

McCaskill urged to reject Peru trade deal

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Washington — Farm, union and trade groups are urging Sen. Claire McCaskill, a freshman Democrat, to vote against a free trade agreement with Peru, saying it would cause job losses for Missouri workers and depress income for farmers.

"There are so many things that are wrong with it," said Jim Kabell, secretary-treasurer of Teamsters Local Union 245 in Springfield and president of the Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska Conference of Teamsters.

The union estimates Missouri lost 31,000 jobs under the North American Free Trade Agreement between 1996 and 2004. It fears more job losses under the Peru agreement and that the deal does not protect U.S. workers as some previous treaties have.

Russ Kremer, president of the Missouri Farmers Union, said the agreement "threatens to erode the profitability of farmers," particularly corn and cattle producers because of low-cost competition.

McCaskill said she hasn't decided how she'll vote.

"I will review this proposed trade agreement with a critical eye to assure that American interests are protected," McCaskill said in a statement.

The Senate is expected to vote on the agreement as early as next week. It passed the Democratic-led House 285-132 on Nov. 8. Democrats split nearly 50-50 on the trade pact, while all but 16 Republicans backed the agreement. Reps. Roy Blunt, R-Springfield, and Ike Skelton, D-Lexington, voted in favor of it.

Democrats who voted against the agreement called it another trade deal they believe will mean lost jobs and higher trade deficits. They dismissed assurances by proponents that the Peru trade pact has tougher provisions to protect workers and the environment than previous trade agreements.

President Bush is urging Congress to pass the agreement, which his administration negotiated.