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Contact: Bryan Buchanan (202) 454-5108

Trans-Pacific Trade Talks in Malaysia Underscore Secrecy of Negotiations, Problems With Potential Deal

Statement of Lori Wallach, Director, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch

The Obama administration's Trans-Pacific Free Trade Agreement (FTA) talks in Malaysia this week underscore the point that critics of this potential trade deal have been making for months: Despite Obama's pledges to negotiate a high-standard deal and do so transparently, the negotiations continue to take place in extreme secrecy. Additionally, leaked texts have shown that the deal likely will repeat the worst aspects of past trade deals and add new one-percenter demands to limit consumer access to affordable medicines, weaken food and product safety, and cause more damage to most of us.

Transparency even has taken a step backward in the Malaysia round.

Negotiators are not even meeting with stakeholders this time around. And not only have repeated international calls to release the working texts gone unheeded, we learned in September that the Obama administration joined the other negotiating parties in signing a secrecy pact that stipulates the texts will not be released until four years after negotiations end. International outcry led the government of New Zealand – the repository of Trans-Pacific FTA documents – to publicly post the text of these “confidentiality letters.” That means that the only document that has been released so far is a document – released only in response to extreme international pressure – explaining that no documents will be released.

More than 600 executives from corporations have been named as official U.S. trade advisors and have access to the texts and talks. But members of Congress, journalists and the people whose lives will be most affected have no ability to see what our negotiators are bargaining for – and bargaining away – until a deal is final and it is effectively too late for changes.

Two-thirds of all House Democrats recently voted against Obama on FTAs he submitted that had been negotiated in secret by the previous administration – a greater percentage than on any other legislation since he took office. The administration should take that as a warning of what not to do as it negotiates the Trans-Pacific FTA.

Read the secrecy pact at <http://bit.ly/uPeFTJ>. Read the letters from the international transparency campaign at <http://bit.ly/nmiw4v>.

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