

# INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS

JAMES P. HOFFA  
General President

25 Louisiana Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20001



KEN HALL  
General Secretary-Treasurer

202.624.6800  
www.teamster.org

January 10, 2014

United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of our 1.4 Million members, I am writing in strong opposition to the “Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities Act of 2014” to urge you, as a member of the Democratic Caucus, to oppose it. This bill, submitted yesterday by the Chairmen of the Finance and Ways & Means Committees, is a badly made retread of the Fast Track we fought on the Hill and at the grassroots in 2002, when George Bush’s USTR was expanding the NAFTA model to Colombia, Panama and South Korea.

The House version of this outdated Fast Track, HR 3830, doesn’t even have – nor does it deserve – an original Democratic co-sponsor. You Democrats can do better than this. I urge you to reject this bill and work with us and each other to craft something progressive that reflects and can enforce the values we share – middle class prosperity though global competitiveness, consumer safety, workers’ rights and environmental sustainability – and gives you a more meaningful role in real trade policy reform. At the very least, any new Fast Track grant must require that your negotiating objectives, reflecting your fair trade values, are met and certified before a trade agreement is signed.

The Teamsters will work with you this year to solve the crisis of income inequality – to raise the minimum wage, close corporate tax loopholes, make infrastructure investments, realign workplace equities and, yes, fight for fair trade with policies to make America more competitive in the global economy. But if this Fast Track passes and the new crop of big trade pacts, trans-Pacific and trans-Atlantic, are ratified without your amendments or even a full debate, and up-or-down votes on implementing legislation that the USTR writes for you, I will predict that the challenges to working families will only increase, as they have for a generation under our flawed and failed so-called “free trade” regimes.

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Twenty years ago, the NAFTA came into force after ratification under Fast Track rules – one of the sixteen times trade deals were passed using this extraordinary delegation – and, since then, the U.S. economy has hemorrhaged good-paying jobs, lost to import surges and production off-shoring, while wages have stagnated. We don't want more of the same for our children.

As you know, the first trade pact that this Congress will likely debate is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); and although you haven't seen the full text of the agreement, you already know that it is bigger and more complex than any so-called "trade" deal ever negotiated. Its twenty-nine chapters will infringe on too many areas of domestic policy-making and economic activity – intellectual property, food safety, financial regulation, government procurement, services, immigration, healthcare, energy, labor rights and the environment – too many to justify the broad delegation of your own committee jurisdictions (let alone your constitutional prerogatives) that this legislation demands.

In conclusion, in our opinion, given the size and complexity of the new crop of trade deals which the USTR is negotiating; and given the lack of transparency to Congress and the public during these trade talks; and given the record of job losses which we sadly commemorate twenty years after NAFTA was passed with Fast Track; it is simply inappropriate for Congress to relinquish any of your constitutional authority to determine the direction of U.S. participation in the global economy – but even if you must give a little to the Administration, we must first work together to defeat the Baucus-Camp bill.

I am looking forward to the congressional debates and national conversation now that the battle is joined over Fast Track. We hope to work directly with your office to enact real trade reform. In the meantime, no Member should underestimate our opposition to this very bad bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James P. Hoffa". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

James Hoffa  
General President

JPH/md