would help deliver trade agreements that could benefit workers, communities, public health, and the environment. Sincerely,

350.org
Athens County (OH) Fracking Action Network
Berks Gas Truth
Catskill Mountainkeeper
Catskill Citizens for Safe Energy
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for International Environmental Law
Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Clean Economy Coalition of the Coastal Bend
Clean Water Action
Delaware Riverkeeper Network
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice
Earthworks
Energy Action Coalition
Environmental Action
Environmental Health Coalition
Environmental Investigation Agency
Food & Water Watch
Friends of the Earth
Friends of Merrymeeting Bay
Greenpeace USA
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Institute for Policy Studies, Climate Policy Program
League of Conservation Voters
Natural Resources Defense Council
Oil Change International
Olympic Climate Action
Partnership for Policy Integrity
People Demanding Action
PODER (People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources)
Progressive Democrats of America
Progressive Democrats of America Maryland
Rainforest Action Network
Safe Climate Campaign
Sierra Club
Southern Oregon Climate Action Now
SustainUS
The SEED Coalition
The Texas Drought Project
Union of Concerned Scientists, Center for Science and Democracy
Washington Environmental Council
Wild Earth Guardians

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