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For Immediate Release:
June 28, 2011

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Obama Edges Closer to Political Cliff With Deal to Combine Program to Aid Workers Losing Jobs to Trade With Three Bush-Era NAFTA-Style Trade Pacts Projected to Cause More Job Loss

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

Given that polls show most Americans oppose more NAFTA-style trade pacts because they are job-killers, announcing that three more such agreements are ready to move only because a program to assist workers losing jobs to bad trade deals also can be extended will probably not surprise many Americans, but it sure will make them mad.

For most Americans, what's newsworthy is not that the administration is pushing Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), which effectively is a job burial insurance program, but that pushing a deal on TAA is being used as political cover to move more NAFTA-style trade agreements that will kill more American jobs in the first place, especially given our high unemployment rates.

Poll after poll shows that the vast majority of the American public – across stunningly diverse demographics – is opposed to NAFTA-style trade deals and that members of Congress vote for them at their peril. Earlier this month, White House Chief of Staff Bill Daley, whose job is to sell these trade deals and who helped former President Bill Clinton sell NAFTA to a skeptical Congress, recognized that workers “lose from these agreements” and implied that campaigning against FTAs could even be an electoral advantage. (*The Washington Post*, “White House's Daley seeks balance in outreach meeting with manufacturers,” June 16, 2011.)

The point that's gotten lost in all this wrangling over TAA is that the three leftover Bush trade deals are bad in and of themselves. Even an official government study finds that the Korea deal will increase our trade deficit, and we know up front that it will kill jobs and undermine our national security. The Colombia deal will eliminate any leverage the U.S. has to combat the forced displacements and murders of unionists, Afro-Colombians, human rights defenders and others – problems that have gotten worse since this deal was signed in 2007. The Panama deal will make it harder for the U.S. government to penalize tax-dodging multinational corporations. The supplemental deal on autos for Korea, the labor “Action Plan” for Colombia, and the tax information exchange agreement for Panama are all toothless and do nothing to alleviate the aforementioned problems, as Public Citizen has extensively documented. They were all part of a political-cover kabuki dance.

Moreover, the fact remains that all three deals have the same damaging provisions we all remember from NAFTA: limits on financial services regulation, foreign investor privileges that promote offshoring, weak labor standards, limits on imported food safety and inspection, and the ridiculous private investor-state enforcement system that empowers multinational corporations to go around our domestic courts and directly challenge our state and federal laws before foreign tribunals and demand compensation from our tax dollars for claimed violations of the trade deal.

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