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Joan Claybrook, President

Selected Campaign Statements By President Barack Obama on U.S. Trade and Globalization Policy

Obama On the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and NAFTA Expansion:

“One of the first things I’ll do as President will be to call the Prime Minister of Canada and the President of Mexico and work with them to fix NAFTA. We’ll add binding obligations to protect the right to collective bargaining and other core labor standards recognized by the International Labor Organization. And I will add enforceable measures to NAFTA, the World Trade Organization (WTO), CAFTA [Central America Free Trade Agreement] and other Free Trade Agreements (FTA’s) currently in effect. Similarly, we should add binding environmental standards so that companies from one country cannot gain an economic advantage by destroying the environment. And we should amend NAFTA to make clear that fair laws and regulations written to protect citizens in any of the three countries cannot be overridden simply at the request of foreign investors.”¹

“I voted against CAFTA and never supported NAFTA. NAFTA’s shortcomings were evident when signed and we must now amend the agreement to fix them. While NAFTA gave broad rights to investors, it paid only lip service to the rights of labor and the importance of environmental protection. Ten years later CAFTA – the Central American Free Trade Agreement – had many of the same problems, which is why I voted against it. We must add binding obligations to the NAFTA agreement to protect the right to collective bargaining and other core labor standards recognized by the International Labor Organization. Similarly, we must add binding environmental standards so that companies from one country cannot gain an economic advantage by destroying the environment. And we should amend NAFTA to make clear that fair laws and regulations written to protect citizens in any of the three countries cannot be overridden simply at the request of foreign investors.”²

Obama On the WTO:

“I do not support trade efforts that undermine important federal, state and local policies and long-time practices that have been designed and implemented to benefit American families. As such, before expanding GATS to other domestic sectors, I believe we must have a thorough assessment of how such a move would affect the existing practices and goals of U.S. federal, state and local governments.”³

Obama On Imported Food and Product Safety:

“As president, I will make sure that any goods coming into America meet American safety standards, and that the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Food and Drug Administration and the

other agencies that protect consumers have the tools necessary to make sure that what we're buying is safe."⁴

"I will enforce Buy America requirements to protect specialty crops. I also support immediate implementation of the Country of Origin Labeling law, which will require meat products and specialty crops including fruits and vegetables to indicate their country of origin. I believe that American producers should be able to distinguish their products from imported ones and that consumers deserve the right to know where their food comes from."⁵

"As president, I will also mandate independent, third-party system of all children's toys and other consumer products before they enter the United States. I will dramatically increase resources for the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). I will work with the Chinese government and other foreign governments to establish a better system, including the possibility of stationing U.S. inspectors in overseas factories, to monitor and act when dangerous toys, food and other products are identified... I believe that we must have strong standards to accept imports of food and other products. Equivalent standards do not necessarily have to be identical to ours, but they must achieve the same level of protection for consumers. I support ensuring that our trade agreements include protections for consumers that are as good as U.S. safety standards."⁶

Obama On Investment Rights:

"With regards to provisions in several FTAs that give foreign investors the right to sue governments directly in foreign tribunals, I will ensure that foreign investor rights are strictly limited and will fully exempt any law or regulation written to protect public safety or promote the public interest. And I will never agree to granting foreign investors any rights in the U.S. greater than those of Americans."⁷

Obama On Trade Negotiating Authority:

"I will replace Fast Track with a process that includes criteria determining appropriate negotiating partners that includes an analysis of labor and environmental standards as well as the state of civil society in those countries. Finally, I will ensure that Congress plays a strong and informed role in our international economic policy and in any future agreements we pursue and in our efforts to amend existing agreements."⁸

"I oppose extending or renewing the current Fast Track authority as designed, but would support a redesigned process that provided for greater transparency, more democratic participation, and required labor and environmental provisions in the core of agreements."⁹

"I will not support extension of the existing Fast Track process that expired. I have not and would not support renewing Trade Promotion Authority for this President. The current Fast Track process does not mandate that agreements include binding labor and environmental protections nor does it give an adequate role to Congress in the selection and design of agreements. I will work with Congressional leaders to ensure that any new TPA authority fix these basic failings and open up the process to the American people for their participation and scrutiny."¹⁰

“The process used to negotiate NAFTA, the text of the agreement itself having failed to include labor and environmental protections, and the inadequate consideration or transition assistance for those who would lose their jobs in both countries as a result of changing production patterns, all contributed to a failure of governance and that has indisputably hurt us.”¹¹

Obama On Agriculture:

“I will work to maintain the American farmer’s competitiveness around the world, and ensure the growth of family farms. My pro-American trade agenda will ensure the interests of farmers and ranchers are not traded off in favor of other industries. I will work to ensure that all trade agreements contain strong and enforceable labor, environmental, and health and safety standards so American farmers are able to compete on a level playing field. I will instruct the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to negotiate agreements that grant American products access commensurate to access provided foreign products to the U.S. market, and I will examine existing U.S. trade agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA to ensure they do not undermine U.S. farmers.”¹²

Obama On Labor and Environmental Standards:

“I strongly support the inclusion of meaningful, enforceable labor and environmental standards in all trade agreements. As president, I will work to ensure that the U.S. again leads the world in ensuring that consumer products produced across the world are done in a manner that supports workers, not undermines them.”¹³

Obama On Global Warming and Trade Agreements:

“The U.S. must lead efforts to combat climate change, but the only effective solution to this global problem will require the development and enforcement of an equitable global agreement that includes the participation of all our major trading partners. I will take all necessary and appropriate steps to ensure that policies designed to reduce global warming pollution are not constrained by trade agreements.”¹⁴

Obama on Health Care and Trade Agreements:

“I am committed to signing a universal health care plan into law by the end of my first term of office. I will instruct my USTR appointee to examine any existing WTO regulations, as well as proposed policies put forward by the outgoing Bush Administration, to ensure that these are no existing trade regulations that will affect implementation of this goal.”¹⁵

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Letter to the Iowa Fair Trade Campaign, December 26, 2007. Available at http://www.citizen.org/documents/Obama_IFTC.pdf.
- ² Response to a Texas Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, March 3, 2008. Available at <http://www.citizen.org/documents/TXFairTradeCoalitionObama.pdf>.
- ³ Response to a Pennsylvania Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, April 2, 2008.
- ⁴ Letter to the Iowa Fair Trade Campaign, December 26, 2007.
- ⁵ Response to a Texas Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, March 3, 2008.
- ⁶ Response to a Texas Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, March 3, 2008.
- ⁷ Response to a Pennsylvania Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, April 2, 2008. Available at http://www.citizen.org/documents/PA_Fair_Trade_Coalition_Obama.pdf.
- ⁸ Letter to Wisconsin Fair Trade Coalition, February 18, 2008. Available at http://www.citizen.org/documents/WFTC_Obama_Letter.pdf.
- ⁹ Response to an Oregon Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, May 9, 2008. Available at <http://www.citizen.org/documents/ORFairTradeCoalitionObama.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Response to a Pennsylvania Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, April 2, 2008.
- ¹¹ Response to an Oregon Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, May 9, 2008.
- ¹² Response to a Pennsylvania Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, April 2, 2008.
- ¹³ Response to a Texas Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, March 3, 2008.
- ¹⁴ Response to an Oregon Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, May 9, 2008.
- ¹⁵ Response to a Pennsylvania Fair Trade Coalition questionnaire, April 2, 2008.