

For Immediate Release:
March 29, 2007

Contact: Larry Weiss 202-494-8826

713 Labor, Farm, Environmental, Other Groups Tell Democratic Leadership: More Fast Track for Pres. Bush is Absolutely Unacceptable

Widespread Opposition to Fast Track Weighs on Administration Consideration of Recent Democratic Ways and Means Proposal to ‘Fix’ Free Trade Pacts

WASHINGTON – Regardless of how the Bush administration responds to a recent Democratic Ways and Means Committee proposal, labor, environmental, farm and other organizations announced today that they will vigorously oppose any new grant of Fast Track trade authority to President Bush, said the Citizens Trade Campaign (CTC) which released a letter from 713 national and local organizations today. CTC is a national coalition representing a combined 11 million Americans with field offices across the country.

“Democrats came to a majority in no small part because scores of new Members won election by opposing the Bush trade policy so it is inconceivable to us that the new Democratic majority would provide new authority on trade to President Bush,” said James P. Hoffa, President of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, a CTC Executive Committee member.

In a letter, 102 national organizations and 611 state and local organizations representing labor, religious, civil rights, environmental, farm, AIDS action, development, consumer and related groups call on Congress to ensure the June 30, 2007 expiration of Fast Track ends the era of Bush NAFTA-style trade agreements. Groups plan to reinforce this message with meetings and events scheduled over the congressional spring recess.

“This letter shows there are boots on the ground, ready to march in force against any proposals to provide this president more authority over our trade policies,” said Larry Weiss, Executive Director of Citizens Trade Campaign. “The think tanks, idea factories and op-ed writers may urge the Democrats to tweak the status quo NAFTA model, but outside Washington there is enormous energy and determination that the Congress move our trade policy in a totally new direction.”

The letter emphasizes the negative effects of Fast Track which has enabled passage of destructive and widely unpopular trade agreements such as NAFTA, CAFTA and WTO with little Congressional oversight and no meaningful input. The letter calls for a restoration of Congress’ role in trade policymaking stating:

There is no way to “fix” Fast Track, which only allows Congress any vote after agreements’ contents are decided by the Executive Branch and entered into by signing. Congress needs a new mechanism to authorize the Executive Branch to conduct

negotiations that gives Congress a steering wheel and, when necessary, a brake, on the negotiation process.

“This is an important moment in the trade debate,” said Weiss. “People from all over the country showed their preference for fair trade policies in the midterm election. Now it’s Congress’ turn to act by ending Fast Track, ensuring President Bush remains disarmed for the remainder of his term, and in the future creating a new system for trade negotiations that restores their authority to set the course on trade.”

The groups, from all regions of the United States, also cite the new Democratic Congress’ opportunity to end the Administration’s disastrous trade agenda, and chart a new course for trade. This is especially significant in the wake of an election that brought in 37 new fair trade members of Congress, all defeating “free” trade incumbents.

“The entire political agenda in this country is now focused on this Administration’s abuses of its authority and the American public does not trust President Bush to have more authority over anything – least of all to continue a trade policy that has devastated the American middle class and our manufacturing base,” said Weiss.

#####