

Media Release

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Freshman Senators Stand Against Modified NAFTA Expansion
Politics of Pushing Trade Agreements Reflected in Peru Trade Vote of New Members

Washington D.C. – Sensitivity to the politics of pushing NAFTA style trade agreements -- often associated with the outsourcing and off shoring of American jobs – has led many House and Senate freshman members to consistently oppose a continuation of the controversial trade model.

Seven of nine Senate freshmen Democrats voted to oppose the modified NAFTA expansion into Peru, roughly mirroring the thirty-one of forty-three freshman Democrats in the House who opposed the same Peru FTA in early November. Senators Bob Casey, Sherrod Brown, Amy Klobuchar, Claire McCaskill, Jon Tester, Bernie Sanders, and Sheldon Whitehouse joined a majority of House Democrats, including the wave of thirty-one freshman Democratic members, in voting against the Peru trade pact despite improvements in labor and environmental rights. In spite of that opposition, the Peru Agreement passed the Senate by a margin of 77 to 18.

“Senators, with 6 year terms, are meant to be insulated from the will of angry voters, and that was very clear on the Peru vote Tuesday,” stated Andy Gussert, Director of Citizens trade Campaign. “Many Senators stood against the will of their constituents by supporting this broken system. Whether it’s NAFTA, CAFTA or PERUFTA, candidates are getting elected by running against the status quo, and those freshman members are keeping their campaign promises.”

Trade has also become a major issue in Presidential politics during the 2008 election. In key early Presidential primary states, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and both Iowa freshmen Democratic House members opposed the modified NAFTA expansion to Peru, as did both New Hampshire Democratic House members.

In fact, most Democratic Presidential candidates have announced opposition to the Peru FTA, including former Senator John Edwards, candidate Bill Richardson, current Senators Joseph Biden of Delaware and Chris Dodd of Connecticut, and House member Dennis Kucinich. All five Presidential candidates in the Senate, including Republican John McCain, did not vote on the controversial Peru Agreement.

Opponents of the Peru FTA are advocating for a new direction to better address problems found in the failed NAFTA/CAFTA trade deals. Some of those problems include:

- Foreign investors based in Peru will have the right to question our domestic laws and receive compensation if such laws undermine corporate profits.
- Incentives are provided for U.S. companies to leave the United States under the investment chapter of the agreement.
- The sovereignty of local, state and federal U.S. government bodies will be undermined. Foreign companies will be able to bypass “Buy America” laws.
- The elimination of remaining tariffs for staple food crops allow agribusiness cartels to dump cheap imports into Peru at below the cost of production, displacing farmers from their local markets, forcing them from their land, and causing a mass migration from the rural countryside.

Not one U.S. labor, environmental, faith or consumer group endorsed the Peru FTA. The agreement was also opposed by both of Peru’s labor federations, its major indigenous people’s organization, and a prominent Peruvian Archbishop.

With a majority of House and Senate freshman Democrats opposing the Peru FTA, along with a majority of all House Democrats, it is unlikely that controversial agreements including Colombia, Panama or South Korea will be brought up in the near future. The Peru FTA was the least controversial of four agreements that President Bush is attempting to push before Congress this year.

Gussert, who recently served as President of a state labor federation, criticized President Bush for his remarks calling for passage of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement. “Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world to be a union member. More labor leaders are killed there than in the rest of the world combined,” Gussert said. “No one should ever have to put their life on the line in order to stand up for workplace rights.”

That the Senate passed the NAFTA-style trade agreement into Peru by such a wide margin is not unexpected. The Morocco and Bahrain FTAs were passed by voice vote in 2004; 80 senators voted for the Australia FTA in 2004; and 83 voted for China permanent normal trade relations in 2000. The Peru FTA received less Democratic support in the House than the 2004 Australia FTA, the 2004 Morocco FTA, and the 2005 Bahrain FTA.

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For more information about trade, call CTC at (202) 494-8826 or email Andy Gussert at agussert@citizenstrade.org. Citizens Trade Campaign (CTC) is a national coalition of environmental, labor, consumer, family farm, faith, and other civil society groups, and serves as a leading advocacy vehicle in the fight for international trade policy that focuses on the interests of the majority of the world's working people.

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Citizens Trade Campaign is a coalition of labor, environmental religious, family farm, and consumer organizations united in the pursuit of social and environmental justice in trade policy