

Public Interest Groups Start Campaign Aimed at Turning Around on WTO, Doha

International Trade

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Public Citizen, the Citizens Trade Campaign, and the United Steelworkers Union Oct. 19 launched a campaign to “turn around” the World Trade Organization, in an effort to change the administration's path on the WTO.

The Obama administration will be facing a political decision point on Doha Round negotiations, with a smaller negotiating meeting starting Nov. 28 and a full WTO ministerial in Geneva scheduled for Nov. 30-Dec. 2, Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, said.

Wallach said that USTR's review of the WTO had not been particularly inclusive, and members were seeking meetings to speak to USTR on the issue of whether to move forward with the WTO.

“I think that there is still a divide between the policy and politics on this issue. There is not yet, I think, a full commitment in the administration to revisiting the old agreements and creating a truly new model going forward,” she said.

She said the current U.S. agenda on the Doha Round and WTO remained the Bush administration's agenda, and that multinational corporations were seeking to push an expansion of the WTO through the Doha Round to the detriment of the general public.

As part of the campaign, the coalition has an online petition, addressed to President Obama, that says: “Time is overdue to turnaround the WTO. We supported your campaign commitments to create a new trade policy that works for all of us, not just the special interests. That is why we are calling on you to replace Bush's more-of-the-same WTO expansion agenda. We're ready to fight for a WTO turnaround plan we hope you will lead.”

Wallach said demonstrations would not be focused geographically on Geneva—as was the case with demonstrations in Seattle where the ministerial meeting was held 10 years ago—but rather focused on national capitals.

Leo Gerard, president of United Steelworkers Union, endorsed the Trade, Reform, Accountability, Development, and Employment Act or TRADE Act (H.R. 3012) introduced by Rep. Mike Michaud (D-Maine), which would expand congressional oversight, replace trade promotion authority, and analyze existing trade deals to amend those deals to address who has benefitted and who has been left behind, and what it is that the WTO does and doesn't do.

Gerard said he was pleased that the Obama administration had enforced the rules in the Section 421 case imposing a safeguard on tire imports from China, but said the Steelworkers did not have other Section 421 safeguard cases to file at the moment.

Andy Gussert, director at the Citizens Trade Campaign, rejected any attempt by the Obama administration to move pending free trade agreements with Panama, Colombia, and Korea through Congress. He said there was no political will to do the FTAs, and that they needed to be renegotiated.

Gerard said that no "cosmetic" changes would render the agreements acceptable to the U.S. Steelworkers, Public Citizen, and the Citizens Trade Campaign. He said there was no way to solve the problems in the agreements, citing violence against labor unionists in Colombia, tax havens in Panama, and problems with autos trade in the South Korean FTA.