

Legislators Question Benson's Authority to Include New Hampshire in International Trade Agreements

Contact:

Sen. Sylvia Larsen, 603-271-3076

Arnie Alpert, 603-224-2407

FOR RELEASE:

Thursday, September 9, 2004

Letter Delivered to AG's Office

CONCORD NH --- Senator Sylvia Larsen today delivered a letter signed by six members of the New Hampshire House and Senate to the Attorney General asking her to investigate whether Governor Craig Benson had constitutional authority to tie the state's purchasing policies to the rules of "free trade" agreements being negotiated by the Bush Administration.

"The New Hampshire constitution gives the General Court, not the Governor, the authority to set rules for commercial activity in the state," said Senator Sylvia Larsen (Concord) on behalf of six members of the House and Senate.

The letter to Kelly Ayotte, the newly appointed Attorney General, was also signed by Senators Joe Foster (Nashua) and Lou D'Allesandro (Manchester), as well as Representatives Ed Mears (Berlin), Chuck Weed (Keene), and Peter Burling (Cornish).

Accompanied by John Amrol, Executive VP of the New Hampshire AFL-CIO, Arnie Alpert of the American Friends Service Committee, and Liana Foxvog, national organizer for Sweatfree Communities, Sen. Larsen handed the letter to Deputy A.G. Michael Delaney.

"By single-handedly authorizing New Hampshire to be part of these trade agreements, Governor Benson is selling New Hampshire jobs down the river," Larsen said. "These trade agreements would prevent New Hampshire from ever giving preferential treatment to New Hampshire businesses, New Hampshire products, or hiring New Hampshire workers."

In a letter to United States Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Zoellick November 18, Benson authorized the USTR to include New Hampshire in the government procurement sections of several trade agreements, including agreements with 5 Central American countries, Morocco, Australia, 5 Southern African countries, plus the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which would include the USA and 33 countries.

"Gov. Benson's unauthorized signing of this agreement will speed up the outsourcing of New Hampshire jobs," Larsen added.

"What is particularly troublesome," said Larsen, "is that none of the agreements were complete at the time the Governor said New Hampshire would comply with them. The details were not public."

"The Governor did not ask the General Court or the Executive Council for approval. Nor did he let us know he had committed New Hampshire to comply with a new set of trade agreements."

Others who signed the letter to the Attorney General at the NH AFL-CIO's Labor Day Breakfast were Sen. Iris Estabrook, Rep. Jim Craig, Rep. McKim Mitchell, Rep. Barbara Hagan, Rep. Ben Baroody, Rep. Gloria Seldin, Rep. John DeJoie, Rep. Jackie Pitt, and Rep. Chris Pappas.

###

Copies of Benson's letter and other background materials are available.