

# Texas Fair Trade Coalition

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## Presidential Candidate Questionnaire for Federal Office

Candidate Name: Barack Obama

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The Texas Fair Trade Coalition is comprised of more than 40 organizations, including the Texas AFL-CIO, the Texas Farmers Union, the Texas State Association of Electrical Workers, the USWA Texas P & L Committee, the UNITE-HERE Southwest Regional Board, the Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter, UFCW Region 5, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, and the Texas Teachers Federation. We oppose further agreements based on the NAFTA model and expect those who represent us to do the same and urge candidates seeking federal office to commit to renegotiating existing agreements and promoting a new responsible trade model. We are asking questions of candidates to determine who is committed to addressing the damaging failures of our status quo trade and globalization policies.

The following questions will be shared with our TFTC partners in the labor, environmental, family farm, student, and faith communities. We strongly encourage you to supplement answers with additional information, explanations and rationale.

**Please respond by e-mailing [info@texasfairtrade.org](mailto:info@texasfairtrade.org) or faxing 866-695-8776.**

### **Our Position**

We believe the NAFTA model has failed the U.S. and our trading partners, and has not lived up to its promises. During the NAFTA era, we have seen one out of every four U.S. manufacturing jobs destroyed, including tens of thousands of jobs here in Texas. We've seen real wages decline as income inequity has soared. NAFTA and other NAFTA style agreements have resulted in scores of attacks on our domestic environmental, health and safety laws. They limit our ability to promote good-paying jobs here and restrict initiatives to raise working conditions around the globe. NAFTA resulted in the displacement of over one million Mexican peasant farmers, increasing immigration to the United States from Mexico by 60 percent. CAFTA is leading to more of the same.

### **NAFTA Style Trade Agreements**

#### **Procurement**

1. Trade agreement procurement rules undermine the ability of federal and state governments to use tax dollars to create and maintain good jobs, to promote economic opportunity and development, and to achieve other important social goals, including safeguarding prevailing wage, renewable energy, and recycled content laws. Will you renegotiate current and existing trade agreements' procurement provisions to remove the bans on *Buy America* and anti-offshoring policies and to remove the provisions that could subject prevailing wage, renewable energy, recycled content, living wage and other important procurement policies to challenge in trade tribunals?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** I am committed to ensuring that U.S. products and services are treated fairly in our international trade agreements. I will start with a reevaluation of NAFTA and a renegotiation effort to fix it, and I will ensure that U.S. products are treated on a level playing field with those of other countries. I will also task my U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) with exercising our rights at the WTO and ensuring that U.S. products and services are not unfairly and illegally discriminated against abroad. I will increase resources for the underfunded-USTR Office so it has the tools it needs to carry out its responsibilities to the federal government and the American people. I will also end tax breaks for companies that ship America jobs overseas and shift those incentives to companies that keep and maintain jobs here in the U.S.

I also support immediate implementation of the Country of Origin Labeling law, which will require meat products and specialty crops including fruits and vegetables to indicate their country of origin. I believe that American producers should be able to distinguish their products from imported ones and that consumers deserve the right to know where their food comes from.

2. Will you commit that all future trade agreements you may negotiate will not include the procurement terms that ban Buy America policies, local preferences and anti-offshoring policies by requiring us to treat foreign bidders the same as U.S. firms?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** I am committed to ensuring that U.S. products are treated fairly in our international trade agreements, and I will ensure that U.S. products are treated on a level playing field with those of our countries. I will enforce Buy America requirements to protect specialty crops. I also support immediate implementation of the Country of Origin Labeling law, which will require meat products and specialty crops including fruits and vegetables to indicate their country of origin. I believe that American producers should be able to distinguish their products from imported ones and that consumers deserve the right to know where their food comes from.

### **Food and Product Safety**

3. Do you commit that future trade agreements you may negotiate will not include the terms now found in or trade agreement that limit our ability to ensure that imported and

domestic products actually meet our U.S. safety standards, and limit the rate of border inspection of imported goods?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** As president, I will also mandate independent, third-party system of all children's toys and other consumer products before they enter the United States. I will dramatically increase resources for the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). I will work with the Chinese government and other foreign governments to establish a better system, including the possibility of stationing U.S. inspectors in overseas factories, to monitor and act when dangerous toys, food and other products are identified.

4. Do you commit to renegotiating the provisions in WTO, NAFTA and other existing U.S. trade agreements that require us to accept imports of food and products that only meet 'equivalent' standards set by the exporting country INSTEAD of actually meeting our U.S. safety standards and the provisions that limit the rate of border inspection of imported goods?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** I believe that we must have strong standards to accept imports of food and other products. Equivalent standards do not necessarily have to be identical to ours, but they must achieve the same level of protection for consumers. I support ensuring that our trade agreements include protections for consumers that are as good as U.S. safety standards.

## **Agriculture**

The number one priority of each future trade agreement must be to provide farmers and ranchers across the globe an opportunity to receive a fair price for their commodities. Each trade agreement since the early 1990's has led to both lower prices being paid to producers for commodities and floods of imports that lack environmental and quality-control standards. These agreements have undermined the livelihoods of family farmers and ranchers here and in our trading partners, increasing rural poverty while doing nothing to protect the environment or ensure food safety.

5. As President, will you renegotiate existing trade agreements to address these problems, and ensure that they are addressed in all future agreements?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** I will work to break down trade barriers to maintain the American farmer's competitiveness around the world, and ensure the growth of family farms. My pro-American trade agenda will ensure the interests of farmers and ranchers are not traded off in favor of other

industries. I will instruct the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to negotiate agreements that grant American products access commensurate to access provided foreign products to the U.S. market, and I will examine existing U.S. trade agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA to ensure they do not undermine U.S. farmers. I will help producers develop global marketing networks through the use of new electronic transaction systems and special promotion programs. And I will work to ensure that all trade agreements contain strong and enforceable labor, environmental, and health and safety standards so American farmers are able to compete on a level playing field.

## **NAFTA Expansion to Panama**

6. The Panama Free Trade Agreement is currently stalled because a prominent Panamanian politician has been indicted for murdering U.S. military personnel. However, at some point this controversy will be over. During the campaign, all Democratic candidates have powerfully critiqued NAFTA's failures and agreed it must be altered. Given the Panama FTA replicates many of NAFTA's worst problems – such as foreign investor provisions that grant foreign investors greater rights than those of Americans – will you commit to either renegotiate or withdraw from this agreement if you are elected President?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** Miguel Gonzalez Pinzon is the President of the Panamanian National Assembly. Gonzalez is under indictment in the U.S. for the murder of U.S. Army Sgt. Zak Hernandez Laponte and the attempted murder of U.S. Army Sgt. Ronald Marshall on June 10, 1992. Until that situation is resolved, we cannot support any trade agreement with Panama. If that situation is eventually resolved, I will only support it if it does not bear the flaws of other NAFTA-style agreements.

With regards to provisions in several FTAs that give foreign investors the right to sue governments directly in foreign tribunals, I will ensure that this right is strictly limited and will fully exempt any law or regulation written to protect public safety or promote the public interest. And I will never agree to granting foreign investors any rights in the U.S. greater than those of Americans. Our judicial system is strong and gives everyone conducting business in the United States recourse in our courts. The tribunal system was created to ensure that our investors would have access to similar protection abroad. I understand the concerns surrounding this issue, and am committed to working to address them.

## **Priorities**

7. Will you commit to renegotiating NAFTA and all existing trade agreements to address problems including labor and environmental standards, investor rights, procurement rules, food and product safety, and agricultural provisions BEFORE initiating any new trade agreement negotiations?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** I voted against CAFTA and never supported NAFTA. NAFTA's shortcomings were evident when signed and we must now amend the agreement to fix them. While NAFTA gave broad rights to investors, it paid only lip service to the rights of labor and the importance of environmental protection. Ten years later CAFTA – the Central American Free Trade Agreement – had many of the same problems, which is why I voted against it. We must add binding obligations to the NAFTA agreement to protect the right to collective bargaining and other core labor standards recognized by the International Labor Organization. Similarly, we must add binding environmental standards so that companies from one country cannot gain an economic advantage by destroying the environment. And we should amend NAFTA to make clear that fair laws and regulations written to protect citizens in any of the three countries cannot be overridden simply at the request of foreign investors.

### **Sweatshops**

8. Cities, counties, and states across the country have passed anti-sweatshop ordinances and policies designed to ensure that taxpayer dollars are not used to purchase goods made in violation of basic labor standards. Just last year, the city of Austin passed an anti-sweatshop ordinance. Will you commit to passing and implementing similar legislation at the federal level to ensure that our federal tax dollars are not used to purchase sweatshop-made products?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** I strongly support the inclusion of meaningful, enforceable labor and environmental standards in all trade agreements. As president, I will work to ensure that the U.S. again leads the world in ensuring that consumer products produced across the world are done in a manner that supports workers, not undermines them.

### **Fast Track**

Fast Track concentrates power in a small executive branch agency where corporate lobbyists set the agenda away from democratic oversight. This process is how we got into NAFTA, CAFTA and WTO – with past administrations signing trade deals before Congress got to vote on their contents. The agreements put into place under Fast Track have resulted in disproportionate damage to U.S. farmers, ranchers, workers and firms.

9. As President, will you commit to replacing the fast track negotiating process with a new system that includes the following principles that have been adopted as formal policy by the National Farmers Union, the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win labor federation:

- a. Readiness criteria to determine appropriate negotiating partners;
- b. Binding obligations regarding what must and must not be in future trade agreements;
- c. The right of prior informed consent for states before they are bound to investment, service sector and procurement rules in trade agreements; and
- d. The right for congress to vote before agreements are signed.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** I will not support extension of the existing Fast Track process that expired. I have not and would not support renewing Trade Promotion Authority for this President. The current Fast Track process does not mandate that agreements include binding labor and environmental protections nor does it give an adequate role to Congress in the selection and design of agreements. I will work with Congressional leaders to ensure that any new TPA authority fix these basic failings and open up the process to the American people for their participation and scrutiny.

**WTO “Doha” Round**

10. The agenda of the WTO Doha Round has proved to be disagreeable to a majority of countries. Negotiations have collapsed repeatedly and the talks are 3 years past their deadline for conclusion. Workers, family farmers, and activists around the globe have made clear that the WTO hinders instead of helps the world develop in a fair, just, equitable and environmentally sound way. Do you think that the time has arrived for a new U.S. president to take the leadership to declare that the current Doha framework is a loser and to call for talks to be restarted on a different agenda that focuses on fixing the problems in the existing WTO rules that have caused the WTO’s lack of legitimacy in the first place?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** I support ensuring that future WTO negotiations are productive and fair to working people and the environment. I believe that we can work within the framework of the WTO to ensure our international standards for workers, poor nations, public health, and the environment are all improved. And we must ensure that global trade rules allow governments to pass nondiscriminatory laws and regulations that are in the public interest.

These answers represent my beliefs and positions, and may be used by Texas Fair Trade Coalition to keep members and the public informed about trade issues.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**  \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** March 3, 2008 \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your willingness to complete this Questionnaire. We would like to act as a resource of information to you and your campaign on trade issues. We look forward to working with you over the period of your candidacy, and thereafter.*