

NEWS RELEASE ...

New Hampshire Legislature Tells Federal Officials: Don't Make Trade Commitments Affecting Our State Unless We Authorize It

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CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE --- Both Houses of the New Hampshire state legislature have adopted resolutions which instruct federal trade negotiators to consult with them before completing new trade agreements whose provisions affect the traditional authority of state and local governments.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 3 passed the House May 31 by a 191 to 106 vote. The resolution had already been approved in the State Senate on April 5 by a voice vote.

Coming as the Administration re-works the language of pending bi-lateral agreements with Panama, S. Korea, Peru, and Colombia, and as talks continue in the World Trade Organization's Doha Round, the resolution represents "an increasing concern from the states about the impact of trade agreements on our own authority to act in the best interest of our citizens," said Senator Betsi DeVries, of Manchester, a retired firefighter and the resolution's prime sponsor.

"The arcane language of trade provisions covering investment, government procurement, and regulation of the service sector takes a direct aim at areas which have historically been under the authority of the state and local governments," said Rep. Susi Nord of Candia, who also sits on her town's Planning Board. "We are telling the trade negotiators not to agree to provisions which affect our state unless we tell you to."

The resolution says that the state of New Hampshire instructs the United States Trade Representative to exempt New Hampshire from new provisions of the General Agreement on Trade in Services, a controversial section of the trade rules administered by the WTO, "unless explicitly granted authority to include the state in such offers."

The resolution also points out that under the New Hampshire Constitution it is the legislature, not the Governor, which has the authority to set the terms for trade. "That means," DeVries said, "that the trade negotiators need to communicate directly with us, not just with the Governor, about these issues."

Pennsylvania's House of Representatives passed a similar resolution on May 23 by a vote of 133 to 66. The resolution urges Congress to oppose the extension of the President's "fast track" trade negotiating authority, calls for increased consultation between trade negotiators and the states, urges maintenance of the state's traditional authority, and insists the state have the right to be consulted on non-tariff issues.

Also last week, the NH House approved without opposition the creation of a "Citizens Advisory Commission" to evaluate the impact of trade agreements on the state. Once minor differences with the Senate are worked out, the Governor and legislative leaders would appoint members from the fields of business, labor, farming, environmentalism, and government to study the agreements and issue reports. Similar commissions are already running in other states, such as Maine, according to Senator Jacalyn Cilley, of Barrington, the proposal's prime sponsor.

“The provisions of these agreements are far more sweeping than many state and local officials comprehend,” said Cilley, a small business owner. “We need to have our own ability to assess their impact.”

Passage of both measures has been supported by local organizations including the American Friends Service Committee’s New Hampshire Program, the NH AFL-CIO, Working Families Win, Save Our Groundwater, Worldview Ltd., and the NH Fair Trade Campaign.

Rep. Chuck Weed, of Keene, who first introduced a proposal to create a trade policy oversight commission in 2001, said “It’s time to put trade policy on a slow track, and to hear from New Hampshire citizens the consequences of free trade agreements, so that our Congressional representatives can be sure the public interest is served before new commitments are made.”

For help reaching Senators Cilley or DeVries, contact the NH Senate Information Officer at (603) 271-3043

For help reaching Representatives Weed or Nord, contact the NH House Information Officer at (603) 271-3666

To read the text of the resolution, go to:

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2007/SCR0003.html>

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