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NAFTA Plan Does Not Describe Promised Transformation of NAFTA to Prioritize Working People

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

Note: Today, the Trump administration published a document on its NAFTA renegotiation objectives. Under the 2015 Fast Track law, the administration must publish "a detailed and comprehensive summary" of its specific negotiating objectives 30 days before formally beginning trade talks.

"This document does not describe the promised transformation of NAFTA to prioritize working people that some voters were expecting based on President Trump's campaign pledges.

More than 910,000 specific American jobs have been certified as lost to NAFTA under just one narrow program, but this document does not make clear whether NAFTA's job offshoring incentives or its ban on Buy American procurement policy will be eliminated or labor or environmental standards better than the widely rejected one in the TPP will be added.

The document is quite vague so while negotiations can start in 30 days, it's unclear what will be demanded on key issues, whether improvements for working people could be in the offing or whether the worst aspects of the TPP will be added making NAFTA yet more damaging for working people. The administration should follow the European Union's practice and make public its actual proposals being shared with Mexico and Canada prior to talks starting.

The Trump administration has a very narrow pathway to both achieving the president's campaign pledges on NAFTA and passing a new NAFTA deal. Achieving Trump's campaign-promised NAFTA deficit-lowering and U.S. job creation goals will require changes to NAFTA that GOP congressional leaders and the corporate lobby oppose and about which this document remains vague. Even if a bloc of GOP rank and file members may support elimination of NAFTA's investor offshoring incentives and Buy American ban, which are necessary to achieve Trump's goals, a sizeable bloc of Democratic votes will be needed to pass a new NAFTA of that sort. But GOP congressional leaders and the corporate lobby are demanding TPP elements be added to NAFTA and that will push away Democrats. Some aspects of that TPP agenda can be seen in today's document because much of the text repeats the negotiating objectives of the 2015 Fast Track bill, which GOP leaders and the corporate lobby loved and most congressional Democrats, a sizeable bloc of GOP congressional members and labor and civil society groups opposed."

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