

For Immediate Release
Contact: Denice Martin, (503) 867-1352

Hermiston City Council Urges Congress to Change Its Trade Policy Passes Resolution Asking Congress to Oppose "Fast Track" and Trade Agreements that Ship Local Jobs Abroad

Hermiston, OR — The Hermiston City Council unanimously passed a “Resolution to Retain Local Jobs” last night, in a vote of 7-0. The resolution calls on Congress to “oppose international trade agreements that facilitate to the offshoring of Oregon jobs” and to replace Fast Track trade promotion authority with “democratic” and “inclusive” trade policymaking procedures. Area residents, many of whom had lost jobs when the Simplot processing plant moved abroad under the North American Free Trade Agreement, testified in support of the resolution at last night’s City Council meeting.

“I have five kids, and grandkids, and I want them to have jobs here when they get older,” said Susana Howard, a former Simplot employee who supported the resolution. “At first I was concerned with finding a new job for myself. Now I’m concerned about what the next generations are going to do if jobs keep moving out of this country.”

“I want to make sure that there are jobs here for our kids, so they don’t have to leave the area just to find work,” said City Council Member Manuel Gutierrez, one of the main supporters of the resolution.

“I’m excited that local leaders have stepped up, acknowledged the pain that the community has gone through, and are urging Congress to wake up to the notion that Fast Track-approved trade deals are hurting this country,” said Jerry Hennings, another former Simplot worker who supported the resolution. “Our elected officials need to stand with us. Trade is a good thing, but it has to be fair and equitable.”

Fast Track is the policymaking process that speeds trade agreements through the Congressional approval process by eliminating ordinary Committee review, amendment and debate procedures. Fast Track expires on June 30, 2007 and can only be extended with Congressional approval. Free trade agreements negotiated and approved under Fast Track have led to the offshoring of U.S. jobs.

The U.S. Labor Department certified 32,300 Oregonian jobs as having been lost due to U.S. trade policy between 1994 and 2006 as part of its Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program. Because the program applies only to certain workers in certain specific industries, this figure does not represent all Oregonians who have lost jobs due to trade. The Oregon Fair Trade Campaign estimates that 68,000 Oregonians have lost jobs due to U.S. trade policy since 1994.

Economists predict that U.S. jobs will continue to be exported if existing trade policies continue to be expanded. Economist Alan Blinder, former Vice Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, recently estimated that 8.2 million existing U.S. jobs are “highly vulnerable to offshoring” and another 20.7 million U.S. jobs are “vulnerable to offshoring.”

“Hermiston’s voice on this matter is particularly important because both Oregon Senators Gordon Smith and Ron Wyden sit on the Senate Finance Committee that considers trade policy,” said Denice Martin, project coordinator for the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign. “Hopefully, Senators Smith and Wyden will get the message that Fast Track-approved trade deals have been causing job loss in all parts of the state and must be opposed.”

“I worked twenty-five years at Simplot and gave my life there. Any time they needed me, I was there, because they were the ones that put food on my table,” said Antonia Morales. “After they shut down, I was left with nothing. It’s time for Congress to listen to my family’s concerns.”

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