

Michaud, Brown call for review of trade agreements

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Rep. Michael Michaud of Maine and Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio, both Democrats, introduced legislation Wednesday to put the brakes on trade agreements by triggering a review of existing agreements as well as providing a process for renegotiating them.

The "Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment TRADE Act" aims to fix "our broken trade policies and it sets a new course on trade that will benefit businesses and workers in the United States," Michaud said in statement.

"In this election year, with trade such a major focus of the debate, it's important that the American people and the presidential candidates hear our message on trade. This legislation will help shape the debate on trade for years to come," he said.

Michaud, a former paper mill worker, said he supports "responsible trade" that creates good jobs in America while offering opportunities for sustainable development in poor countries.

"But our current system has not worked, has not met past promises, and has not served the interests of a majority of people across our country, or the world," said Michaud, who is a co-founder of the bipartisan House Trade Working Group.

Democratic Rep. Tom Allen of Maine signed onto the TRADE Act, along with coalition of 49 labor, environmental, human rights, and community organizations in Maine.

"The people of Maine and America are fed up with trade pacts that export our jobs to other countries. Over the past two decades, tens of thousands of workers in Maine and millions more across America have lost their jobs, especially in manufacturing, because bad trade deals shipped those jobs overseas," Allen said.

The bill sets forth a list of agreements to be reviewed and requires the General Accountability Office to complete the review by June 2010. It also sets forth labor, environment, food and product safety standards, along with national security exceptions and trade remedies.

Ed Gorham, President of the Maine AFL-CIO, said the North American Free Trade Agreement has been devastating to Maine working families, and it has been used as the model for other agreements.

"It's time for trade agreements that work for working families," Gorham said.

Ken Cline of the Maine Chapter of the Sierra Club said his organization supports the bill because it worries that NAFTA model is harmful to the environment.

"We're excited to be working towards a trade agenda that can support, instead of hinder, the crucial work being done to combat global warming and protect the environment," he said.