

For Immediate Release:
February 6, 2007

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National Trade Coalition Strategy Summit Launches Plan to Translate Midterm-Election Fair-Trade Mandate into New U.S. Trade Policy

*At Citizens Trade Campaign “Fly-In”, Labor, Environmental, Farm Grasstops
Leaders from across the Nation Set Campaigns to Defeat Bush’s Peru and
Colombia NAFTA Expansions and Replace Fast Track Delegation System*

WASHINGTON – Citizens Trade Campaign, the national coalition of labor, environmental, farm, consumer and faith-based groups representing millions of Americans, held its first “fly-in” conference since more than 30 new members of Congress took office on a fair trade message.

The Feb. 3-5 conference included coordinators from state fair trade coalitions, including Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Maine and Texas.

“The one issue unifying the majority-making freshmen House and Senate Democrats was that they all ran against the failed Bush trade policy and for charting a new course on trade. The majority of Democrats, and many Republicans, acknowledge that a new trade model is a vital policy imperative to save the American Middle Class, and for the Democrats it is also a vital political imperative to stay unified on a trade policy that demonstrates a clear distinction from the Bush trade model. What the grastops leaders at this summit made clear is that the Democratic leadership must help the freshmen deliver on public expectations for real, significant change away from Bush’s trade policy,” said Chuck Harple, Political Director of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, at a pre-summit meeting of trade groups.

Citing the January 17 letter signed by 39 of 42 new Democratic Representatives to Ways and Means Chairman Charles Rangel, the Coalition leaders pledged to help the freshmen deliver on their campaign promises to stop more of the Bush NAFTA-model trade agreements, starting with the Peru and Colombia Free Trade Agreements. The Strategy Summit also considered plans for how to translate the new Representatives and Senators’ pledges to oppose any form of Fast Track into ending the anti-democratic, outdated Fast Track trade delegation for good and shifting discussions onto how a new trade delegation authority could be created that would provide a much more significant role for Congress and the public to ensure the contents of trade agreements suit the national interest.

“CTC is already working with new members, educating them about NAFTA’s record in their districts, and consulting lawmakers about the many different ways Congress could delegate its constitutional trade authority while also retaining control over the contents of future trade agreements, so we can change course from the failed Bush model,” said Larry Weiss, Executive Director of Citizens Trade Campaign. “There’s nice synergy happening between the grassroots and new member offices that makes us very optimistic that this Congress will deliver significant changes from the trade status quo.”

In light of offers by the White House to consider renegotiating aspects of the Peru and Colombia Agreements, CTC issued a consensus document on the minimal fixes to the Peru and Colombia FTAs that would be required for the coalition, comprised of many of the nation’s leading labor unions, environmental, family farm, consumer and faith groups, to not demand Congress reject the FTAs. The groups agreed that the many changes would have to be made to the actual agreement, through reopening and renegotiation of the text.

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