



## **2008 Presidential Candidate Questionnaire**

**Candidate Name:** *Barack Obama*

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*The **Ohio Conference on Fair Trade (OCFT)** is a statewide coalition of Labor, Faith, Environmental, Agricultural, Community and Social Justice organizations, advocating for **fair trade** policies and a more socially and economically **just** globalization model.*

*OCFT members include: The Ohio AFL-CIO, United Steel Workers (District 1), UNITE HERE (Ohio State Council), Ohio Farmers Union, Jobs With Justice, Ohio League of Conservation Voters, Ohio Environmental Council, Ohio Sierra Club, Ohio Federation of Teachers, Simply Living, United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries, Ohio Civil Service Employees Association, Americans for Democratic Action, Ohio Working Group on Latin America, Department for Social Concerns of Columbus Catholic Diocese, and various Locals of USW, CWA, AFSCME, IBEW and Sheet Metal Workers.*

*The members of our coalition are concerned about the current model of globalization being implemented under the World Trade Organization (WTO). NAFTA-style trade agreements have resulted in significant job loss in Ohio. The impact of these policies have resulted in degradation of our environment, downward pressure on wages and workplace safety, inability to access health-care and higher education, eroded tax bases, increased poverty, immigration and insecurity in developing countries, deterioration of our infrastructure, and the undermining of safe and healthy local food in Ohio.*

***We are looking for commitments from the next President of our country to address these growing problems. Please help us by thoughtfully considering our questions and by committing to real change for Ohio and the U.S.!***

### **1. Agriculture**

a. How would you encourage the benefit of more vibrant family farms and local food security systems as promoted by the new provisions of the Farm Bill when they contradict the provisions and goals of the WTO and our current NAFTA-style trade agreements?

**Answer:** 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-America 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.

## **2. China Trade**

Ohio has been harder hit than most states by trade policies with China. Our state has lost more than 200,000 manufacturing jobs since 2000. Ohio manufacturers are unable to compete when China grants enormous subsidies to foreign investors and misaligns its currency, which Federal Reserve Chair Bernanke calls "an effective subsidy." In November 2007, the U.S. reached a new record annual trade deficit with China -- without December's figures even being calculated.

a. As President, what specific steps will you take in your first year to address China's unfair advantage over Ohio workers and manufacturers?

**Answer:** I recognize that China's currency manipulation and domestic subsidies gives it an unfair trade advantage and has led to U.S. job losses. The Bush administration has utterly failed to address this growing threat to U.S. businesses. I am committed to tackling this problem and ensuring that all trade manipulations are addressed by the U.S. government. I have cosponsored tough legislation in the U.S. Senate to overhaul the U.S. process for determining currency manipulation and authorize new enforcement measures so countries like China cannot continue to get a free pass for undermining fair trade principles. I have also supported proposals to increase tariffs on Chinese goods in order to offset the advantage their goods receive due to currency manipulation. As president, I will immediately adopt a strong program to push the Chinese toward voluntary reform – a goal that is possible with the right leadership in Washington.

b. How would you address China's Human Rights violations and China's failure to enforce labor and environmental standards which contribute to unfair trade advantages?

**Answer:** China's human rights violations and failure to enforce labor, environment and meaningful product safety standards are unacceptable. Unlike our current president, I will take trade enforcement seriously. I will make enforcement the top priority of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Office, and I will increase resources for the USTR so it can carry out its responsibility to protect American interests. I will also use the office of the President and the State Department to continue to apply meaningful pressure on China to improve its human rights practices.

c. Will you commit to initiating and obtaining Congressional approval of legislation that will end the importation of toxic foods, toys and products from China, and to initiating amendments to the WTO that will allow the United States to require all imported products meet our domestic safety standards and allow us to inspect imports to the degree we determine is needed?

**Yes**

**No**

**Additional Comments:** In 2005, I introduced the Lead-Free Toys Act, which would require the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to ban children’s products containing more than a trace amount of lead. As president, I will sign this act into law and ban lead from children’s toys. I will also mandate independent, third-party system of all toys before they enter the United States. I will work with the Chinese government to establish a better system, including the possibility of stationing U.S. inspectors in overseas factories, to monitor and act when dangerous toys are identified.

### **3. Dumping Practices**

“Dumping” refers to the practice of exporting subsidized commodities to the markets of another nation at prices below the actual cost of production. Under NAFTA, the exportation of subsidized corn from the U.S decimated Mexican farms, putting more than 1.5 million family farmers out of business with a resulting 60% increase of immigration from Mexico to the U.S. Chinese steel manufacturers benefit from an array of subsidies that have displaced American steel workers even though U.S. steel production is among the most efficient in the world.

a. Will you commit to prohibiting the practice of “dumping” in our trade agreements?

**Yes**                      **No**

b. What would you do to eliminate the practices of dumping?

**Answer:** In addition to strengthening our trade agreements to prevent dumping, I will also ensure that my U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) takes enforcement seriously and actively monitors any attempts to manipulate the market and create unfair trade advantages. 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.

### **4. Fast Track**

Fast Track Trade Promotion Authority allows presidents to sign trade deals before elected members of Congress are able to approve the agreements’ terms. This process destroys the important checks and balances process the Founders wisely included in the Constitution to provide Congress with exclusive authority to set the terms of commerce with foreign nations. This process also thwarts Americans’ ability to hold their elected officials accountable. Hundreds of trade agreements have been implemented without Fast Track, including the Jordan FTA which excluded NAFTA-style investor rights and included labor rights and thus enjoyed broad support in Congress. After Fast Track was enacted in 1974, the U.S. shifted from decades of balanced trade to an era of unprecedented and growing trade deficits. Since “Fast Track enabled trade agreements” like WTO and NAFTA were implemented, U.S. workers have suffered the destruction of one out of every four American manufacturing jobs – over four million total – which has resulted in flat median wages now hovering at 1974 levels in real terms, even as productivity increased substantially.

a. Will you commit to replacing the Fast Track negotiating process with a new system that includes readiness criteria to determine appropriate negotiating partners, binding obligations regarding what must and must not be in future trade agreements, and the right of Congress to vote before the signing of agreements?

**Yes**                      **No**

**Additional 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.

## **5. World Trade Organization**

The failing Doha round of talks at the World Trade Organization include an expansion of WTO authority that would limit government regulation of essential services, including higher education and energy. This expansion would provide foreign investors operating within the U.S. new rights to challenge our domestic service sector regulatory policies. Some of the U.S. energy service offers that would become part of a Doha Round agreement would limit critical proposals to combat global climate change. The Doha Round also provides for non-reciprocal tariff cuts regarding non-agricultural goods, meaning we would have to cut our tariffs on manufactured goods while many U.S. competitors such as China and Brazil would escape similar tariff cuts – disadvantaging our exports and increasing our markets' exposure to import floods.

a. Will your administration demand a halt to the current Doha talks based on this agenda, and instead champion a new round of WTO negotiations that is designed to address the many unfair and anti-democratic provisions in the existing WTO agreements?

**Yes**                      **No**

**Additional 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.

b. How will you develop new strategies for reorganizing the priorities of the WTO to the benefit of the health, security and sovereignty of all participants?

**Answer:** Please see above.

## **6. American Sovereignty**

Trade deals like NAFTA and CAFTA give foreign investors greater rights than U.S. citizens or businesses. These trade agreements allow foreign businesses to bypass the courts and directly sue the United States in foreign trade tribunals. These pacts empower foreign investors to challenge our U.S. federal and state environmental, agricultural, zoning, health and safety laws. Additionally, agreements such as the Oman FTA provided foreign investors with rights to operate our sensitive infrastructure, such as ports. The FTAs since CAFTA have allowed foreign investors to contest the terms of their natural resource concession and infrastructure construction contracts with the federal government before foreign tribunals under FTA rules, rather than bringing such disputes to U.S. courts as is required of U.S. citizens and firms.

a. Will you commit to removing the provisions in existing trade agreements that allow foreign corporations to enforce their natural resource concession and other contracts with the U.S. federal government before foreign tribunals and commit to excluding such provisions from future agreements you may negotiate?

**Yes**                      **No**

**Additional Comments:** With regards to provisions in several FTAs that give foreign investors the right to sue governments directly in foreign tribunals, I will ensure that foreign investor rights are 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.

b. What is your opinion of providing rights in trade agreements for foreign operation and control of our infrastructure?

**Answer:** I am extremely concerned about greater foreign operation and control of U.S. infrastructure, especially U.S. infrastructure critical to protecting our homeland security. I believe a major part of the problem is the systematic underinvestment in our infrastructure and desire to constantly cut costs, even when doing so has greater short and long-term ramifications for our national interests. That's why I have proposed to create a National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank to encourage more domestic financing of infrastructure modernization and operation.

## **7. Replacing the NAFTA Model**

Ohio has been harder hit than most states by the outsourcing and off-shoring of jobs due to NAFTA and NAFTA-style trade agreements. Ohio has experienced a direct net loss of at least 50,000 jobs to NAFTA. Not reflected in this figure is the "ripple-effect" of job loss on the part of community support services and supply-chain sources. We are encouraged that at least two Presidential candidates have committed to review NAFTA and renegotiate aspects of it!

a. To combat incentives for off-shoring, will you renegotiate NAFTA and CAFTA to eliminate investor rules that allow private enforcement of investor privileges in foreign tribunals, and that give foreign investors greater rights than are provided by the U.S. Constitution as interpreted by our Supreme Court?

**Yes**                      **No**

**Additional Comments:** I firmly believe that foreign investors should have no greater rights than Americans in our trade agreements.

b. Will you commit to impose a moratorium on NAFTA-style trade agreements until the long-range impacts of these ten agreements can be determined and assessed and the damaging provisions addressed?

**Yes**                      **No**

**Additional Comments:** I voted against CAFTA, never supported NAFTA, and will not support NAFTA-style trade agreements in the future. 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. I will only support future trade agreements that support these important principles.

c. Will you commit to providing meaningful assistance to displaced Ohio workers by working with Labor Leaders to strengthen Trade Adjustment Assistance programs and develop new programs to re-train workers in all impacted industries for jobs that will provide long-term and sustainable family-supporting employment?

**Yes**

**No**

**Additional Comments:** I will update the existing system of trade adjustment assistance by extending such help to service industries, creating flexible education accounts that workers could use to retrain, and providing retraining assistance for workers in sectors of the economy vulnerable to dislocation before they lose their jobs.

d. Will you please indicate the reason(s) for your support of, or opposition to, the recent Peru Free Trade Agreement?

**Answer:** I supported the Peru FTA because it has strong labor and environmental protections and represents a break from trade agreements like NAFTA that are bad for American workers. Putting these protections in the Peru deal sets an important precedent for making sure our trade policies work for working Americans. Rejecting this agreement would neither stop globalization nor advance the cause of those who care deeply about fair trade. At a time when bipartisan cooperation is all too rare in Washington, I commend Speaker Pelosi and Chairman Rangel for reaching across the aisle to make progress on behalf of American workers. But U.S. policy toward Latin America has to mean more than just increased trade – we also have to remain engaged on a number of other political and economic issues, and work with nations across the region to improve infrastructure, strengthen civil society, and promote democracy.

By signing this Questionnaire, I submit that these answers represent my commitment to formulating a fairer and more just trade policy when I become President, and my permission to share these intentions with your membership and with the people of Ohio.

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**Signature**

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**Date**

*Thank you for completing this Questionnaire! The Ohio Conference on Fair Trade appreciates your willingness to address these important issues, and we wish you well in your campaign. We also look forward to the opportunity to work with you during your candidacy and during your term(s) in Public office.*