

# Trade Secret

## Labor Activists Annoy Blumenauer

By Scott Moore  
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When Congressman Earl Blumenauer's Portland office opened at 8 am on Monday, September 24, a couple dozen labor activists were there to greet his staffers with a present—several large bags of rice and frozen corn, which they dropped on the floor and used to barricade the office door.

The presents were intended to protest Blumenauer's expected yes vote the following day on a deal that would open up free trade between the US and Peru, eliminating tariffs on numerous products between the two countries—including rice and corn. The problem, the protestors insisted, was that the deal would lead to artificially cheap US crops being dumped on Peru, forcing millions of Peruvian farmers out of business.

The group, including members of the Portland Central America Solidarity Committee (PCASC), and labor leaders like Richard Beetle of Laborers Local 483, stood in the lobby of Blumenauer's office, reading angry letters from Peruvian unions and the US Change to Win union coalition. After months of trying to change Blumenauer's mind, the activists demanded that he give them an explanation. None came, and staffers informed the protestors that the congressman wouldn't be making a comment.

A day later, his office sent an email that was quasi-supportive of the Peru trade deal, saying that Democrats had successfully worked to include two major provisions in the deal that would keep it from ending up like other free trade deals with our neighbors in the Southern Hemisphere. The agreement forces Peru to abide by international labor standards and environmental protections. But those standards aren't enough for the fair trade crowd, who pointed out that only the presidents of the countries could file claims if labor standards are violated.

"I'm not entirely comfortable leaving it up to George W. Bush to file a labor claim in Peru," Daniel Denvir, a member of PCASC, told reporters at the event.

Even though the trade deal is the product of the Bush administration, the protestors picked their target—Blumenauer—in part because his yes vote seems so uncharacteristic.

"Why would a liberal Democrat from one of the most liberal districts in the country support a deal that's bad for workers?" asked Chris Ferlazzo, an organizer with Jobs with Justice, between protest chants. "Here in Portland, we don't have anyone who consistently votes against Bush's trade agenda."

Ultimately, the event came to naught. Four members of PCASC were arrested after protestors blocked the office door, and Blumenauer still voted for the trade deal, which passed through the House Ways and Means Committee Tuesday morning, September 25.