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Despite USTR Kirk's Rhetoric, Obama Administration Trade Approach Is More of the Same

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

Ambassador Ron Kirk says that the administration wants to restore Americans' long-lost faith in our trade policy and repeatedly promises to truly fix Bush's leftover job-killing trade deals – but, at the same time, he's before Congress pushing forward three of Bush's NAFTA-style deals for approval.

Slightly altering auto tariff schedules in Bush's NAFTA-style agreement certainly is not a faith-restoring trade policy overhaul. The Korea trade deal is still projected to increase the overall U.S. trade deficit and cost 159,000 U.S. jobs. The Korea deal requires the kind of financial deregulation that contributed to the economic crisis. The deal still contains Bush's ban on reference to the International Labor Organization conventions when enforcing its weak labor standards. This agreement even allows South Korean goods to be given the benefits of the agreement even if such goods contain inputs or parts from North Korea, despite our sanctions on trade with that country. And it still has sovereignty-eroding, public-interest-policy-chilling rules that allow multinational corporations to sue governments in private, foreign tribunals for taxpayer money.

The administration had a chance to fix the many glaring problems in Bush's NAFTA-style Korea agreement, but it didn't. Kirk is right that the majority of Americans oppose another one of these job-killing trade deals.

Given the ugly battle that will ensue in Congress and with the American public over the Korea trade deal, we hope the administration will take a different approach with Colombia, Panama and the other countries with which it is now negotiating. With respect to Panama and Colombia, prior to any trade agreement being appropriate, Colombia's deeply ingrained violence and Panama's tax-haven status must be eliminated.

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