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Elected, Labor and Business Leaders Detail TPP Trade Pact Problems as Obama Considers Heading to Asian Trade Summit

As White House Weighs Attending Trade Summit during Government Shutdown, Major Unresolved TPP Issues, Growing Opposition to Fast Track Authority Highlighted

Washington, D.C. –Today, House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee Co-chair Rosa DeLauro, Ways & Means member Jim McDermott, CWA President Larry Cohen and Brian O'Shaughnessy, Chairman of Revere Copper Products warned of severe threats to U.S. jobs, food safety and affordable medicines posed by the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement. With negotiations far from over, Congress should retain its authority to ensure that any final deal benefits most Americans and not pass Fast Track trade authority. Comments were made during a teleconference call moderated by Lori Wallach, Director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch.

President Obama is facing the choice of staying in Washington for on-going government shutdown and debt ceiling negotiations or traveling to Bali to attend a summit with the heads of state of the 11 other nations involved in TPP talks on the sidelines of the 21st Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting October 7-8.

At the Summit, President Obama hoped to announce a final TPP deal after four years of contentious negotiations. However, there is no consensus on key TPP terms relating to job offshoring, a ban on Buy American procurement, disciplines against State Owned Enterprises subsidizing their operations or enforceable labor and environmental rules. Most other TPP nations strongly oppose U.S. proposals that could increase medicine prices and undermine financial regulation. Talks on sensitive auto, dairy, textile, and sugar market access issues are still in their early stages. Despite bipartisan demands in recent weeks by 60 U.S. Senators and 230 Representatives that TPP include disciplines against currency manipulation, talks on the subject have not even begun.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) said, “The Trans-Pacific Partnership is an agreement of broad scope and I have been particularly concerned with food safety issues. We would see an influx in seafood products from Vietnam and Malaysia, which have terrible food safety records, with any TPP agreement and I am afraid the food safety dispute resolution process being negotiated may further jeopardize food safety.

“On top of this, I do not believe all Members of Congress are being given a sufficient opportunity to provide input or have a meaningful role in the negotiating process. Twentieth Century ‘Fast Track’ is simply not appropriate for 21st Century agreements like the TPP agreement that is moving toward completion. It must be replaced with trade promotion authority that increases Congress’s role in the process.”

Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA) said, “Washington State knows the value of a good trade agreement, and our economy depends on robust trade relations. I have voted for some trade agreements and against others, because substance matters. On fast track authority, I voted against it in 2002 because I did not think it included mechanisms to ensure that a President will consult meaningfully with Congress during a trade negotiation. The Obama administration has been better on consultations compared to the Bush administration, but more can be done to improve the process so that there is greater transparency and larger role for Congress.

“On the Trans-Pacific Partnership, I will be watching closely to see what kind of an agreement we get out, particularly related to ensuring access to medicines and provisions related to labor and the environment.”

Larry Cohen, President of the Communications Workers of America said, “If we keep going down the same trade road as we have over the past 40 years, America will soon be the one country on Earth that has not just exported our manufacturing base but also the only one that offshores its service sector jobs like those at call centers. We are going to fight to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Brian O’Shaughnessy, Chairman, Revere Copper Products and Chief Co-Chair of the Coalition for a Prosperous America said, “Companies like mine are the manufacturing cornerstones that our economic revival is supposed to be built on, but year after year, trade bill after trade bill, I see more and more of our customers moving their operations overseas. The lack of transparency during negotiations leads to numerous loopholes in our Free Trade Agreements other countries use to export unemployment and import full time jobs. Just to name three of them, other countries can still manipulate their currency; change their border adjustable taxes to act like tariffs; and, ignore labor, environmental and human rights.”

Lori Wallach, Director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch said, “At the last TPP Summit in 2011, heads of state announced they had a deal when they did not and since then opposition to the very notion that closed-door “trade” negotiations with 600 official corporate advisors should rewrite wide swaths of 12 countries domestic laws has only grown in the U.S. and in other TPP countries. This TPP we-have-a-deal kabuki theatre is aimed at trying to create a sense of inevitability when in fact the talks are deadlocked in no small part because increasingly people in the countries involved are realizing that TPP is not mainly about trade, but would promote more job offshoring, raise medicine prices and roll back vital food safety, financial and other safeguards we all rely on.”

The diversity of the speakers on today’s call - senior members of Congress and business and labor leaders – reveal how concerns about the TPP are growing as details about the secretive negotiations have begun to emerge. The speakers were united in insisting that the pact’s draft texts must be aired fully before the American people and the Congress and not railroaded through Congress using the extraordinary Nixon-era Fast Track procedure. Fast Track has only been used 16 times among hundreds of U.S. trade agreements. Congress refused to delegate its authority using Fast Track when requested by President George W. Bush in 2007 and by President Bill Clinton in 1995, 1997 and 1998.

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