

## **Fair trade coalition touts positive vision for global economy**

By Barb Kucera, Workday editor

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ST. PAUL - The Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition is celebrating 18 years of advocating for trade agreements that strengthen workers and communities around the world – and says the time has never been better to build a just vision for the global economy.

Members of the coalition, including labor, family farm, environmental, faith and social justice organizations, met last week for an annual assembly. They heard from Andrew Gussert, executive director of the national Citizens Trade Campaign, and presented two awards for activism.

The coalition also announced it will hold workshops, a rally and other events the week of Nov. 28 as part of “Seattle +10: Minnesota Week of Action.” The activities commemorate the 10th anniversary of the 1999 World Trade Organization protests that galvanized the fair trade movement in the United States. More information on the events will be posted on the coalition’s website.

Much has happened since the 1993 passage of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, said Gussert. The Clinton and Bush administrations tried – and often succeeded – in pushing through trade pacts that benefit corporations but contain no provisions to protect workers, human rights and the environment.

Massive protests such as the one in Seattle and the growing power of the fair trade movement have changed the way many governments are approaching globalization, Gussert said.

“We are winning,” he said. “We are changing the way people look at this . . . We need trade that helps the majority of people in the world and in this country.”

Because Congressman Collin Peterson was at work in Washington, assistant Sharon Josephson (above left) accepted the award on his behalf. Mark Froemke of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco and Grain Millers union made the presentation. Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition Coordinator Alicia Ranney presented Gerardo Cajamarca with the community activist award.

The 2009 TRADE "Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment" Act provides an opportunity to shape the global economy in a positive way, Gussert said. The legislation, which already has 130 co-sponsors, details environmental, labor, farm, human rights, product safety and other key provisions to be included in all trade pacts negotiated by the United States.

It also requires the federal government to review current trade agreements and renegotiate those that fall short of the new standards. Perhaps most importantly, it eliminates the controversial "fast track" procedure that has allowed past administrations to push through trade deals with little or no debate and substitutes a more democratic process.

"This bill offers a comprehensive new model for conducting global trade," noted Alicia Ranney, coordinator of the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition. Currently, the Minnesota groups are working to urge U.S. Senators Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar to co-sponsor the TRADE Act.

The importance of political action was highlighted in the awards given by the Fair Trade Coalition. Congressman Collin Peterson, who represents the 7th District covering the western part of Minnesota, received the "Congressional Leadership Award."

Peterson "has been a champion for fair trade that supports working people," the coalition said. In 1993, he was one of Minnesota's most outspoken critics of NAFTA and helped to form the Congressional Anti-NAFTA Caucus. He also is an original co-sponsor of the TRADE Act.

The coalition honored Colombian union leader Gerardo Cajamarca with the Community Activist Leadership Award. Facing death threats for his union and community organizing, Cajamarca received asylum in the United States in 2004.

As an organizer for District 11 of the United Steelworkers, Cajamarca has worked on union drives in the Midwest while also continuing his efforts to speak out against human rights abuses in Colombia.

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