

Trade pact review bill called ‘landmark legislation’ Phil Hare says measure aims for fair trade policy

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GALESBURG — Congressman Phil Hare, D-Rock Island, said a new trade bill introduced Wednesday in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives is what he termed “landmark legislation.”

Hare, a co-sponsor of the bill and a member of the House trade working group, took part in a telephone news conference to discuss the Trade Reform Accountability, Development and Employment Act. He placed the blame for the loss of 1,600 Maytag jobs here and 3 million manufacturing jobs in the U.S. on bad trade policies.

“We don’t want to be viewed as just obstructionist,” Hare said. “We can have a trade policy and trade deal that works for” both the U.S. and its trading partners.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, is the lead sponsor of the bill in the Senate, while Rep. Mike Michaud, D-Maine, has the same role in the House.

The legislation requires a review of existing trade pacts, including NAFTA and the World Trade Organization, and sets forth what must and must not be included in future trade agreements. It also provides for the renegotiation of existing trade agreements and describes the key elements of a new trade negotiating and approval mechanism to replace Fast Track. The replacement of Fast Track would strengthen Congress’ role in developing and modifying trade agreements.

Brown noted the U.S. had a trade deficit of \$38 billion in 1992, which has now grown to more than \$800 billion. He said the trade deficit with China has gone up to the tune of about 1,200 percent.

Opposition to a proposed free trade agreement with Colombia also was mentioned a number of times during the news conference sponsored by the Public Citizens' Global Trade Watch.

According to Brown, existing trade agreements, “cost jobs, they hurt communities and they mean too many toxic toys” and other defective products are being imported.

“It’s not that we’re opposed to trade,” Michaud said. “We’re for trade, but we want to change the model.”

A poll released last month by the Pew Research Center found that 48 percent of

respondents believe free trade agreements are a bad thing, while 35 percent see them as a good thing. A Wall Street Journal/NBC poll released Jan. 1 found 58 percent of Americans think “globalization has been bad ... because it has subjected American companies and employees to unfair competition and cheap labor.”

Supporters of the bill said the legislation is supported by a broad spectrum of Democrats in Congress, as well as environmentalists, labor unions, human rights organizations, agriculture and the faith community, among others.

Brown and others said the bill will not be passed during the current session of Congress. Discussion during the news conference made it apparent that supporters believe the chances of the president signing the bill would be enhanced if Sen. Barack Obama were to be elected in November.

Asked if he thought the bill would be signed if Republican John McCain is in the Oval Office, Hare said, he thinks the chances “will be better than what we have now. What we have now is basically a president that sends a trade agreement to the Congress and says ‘take it or leave it.’ ”

Also taking part in the press conference were Rep. Betty Sutton, D-Ohio; Andy Gusser, director of Citizens' Trade Campaign; and Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizens' Global Trade Watch division.