



Auto Safety • Congress Watch • Energy Program • Global Trade Watch • Health Research Group • Litigation Group
Joan Claybrook, President

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
Feb. 28, 2008

Contact: Bill Holland (202) 454-5190
Kate Pollard (202) 454-5126

To Implement Domestic Campaign Policy Priorities on Health Care and Global Warming, Future Presidents Must Alter Existing U.S. Trade Commitments

New Public Citizen Report Identifies Changes to WTO, NAFTA Rules Needed to Facilitate Candidates' Proposals on Health and Climate

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Public Citizen today identified changes needed to World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and the investment provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to implement a dozen of the presidential candidates' key health and climate policy proposals.

The changes were detailed in a report, "Presidential Candidates' Key Proposals on Health Care and Climate Will Require WTO Modifications, Overreach of WTO Highlighted by Potential Conflicts with Candidates' Non-Trade Proposals," released today, available at <http://www.citizen.org/documents/PresidentialWTOreport.pdf>

"Growing public ire about our current trade and globalization policies' damage to Americans' economic prospects has played an enormously important role in this election, with most candidates committing to reform NAFTA," said Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch division. "But candidates and voters have little idea that some of the candidates' domestic policy priorities on health care and climate change could be limited by the overreach of so-called trade agreements like the World Trade Organization. The need for a comprehensive overhaul of the WTO could not be more urgent."

Although they have nothing to do with trade, key health care cost containment proposals on the creation of health insurance risk pooling mechanisms, reduction of pharmaceutical prices and electronic medical record-keeping, a proposal to expand coverage by requiring large employers to provide health insurance and a proposal to establish tax credits for small employers as an incentive to provide health insurance fall within WTO jurisdiction. In addition, proposals that address climate policy, such as increasing CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency) standards, banning incandescent light bulbs, establishing new regulation of coal-fired electric plants and establishing national renewable portfolio standards (RPS), green procurement proposals and green industry subsidies come under the jurisdiction of existing U.S. WTO commitments.

“Corporate lobbyists, previous U.S. presidents, and ‘free market’ think tanks worked hand-in-hand to lock in corporate privileges on health care, energy and other domestic policies and shield them from small ‘d’ democratic reforms of the kinds proposed by Clinton, McCain and Obama,” said Todd Tucker, research director for Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch division and an author of the report. “Now is the moment presidential candidates must stand up for their important domestic platform priorities and commit to renegotiate the WTO and other flawed trade deals.”

Moreover, the candidates haven’t addressed the need to renegotiate other provisions in trade deals like the WTO, NAFTA and other NAFTA-style trade deals that severely limit future presidents’ policy space to enact legislation on non-trade issues.

“Trying to work within the tiny policy space permitted by existing WTO rules would result in the challenges surrounding America’s health care debacle and the global climate crisis being defined so narrowly as to ensure real redress is impossible,” said Wallach. “The candidates must reject corporate calls for watering down their proposals and instead emphasize opening up the much-needed policy space to provide real solutions to pressing domestic concerns.”

###

Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C.

For more information, please visit www.citizen.org.