



Ohio Conference on Fair Trade

AFFILIATE OF **CITIZENS TRADE CAMPAIGN**

Congressional Leaders Launch Bold New Trade Reform Act

Ohio Conference on Fair Trade
June 5, 2008

Media Advisory

Contact: Karen Hansen
Phone: 614.280.3631

Columbus - The Ohio Conference on Fair Trade (OCFT) commends Sen. Sherrod Brown and five members of Ohio's congressional delegation for co-sponsoring the groundbreaking Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act, introduced by Sen. Brown and Rep. Mike Michaud yesterday in Washington D.C.

Representatives Marcy Kaptur, Dennis Kucinich, Tim Ryan, Betty Sutton and Charlie Wilson were among over fifty original House and Senate co-sponsors joining labor, environmental, family farm and faith groups in support of new consensus legislation which offers a positive vision for future U.S. trade policy. Rep. Betty Sutton, representing Ohio's 13th Congressional District, distinguished herself last year when she organized 38 of her freshmen colleagues on a resolution demanding new trade policy. "Our bill (the TRADE Act) makes it very clear that Congress is going to reclaim its constitutionally mandated oversight of U.S. trade policy," says Rep. Sutton. "It is about time our trade policies worked for American workers and businesses instead of against them."

"Fair and level global trade is long overdue and Ohio's workers and communities have paid a steep price," says Tim Burga, Ohio AFL-CIO Chief of Staff and OCFT member. The state's labor federation, representing over one million workers, praised Senator Brown's initiative. "Sen. Brown has taken the reins to address the economic meltdown that turning over our foreign trade rights to corporate profiteers has caused."

"This bill breaks new ground on the enforcement of labor rights, environmental protection, food and product safety, procurement, safeguards against surges of imports, trade remedies against unfair trade practices and the ability for countries to regulate foreign investment," says Bruce Raynor, President of UNITE HERE.

The current U.S. trade model has had devastating impacts. Since 1975, when Fast Track was first enacted, the trade deficit has gone from a slight surplus to an unsustainable \$709 billion deficit in 2007. A net 4.7 million manufacturing jobs have been lost, a significant

portion of those from Ohio. American worker productivity has doubled but median wages are only 1 percent above 1970s levels.

"When you find yourself in a hole, stop digging!" says Joe Logan, past President of both OCFT and the Ohio Farmers Union. "Our ill-conceived trade policy has placed the American economy in great jeopardy." National Farmers Union President Tom Buis explains: "Current trade agreements have consistently failed to live up to their promised benefits, encouraging a race to see who can produce the cheapest food and fiber regardless of production standards." Buis says that America's trading partners are not required to meet the same high labor, environmental, and health and safety standards as American farmers and ranchers. "It is imperative that Congress adopt a new trade agenda that recognizes the importance of American agriculture," says Buis. Ben Burkett, President of the National Family Farm Coalition adds: "(The TRADE Act) is clear that fair trade begins with farmers being able to earn fair prices reflecting cost of production, fair treatment of farm labor, and limitations against unfair dumping practices. It allows for all countries who are part of a trade agreement to establish strategic food and energy reserves, an important policy instrument that must be reinstated to address the growing global food crisis."

The TRADE Act also triggers a review of all existing trade agreements, and provides a process to renegotiate them. "Long overdue, this comprehensive approach allows us to reassess the failed trade model that has damaged workers and the environment, and jeopardized food security and public health," says OCFT President Simone Morgen, representing Columbus Jobs With Justice. "We have the opportunity for a new beginning that can spread the benefits of fair trade to the widest possible number of people. This is change we can really believe in!"

The Ohio Conference on Fair Trade is a statewide coalition of Faith, Labor, Environmental, Family Farm, Community and Social Justice organizations, advocating for just and sustainable globalization and trade policies.